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# Meanings of 'the outdoors': Shaping outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand

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submitted in partial fulfilment

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## Abstract

The issue of human-nature relationships has become increasingly important given the environmental issues affecting the world. Thus, education which can encourage students to positively engage and connect with the world around them is vital. Outdoor education offers one way to help build relationships, but only if outdoor educators have an understanding and appreciation of the ways 'the outdoors' influences their pedagogy. Over the years, growing emphasis on adventure activities, social and personal development, and experiential learning styles, has subsumed the role of 'the outdoors' within outdoor education.

Using an interpretive narrative framework, this research focuses on 'the outdoors' as a defining feature of outdoor education. A series of three semi-structured interviews with 11 outdoor educators provided opportunities to explore meanings of the outdoors and how those meanings influenced their understandings and practices of outdoor education. An inductive analysis of the interviews identified five primary themes; locations, activities, living simply, emotional responses, and relationships, and these were used to unpack the participants' beliefs and experiences of 'the outdoors' and outdoor education. In order to retain the richness and complexity of the meanings the participants shared, the findings are presented in a variety of formats including vignettes and poetic text.

The findings are multi-layered, something that reflected the dynamic nature of 'the outdoors' and the ensuing opportunities offered for creative and critical thinking. There was also evidence that the participants were vigilant about adopting a multi-dimensional approach to outdoor education. This required integrating pragmatic pro-environmental actions, experiential opportunities, challenge activities, spontaneous learning moments, and quiet time into many of their sessions. In so doing, they ensured experiences for their students were holistic, meaningful, and engaging, as well as promoting a respectful relationship with 'the outdoors'. Some of these

practices were constrained at times by the expectations of current secondary school educational orthodoxies, especially those relating to assessing pre-determined outcomes. Nonetheless, there was an unreserved belief that outdoor education has an increasingly distinct and important role to play in the school curriculum. How this will be enacted depends on the challenges and opportunities that rise and fall with changing social, political, and economic agendas.

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Finally, this research could not have been completed without the 11 outdoor educators who were at the heart of the research – it was their ideas, stories, experiences, practices, and voices, which both constructed and revealed meaning. I was privileged to have been part of such a generous community of voices, and I feel that a particular strength of this research was the willingness of the participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and stories. They helped me celebrate my relationship with the outdoors, something I will certainly not take for granted again or believe that everyone sees it the same way.

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# Chapter 1 – Positioning the Research

This research focuses on two questions — what meanings of 'the outdoors' are constructed by outdoor educators through their personal and work experiences and how do those meanings shape their understandings of, and practices in, outdoor education? In pursuing these questions, I explore 'the outdoors' through the stories that are told about it. My interest in addressing outdoor meanings lies in the wider project of living responsibly on planet earth and how outdoor educators can assist in that project. As Cronon (1996a) states "to protect the nature that is all around us, we must think long and hard about the nature we carry inside our heads" (p. 22).

This introductory chapter outlines the aims and significance of the thesis and contextualises the study within Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Taking my bearings

For the last 40 years I have worked as an outdoor educator in Britain, Canada, Australia, Antarctica, and now in Aotearoa New Zealand. There have been some fantastic moments which have inspired me in so many ways. Throughout my work I have noticed a multiplicity of emotions generated by 'the outdoors' and listened to countless stories told by students and colleagues of their outdoor experiences. So, I come to this research late in my career to explore what it is about 'the outdoors' that impacts on a person and assists in creating learning experiences. My interests lie in how outdoor educators engage with and interpret experiences of 'the outdoors', and how they integrate these meanings into their practices. Whilst driven by my own curiosity, this research has significance for outdoor education, which from my experience, has not fully explicated 'which outdoors' and 'whose outdoors' is referred to by using the term 'the outdoors'. Developing a clearer conception of 'the outdoors' potentially affects our interaction with it (Barrett, 2006; Fox,

2000), which I believe has implications for how we manage and educate about the environment. Thus, for outdoor educators to keep abreast of contemporary pedagogy, social changes, and environmental debates, they need to consider questions about what 'the outdoors' means to them and for their outdoor education practices.

As I delved into meanings of 'the outdoors' many deep-seated assumptions emerged – assumptions not previously confronted. An earthquake in September 2010 shook Christchurch, the city in which I live. Part of the central city collapsed and many suburbs slumped as the land beneath them turned into liquid sand. In February 2011, a second major earthquake struck, opening a new fault line closer to the city centre. Buildings toppled, killing over a hundred people, waterways were contaminated as sewer lines were buckled, and rocks rolled down off the crags crushing houses. In the turmoil, I looked inward to consider my response to both the creative and destructive processes of nature. During this reflexive process, I realised that my perceptions of the outdoors were mediated through a social and cultural lens dominated by industrial modernity and a potential ecological crisis. City life with all its comforts and sophistications could not offer protection from the cataclysmic effects of natural disasters. It provided an extra impetus for me to re-evaluate my relationship with 'the outdoors'. This was no easy task and many shudders and shakes reminded me of my vulnerability and intimate connection with the wider world.

### Mapping out the research

As well as being described as the Shaky Isles, Aotearoa New Zealand is often referred to as a natural paradise, and images of natural scenery are frequently used to promote it. Symbols of 'the outdoors' as '100% pure', clean, and green resonate with many people and play a defining role in the construction of national identity (Bell & Matthewman, 2004; Dew, 1999; Ministry for the Environment, 2007). As Dew (1999) notes, "the symbol of clean and green New Zealand provides a very strong cultural

resonance which strengthens chains of cultural meaning and provides a strong impetus for action" (p. 53).

Recognising that this story of a pristine '100% pure' land is socially constructed, does not belie its influence over how New Zealanders respond to 'the outdoors'. As Park (2006) points out however, while Aotearoa New Zealand may pride itself on its natural environment, it promulgated "world beating levels of native bird extinctions and wetland loss" and carried out "one of the most comprehensive transformations of indigenous nature the world has seen" (p. 196). Yet the pure clean green image persists. When stories about the land are appealing, they are willingly accepted (Bell, 1996) and then proceed to influence people's understandings of what nature is and how they should interact with it. In time, these cultural depictions frame policy and practice and become (in)scribed on the landscape itself (Davies, 2000).

There are though, many different meanings ascribed to 'the outdoors'. These meanings range from 'the outdoors' being a formless abstract space to those more closely aligned to Lovelock's (1979) concept of Gaia as a complex living entity. 'The outdoors' is represented as unproductive land to be tamed by farming and conversely a sublime place which gains value because it has not been altered by human endeavour. It has intrinsic spiritual and cultural worth, yet is mined for resources. Typified by Crump (1960) in *A Good Keen Man* as the province of male work, stoicism, and adventures, for others 'the outdoors' is sometimes the realm of a nurturing Papatūānuku (mother earth). This positions 'the outdoors' as enigmatic, valued as a special and unique part of Aotearoa New Zealand and at other times an underutilised resource. This brief summary indicates the multiplicity of meanings that 'the outdoors' can potentially have, especially when viewing the term from sociological, psychological, philosophical, geographical, and educational perspectives.

According to some scholars, what is meant by wilderness, nature, or 'the outdoors' cannot be separated from their human origins as the act of labelling influences the way we perceive a place (e.g. Cronon, 1996b; Proctor, 2001). In 1888, for example, the Arahura River was designated under the Mining Act to be a 'sludge channel' in order to allow gold mining debris to be discharged into it (Young & Foster, 1986). This was particularly distressing for local Māori who considered the river sacred because of the pounamu (greenstone) found there. There can be little doubt that experiences in a 'sludge channel' will be perceived differently from the experiences when visiting a sacred and revered site. The river does not change only our perceptions and hence our experiences. This also highlights that meanings vary depending on individual and cultural perspectives, yet stakeholders often present their view as the only one or at least the 'real' one. Over time, some of these beliefs gain dominance, which further limits what can be known, as in general people begin to see only what they expect to see.

Meanings of the outdoors thus arise from the values, beliefs, and significance attributed to the setting by an individual or particular group (Stedman, 2002). Often these meanings coalesce through a series of stories (Vanclay, 2008). When a certain body of stories are told often enough they can inadvertently privilege one group of stakeholders over another (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003). Until recently, much of the research on meanings ascribed to 'the outdoors' in Aotearoa New Zealand has arisen from a resource management and tourism perspective (Booth, 2006; DoC, 2003), which tends to place prominence on 'the outdoors' as a commodity for tourists (Clope & Perkins, 2002). While much of this research has merit, other perspectives are required to maintain balance and ensure that the values and beliefs of multiple groups are taken into account when making decisions. More recently, edited books by Stephenson, Abbott, and Ruru (2010) and Abbott and

Reeve (2011) have added rich insights to these debates by focusing on diverse responses to landscape and wilderness.

According to Zink and Burrows (2008) and Zink and Boyes (2006), the role of 'the outdoors' in outdoor education has received limited attention and is often poorly articulated. In *Outdoor Adventure and Social Theory* (Pike & Beames, 2013) for example, the editors suggest that addressing the meaning of 'outdoor' is easy, as it refers to open air and is the opposite of indoor. Such lack of interest in outdoor meanings is surprising given the NZ Ministry of Education's assertion that outdoor education is in, for, and about 'the outdoors' (Ministry of Education, 2004). The consequence of this paucity of engagement by many outdoor educators in debates about the varied meanings and overall relevance of 'the outdoors' can potentially limit what is known and experienced (Barrett, 2006; Fox, 2000).

### Drawing the contours

Education plays a role in the making and transmission of ideas, practices, and beliefs, both intentionally by what is taught and at times less intentionally by what is not taught (Eisner, 1991). In addition, as Labaree (2005) points out, teaching is amazingly complex as there are many variables that affect student learning including their relationship with the teacher and the place it occurs. Many young New Zealanders are introduced to 'the outdoors' through school, club, and holiday outdoor education programmes. In the 1990s, it was estimated that there were over 800 providers of outdoor education experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand, including schools, tertiary institutes, private training establishments, private businesses, and charitable trusts (Knol as cited in Davidson, 2005). Yet despite the many schools and organisations valuing the potential to learn outdoors, most formal education occurs indoors.

Outdoor education includes a mixture of programmes, philosophies, theories, and practices (Andkjær, 2008; Boyes, 2000; Nicol, 2002a).

Whilst there are difficulties in determining the parameters and scope of outdoor education, it is frequently delineated by its location out-of-doors (Barnes & Sharp, 2004; Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin, & Ewert, 2006; Ibrahim & Cordes, 2008; Plummer, 2009). According to Brookes (2004b) however, while the importance of being outdoors is highlighted in outdoor education literature, it is absent from many of the discussions regarding aims and purposes. In addition, when 'the outdoors' is discussed it is often compared to 'indoors' rather than by what 'the outdoors' means (Neill, 2004b; Zink & Burrows, 2008). This indicates that while outdoor education potentially plays a central role in constructing and perpetuating meanings about 'the outdoors', those meanings remain inadequately examined or researched.

I have elected to use the term 'the outdoors' for this research because it encompasses a range of environments and is a term New Zealanders are familiar with. Alternate expressions include the environment, wilderness, natural landscapes, the great outdoors, backcountry, bush, high country, non-urban, outside, or out-of-doors. Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand have used the outdoors to enhance curriculum delivery and educational engagement for more than 150 years (Boyes, 2000; Lynch, 2006). In 1999, outdoor education became a key learning area of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum Document (Ministry of Education, 1999). In defining outdoor education, the Ministry of Education (2004, para 4) states that it "is a broad term describing education in the outdoors, for the outdoors, and about the outdoors." Given this definition, 'the outdoors' becomes a defining part of outdoor education and is therefore a relevant and appropriate term for this study. To further define 'the outdoors', the Ministry of Education refers to it as 'the natural environment', although to distinguish between what is natural and what is not can also be controversial. Brookes (2004a) also notes, little is done to determine which outdoors is being referred to in many outdoor education definitions. Yet grammatically, 'the' that is frequently placed

prior to 'outdoors' suggests that an accepted version of what 'the outdoors'<sup>1</sup> means is assumed. This propensity to treat the outdoors as something where all participants have similar experiences and can learn useful lessons about themselves continues, despite many arguments suggesting that human relations with places where they live, work, and recreate are contestable and ambiguous (see Cronon, 1996b; Hay, 2002).

Currently, outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand is perceived by many to be activity and adventure focused (Boyes, 2012; Jones, 2004/2005; Lynch, 2006). This has not always been the case, as outlined by Lynch (2006) in her comprehensive study of developments in outdoor education over 100 years. The roots of outdoor education lay in nature studies and a desire to provide city children with opportunities to experience nature and improve their health. As the field expanded, a myriad of terms (e.g. adventure education, Outward Bound, education outside the classroom (EOTC), outdoor pursuits, outdoor environmental education, and boot camps) were introduced. At times, these have been used synonymously with outdoor education, but each one has also been promoted as a distinct and stand-alone strand. These differing strands have led to mixed messages being incorporated, particularly around the value and purpose of outdoor environments and the role of adventure (Cosgriff, 2008; Irwin, 2008b; Jones, 2004/2005).

How outdoor meanings become accepted involves an interplay between material locations, cultural knowledge, general usage, and individual experiences. Language is predominant in developing and sharing meanings as it is through everyday talk and stories that we try to make sense of concepts. The outdoors, as a key aspect of outdoor education, is rarely questioned or explored; it remains in the background, assumed to be something known and familiar. Yet decisions about how the outdoors

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<sup>1</sup>The single quote marks around 'the outdoors' have been used to highlight the difficulty of talking about a dominant construction when there are many localised meanings of outdoors. Having addressed the issue this convention will not continue.

could and should be managed (e.g. as a resource or spiritual sanctuary) are emotionally, intellectually, politically, and ethically driven. They have been, and will be contested, because they relate to debates about our relationship with the land, as well as 'what is nature?' and 'what is natural?' Thus becoming more aware of what is meant by the outdoors is a prerequisite for understanding certain assumptions within outdoor education. This is significant, as the way the outdoors is conveyed in outdoor education potentially shapes the outlook of students in regards to how they value and understand the world they live in, and as Suzuki (2003) notes, it is a world we all depend on.

The next section positions this research within Aotearoa New Zealand by introducing some of the key factors that have shaped ways of understanding the outdoors, namely the physical landscape itself, Māori cosmology, colonial attitudes of conquering, and nationhood.

### Aotearoa, New Zealand – Islands in the Pacific

Many of the stories, which underpin meanings of the outdoors in Aotearoa New Zealand, are linked to its isolation, natural landscapes, weather systems, and different waves of settlers. The islands of Aotearoa New Zealand lie in the Pacific Ocean about 1,500 kilometres from the nearest large landmass and stretches from the near tropical north down to the sub-Antarctic islands. With much of the country lying in the roaring forties weather system, it is continuously exposed to alternating cyclones and anticyclones which bring with them rapidly changing weather conditions including high winds and heavy rain particularly in the West. As Walrond (2008) notes, the unique bird life, windswept coastlines, swampy forests, open tussock, and glaciated mountains feature strongly in how New Zealanders relate to the land.

Current scholarship suggests that Aotearoa New Zealand remained isolated until sometime after AD 500 when a group of Polynesians arrived from somewhere between Taiwan and New Guinea (Belich,

1996). These settlers have been collectively called Māori and are considered to be tangata whenua, or the indigenous inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand. Traditional Māori life was built around the belief that humans are interconnected with the environment through their whakapapa (genealogy) which stretches back to the creation story of Papatūānuku (earth mother) and Ranginui (sky father) being separated by their children to create an environment in which all life could flourish. As Andrea Morrison (cited in Pihama, Smith, Taki, & Lee, 2004, p. 25) explains:

*Whakapapa links Māori as descendants of Papatūānuku and Ranginui and records an intimate link for Māori with the earth and the physical world. We can be linked through whakapapa in the varying relationships of whānau, hapū and iwi to the landscape of tribal areas specifically to mountains, rivers, lakes and sea. Whakapapa also means that a person's ancestors populate space through historical time and present time. Historically, places have been named by ancestors and named after them. The stories of ancestors and places they are associated with are recalled in thought, at hui and in conversation.*

Thus whakapapa unites humans with the rest of creation. Kinship ties with non-human beings are governed by the same reciprocal whānau (family) obligations that structure relationships between humans (Pihama et al., 2004). From this kinship come the deep ties of people to place. As Evison (1993, p. 9) notes:

*The tribe's land was not only the source of economic wellbeing. For each Maori it was also the burial ground of the placenta and the bones of ancestors, and the abode of the tribal atua (Gods, supernatural entities) and of many other gods as well. The ancestral lands were therefore regarded with deep veneration.*

From the late 1700s, European settlers arrived bringing with them stories and memories of their home, and as numbers grew, they changed both land use and place names. While settlers claiming ownership of the land was met with resistance from Māori iwi (tribes), after a series of battles, confiscations, purchases, and 'legal' manipulations European settlers were eventually allowed to purchase land cheaply and clear it for farming.

The Treaty of Waitangi, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, was signed in 1840 as a constitutional document between the British crown and Māori. The principles of the treaty centre on participation, partnership, and protection of Māori knowledge and taonga (treasures). The relevance of the Treaty continues to be debated, for as Liu, McCreanor, McIntosh, and Teaiwa, (2005) state "the facts of history are the bare bones of a nationhood: it is in the fleshing out of facts into narratives of meaning that a people are forged" (p. 13). In this 'fleshing out', many stories have been told, some of which were a genuine attempt to unravel history, while other stories were fabricated to deliberately deceive, and disenfranchise Māori. More recently, alternative accounts of Aotearoa New Zealand's history have been published (e.g. Belich, 1996, 2001; King, 2003; Orange, 2004), resulting in Pākehā perspectives (New Zealanders of European descent) being challenged and revised as old stories are replaced by new. There remain, however, some stereotypical concepts of national identity, based on notions of being practical, down-to-earth people with an affinity to the land, who can solve problems through hard work and ingenuity (Andrews, 2009; Bell, 1996). As Bell noted, many of these traditional characteristics arose in farming and settler communities, which contributed to a strong work ethic and moral wholesomeness being associated with the rural sector, but not necessarily to those living in cities.

While Māori beliefs, language, and traditions offer a distinct set of meanings in regard to New Zealander's relationship with the outdoors,

mainstream Pākehā culture tends to dominate and set the tone for education, recreation, and resource management (King, 2003; Park, 1995).

## Researching meanings of the outdoors

Meanings of the outdoors are personal, frequently contested, and are often assumed to be something outdoor educators agree on. Meanings do not develop in a vacuum, but are embroiled in a social mixing pot of knowing through telling stories, sharing photos, or listening to others as they recount their experiences. This suggests that meanings evolve as people talk with others and try to make sense of their worlds. The search for meaning thus involves engaging with people as they interpret and reinterpret the world around them. Consequently, for this research I position myself within the interpretive paradigm with its goals of seeking deeper understanding of particular phenomenon and the processes of meaning making (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010; Pope, 2006). The interpretive paradigm is my theoretical perspective and philosophical stance that informs the qualitative methodology and overall research (Crotty, 1998). It involves describing and interpreting the meanings that people share and the social constructs which influence them. Sparkes (1992) outlines that:

*Interpretivists focus on the interests and purposes of people (including the researcher), on their intentional and meaningful behaviour, then by attempting to construe the world from the participant's point of view they try to explain and understand how they construct and continue to reconstruct social reality. (Sparkes, 1992, p. 27)*

In doing so, I acknowledge that individuals develop subjective understandings that they believe are true and therefore real about the outdoors, but that these ideas are shaped by society and, in particular for this research, the practices of outdoor education. Interpreting the

interpretations are also part of the cycle of developing meaning, as I too have been influenced by society. Thus looking reflexively at my own beliefs and assumptions is a critical element in interpretation.

According to Bruner (1990), there are two ways of conveying meaning – paradigmatic and narrative. A paradigmatic argument appeals to reason and logic, while narrative convinces us because of its verisimilitude (Lyons, 2007). Paradigmatic proof originates from the empirical question of how we come to know what is true, whereas narrative originates from how we endow experience with meaning (Bruner, 1990). From my observation, many outdoor experiences are conveyed in story form, as they capture the nuances and responsive engagement with a dynamic environment. Thus, listening to the stories people share about their outdoor experiences offers a useful way to explore the changing perspectives and on-going construction of outdoor meanings.

There are many perspectives on what constitutes narrative research (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1995b; Riessman, 2008), but in essence, it is based on the premise that we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). Telling stories involves more than a simple description of events, as they contain assumptions, beliefs, and values. Stories help build a sense of identity for the narrator and consequently tend to maintain a sense of coherence whereby certain elements are emphasised whilst others are glossed over. Whilst experience and what is spoken about after the event differs, within the context of this research, it is accepted that stories reveal much about how people live, work, and relate to the outdoors.

A narrative approach to interpretive research provides opportunities to gather rich in-depth descriptions whilst acknowledging that we encounter the world in different ways. This offers a fitting way to draw out outdoor meanings and their influence on outdoor education. In

addition, interpretive research is participant centred and inductively builds patterns of meaning from the material that research participants share (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2003). The epistemological underpinning of this research is based around experiential, relational, and co-constructed knowledge. An epistemology is the ways of knowing or the theory of knowledge embedded in the particular theoretical perspective and philosophical stance of the researcher. The epistemology embedded within the interpretive paradigm is constructivist and recognises that meaning is continuously being built up as individuals interact in the world, rather than being objectively identifiable (Cohen et al., 2007; Crotty, 1998; Sparkes, 1992). This blends with my personal philosophy of education which positions learning as a process of discovery and involvement, rather than the acquisition of facts, repetition, or imitation. This type of pedagogical philosophy has been defined as pragmatism as it has built on the work of Dewey (1916/1966; 1938) and favours action oriented and experiential situations where students create their own meanings and are able to apply learning in practical situations (Ardalan, 2003).

Meanings arise as individuals interact with each other and their worlds, but these meanings are relative and dependent on cultural and occupational understandings (Hall, 1997). This understanding is particularly relevant for this research, which explores meanings formed by the personal and professional practices of outdoor educators. As Potter and Henderson (2004) explain, outdoor educators tell stories "to encourage students to come to know and learn that the land is not an empty place, but rather echoes with meaning" (p. 78). Hence, what becomes important is not a singular 'truth' but the interpretations they convey and the way they construct meanings in and through practice. These internally constructed points of view, according to Aitchison (2003), can be "an inextricable mixture of acute observation, cultural brainwashing, fragments of memory, and a dollop of imagination" (pp.

70-71) suggesting that most meanings are neither unequivocal nor stable. While being sensitive to the difficulties in both conveying and interpreting the meanings of others, a pragmatic way forward is to focus on meaning as constituted through the world of practice and revealed through stories.

In brief, this research explores meanings of the outdoors and how these meanings are incorporated into the educational practices of 11 outdoor educators. The interpretive paradigm and narrative research approach suggest several key considerations for my research: the sharing of ideas in an appreciative framework; the nuanced nature of meaning; the embedded nature of personal stories within cultural stories; the evolving and relational nature of meaning making; and the ability to acknowledge my own role in the research.

Although my own story is never far from the surface, deciding how to weave myself into the research was a constant challenge. I neither wanted to dominate the interpretation nor pretend that my influence was non-existent. When I arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1978 to work at The Outdoor Pursuits Centre, Graeme Dingle, the director, informed me that this was a New Zealand centre and things were done differently. He suggested I set aside my preconceptions, British values, and practices, and immerse myself in the differences. A couple of weeks later, I arrived back from a tramp with my group, scratched and battered after fighting through kilometres of toetoe (cutty grass). I anticipated criticism, as the centres I had worked at in Britain had not allowed students to wear shorts in case they became scratched. I looked at my legs and those of the group, thinking we would have fared better if attacked by a couple of tigers. Graeme just laughed and suggested I should learn to float through the swathes of toetoe and not fight them, go with the flow, move steadily and purposefully, look around, and pick a good line. This advice I heeded on many bush trips, and has set me in good stead for this research. A few years ago when walking into the

world of research, I looked around, tried to put aside many of my old ways of thinking, and pondered on what seemed like endless possibilities. This then is in part a personal journey, but one which engaged the help of other outdoor educators in order to understand more about what the outdoors means and how it influences outdoor education practices.

## Layout of the thesis

To help capture the structure and flow of this thesis, each chapter is briefly outlined.

Chapter 2 explores meanings of the outdoors through fiction, research, and debates of related concepts such as place, landscape, wilderness, and natural environments. These latter terms have been studied extensively and much of that work is useful in informing the range and complexity of the outdoors. The chapter concludes by discussing three studies which explore meanings of place, wilderness, and landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter 3 is a review of literature relating to the role of the outdoors in outdoor education. By addressing the changing nature of outdoor education and the differing terms used within the sector, it raises issues of what distinguishes outdoor education as a distinct body of practices within education. Selected reflections from outdoor educators are used to illustrate the nature of outdoor education practice.

In chapter 4, the research methodology and methods are described. I discuss the interpretive narrative approach used in terms of addressing the interpretive nature of meaning and the relational nature of meaning making. The methods used to select participants, interview, analyse, and construct vignettes are detailed.

Chapter 5 presents the first of two findings chapters incorporating condensed vignettes from the eleven participants. These vignettes

highlight key elements of outdoor meanings from the participants' viewpoint. Further interpretation of the meanings is then presented. Five key themes addressed include location, pursuit-based activities, experiences of living simply, emotional responses, and relationships, which contribute to meanings of the outdoors.

Chapter 6, the second findings chapter, addresses the findings relating to the shaping of outdoor education understandings and practices. The chapter is divided into five main sections based on the five themes addressed in chapter 5. In addition, to overcome the difficulty of describing some of their pedagogical understandings in the outdoors, the participants' voices are amalgamated as poetic representations to convey meanings about how the outdoors influences educational practices.

Chapter 7, draws together the threads that run through this thesis and discusses the opportunities, implications, and shaping of outdoor education. The chapter highlights the need for multi-faceted approaches which bring together many meanings of the outdoors into outdoor education.

Chapter 8, the conclusion, reflects on the research, draws out significant aspects of style and process, and highlights the value of delving into meanings of the outdoors for outdoor education.

## Chapter 2 – Exploring meanings of the outdoors

*Mountains, like all landscapes, are cultural as much as they are natural; they are social as much as they are physical; they are not simply "out there" shaped by the wind and the rain; rather, they are formed by the ideas that exist inside our heads. (Robertson & Hull, 2001, p. 176)*

Debate about meanings of the outdoors has been limited, possibly because 'the' preceding 'outdoors' assumes a certain unitary status, which masks the diversity and complexity of the term. While 'the outdoors' may have received modest attention, concepts such as place, landscape, wilderness, and nature have been well represented and debated in academic disciplines such as human geography, architecture, psychology, and philosophy. What is evident from this work is that meanings relating to these terms are not constant or unitary, but are highly contested and responsive to changes in society (Hay, 2002). This reflects the quote (Robertson & Hull, 2001) at the start of this chapter which identifies that meanings arise from cultural perceptions as well as the entity itself.

In this chapter, I address some conceptions of the outdoors in Aotearoa New Zealand as revealed in historical prose and poetry. Following on, research on meaningful settings and the links that the outdoors has with critical commentaries on place, landscape, wilderness, and natural environments is examined, especially as they relate to outdoor education. I conclude by exploring some of the research relating to the outdoors in Aotearoa New Zealand that is particularly relevant to this study.

## A developing account of the outdoors in Aotearoa New Zealand

As Park (2006) notes, the assumption that New Zealanders have a strong affinity with the outdoors has been promoted through prose, poetry, art, and marketing since the late 1800s. Thus, fiction and historical accounts can potentially reveal some of the dominant meanings and perceptions of the outdoors. Andrews (2009) agrees, stating "writing anchors itself to the land in a number of different ways, and records not only our growing accommodation with the landscape, but changes within the landscape—and what those changes mean for the people who inhabit it" (p. 245).

The importance of language is highlighted by Smith (2010), who writes of how *waiatatangi* (songs of lament) were created as Māori developed their connectedness to the local landscapes through learning "to read their local environments for resources that would sustain them" (p. 28). In translating *waiata* passed down through the generations, she notes how they reflected the emotional, spiritual, and ancestral ties the composer had with the land. Much Māori knowledge derives from this integration between the spiritual and physical world, which underpins how many Māori think, understand, interact, and interpret the world (Pihama et al., 2004). Māori thus have an identity, which is bound up with language, being part of the land, and having a special status as *tangata whenua* (people of the land).

In a similar way, Andrews (2009) notes that when Europeans first arrived they had no names for the native birds and plants and kept comparing them to their homeland. Only when they learnt and developed names of local places and plants did a language evolve that began to represent Aotearoa New Zealand. Kuzma's (2003) study of early colonial literature supports this. Noting that much early literature was about bushmen, mountain men, and rabbiters telling tales around their campfires as they

searched "for words to adequately convey their feelings for the new and sometimes alien place" (p. 2).

Early editions of the New Zealand Alpine Club Journals capture some of the European responses to, and meanings of, the outdoors. One of the earliest expeditions occurred in 1857, with the first crossing of the Southern Alps by Europeans. In 1921, A. P. Harper, recounted this expedition of his father, Locke, and the three Māori guides (Harper, 1921). While this was an adventure and a 'first crossing' for Harper and Locke, his guides were familiar with the terrain and could point out many features. After a particularly heavy storm, Harper wanted to continue down the flooded river on the mokihi (flax raft) although "Maori considered it madness and at first refused to risk it" (1921, p. 78). Exploration and conquest were predominant values in driving Harper onward, whilst the Māori guides travelled in ways more in tune with the land. Harper did acknowledge their ingenuity in catching birds and fish, and their help in making the mokihi and flax sandals when his boots failed, but in a final summary revealed some of the telling differences in attitudes stating:

*The whole expedition took about three months but a great deal of time was wasted in camps owing to bad weather and to the Maoris' habit of loafing at any place where eels and birds were plentiful. (Harper, 1921, p. 81)*

Other accounts in the New Zealand Alpine Journal were written about the mountains "testing the mettle of climber" (Sutton-Turner, 1921, p. 85), arduous ascents, and bagging another peak. There were tales of stoic endeavours and revelling in a degree of hardship when stormed in for numerous days with limited provisions. In contrast, the traverse of Mt Cook by Mrs J Thomson (Thompson, 1921) was written in much softer terms. The avalanches were lace-like, the crevasses filled with beautiful blue ice, and on the summit they refreshed themselves "with some watery tea and tinned pineapple" (1921, p. 17). While completing

the traverse was important, much of her account is about her guide, other climbers at the hut, or the friend who regaled them with hot tea when they finally arrived at the Haast Hut. Many of the reports from male climbers included reflections on magnificent views, hearty meals, good chums, and the "hours of golden thoughts which are denied to the man on the lowlands" (Sutton-Turner, 1921, p. 85), but most articles included the technical details of what they took, how they overcame obstacles, and what they found.

The European image of the stoic individual able to overcome adversity and conquer great heights was further crystallised in 1953 when Sir Edmund Hillary completed the first ascent of Mt Everest with Sherpa Tenzing. Booth's (1993) juxtaposition of Hillary's and Tenzing's accounts written about leaving camp on their summit bid draws attention to different cultural meanings associated with climbing the mountain. Tenzing reflects on growing up in the village below, the old monastery, and friends at the South Col who helped them reach their high camp. Hillary wrote of strapping on crampons, tying the rope, turning on the oxygen, and grasping his ice axe. Over the years though, Hillary's attitude changed from the one depicted by his infamous comment after returning from the summit "well, we knocked the bastard off" (Booth, 1993, p. 26) to an attitude of caring for the Himalayan mountains and the people who inhabited them. As Booth notes in later years Sir Edmund Hillary:

*...set an example of caring to the world. Through his worldwide travels in support of environmental causes, Hillary has come to epitomise the modern adventurer who not only travels but also defends, who not only sees for himself but also brings the message home to hundreds of millions more. (1993, p. 10)*

This quote indicates how individual and social attitudes to the outdoors can change over the years. For example, the role of pastoralism was influential in both altering the landscape and in the way New Zealanders relate to the land (Dominy, 2002; Park, 1995). Burn-offs, introducing

different grass seeds, felling vast tracts of forest and sluicing rivers for gold converted the landscape dramatically. As Kuzma (2003, p. 37) notes, "on one hand settlers celebrated the progressive transformation of the landscape, while on the other they lamented the loss of the natural indigenous beauty." This tension between transforming land and valuing natural environments resulted in some areas been set aside for parks and reserves although, as Kuzma suggests, a good deal of that land was also deemed unsuitable for farming. The settlers also arrived with British values of what the land should look like and the term 'countryside' typified that. Curry (2004) argues that clearing the bush and draining swamps did not evoke memories of the more genteel countryside they were familiar with, so instead areas beyond the city were conceptualised as untamed wilderness or, more colloquially, the bush or the outdoors (Andrews, 2009; Kane, 2010; King, 2003).

When describing broad meanings, such as those encapsulated by the term outdoors, accepted ways of knowing emerge from the way they are written and spoken about. After a while, these descriptions and meanings appear so natural and normal that we often remain unaware of their influence. The pioneering spirit of the outdoors for example, was further reinforced in Glover's popular collection of poems about a gold miner *Arawata Bill* (Glover, 1953), and Crump's books of hunting, of which *A Good Keen Man* (Crump, 1960) "was one of the most popular books ever published in New Zealand" (New Zealand Book Council, 2010, para.2). Both authors emphasised images of rugged independent men who were much happier away from the cities. They promoted the outdoors as a suitable domain for building a crusty self-reliance. At the time, there was a growing concern that the youth in the cities were becoming soft, and outdoor experiences could be an "antidote to some of the harmful effects of urban life" (Cates, 1978, p. 171).

A body of fictional writing reveals New Zealanders' connection to the outdoors—Hebley's (1998) review of landscape in New Zealand

children's fiction attests to that. Harbours, hills, beaches, and bush feature widely and, as she argues, have given rise to many stories of adventure and challenge, as well as opportunities to discuss environmental and social concerns. Hebley quotes Lasenby's *The Lake*, "there were other slips, but everything else was bush. It went on and on for ever and ever. I thought of all the bush that I couldn't see, and felt small, smaller than a robin" (cited in Hebley, 1998, p. 96), to demonstrate how authors positioned characters treading the delicate line between alienation and a sense of belonging. Hebley (1998) suggests that as the land, plant, and birdlife became more familiar, a stronger sense of connection was developed, but despite that, many outdoor experiences retained elements of unfamiliarity and uncertainty.

Social and cultural meanings are constantly being negotiated and manipulated in various ways, through media depictions, fiction, education, historical events, political agendas, legal contests, and exceptional natural events (Antrop, 2005; Cheng et al., 2003; Measham, 2007). Meanings are not static and as economic priorities shift from sheep to dairy farming, forestry to adventure tourism, sacred land to energy production; it becomes important for some stakeholders to actively manipulate how certain areas are valued. In much the same way as the New Zealand Company in the late 1800s promoted the pastoral values of Aotearoa New Zealand by patronising artworks which would entice immigrants and raise the value of the land (Park, 2006), contemporary marketing now emphasises adventure and the clean green environment to entice tourists. These images though, do more than entice tourists; they influence popular beliefs about identity and how we value the land. The confusion of branding and image creation with reality was evident in the debates, which followed Climate Change Minister Tim Groser's criticism of freshwater ecologist Mike Joy. Joy, commenting on the woeful state of the rivers and questioning the 100% pure image, stated that "there is the picture-postcard world, and then

there is the reality" (Stewart, 2012, para 4). The flurry of political attacks on Joy suggested an unsubstantiated marketing campaign was considered more valuable for the image of Aotearoa New Zealand than the actual quality of the water. Thus, it would seem that New Zealanders are meant to value the environment, but do nothing to protect it, especially when acts of care and protection compromise economic growth.

Aotearoa New Zealand, like many countries, uses a set of narratives and images to transmit values and knowledge and create a coherent sense of nationhood (Andrews, 2008; Bell, 1996). Indeed, part of the sense of being a New Zealander relates to a feeling of affinity with the land. Lay (2008), for example, considers summer beach-going as a defining feature of Aotearoa New Zealand identity. Bell (1996) suggests many of these narratives which lie behind this country's identity are based on a "romanticised past that never was" (p. 193). Images of a pristine and scenic landscape, respect for the land, and stoic hard-working settlers, are signs of Pākehā dominance rather than being based on actual events. For as Park (2006) notes, Aotearoa New Zealand has been the site of mass extinctions and changes to the landscape since its settlement. In his collection of prose and poetry on outdoor life in Aotearoa New Zealand, Turner (2008) suggests that mixing fact with fiction helps to draw out the truth and expose greed, whilst celebrating the joy of being outdoors. There is a sense in Turner's writing that the outdoors is more than a backdrop for activity, but somewhere which encourages mutual engagement between people and the land and, if that moment of mutuality can be attained, then both are sustained.

Meanings of the outdoors are developed from historical accounts, children's fiction, poetry and prose, myths and marketing, as well as physical experiences. Culture, gender, and politics all influence these narratives, because while they may be personal, they draw on a collective set of values. Hence, while meanings of the outdoors as a

rugged place for adventure, and a clean green environment for tourists and residents alike continue to persist, they are slowly shifting as demographics and social values change. Ruru (2010), for example, argues that ideas underpinning the conservation estate which promoted a "national identity embedded in monocultural Pākehā colonial constructs" (p. 138) are changing due to recent Treaty of Waitangi settlements which recognise Māori rights of kaitiakitanga (guardianship). If these changes continue, historical links to a pioneering past will fade, creating a space for other outdoor meanings to emerge, which may be more representative of Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse population. For as Turner (2008) evocatively writes:

*The colours of the tussock and rye grasses change with the seasons; there's variety, too, that comes with clover, borage, bugloss, ragwort, foxgloves, poppies, lupin, thyme and so on. A mixture of the native and the introduced gradually adjusting and learning to survive together. (Turner, 2008, p. 24)*

## Researching meaningful settings

Where we live, work, and recreate, and the stories which are shared about those settings influence who we are and who we become (Cameron, 2003; Hiss, 1991; Lippard, 1997). This has resulted in a body of research seeking to understand how and why certain settings become meaningful. Common approaches to researching meaningful settings include: positivistic measures of place attributes (Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002; Stedman, 2002; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996); social construction explorations of the shared values and symbols which create common meanings (Haluzá-Delay, 2001; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Williams, 2001); phenomenological studies of lived experiences (Auburn & Barnes, 2006; Raffan, 1993; Relph, 1976; Wattchow, 2007); and narrative, whereby meanings are both reflected and constructed through the stories that people tell (Cronon, 1992; Dominy, 2002; Vanclay, 2008; Williams, 2008). These are not the only approaches with some researchers blending

methods. Davies (2000) and Whitehouse (2000) for example, combined phenomenology and feminist orientated poststructuralism to explore body/landscape/language relationships and how Western discourses have tended to separate out these components. There is also a group of researchers, predominantly from human geography (McHugh, 2009; Thrift, 2000b; Wylie, 2005), using non-representational and performative theory to understand place and landscape as assemblages through movement, sensations, and the act of being in the moment. Some scholars (e.g. Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Stedman, 2003b) suggest this variation of research traditions is so broad that it limits the ability to accrue a coherent body of knowledge. Patterson and Williams (2005) disagree, arguing that each research or theoretical framework has limitations, but findings from diverse methods build up layers of understanding regarding the multifarious roles different environments play in how we live and who we are.

As well as approaching research through different lenses, a variety of data collection methods have been used to explore meaningful settings including surveys (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002), interviews (Manzo, 2005; O'Brien, 2006), fiction (Nairn & Panelli, 2009), photography (Loeffler, 2004), art-work (Shepardson, 2005), and narratives (Riese & Vorkinn, 2002). Some of this work has tended to reduce meanings into typologies or a few key themes, while others acknowledge the vast array of individualised meanings. Work by Mausner (1996) for example, exploring the natural environment, identified a kaleidoscope of meanings based on three tiers: an inner circle of attributes based around individual differences; a grouping of meta themes reflecting the cultural milieu; and an outer cluster representing the subordinate categories of naturalness. As each piece moves, new patterns of meaning emerge, suggesting that while there may be a finite number of components drawn upon to create meanings, there are an infinite number of

responses. From within that infinite number of meanings though, Cronon (1996c) suggests certain themes gain dominance.

Davies (2000) however, contends that personal experiences can override dominant conceptions. Residents and regular visitors for example, often speak of experiences growing up and a feeling of home and belonging, not the dominant management themes relating to scenic views, overcrowding strategies, recreation opportunities, and solitude (Stephenson, 2010). In addition, Gunderson and Watson (2007) observed that some research participants who had developed attachment to one location were able to value other similar renowned locations without actually visiting them. They noted that value can be attached to a broad concept (like the outdoors) by being aware of the contribution it makes toward their life, be it aesthetic, spiritual, emotional, or practical. This blending of specific experiences to form a generic place setting was described by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) as *place-congruent continuity* whereby characteristics of places are transferred from one place to another.

Stedman (2003a) suggests that the role physical settings play in shaping meanings is implied, but not always specified, stating "although social constructions are important, they hardly arise out of thin air: the local environment sets bounds and gives form to these constructions" (p. 671). The debate as to whether the physical land has intrinsic meanings is, however, contested. For some scholars, certain settings encourage patterns of activity which over time become closely associated, creating a point where place and identity, and land and culture, converge (Dominy, 2002; Strang, 2005). Other scholars (e.g. Greider & Garkovich, 1994) more explicitly state that the physical land has no intrinsic meaning. On the other hand, many Māori believe that the land has ancestral meanings which stretch back to the creation stories of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, with every aspect of the land holding layers of significance (Mead, 2003). These strong links to the land support Māori

beliefs which suggest the spiritual and physical worlds are not separate, but that whakapapa (genealogy) bring people and the environment together (Pihama et al., 2004). Norberg-Schulz (1980) also argues that places have, what he refers to as *genius loci*, or spirit of place; a qualitative phenomenon which cannot be reduced to any singular property and remains an underpinning essence which transcends short term events and responses.

Other scholars suggest meanings are co-constructed as our bodies move through and respond to the physical and material elements of land and water (Abbott, 2010; Atherton, 2007; Johnson, 2007; McHugh, 2009; Mullins, 2009; Spinney, 2006). This is important for outdoor education as many pursuit-based experiences involve moving through the environment. As Mullins (2009, pp. 235-236) notes in his investigation of canoeing "the mutability of land and the fluidity of wind and water" alongside "skilled activity of corporeal movement" are important factors in finding meaning. It is likely that different meanings would emerge after skiing across open snowfields in a blizzard, than after meandering through the same area on a warm summer's day. Certainly different levels of understanding would occur if we looked at someone else's photos or read a route guide of the same trip. Observing, reading about, and talking with others may offer some insight, but as Stranger (1999) explains, understanding what a particular area might mean to a surfer and uncovering the pre-cognitive sensations and experiences would require going there and surfing.

As the literature revealed, seeking meanings, feelings, and the connections that people hold for these settings usually requires talking with, observing, or gathering stories from those who live, work, or recreate there. This is supported by Stedman (2002) who notes that meanings arise from the values, beliefs, and significance attributed to the setting by individuals and groups, which are then made known through their descriptions and stories. Some research suggests however,

that what is shared through observing and talking with others is only partial, as another level of meaning resides in the bodily experience of being there and being fully engaged.

## Outdoors as place

Wendell Berry has been credited with poetically stating "if you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are" (cited in Stegner, 1992, p. 199) and "if you don't know where you're from, you'll have a hard time saying where you're going" (in Goodreads, 2012, para. 35). Places where we live, recreate, and work are important – we react to them in ways we are not always conscious of and they shape us and how we live our lives (Hiss, 1991).

Place is an important concept which defies disciplinary boundaries as evidenced from the extensive body of literature discussing place in geography (e.g. Cresswell, 2004; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1990), art and architecture (e.g. Lippard, 1997; Mitchell, 2002; Schama, 1995), and philosophy (e.g. Bachelard, 1969; Heidegger, 1927/1996; Malpas, 1999). Within education and outdoor education place has also received attention (e.g. Brookes, 2002a; Gruenewald, 2003; Martin, 2005; Raffan, 1993; Wattchow, 2007; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Despite this body of literature, Cresswell (2004) still suggests that "there is very little considered understanding of what the word 'place' means" (p. 1). While this may be the case, compared to available studies on the outdoors, there is a depth and breadth of literature about place which highlights many philosophical arguments and contested meanings. According to Wattchow (2005), these debates offer critical insights which have been largely dismissed by outdoor educators.

Cresswell's (2004, p. 7) definition of place as "a meaningful location" brings together physical land, the social world, and the realm of meaning. For Measham (2007), one advantage of adopting place as a concept through which to explore the outdoors, or in his terms 'primal

landscape' is that it recognises the social and relational dimensions of meaning making. To acknowledge that we contribute to the significance of meanings as much as the setting, does not lessen the importance of the setting, but recognises our relationship with it. The relationship and our responses become critical, as the meaning is neither in the location nor in the individual, but in the relationship that forms between them.

According to Malpas (1999), the combination of material locations with subjective experiences, helps transcend the objective–subjective epistemological dualism of Western philosophy. Malpas suggests this provides sufficient reason on its own to study place and gives credence to using the outdoors for education. Similarly, Macnaghten (2003) identifies the role of practice in understanding people's relationships with place, emphasising that being and doing is a bridge between dichotomising meaning as either 'out there' in material objects, or as internalised representations of the human mind. Meanings emerge when people are engaged with places as they try to understand what is happening; they are not inscribed on a passive world, layered upon the physical land, or written over its material features for people to find (Cloke & Pawson, 2008; Ingold, 2004; Spinney, 2006).

When humans are actively immersed in their environments, responding emotionally and intuitively to a myriad of sensations, their thoughts and actions adjust. It is this awareness of place and the relevance it plays in our lives that underpin calls for a more place-responsive style of education (Gruenewald, 2003; Takano, Higgins, & McLaughlin, 2009; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). As Rowles (2003, p. 111) notes "the self is in and of rather than separate from the individual's environment and that lives are intimately and inextricably immersed in place." Becoming more aware about the ways places influence learning and who we become, potentially changes the epistemological foundation of the outdoors from a venue or backdrop to learn in, to an integral part of who we are. The

importance of this is emerging as more outdoor education scholars engage with the epistemological and ontological concepts of place.

According to Hiss (1991, pp. 3-4), we experience places in two distinct ways, "pinpoint perception" which blots out the environment and allows us to focus on our own thoughts and desires and "simultaneous perception" which opens us up to the environment and allows for a range of sensations to infiltrate our general awareness, mood, and behaviour. Hiss suggests we constantly shift between these two modes, but that slowing down and feeling safe enhances simultaneous perception. In the event of danger, we focus immediately on its source but, after the danger passes, our bodies relax and we are able to absorb more of what is around. This is relevant for understanding our different responses during intense physical activities and those achieved in quieter moments. Bricker and Kerstetter (2002) for example, noted a link between place attachment and reported levels of skill in a study of white-water recreationalists in California. Their research suggested that the ability to engage in robust recreational activities helped in getting to know a place, especially when sustained effort was put into improving skills. Attachment to the place apparently grew through this commitment to improve performance as both gaining competence in the activity and where this learning occurred became salient parts of their identity. Contrarily, Wattchow's (2008) phenomenological research with students paddling on the Murray River suggests they are more receptive to learning about their relationship to place on the slower sections of the river, where improving skills and paddling techniques are not the focus. He further suggests that outdoor educators can enhance reciprocal ways of living within the wider environment by slowing down and allowing time for students to explore and experience what the place means to them.

This suggests that understandings of the outdoors and outdoor education have much to gain from building on perspectives of place.

Some outdoor education scholars (e.g. Brookes, 1994; Raffan, 1993) have been studying place for over 20 years, but only recently have strong educational connections been made with the wider discourse of outdoor education within Aotearoa New Zealand (see Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Brown and Wattchow advocate for an alternative vision of outdoor education with an emphasis on responding to and empathising with specific and particular places rather than the outdoors in general.

In bringing together people and locations, place grounds the person in the world, a world they are part of and rely on. It is no longer an abstract space, but one where presence and performance bring it to life. Working in local and specific places, people are able to position themselves in the geological, natural, and social, history of a unique spot and know too they are part of that place. Not only is place a 'meaningful location', it offers meaning to our lives. This raises the question as to whether the outdoors can be perceived as meaningful. The outdoors is in one sense a collection of outdoor places each with their own history, culture, and ecology. It is also a more universalising concept which overlays each specific place with a set of culturally evolving images. Carter (2009) discusses the doubled process of place making, whereby each place is constructed within the terms of a "universal projection" (p. 22). He asserts that places are inter-related and cannot be conceived of as closed systems, but that each place exists through its relationship with the wider world and is dependent on the way the world is understood and experienced. This suggests that the outdoors with its tracts of bush, sites of significance, intimate places, and expanded views offers a meaningful way to understand how humans, activities, and places enfold together.

Places are somewhere; they retain their material elements and can be touched and smelt. They are however, configured in meaningful ways through the way we live, work, and recreate in them and through our comings and goings to other places. These practical and embodied

engagements influence both who we are and the place itself. In this way, the Western perspective of people and places being separate is challenged and opened for debate. According to Martin (2007) however, a Western philosophical position remains dominant, such that "nature as a part of self is not a conception that most school students hold" (p. 58). He suggests we use many words that imply a separation between the person and the environment, which creates difficulties in grasping the unity of people and place. In the English language, we speak of person as one thing and environment as another. Martin (2007) and Jordan (2009) believe that rather than challenge and change the thinking that humans are separate from nature, it may be more appropriate to develop a sense of caring as we might for another person. In general, people care for people they have a close relationship with; such attachments require time and an on-going body of positive experiences. This challenges outdoor educators to consider carefully how they portray the places they take students to. Ignoring how the outdoors becomes meaningful potentially limits opportunities to connect with them as anything other than a stranger.

One potential issue for outdoor education, is that from a place-based perspective being a local, not a visitor or stranger, is usually considered preferable as it offers opportunities for deep connections with place. For example Hay's (1998) research with residents from Banks Peninsula suggested that long-term residency, insider status, and local ancestry were important factors in developing a rooted sense of place, whereas those who visit for a short time would only achieve a fleeting appreciation. In this context, rootedness contributes to feelings of dependability, connection, and security, which enhance well-being and quality of life (Relph, 1976). In later writings, Relph was more explicit in recognising that elements of rootedness could also lead to parochial and exclusionary tendencies (Relph, 2008). Places can be the centre of power struggles politically and territorially, with some groups disregarding

diverse cultural and contradictory meanings. Places become contested, with different groups vying to justify their meanings and values as the 'real' ones. Once feelings of a special or significant relationship occur, then a natural consequence is for people to believe they have special rights, which can result in trying to exclude others. Gruenewald (2003) warns that place studies can become problematic when experiences are legitimised in ways that privilege rootedness. Political and economic forces are not neutral and it is possible to inadvertently disadvantage groups by attending to what appears to be valued traditions or special place relationships.

Place making is thus entwined in practices of domination, oppression, and parochialism. Groups select and portray certain stories and, the more dominant the group, the more sedimented the layers of stories become (Measham, 2007). Those with greater power have greater influence in collective understandings of place. As Brookes points out "environments in which outdoor education takes place are real, but there is no access to that reality unmediated by history and culture" (2006, p. 10). Furthermore, places are named, bounded, and owned, which creates an illusion of separation. While these divisions are arbitrary, naming makes them seem real and immutable. Malpas (2008) suggests these criticisms of place are partially overcome by using indigenous modes of thought which direct attention to the mutuality of the relationship between place and humans. With a focus on belonging to place as opposed to place belonging to us, then we can respond to the land in terms of guardianship and care, attributes that could form the basis of critical thinking about the outdoors.

Another disjuncture between concepts of place and outdoor education entails journeys to, in, and across tracts of land which are not common sites of dwelling. For Relph (1976), mobile lifestyles remove us from knowing our place in the world and set us adrift. Cuthbertson, Heine, and Whitson (1997) and Kaltborn and Williams (2002) challenge Relph's

hierarchy which promotes home – where your roots are – as the most authentic and worthwhile form of connection. Instead, they offer a positive account of mobile lifestyles, which help develop a holistic and interconnected sense of place. Place meanings which have emerged from studying nomadic life also reveal ways of inhabiting the earth which are not location specific, where journeys are valued as a way of life which encapsulates freedom and lightness (Chatwin, 1988; Rao, 2002). In similar ways, there is a body of research which indicates that individuals form significant personal relationships with land and water through participating in a range of recreational activities and journeys (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002; Brymer, Downey, & Gray, 2009; Mullins, 2009; Wattchow, 2008).

To avoid some of the problems of parochialism bound up in learning through rootedness and residing, *place-responsiveness* has tended to override *place-based* as the term of preference within outdoor education writing (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Place-responsive education includes areas beyond the local environs, while retaining a strong focus on building connections and appreciating local knowledge, it does not depend on residing there. Wattchow and Brown also build on Relph's (1976) notion of an 'empathetic insider' or someone who seeks to understand places and local meanings. They note that the 'empathetic insider' may be more sensitive to the possibilities of place which the 'existential insider' or long-time inhabitant, has become desensitised to. In a similar way, the term 'compassionate sense of place' has been used by Cuthbertson (1999) and Haluza-DeLay (2006a) to encapsulate the relational, embodied, and caring notions of being in place without being 'rooted' to place. Becoming compassionate and responding to places away from local areas, is relevant for outdoor education as it encompasses learning to appreciate the subtleties of living within different environments including National parks and other natural areas,

as knowing how to respond in those areas contributes to learning to live well in the wider world.

A further critique is that the notion of place is so broad, malleable, and nebulous that it becomes indefinable – it can relate to everything, yet nothing (Cresswell, 2004; Hiss, 1991; Hubbard, 2005). Cameron (2003) is one writer who perceives breadth of place meanings to be both a strength and a weakness, for while the intricacies of place are never-ending, they remain profound especially in developing understandings of who we are and how to live. However, when the concept of the outdoors encompasses all that the term place refers to it can be somewhat overwhelmed for, as Cresswell (2004) notes, examples of place and its significance to people often refer to houses, home, and feelings of rootedness. The outdoors as a collection of meaningful locations builds on the immutable relationship between places, engages with the wider discourse of place, recognises the importance of being place-responsive, yet retains a degree of separation from debates which focus on being rooted to place and practices of domination, oppression, and parochialism.

## Outdoors as landscape

Some meanings of landscape overlap with the previous discussions on place, for landscapes are places endowed with meaning and significance, which often generate an emotional response (Herrington, 2009; Stephenson, 2010). At times place and landscape appear to be used interchangeably, a case in point is Stephenson's writing:-

*I saw the same physical features, but my later reaction to the landscape was different, deeper, more passionate. Is 'landscape' just what I saw the first time, or is it my latter experience? And if the latter, how much more enriched, more passionate might be the perceptions of those who had lived in the place for a long time? (2010, p. 152)*

Thus in order to create a level of distinction, this section focuses mainly on aesthetic interpretations of landscape as their status is usually based on aesthetic appearances (Rose, 2002). According to Firth (2008), considering aesthetic responses provides another avenue to explore how people develop meaningful relationships with the land, which is important if, as Gobster, Nassauer, Daniel, and Fry (2007) claim, landscapes which are found to be aesthetically attractive are more likely to be cared for. This does not deny or denigrate the multi-disciplinary studies which landscape scholars embrace, or keep the concepts entirely separate, for at times some of the following discussion may be equally applicable to conceptions of place.

Landscapes conjure up images of sunsets, forests, lakes and mountain vistas, but they are more than just scenes for, as Dakin (2003), suggests they represent holistic ways of interacting with the world. They generate emotional responses which can become significant events in our lives. Such aesthetic and emotional judgements though, are based on the particular values of society and, as Park (2006) notes, this means the term natural landscape is an oxymoron as humans create landscapes. Tracts of land only become landscapes when we perceive them to be so; hence we are accomplices in privileging aspects and determining the parameters of landscapes. In Aotearoa New Zealand, pristine, mountainous, and uninhabited areas have gained special status. These parameters however exclude many of the nuanced responses of what makes landscapes meaningful to local inhabitants. In this way, outdoor scenes can become homogenised and global values are privileged ahead of those who work and reside in those areas (Park, 2006).

We are inculcated with culturally valued landscape images –on postcards, art works, and advertisements for a variety of goods. We become encultured to look for pictorial images even when experiencing 'the real thing' because our aesthetic approach toward natural environments has been filtered through privileged images and esteemed

paintings (Hull, 2006; Park, 2006). Certain landscape conventions become so dominant that people have difficulty appreciating landscapes when they do not fit within those parameters. While in its own right this is not problematic, it can mean that when the visual environment does not conform to the image we seek, the experience itself is diminished. For example, there are many photos of Aoraki/Mt Cook as a towering snow clad peak with a bright blue background and, instead of appreciating its many moods, a sightseer may feel disappointed at missing this ideal image. Furthermore, Park (2006) suggests that dismissing environments which do not look like picture postcards has resulted in many wetlands and lowland forests which are in need of protection being overlooked.

While Cresswell (1996) may have asserted that "we do not live in landscapes – we look at them" (p. 11), aesthetic appreciation involves more senses than the ocular as landscapes can also be appreciated through active participation (Atherton, 2007). Davies (2000) also challenges perceptions and styles of writing which separate our bodies from the landscape, suggesting that we become intertwined with the landscape as each (in)scribes itself on the other. Our bodies furnish us with responses to landscapes when we are moving in them, not simply observing them, for example as the land steepens and we climb upward we feel tiredness in our legs, tightening in our chest, and our breathing becomes laboured. Atherton (2007, p. 41) calls these "outdoor kinetic experiences" where physical engagement opens "people to the wisdom of the body". As active participants, we can on occasions feel intimately in tune with the rhythms of the land—the effort required enhances our engagement and moves us beyond being an observer to create a profound aesthetic connection (Spinney, 2006). Le Breton evocatively describes this connection as "a melting of self into action" (2000, p. 3).

Bodily engagement with landscapes involves trusting our responsive and intuitive senses rather than rational cognition. While this embodied way

of knowing is rarely used in the classroom, it is well accepted within outdoor education (Rea, 2008b). Atherton (2007) points out that the difference between sitting by a stream or energetically cycling along its bank, is that the former serves as a modest escape from the familiar, whereas speeding along the bank manoeuvring around trees and roots shakes up the familiar, keeps us off balance, and opens up opportunities to see landscapes anew. In moving, it is necessary to respond to the terrain; the tramper picks a route through the rocks to maintain secure footing, the climber uses a sequence of holds to stay in balance, and the skier searches for contours to aid their descent. In this way "the contours of the landscape are not so much measured as felt" (Ingold, 2000, p. 203). Meanings created in this way often emerge because a person opens up to new knowledge and trusts their often neglected intuitive modes of thinking (Atherton, 2007).

Aesthetic ways of knowing also acknowledge experience which is ineffable, removing the need to represent the event through words or privilege spoken accounts as somehow more significant than bodily, silent, and emotional responses. Our bodies absorb whatever it can from the surroundings, colours, scents, light, and airflows and these affect our moods and emotions. In a similar way, kinaesthetic knowing acknowledges that the body is learning in and from the land, whether it is aware of that or not. As Davies (2000) eloquently states, through our lived bodies "we become appropriate(d) beings in the landscape, and in that same process, beings who can (re)appropriate its meanings and patterns, (re)constitute bodies in relation to landscapes, (re)signify what we find we have become" (p. 249).

Tuan (1991) cautions that too much focus on appreciating landscape in an aesthetic way which is detached from the practical concerns of those who live there can be superficial. This detachment could potentially be a problem for outdoor education, especially when its goal is to develop environmental awareness, for when the multi-sensory nature of our

connection to the landscape is diminished, so too is our appreciation of the subtle changes involved in ecological processes. Outdoor areas, which are represented as scenic landscapes devoid of people result in the land becoming valued not for what it can do, but for what it looks like in an untouched state. Yet, as Rose states, the only thing that "the landscape ever is, is the practices that make it relevant" (Rose, 2002, p. 463). Discussions of landscape, which focus on practices, relationships, embodied appreciation, as well as aesthetic understanding, have potential relevance for unpacking outdoor meanings and how they are formed by what we do.

### Outdoors as wilderness

A fascination with wilderness has generated passionate debates in North America (see Cronon, 1996b; Keeling, 2008; Ouderkirk, 2003) and Australia (see Washington, 2007), with fewer emanating from Europe. Many of these debates stem from differences between supporters of the essentialist nature of wilderness and those who believe it to be "a cultural invention" (Cronon, 1996b, p. 70). By drawing boundaries, adding names and labels, and inscribing wilderness with values of pureness, freedom, and an enduring spirit, vast tracts of land were changed from being designated wasteland to somewhere special and uplifting. Many of these areas were selected for the recreational and aesthetic tastes of the colonial elite to the exclusion of tangata whenua or local populations (Barry & Smith, 2008; Park, 2006). Park (2006) asserts that most New Zealanders remain unaware of the historical influences that shaped the land. Wilderness "came with us, the invader. It came in our heads, and it gradually rose out of the ground to meet us" (Murray cited in Park, 2006, p. 82). As Park points out, Cook's explorations of Aotearoa New Zealand occurred at about the time that Romanticism was taking hold in Europe; hence, it is no coincidence that the rugged and sublime aspects were preserved. The colonial settlers saw the craggy mountains and high country as pristine and uninhabited

not as sacred or traditional food gathering areas. For Park, the conservation movement still reflects colonial attitudes which see "Māori as unsuitable tenants of an otherwise vacant land" (2006, p. 87). He believes wider historical, cultural, and ecological understandings are required to avoid such over simplified responses.

While the meaning of wilderness is elusive, one popular conception in Aotearoa New Zealand entails the rejuvenating experience of being in a natural environment away from other people and from facilities (Shultis, 1999; Wray, 2009). This conception builds on the biblical origins of the term wilderness which suggested that spending time away from civilisation allowed people to enter a contemplative state which brought them closer to God (Cronon, 1996b). Over time however, the meaning of wilderness has changed. During the middle ages, for example, wilderness was considered a frightening and dangerous place that people should avoid, but in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the onset of the industrial revolution and the resultant Romantic Era, wilderness again became valued for spiritual renewal, escape from society, and contemplation (Cronon, 1996b; Macfarlane, 2003). This meaning of wilderness as unmodified land which inspires awe and rejuvenates the body, mind, and spirit remains a dominant model for many Western countries, although over the last 20 years has become increasingly contested with some writers arguing that it is elitist (Cronon, 1996c; Park, 2006).

From a managerial perspective, areas designated as wilderness usually include criteria such as remoteness, size, and freedom from development such as huts and tracks. The New Zealand Conservation Act's (New Zealand Government, 1987) criteria for wilderness areas is similar in scope, building on the Wilderness Advisory Group (1985) definition: "wilderness areas are wild lands designated for their protection and managed to perpetuate their natural condition and which appear to have been affected only by the forces of nature, with any imprint of human interference substantially unnoticeable" (para. 4).

While not all outdoor areas match this definition of wilderness, some do, especially those containing high mountains, remote valleys, and dense bush. Department of Conservation (DoC) documents also refer to areas of the outdoors that do not meet the criteria as wilderness (Higham, 1998).

In research on popular conceptions of wilderness, Shultis (1999) identified that wilderness was often viewed in an unproblematic way which supported values of preserving large tracts of natural land. Part of his research included an open-ended question asking participants to identify their three strongest images of wilderness. The most frequent image identified was bush/native forest, followed by peace/solitude/freedom, and then animals/birds/wildlife. "The composite image emerging was that of undisturbed, peaceful, and beautiful areas of native forests and other vegetation containing birds and other animals, and often including alpine and freshwater scenes" (Shultis, 1999, p. 69). Shultis also indicated that many respondents conflated wilderness with the outdoors or the bush, which were not officially designated as wilderness. This supports Kliskey's (1992) PhD study, which concluded that a formal definition may not be as important as the characteristics attributed to it, especially those which remind people of their connection to nature.

Concepts of wilderness, as existing in a state free from human endeavour, where everything about wilderness is denigrated by humans being there, can be problematic. Separating humans from nature can become an impediment to forming ethical and sustainable relationships with nature, as imbuing areas with a somewhat special and mystical significance avoids building an on-going working relationship with the land (Cronon, 1996b). Keeling (2008) asserts that arguments which focus on human separation from nature area distraction to the central purpose of wilderness, as it becomes more about language and ignores "the perfectly ordinary context in which 'nature' is used to mean 'other than

human" (p. 505). These wilderness debates are similar to the ones Soper (1995) carefully lays out in her book *What is Nature?* Soper identifies two main positions: 'nature sceptics' and 'nature endorsers'. The endorsers invoke nature's intrinsic worth and authenticity, while the sceptics assert that nature has no reality external to its linguistic construction. For the endorsers, reducing nature to a social construction is the antithesis of nature, which gains significance as something beyond or other than human. The sceptics argue that continued adherence to a Romantic nature ethic obliterates aspects of nature, which have been politically manipulated to sustain power discrepancies and perpetrate atrocities. Soper asserts these two positions are so diametrically opposed that resolution appears irreconcilable.

As noted earlier, current popular opinions about wilderness in Aotearoa New Zealand are usually positive, with most wanting to preserve what remains from technological advance. It is somewhat surprising then that outdoor educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, with the exception of Boyes (2011), have not engaged with these debates. In an article, which addresses the role of wilderness in outdoor education, Boyes acknowledges that wilderness areas are a conundrum for outdoor educators as their pristine nature is disrupted by the presence of humans. With a subtle twist, he then disengages outdoor education from much of the debate by suggesting that non-traditional wilderness spaces closer to home are best used for education as they bring nature into our lives and avoid the social separation created when travelling to remote and uninhabited areas. This shift of meaning clearly separates the outdoors as used for education from formal definitions of wilderness.

Wilderness is part of our language, but it is more than an idea, as there are expanses of land where non-human life can thrive, or decline, independent of human impacts. While sceptics assert wilderness is an unnatural social construction and "hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural" (Cronon,

1996b, p. 69), this does not necessarily lessen the experiences of the many people who have had positive emotionally fulfilling encounters in wilderness areas. These encounters are supported by a growing body of research, which suggests that wilderness offers opportunities to experience sensations of awe and spiritual connection which help one feel more alive and can transform lives (see Heintzman, 2003; Taniguchi, Freeman, & Richards, 2005).

The concept of wilderness incorporates objectively defined areas represented by size and remoteness as well as areas defined by subjective dimensions, or how people feel about them. Accepting and valuing the plurality of subjective meanings can, as Hull (2006) notes, overcome the limitations of polarising debates and encourage broad community engagement which seeks common ground. To date there has been little engagement with these debates within outdoor education, leaving meanings of the outdoors open-ended, and largely uncontested, despite a common perception that conflates wilderness with the outdoors.

## Outdoors as natural environments<sup>2</sup>

Nature's complexity, as Soper (1995) asserts, is masked by the ease and regularity with which we use the word. While Cronon (1996b) highlights the importance of thinking about nature as the "full continuum of natural landscapes that is also cultural" (p. 89), many inspirational writers (e.g. Abram, 1996; Berry, 2002; Snyder, 1995; Turner, 2008; Williams, 1995) usually refer to natural environments as areas which fill people with joy because they have little sign of buildings and industry. These avowed inspirational aspects of naturalness acquire moral

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<sup>2</sup>Natural environment is a contentious term because it is frequently based on the assumption that humans and nature are separate. This research recognises that humans are intricately bound together with nature, but accepts common usage whereby natural environments exist where human endeavour has not dramatically changed the appearance of the land and key elements of the area's ecology remain intact.

overtone as land which appears unadulterated by human artefacts is "viewed as good, morally innocent and so natural-looking landscapes take on the appearance of goodness" (Herrington, 2009, p. 7). To avoid repetition with previous debates of place, landscape, and wilderness, this section focuses on research which explores the connotations of goodness, health, and well-being often associated with natural environments.

There is a growing body of research on the effects of green spaces, views of trees, and fresh air as important factors in the recovery from stress; improved blood pressure and cholesterol levels; and reduced attention fatigue (Florez, Martinez, Chacra, Strickman-Stein, & Levis, 2007; Hartig, Evans, Jammer, Davis, & Garling, 2003; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1994; Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001). Studies have also indicated that being close to nature and green spaces improves physical vitality and co-ordination (Fjortoft & Sageie, 2000; Kellert, 1997), stimulates social interaction (Bixler, Floyd, & Hammitt, 2002; Cohen & Finch, 2008), and provides opportunities for personal development and well-being (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Frumkin, 2001; Kellert, 2002; Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, & Dolliver, 2009; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007; SPARC, 2008; Wells & Evans, 2003). Much of this work has direct relevance to outdoor education which often builds on feelings of well-being as a way to enhance learning potential, decrease anti-social behaviour, and improve physical fitness.

While the number of accounts which indicate that contact with natural outdoor environments improves health continues to grow, there remains debate as to how and why it occurs. Some research indicates that sunlight and fresh air improve mood by triggering the release of hormones such as serotonin (Keller et al., 2005), while other explanations focus on stress reducing environments (Kaplan, 2007). According to Kaplan (2007), natural environments possess qualities that help reduce mental fatigue, offering opportunities for people to both get

away from the stresses of everyday life and engage with environments which hold fewer distractions. Fatigue which occurs when the senses are inundated with excessive technological or social stimulations can seriously impair well-being by increasing irritability, antisocial behaviours, depression and stress (De Vries, Verheij, Groenewegen, & Spreeuwenberg, 2003; Mabey, 2006). A further reason for the positive effects has been termed 'biophilia' or the biological need to connect to the natural world (Kellert & Wilson, 1993). While this theory has gained some popularity, to date there is no strong support which indicates that benefits inevitably accrue from an innate state of 'biophilia' (Henwood, n.d.). Taken together, hormone stimulation, restorative environments, and innate environmental needs are potentially important concepts which help explain why exposure to natural outdoor environments leads to well-being.

Research in positive psychology suggests there are many benefits to generating feelings of well-being, although different views of what a sense of well-being means exist. Some researchers view it as subjective (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2005), whilst others take a more psychological approach (Ryff & Singer, 2006). There does appear however, to be overlap between personal feelings of happiness and the functional psychological elements of self-acceptance and sound relationships, which emanate from positive experiences. While not directly linked to natural environments, research on the benefits of positive experiences indicate improvements in resilience, social skills, and physical health (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). In addition, Seligman et al. (2009) describe their observations at Geelong Grammar School and its Timbertop outdoor education campus, where a focus on happiness and well-being promoted increases in creative and holistic thinking, resilience, and flexibility.

Panelli and Tipa (2007) challenge Western models of health and well-being which separate the person from their environment. They promote a holistic and generative approach, which integrates the land, family, and spirituality. Their ideas build on Durie's (2001) *Te Whare Tapa Wha* model, which emphasises balance between the four cornerstones of hinengaro (mental well-being); wairua (spiritual well-being); whānau (family well-being); and tinana (physical well-being). When any one of these elements is out of balance, overall well-being is compromised. This holistic approach, which embeds people in their physical, spiritual, and cultural environment, encourages people to think about where they live and how the environment enables people to flourish. For as Durie (1999) identifies, good health is hampered when the environment is polluted with contaminated water, smog, neon lighting, concrete slabs, or the jangle of steel which obliterates the sound of birds.

A full examination of the body of health and well-being orientated research, which is seeking insights into the effects of natural environments on the physiological and psychological responses of the body, is beyond the scope of this research. This brief summary alludes to why some people feel energised after spending time in natural environments and ways in which those feelings of well-being influence learning. The outdoors is often associated with natural environments and, as such, is bound up with concepts of healthy living, moral goodness, and positive well-being.

## Place, landscape, and wilderness research in Aotearoa New Zealand

To date, much of the research on meanings ascribed to natural environments in Aotearoa New Zealand has arisen from a resource management and tourism perspective (Booth, 2006). In general, management issues place prominence on outdoor environments as commodities to be managed to meet tourism needs (Cloke & Perkins,

2002). Many of these land management and tourism studies have measured, assessed, and quantified 'visitors' responses to the Department of Conservation (DoC) estate (Cessford & Burns, 2008; Squires, 2007). This is important work, but does not always uncover the values and meanings underpinning 'visitors' views as they can fail to grasp the rich detail of individual responses and the different social and cultural contexts in which they occurred. This is not to suggest that the writings of Park (2006), edited collections (Abbott & Reeve, 2011; Stephenson et al., 2010), and many other writers of prose and poetry, have not made a significant contribution to highlighting the way New Zealanders respond to the land, only that management decisions appear to be based more directly on quantified responses.

In the next section, I examine three studies which address relationships and meanings which New Zealanders form with the land they live and recreate in. These include: Hay's (1998) study of different cultural representations of Banks Peninsula; Stephenson's (2010) interviews with newcomers and long-time residents of Akaroa; and Wray's (2009) socio-cultural study on the meanings of wilderness through the stories and diaries of wilderness users. While different in scope, with Hay addressing place, Stephenson landscape, and Wray concentrating on wilderness, they offer insights into the connection New Zealanders form with the physical environment.

Hay's (1990, 1998) cross cultural perspectives of sense of place with residents from Banks Peninsula, a rural area one hour's drive from Christchurch, suggested that long-term residency, insider status, and local ancestry were important factors in developing a rooted sense of place, whereas those who visited for a short time would only achieve a fleeting appreciation. In talking of the physical attributes, the residents contrasted the sheltered nooks and crannies of the Peninsula's coastline with the expansive views and a sense of space whilst walking across the rugged tops. The residents also compared the Peninsula to the city

preferring the clean fresh air, sense of community, and the slower pace of life. At times he noted "an "us" versus "them" sentiment between city and country life" (Hay, 1990, p. 235) and despite many residents visiting Christchurch on a regular basis, they did not identify with the city. The shape of the Peninsula with its physical distinctiveness, hills, and natural enclosures created a feeling of separation from Christchurch and the Canterbury plains, which in turn was fashioned into a sense of territoriality.

Māori respondents, Hay (1998) observed, had a deep affinity to the spirituality of the Peninsula, and an awareness of significant historical sites, despite several of these sites being in private ownership or transformed by farming practices. He noted that both Pākehā and Māori had a sense of belonging to the land but, whereas Pākehā residents spoke of moving away to the city on retirement, Māori spoke of returning to be closer to tribal lands as they aged. The changing circumstances, age, and longevity of residence resulted in an on-going development of meaning.

Akaroa, on Banks Peninsula, was also the site of Stephenson's (2010) research. She interviewed long-term residents and those more recently arrived to explore what was important for them about the landscape. She identified over 750 comments and broadly grouped them into those relating to the physical, which she called the 'surface landscape' and others, which related to family histories, traditions, past experiences, as 'embedded landscape'. While she uses the term 'embedded landscape' other writers would likely talk about 'sense of place'. The surface or physical characteristics of the land the residents enthused about included the aesthetic landscapes of the bush and hills, the views of the harbour and sea, the drifting mist, and the clear starry nights. Many also spoke of the early pioneering days of whaling and sawmilling, and on-going practices of fishing, farming, and gathering kai moana (seafood), as ways of interacting with the landscape. These activities were two-way,

the residents interacted with the landscape, whilst the landscape influenced and shaped what they could do and where they could go. This two-way interaction bonded them to the land. Like Hay, she also noted the spirituality of Māori participants when they spoke of the area and how each place and each name had a story attached to it, thus while the landscapes were the same different cultures, residents, and visitors responded in some quite distinct ways.

In the introduction to her PhD thesis —*The culture of the wild: An exploration of the meanings and values associated with wilderness recreation in New Zealand*, Wray (2009) describes wilderness as

*... places where they might spend two weeks or more trudging through mud, rain, sleet, swamps, dense vegetation and boulder fields; sleeping in wet sleeping bags; carrying packs that weighed more than me; eating tasteless dried food; getting lost or flooded out of camp in the middle of the night, and not having a shower, a proper hot meal or a cold beer for the whole trip. This was the 'real' New Zealand wilderness, and it was only suitable for the truly experienced. It was a place where people could 'escape' from every day life; where they could explore the wild New Zealand landscape, develop outdoor skills and abilities, and live in a way similar to that of the first European settlers to New Zealand several hundred years ago. (2009, p. 1)*

In this statement, Wray captures many of the popular conceptions of wilderness, which were reinforced by her participants, a key one being that 'real' New Zealand was away from the city. She noted that the research participants from New Zealand, as opposed to those from overseas, demonstrated a "deep attachments to wilderness – as a concept and a place, and have developed strong views on what is and what is not appropriate in a wilderness setting" (Wray, 2009, p. 193).

They spoke about the wilderness with pride and having an affinity with it was perceived as part of being a New Zealander. In particular, they valued iconic native species of flora and fauna, magnificent scenery, and spectacular waterfalls and, in general, she found wilderness recreationalists were knowledgeable and interested in what was around.

Wilderness was a cultural icon for the New Zealanders in her study, so experiencing the challenges and solitude, and understanding more about it provided opportunities for them to explore their Kiwi roots. Despite valuing the naturalness of the land, many enjoyed visiting areas which contained traces of human history and links to the past. These traces forged links with the early wilderness explorers and their pioneering spirit. This spirit of overcoming hardship and battling stoically on, she noted, was built partly on stories of their forebears adapting to a demanding, isolated life in a rugged country.

These three studies indicate the meanings some New Zealanders hold about the outdoors, whether through the concept of place, landscape, or wilderness. One key element that emerged is how the shape, ruggedness, and unusual vegetation reinforced feelings of isolation. This isolation contributed to forming a national identity built on a pioneering spirit for Pākehā and a spiritual connection for Māori, with notions of exploration, stoicism, respect, and adventure blending together for many of their research participants. There was also tension between what the city offered as opposed to the smaller rural settlements or wilderness, with participants accepting the value of cities, but not liking them. Cities were described as crowded, busy, and unhealthy, with the 'real' New Zealand being tied to a rural ethic of hard work and community. Ancestors were venerated for their efforts of adapting to this new land and in improving productivity, but general land transformation and the destruction of native habitat was disparaged.

These studies reveal some of the complexity surrounding the meanings New Zealanders hold about the outdoors and, in doing so, highlight the need for more work to be done in this area. With culture playing a part in the meanings formed, looking at different groups has the potential to increase understanding about how these different meanings influence the way we live, work, and care for the planet.

## Summary

The problems of language and the meaning of words such as outdoors, environment, place, natural environments, landscape, and wilderness, create a degree of ambiguity, confusion, and opacity (see Barry & Smith, 2008; Bourke & Meppem, 2000). While some terms have an aura of familiarity, which conveys a self-evident understanding, they still mean different things to different people. Certain definitions however gain credibility; a subtle process of demarcation takes place, with some meanings becoming privileged, while others are marginalised (Cronon, 1996c). These dominant meanings can influence and limit the type of experiences we have and the ways in which we interact with the environment (Barrett, 2006; Fox, 2000). So while many meanings are not inherent, they can appear to be. Thus, how these terms are used and interpreted "is not politically or ethically neutral; it has implications for who 'we' are and the values and practices we have in relation to the land" (Barry & Smith, 2008, p. 565). As Smith (1999, p. 157) notes, this is particularly important for indigenous groups if they are to maintain control over meanings, because in "naming the world" they also name their realities. In a similar vein, with the outdoors receiving limited attention from outdoor educators, potentially they could lose control over what it means to them and their educational practices. In addition, opening up debates and exploring the multiple possibilities of what the outdoors does and could mean offers fertile ground for unpacking certain assumptions within outdoor education.

The outdoors has been the focus of fictional, historical, and political stories, depicting images of the outdoors as sites of aesthetic importance, challenge, stoic endeavour, and well-being. These depictions influence, but do not determine our personal experiences, as the outdoors does not have a singular, fixed, and stable meaning. It is our practices, connections, and relationships, which constitute its meaning. This requires appreciating individual perspectives and listening carefully to nuanced responses, but with a focus on what draws ideas together, for it is the interplay of personal experiences and social narratives, which reveals both commonly accepted beliefs and the instability of meaning.

Place, wilderness, landscape, and natural environments have been at the centre of many philosophical and cultural debates, yet the outdoors has received less attention, despite being used as a symbol of Aotearoa New Zealand to define self, culture, and nation. The lack of debate defies its complexity and raises questions for, and potentially limits the development of, outdoor education, which has as its agenda – education in, for, and about the outdoors.

## **Chapter 3 – Unearthing the outdoors in outdoor education**

Outdoor education in a variety of forms has been part of Aotearoa New Zealand for over 150 years (Lynch, 1998). However, after examining the nature and scope of outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, Zink and Boyes (2006) concluded there was considerable ambiguity in terminology relating to teaching in the outdoors. This raised questions for them about how clearly outdoor educators themselves understand and/or are able to articulate the role of the outdoors in their practice.

While there is much debate over terminology and the purpose and goals of outdoor education, little has been written on the role of the outdoors in the process of achieving its aims (Brookes, 2004b). When it is considered, it gains some significance from being different from 'normal' classroom education (Zink & Burrows, 2008). This sees the outdoors being represented as an unproblematic and uniform set of places to educate, despite many writers (e.g. Cronon, 1996c; Massey, 2006; Thrift, 2000a; Tuan, 1977, 1990; Wattchow, 2004a; Wylie, 2005) suggesting that human relationships with places are intensely complex and ambiguous.

The prime focus of this chapter is to examine pertinent themes in the literature regarding the relationship between the outdoors and outdoor education particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand. This review starts by trying to untangle relevant terminology to delve into ways that the outdoors has been incorporated, or not, into different streams of outdoor education. It then explores reflections about the outdoors from outdoor educators.

## Unravelling outdoor education

Lynch suggests that, in general, New Zealanders believe outdoor education to be "young people engaged in physical activities in natural environments" (1999, p. 243). Different programmes, however, are underpinned by various ideologies, practices, attitudes to the environment, leadership styles, and educational aims. This range of programmes increases the complexity of what outdoor education means to different educators and teachers, as taking primary students outdoors can be quite different to what happens in secondary school programmes or at residential centres like Outward Bound.

According to Hammerman, Hammerman, and Hammerman (2001) outdoor education is "education which takes place in the outdoors" (p.1). This broad definition appears all encompassing, but there are some fundamental difficulties with the definition. For instance, a survey of Australian outdoor educators (Parkin, 1998) noted that 31% of those questioned believed that outdoor education could occur indoors. In addition, an editorial commentary (Reed, 2002) questioned whether the outdoors was actually needed at all for outdoor education. Some outdoor educators, for example, use swimming pools, indoor gyms and climbing walls, and run skateboarding sessions in covered car parks (Pux, 1999). Thus, while it might appear that a major distinguishing character is the outdoor setting, this is not always the case. The Ministry of Education (2004) broadens the Hammerman et al. (2001) definition to include purpose and content statements as well as location when they describe outdoor education as "education in the outdoors, for the outdoors, and about the outdoors" (Ministry of Education, 2004, para. 4). While this removes the emphasis from being outdoors, it still remains important to ask what counts as 'the outdoors'?

So while outdoor education is supposedly delineated by a focus on the outdoors, it sometimes gains significance by contrasting it to classroom-based education (Neill, 2004b; Zink & Burrows, 2008). Zink and Burrows

state "the educative power of outdoor education resides in this relationship of difference as much as it does in what the outdoors' is" (2008, p. 253). This supports Lynch's (2000) observations that students often commented that their camp experiences were valued not because of the outdoor environment, but because of the contrast they provided with the school environment. When defined in opposition, outdoor education becomes related to what happens in the classroom. As Neill (2004a) states, "it requires a distancing of civilization from nature in order for "nature" to have novel effects and an "indoorisation" of education in order for "outdoor" to be considered worthy of identification" (para 2).

Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richard's (1997) meta-analysis, and literature reviews by McKenzie (2000) and Rickinson et al. (2004a) exploring claims regarding the efficacy of outdoor education programmes indicated that, while findings identified some positive benefits for most students, there was little focus on the processes underpinning how these changes occurred. This confirms what Ewert (1983, p. 27) indicated, when he suggested that an outcome approach is a pervasive "educational black box", where benefits may be identified, but cannot be meaningfully aligned with what happens during the experience. More recently Zink's (2005) research into an outdoor education programme in Aotearoa New Zealand identified the complexity and contradictions inherent in the experiences of the students, noting that many of these experiences are normalised by discourses of outdoor education. Hence, she believed that outdoor educators see what they expect to see, but do not unpack the underlying assumptions. In regard to the outdoors, this is often perceived as a good place to be and a useful place to enhance learning (Zink & Burrows, 2008). Although as Bixler and Floyd (1997) note, not all students enjoy being outdoors with some perceiving it to be scary, dirty, and uncomfortable.

### ***The changing face of education***

From the late 1980s, education in Aotearoa New Zealand has been transformed by neo-liberal policies which promote economic efficiency, business style competitive strategies, and centralised forms of control and accountability (Codd, 2005). Neo-liberal politics, according to Kincheloe (2007), rescinded progressive forms of education by promoting standardised testing, individualism, self-interest, and consumerism. These values in turn promote competition and consumption ahead of care and responsibility. Alongside these political changes, the curriculum itself was undergoing reform. The consultation for this reform started in the mid-1980s, and the initial draft (Department of Education, 1988) drew together separate subject areas and promoted a holistic format. This draft, however, was further reviewed in the early 1990s to encompass more business perspectives and reflect the growing neo-liberal agenda. As Chapman (2011) notes, later curriculum documents were ideologically different from the initial draft, having a greater focus on preparing students to compete in the international economy. These changes promoted more accountability, leading to a reliance on measurable learning outcomes, a narrowing of content, and less attention on the processes of thinking and learning (Codd, 2005). While a comprehensive review of these changes is beyond the scope of this research, Dumble (2003), Hill (2011), and Boyes (2012) ascertain that these changes have been significant in shaping outdoor education over the last 20 years.

In 1999, as a consequence of the curriculum reforms, outdoor education was officially positioned as one of seven key areas of learning within Health and Physical Education (Ministry of Education, 1999). With the release of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (English-medium schools)<sup>3</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2007), eight learning areas were created with

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<sup>3</sup>*Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* is the official curriculum for Māori-medium schools.

outdoor education remaining in the health and physical education area. The essence of the health and physical education area was distilled as:

*Through learning and by accepting challenges in health-related and movement contexts, students reflect on the nature of well-being and how to promote it. As they develop resilience and a sense of personal and social responsibility, they are increasingly able to take responsibility for themselves and contribute to the wellbeing of those around them, of their communities, of their environments (including natural environments), and of the wider society. (Ministry of Education, 2007)*

This statement highlights individual responsibility emphasising challenge, individual well-being, resilience, and personal contributions to society and the environment. Although officially placed within the health and physical education curriculum the overall key areas of learning and values embedded in the curriculum are supportive of holistic outdoor education practices. Indeed many school camps and excursions directly support delivery of these broader aims and values.

Understandings of what constitutes learning are very complex and a complete review is beyond the scope of this research. Outdoor pedagogy has tended to emphasise experiential, holistic, and active ways of learning. Sfard (1998) succinctly summarised complex learning strategies as a contest between the metaphor of acquisition and that of participation. Acquisition focuses on learning that is intentional, explicit, and cognitive, whereas participatory learning emerges from formal and informal social experiences, often occurring within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) also suggest a shift is occurring in the way learning and thinking is conceptualised "rather than casting thought as a phenomenon that is about the world, thinking is recognised to be part of the world" (2000, pp. 63-64). Learning in that context is no longer seen as acquiring a reality that is external to the learner, but a more holistic, experiential,

and participatory co-evolution which transforms learners and their surroundings. Stables (2005) prefers the term making meaning from experience, whilst Ingold (2010) suggests that while making meaning is preferable to transmission and acquisition, it still does not allow for the open-ended way we learn by responding to and living within our environment. This dynamic and organic way of growing meanings embeds learners within the environment and emphasises the importance of where we learn. Education which moves beyond the classroom allows meanings to emerge from encounters in the world and acknowledges the different learning processes that each individual experiences. Whilst some outdoor education practices have adopted vocational outcomes and competency-based assessment, which have aligned them closer to current neo-liberal educational practices (Boyes, 2012), being outdoors enhances opportunities for holistic, spontaneous, unplanned, and experiential learning opportunities.

### ***The changing face of outdoor education***

Historical records reveal that field trips, outdoor excursions, and nature studies have occurred in some schools since the 1850s (Lynch, 2006). In the 1930s and 40s this extended as "New Zealand educators began to emulate their British counterparts in taking children camping" (Lynch, 2006, p. 9). Camp activities were wide and varied, and included not only tramping, map and compass work, and abseiling, but also many sports, games, and swimming. In addition, nature studies, social studies, art and craft were undertaken, but possibly the greatest focus lay in "improving bodily health as an antidote to some of the harmful effects of urban life" (Cates, 1978, p. 171). While sleeping in tents was part of the experience, many schools visited residential bases such as Port Waikato or Mangatepopo Camp School, which had large dormitories and communal halls where the students slept and ate together. Teachers were encouraged to do nothing at the camp which could be covered as well or better back at the school (Cates, 1978). This is similar to the view

espoused in the USA, by L.B. Sharp (1895-1963) a pioneer of summer camps, who said "that which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there. That which can best be learned in the out-of-doors through direct experience, dealing with native materials and life situations, should there be learned" (Sharp as cited in Brookes, 2004b, p. 8). While, as Brookes points out this statement raises more questions than answers concerning learning; it does introduce direct experience as an important component of outdoor education.

By the 1970s, camping and outdoor education were no longer seen as synonymous, and camping was regarded as just one part of outdoor education (Dowling, 1978). However, as Lynch (2006) systematically details, the concept of camping was and still is an important part of outdoor education practice. Lynch concludes her book by reiterating that the emphasis on camping has helped outdoor education retain strong connections with physical activities in, and studies of, natural or near natural environments.

As society has changed, the reasons for delivering outdoor education have also changed. It started as camps and morally uplifting excursions into the fresh air to improve the health and well-being of children, but changed during the 1940s when some programmes were designed to prepare youth for war (Lynch, 2006). This is evident in the origins of Outward Bound which prepared merchant seamen in WWII to become more resilient and improve their survival rate in times of extreme hardship (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). After WWII, Aotearoa New Zealand became more affluent, allowing many citizens to recreate outdoors (Ross, 2008). Following this social trend, outdoor education became more activity focused with the natural environment moving from "that of battleground to playground" (Nicol, 2002a, p. 37). This shift from military training to recreation remains incomplete as the military ideals of endurance, leadership, and social adjustment were transferred into

the personal growth aspirations of many outdoor education programmes (Brookes, 2003a, 2003b).

In the 1990s, the nature and purpose of outdoor education was often presented as three interlocking circles of adventure activities, environmental education, and social and personal development, with outdoor education located at the overlap (Higgins & Loynes, 1997). In general, outdoor education was seen as a means to enhance these three areas, although adventure activities themselves were sometimes used as the means to achieve the other two elements. To a large extent, this model separates the components into three distinct bodies of knowledge, but draws attention to outdoor education being a balance of all three elements. As discussed later in this chapter, a split between these three areas started to form as environmental educators became more concerned about the role of adventure generating competitive and anthropological views of the world.

Several researchers (e.g. Cosgriff, 2008; Davidson, 2001; Hill, 2010; Lynch, 2006; Zink & Boyes, 2006) suggest that adventure along with social and personal development is the central discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand outdoor education. This has triggered some international authors (Brookes, 2006; Nicol, 2003; Sheard & Golby, 2006; Stewart, 2008) into separating outdoor education into 'outdoor adventure education' and 'outdoor environmental education' allowing some programmes to distance themselves from perceptions of adventure. Boyes (2012) also highlights the on-going tension between "outdoor education as adventure and outdoor education as outdoor learning with environmental education also being a factor" (p. 30), concluding that adventure is currently in a dominant position. This dominance is potentially waning however, with many programmes using more place-responsive, sustainable, and socio-ecological foci in primary, secondary, and tertiary outdoor education (Cosgriff et al., 2012a; Education Review Office, 2011; Irwin, Straker, & Hill, 2012; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

In research by Zink and Boyes (2006), Haddock (2007a, 2007b), and Hill (2010), outdoor educators identified social and personal development as the most important learning outcomes for their programmes. While some research supports these claims (see Rickinson et al., 2004b), Brookes (2003a, 2003b) argues that because there is a pervasive attribution error in many studies, much of the research is invalid. Changes in behaviour, he contends, are falsely attributed to the person and their disposition, not to changes in the situation. He meticulously builds a case as to why changes noted in one situation are therefore not transferable to other situations. Thus, taking people into the outdoors to improve confidence, teamwork, or leadership, may result in some noticeable changes, but these would not necessarily be sustained when the person returns home.

The notion of outdoor education assisting in the development of desirable behaviours is intuitively appealing to educators as it provides a rationale for their practice (Sheard & Golby, 2006). Many such developmental approaches use a challenge-based philosophy— in this way the activities and the people become dominant and the venue receives little consideration. For example, much of the research which measures outcomes in relation to an individual's personal development does not mention the outdoors (e.g. Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010; Sheard & Golby, 2006; Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, & Furman, 2008). The emphasis is placed entirely on the activities which challenge the students and the methods used by the facilitators to draw out the learning opportunities. Hence, while personal development provides a rationale for outdoor education, it can also overwhelm the outdoors and the reasons for going there.

### ***Experiential education***

While the adventure activity, social and personal development, and environmental elements of outdoor education continue to be debated,

some definitions of outdoor education have focused more on the method of teaching rather than on a subject with a clear body of content (Higgins, 2003; Lynch, 1999; Nicol, 2002a). Lynch states "unlike most other curriculum innovations of its time, outdoor education was initially viewed as a teaching method" (1999, abstract, n.p.). As a method of teaching, outdoor educators often build on some of the principles of experiential education which relate back to Dewey (1929). Plummer (2009) notes that the "precise meaning and background of an experiential philosophy is difficult to articulate and frequently unclear, although many outdoor educators subscribe to it" (p. 247). Experiential education has been defined as "a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experiences" (Luckmann, 1996, p.7), but most constructivist perspectives of experiential education focus on a learning cycle which suggests that learning results from abstract reflection on concrete experiences from which new abstractions and applications result (Beard & Wilson, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Priest & Gass, 2005). However, this process has been critiqued by Payne & Wattchow (2008) as it can promote a rational and verbal accounting of experience which devalues the role of the learner's body. Other critics argue that constructivist learning cycle models offer mechanistic conceptions of learning (Brown, 2009; Quay, 2003), and ignore the ways that actions and perceptions are socially and culturally determined (Brown, 2010; Seaman, 2007).

While direct experiences are deemed important, experiential education can happen anywhere and does not require an outdoor environment. Research in this area has tended to focus on the processes of the experiential learning cycle itself and not the environment (Seaman, 2007). As Seaman (2008) notes, this focus on a discrete cycle of activities, which suggests reflection occurs after experience, undermines the importance of learning in experience and through physical engagement with the environment. While there are numerous critiques

of experiential education (Brown, 2009, 2010; Fenwick, 2001; Seaman, 2008), it remains an ascribed practice for many outdoor educators. Furthermore, the potential of engaging students through experiential learning has meant that many educators have become interested in using the outdoors to enhance learning across the curriculum, as being outdoors allows for emotionally engaging experiences.

### ***Education outside the classroom***

Not all outdoor education that occurs within schools fits under the health and physical education curriculum. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the term education outside the classroom (EOTC) is sometimes used interchangeably with outdoor education but, particularly in primary and intermediate schools, it has become a style of education which uses different environments to enhance the curriculum. It was first coined by Bill Renwick, Director General of Education (Hughes, 2006/07) in the late 1970s, in an attempt to encompass more teachers and move the emphasis away from camping and outdoor pursuits.

Currently in Aotearoa New Zealand:

*EOTC is a generic term used to describe curriculum-based learning and teaching that extends the four walls of the classroom. EOTC can range from a museum or marae visit to a sports trip, an outdoor education camp, a field trip to the rocky shore, or a visit to practise another language. EOTC can take place in the school grounds, in the local community, or in regions further afield, including overseas. (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 6)*

This is a change from the previous definition which described EOTC as "curriculum-based learning that extends beyond the four walls of the classroom" (Haddock & Sword, 2004, p. 26). While the change from 'learning that extends beyond the four walls of the classroom', to

'learning and teaching that extends the four walls of the classroom' is subtle, it is significant for meanings of the outdoors, which is often symbolically related to concepts of freedom and space (Haluza-Delay, 2001; Maynard & Waters, 2007; Pohl, Borrie, & Patterson, 2000; Straker, 2005). By 'extending the walls' an image of containment is created and some of that symbolism is lost. It also suggests a move toward aligning with classroom orthodoxies rather than offering something distinct.

A UK report on outdoor learning also referred to the outdoors as an outdoor classroom (Dillon et al., 2005). The authors identified a need to understand more about what the outdoors offered education and a "greater conceptual understanding of ways that students can learn in the outdoor classroom" (p. 5). They defined the outdoor classroom as "*those spaces where students can experience familiar and unfamiliar phenomena beyond the normal confines of the classroom*" (p. 10, italics as in original). Their report suggested the outdoors was particularly beneficial when integrated with classroom learning as it enhanced student engagement, which offers a very utilitarian approach to the outdoors.

Furthermore, because EOTC recognises such diverse opportunities to learn, Boyes (2012) notes that this has sometimes resulted in "the dilution of the pervasiveness of the context of the natural environment" (p. 31). He believes this has marginalised elements of environmental education and results in nebulous environmental goals. Zink and Burrows (2008) also question the lack of focus on the environment and suggest it has resulted in a blurring of indoor and outdoor educational spaces, whereby many of the norms of schooling are actually reiterated in the outdoors. This does not take away from some of the other reasons for going outside which include opportunities for direct 'real' experiences (Gilbertson et al., 2006; Haddock & Sword, 2004; Kellert, 2002; Potter & Gray, 1999). In addition, sensory learning (Auer, 2008; Dickson, 1996); increasing student involvement and interest (Ballantyne

& Parker, 2002; Cooper, 1996; Jensen & Guthrie, 2006); and addressing problems in local contexts (Gilbertson et al., 2006; Vickers & Matthews, 2002) are also attributed to learning outside the classroom.

### ***Adventure Education***

Overseas and especially in the UK, the terms outdoor education and adventure education are sometimes used interchangeably (Boyes, 2000), and at other times have been combined into outdoor adventure education. Outdoor adventure education programmes often use adventurous activities to create challenging situations with the aim of enhancing personal and social development (McKenzie, 2000; Priest & Gass, 2005). Not all adventures are dangerous, but most involve some level of risk, as the outcomes of setting out on an adventure are generally unknown. Ewert and Garvey (2007) describe adventure education as "activities and experiences that often include elements of danger or risk and uncertain outcomes" (p. 22).

Hopkins and Putnam (1993) were influential writers in Great Britain, who promoted the term adventure education in preference to outdoor education. They represented it as a triangle of outdoor, adventure, and education (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993) although they did not ascribe anything special to outdoor, other than as a location where adventurous activity could take place. Adventure however, involved three main aspects: uncertainty of outcomes; doing something new; and overcoming challenges, while education was discussed in terms of moral, social, and intellectual growth through the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and experience. For Nicol (2002b), adventure education's emphasis on technical skills and doing activities is the crucial difference from outdoor education, which has a greater emphasis on experiencing the world through the medium of activities. As Nicol states, "the nature of experience (phenomenology), therefore, became the defining element which distinguished adventure education from outdoor

education" (2002b, p. 92). Boyes (2012) on the other hand, suggests the difference lies not in the experience or the activities but in the expected outcomes, which can be summarised as activities for adventure or activities for learning. Either way, environmental education is relegated to the background.

As mentioned earlier, terms have developed distinct meanings in different countries. In Aotearoa New Zealand, 'adventure education' has been used extensively by a private training enterprise (PTE) predominately to train people for scuba diving awards (Adventure Education, 2009), possibly as a consequence of this the term has received limited use in school programmes with the preference being for outdoor education or outdoor adventure education. However, as an international organisation which offers experience-based outdoor leadership courses, Outward Bound in Aotearoa New Zealand remains closely aligned with adventure education as many of the practices promoted in adventure education originated from the British tradition (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). In North America the term has been adopted by Project Adventure (see Prouty, Panicucci, & Collinson, 2007), but in Aotearoa New Zealand the programmes and ideas promoted by Project Adventure are usually grouped together under nomenclature of adventure-based learning (ABL) which has emerged as a subset of adventure education (Brown, 2006; Cosgriff, 2000). Adventure education programmes and ABL activities are often conducted on a ropes course, but can be conducted in a gymnasium, conference centre, or city park; they do not necessarily need to go away from urban environments, although some do. If natural environments are used, then often "nature is understood as an assault course, gymnasium or puzzle to be resolved and controlled. It is a resource to be commodified instead of a home to which to relate" (Loynes, 2002, p. 114).

Adventure education attempts to enhance a feeling of risk within safe operating practices. This tension between risk and safety receives a lot of

attention at outdoor education conferences, in the media, and within organisations such as NZOIA (New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association) and MSC (Mountain Safety Council). This attention, along with tourist images of adventure sports, can normalise ideas of risk and challenge being necessary for all outdoor learning (Brown & Fraser, 2009; Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Zink, 2003). This is further exacerbated by the current trend to increase safety legislation, as according to Jones (2004/2005) this keeps the spotlight on the adventure aspects of outdoor education. Several scholars (e.g. Boyes, 2012; Brown & Fraser, 2009; Hill, 2011; Zink, 2003) believe the role of adventure has become too dominant in Aotearoa New Zealand, but both Martin (2004) and Thomas (2005) suggest that when educators remove all adventure pursuits, this can then limit the students' enjoyment of outdoor education experiences and ultimately reduce their motivation to venture outdoors.

While the role of adventure in outdoor education is contested, adventure itself has many benefits. Simmel's essay *The Adventurer*, identifies that "in the adventure we abandon ourselves to the world with fewer defenses and reserves than in any other relation" (Simmel, 1910 [1997], p. 225). Engagement in adventurous physical pursuits is claimed to open up the senses and help us make sense of the world through our bodies as opposed to our minds (Cooper, 1996; Edensor, 2000; Haskell, 1999; Lewis, 2000; Lorimer & Lund, 2003; Michael, 2000). According to Gadamer (1990, p. 60), adventure "lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength." He goes on to note that, while adventure interrupts the routine of everyday life, it remains a continuous part of our lives. We emerge enriched from adventure and carry these exceptional experiences back into the on-going context of our lives. This is not to say that all adventure achieves that, as some adventure is packaged for easy consumption, whereby thrills can be instantly enjoyed

without on-going commitment (Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Foley, Frew, & McGillivray, 2003; Loynes, 1998).

By implication, the term adventure education potentially suppresses elements of caring for and learning about the outdoors as the emphasis is placed on being outdoors for anthropomorphic benefits. As Wattchow (2004a) notes, outdoor educators need to be aware of what they do, what they say, and how they present ideas as they can influence how participants relate to the land. Privileging adventure and excluding broader relationships with the outdoors could detract from forming caring relationships which help students understand the integrated nature of their role within the world.

### ***Outdoor Pursuits***

Confusion can also occur when the terms outdoor recreation and outdoor pursuits are used alongside, or interchangeably, with outdoor education. Outdoor recreation covers any activity done outdoors, with a subset being 'outdoor pursuits', which relates to the individual activities, especially those which are not mechanised (Priest, 1986; Priest & Gass, 2005). A major provider of outdoor education experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand is the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre (SEHOPC). This centre commenced operation in 1973 and Graeme Dingle, as the founder, considered calling it *The Outdoor Pursuits and Education Centre*, but thought its inevitable abbreviation to OPEC was too controversial (Dingle, 1981). However the term 'outdoor pursuits' introduced a competing philosophical strand into the outdoor education debate which Hughes, a school inspector with national responsibility for outdoor education, called "gung-ho" (Hughes as cited in Lynch, 2006, p. 153).

Pursuits such as kayaking, rock climbing, tramping, caving, and skiing continue to be used within outdoor education despite critiques suggesting adventure activities can refigure the outdoors into an

adventure playground (Boyes, 2012; Loynes, 2002). Many recreational pursuits introduce conquering or competitive values, which influence how we see our role in the world. Some scholars further this argument by suggesting that adventure pursuits are embroiled in an anthropocentric view of the domination of nature, which potentially undermines the ability to build connections with the environment (Boyes, 2012; Irwin, 2008b; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

The shift to a more technical pursuit focus of outdoor education was furthered indirectly by the 1989 'Education Act' which promoted the development of a national framework for qualifications (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2005). Part of that initiative was to forge closer connections between education and industry, which resulted in the formation of various Industry Training Organisations (ITO's). These ITO's were required to standardise qualifications and break them down into unit standards, which would become the building blocks of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The style of outdoor education which the NQF promoted was, according to Dumble (2003), based on the neo-liberal agenda which sought accountability. Hence, small units of learning which were easily measured were valued ahead of broad-based holistic knowledge. Unit standards, for example use competency-based assessments, which require clear learning outcomes. In the outdoor sector, many of the resultant unit standards address technical skill acquisition and risk management, as these are easier to measure than values of caring for self, others, and the environment. According to Dumble (2003) and Jones (2004), this technical and assessment focus undermined the very hallmark of outdoor education. These vocational unit standards were adopted in some secondary schools and centres partly because they attracted some government funding. As a participant in Jones's research stated "our outdoor education program looks better on paper now and is better resourced, but personal and social development run a distant second to qualifications" (2004, p. 4). The

balance between recreation, adventure, thrills, and learning about and caring for the outdoors remains in constant flux as proponents of different strands promote their preferences.

### ***Outdoor environmental education***

A recent cohort of writing suggests "the greening of outdoor education" (Thomas, 2005, p. 31), where stronger connections have been forged with environmental education and education for sustainability (Cooper, 2004; Irwin, 2008a; Irwin et al., 2012; Martin & McCullagh, 2011; Nicol, 2003). This suggests that the link between environmental and outdoor education is recent, yet according to Lynch (2006) there are many examples of outdoor education being an important vehicle for nature study in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Following the initial enthusiasm for field studies a gradual trend to include more physical exercise and activities emerged and, in the late 1970s, records show that environmental aims became subsumed by those of personal and social development (Lynch, 2006). With the increase of physical activity, some proponents of environmental education began to actively distance themselves from outdoor education, setting up the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education (NZAE) in 1984 (Irwin, 2010). This association promoted environmental education as having cross-curricula links to multiple disciplines beyond outdoor education.

The scope of environmental education is also changing. As Palmer (1998) noted the term environmental education, while first used in the 1940s, did not become popular until the 1960s. Since then many academic papers and books have addressed environmental issues, with many calling for urgent action to redress negative impacts caused by industry effluents and affluent lifestyles. While environmental education has traditionally focused on scientific and ecological studies of the natural environment, as well as conservation issues, in the last two decades there has been a trend towards integrating more social, political, and

economic concerns (Eames, Cowie, & Bolstad, 2008). This included a shift from teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to protect the environment towards challenging normative assumptions of how to live on the earth with the goal of changing human behaviour in order to live more sustainably (Orr, 2004). This has led to a broadening of the term environment from its position as 'natural' to encompass global and local social contexts although, at times, there is tension between educators who value environmental protection, and those who want a stronger focus on social justice (Reid & Scott, 2006). In Aotearoa New Zealand, 'environmental education' is becoming more commonly referred to as 'education for sustainability' (Efs), with key goals of living within environmental limits, achieving social justice, and fostering economic and social progress while developing a quality of life for all (Ministry of Education, 2009). Thus, experiences and activities in the outdoors which do not consider the wider impacts of society, have little in common with current conceptions of Efs. Despite this shift, field studies still appear to be considered an important part of environmental education practice, with many learning resources provided to encourage teachers to explore local reserves and parks, as evidenced on the resources page of the NZAEE website (New Zealand Association for Environmental Education, 2010). The growing emphasis on addressing social issues still relies on developing engagement with environments outside the constraints of a classroom as one way to promote pro-environmental behaviour is to spend time outdoors building a feeling of connection to nature (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Heimlich & Ardoin, 2008; Jordan, 2009). These include both local environments, which help students understand some of the pragmatic events of living in a community, and natural areas further afield, such as National Parks, which are equally important to learn about and develop a relationship with.

It is also important to note that environmental education has its detractors. The Bush administration in the United States threatened to cut funding for environmental education, citing 'political advocacy' as the reason (Gruenewald, 2005). Similarly, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the National government announced cuts to environmental education, EfS, and 'Enviroschools' in the 2009 budget (New Zealand Association for Environmental Education, 2009), although some of these cuts were later withdrawn. This alienation in some sectors has supported the rise of another related term –'place-based education' (Gruenewald, 2005, 2008). This name "potentially appeals to a broader range of participants in communities and schools. Whether people identify with or are alienated by 'environmentalism', they can still appreciate and care about the places where they live" (Gruenewald, 2005, p. 263).

### ***Place-responsive outdoor education***

Places matter, and learning about them in tangible ways may help people appreciate and live in closer harmony with them (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Interest in place often derives from the belief that experiences in, knowing about, and an emotional connection with, places will lead to caring for them.

Place-responsive education has two main strands; a closer connection to the local environment through community work projects and developing a stronger sense of place by being more knowledgeable and intimately connected to different locales. While there are exceptions, the focus on community and service work often occurs in the United States (see Gruenewald, 2005, 2008), whilst education exploring sense of place is more prevalent in Australia (see Birrell, 2001; Brookes, 2002b; Dickson, 2003; Stewart, 2008; Wattchow, 2007, 2008). Either way, place-based or place-responsive education requires awareness of the human and non-human forces shaping the specific localities. A similar focus is not as

evident in Aotearoa New Zealand, although it appears to be gaining momentum (see Irwin et al., 2012; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

A focus on place-responsiveness highlights problems which arise when ideas are transported around the world without consideration of how they fit within the local landscape. This tendency to abstract and universalise nature and knowledge can erase the local and indigenous ways of relating to the land (Gough, 2000; Takano et al., 2009). In Japan, for example, concerns were raised about the lack of relevance when programmes were imported from USA and Britain. This was resolved in one area by talking with the community and designing a programme which incorporated the concept of 'huudo' which recognised that each locality had its own stories and reality (Maeda, 2005). Wattchow (2001) also states that the concept of place in outdoor education tends to be generalised rather than treated as a specific experience of a particular place and, as a result, educators often do not know much about the area where they work. Brookes (2006, p. 20) further highlights this as a problem when he states "if guided outdoor activities do in fact shape knowledge of and attitudes towards outdoor environments, the idea of a guide who knows little or nothing about the place in which they offer guidance is alarming".

Wattchow and Brown (2011) point out that place-responsive education is more than retro fitting the current curricula to local places. It requires a vision of education which is trans-disciplinary, bringing together people, learning experiences, and the "geophysical reality of the site of learning itself" (p. 77). The learner is embodied in and entwined with specific places through building up personal experiences and stories which in turn develop a sense of being an empathetic insider in the way they seek to understand and experience place. In advocating for a place-responsive mode of outdoor education, Brown and Wattchow emphasise the importance of learning to respond to and empathise with specific places rather than the outdoors in general.

## Outdoor meanings in the reflections of outdoor educators

One way to understand more about how meanings about the outdoors and outdoor education are constituted is to examine what is shared through articles in peer-reviewed journals. The following section explores some of these storied experiences.

### ***Lake Karapiro***

*The nights were getting cooler, the days shorter; winter would soon arrive.*

*The plan was simple. We were to paddle across Lake Karapiro to a small tributary stream. The hill moon, glowing in the clear sky, beckoned us. It was a perfect night for camping. The fifteen or so canoeists donned warm flannels, woolens, and life jackets. Each canoe, kayak and paddler was linked with another according to a buddy system. With an instructor at the “bow” and “stern” of the flotilla, the aim was to keep the group tightly together.*

*Silence was the key. From the outset, there was to be no unnecessary audible communication – quite a task for thirteen and fourteen year olds. There were waterfowl nesting on the far-side of the lake we did not want to disturb, and, beside if everyone kept silent emergencies could readily be detected. We anxiously paddled across the expanse of water, our eyes straining to penetrate the darkness and interpret the eerie forms that loomed ahead. Soon eyes became accustomed to the night and confidence soared. No longer were the timid secretly wishing to turn back. All we heard was a gentle swishing as each craft glided through the dark waters, the hooting of a morepork (a native owl), water dripping from the paddle blades as alternate strokes were made, the occasional*

*arrogant pukeko, and the croaking of the ubiquitous frogs. It was a serene way to end a hectic day. (Knowles, 1992, p. 6)*

The stories people tell of their outdoor education experiences can provide some indication of the meanings that shape their practice. Knowles (1992) tells his story of an outdoor education camp on the shores of Lake Karapiro in Aotearoa New Zealand; within it are some key outdoor education narratives. He talks about the natural rhythms of nature; planning and risk management; the sense of excitement and adventure generated by venturing in to the unknown; encounters with wildlife; and the potential for personal growth through overcoming challenge. Later in his story, he discusses the spiritual strength and purity of the outdoors, suggesting that nature speaks for itself and does not require contrived reflection experiences. He comments that he has observed many students growing and benefitting from exposure to experiences such as this.

These stories are not unique to Knowles. Many outdoor educators talk about the need for adventure (e.g. Dingle, 1981; Kane & Tucker, 2007; Mortlock, 2001; Priest & Gass, 2005), spiritual awakening (e.g. Gair, 1999; Hågvar, 1999; Haluza-Delay, 2000; Henderson, 1993; Little, 2005; Rea, 2003), risk management (e.g. Davidson, 2006; Haddock & Sword, 2004), personal development (e.g. Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Nichols, 2004; Priest & Gass, 2005), encounters with natural places and wildlife (Birrell, 2001; Martin, 2005; Stewart, 2003), and the culture of fear that pervades society (e.g. Baillie, 2004; Sullivan, 2006). The predominance of these themes in outdoor education texts contributes to maintaining them as worthy and established outdoor education practices.

In addition and somewhat different from many texts, Knowles (1992) captured the holistic and integrated way that learning occurred whilst on the camp. There was an ebb and flow to the learning and experiences with a sense of how the hectic and serene, the raucous and quiet, the day and night helped students become attuned to where they were. His

description emphasised the interconnected aspects of outdoor education, which link personal and social development, to activities and heightening environmental responsiveness, highlighting the lack of separation between environmental, experiential, adventure, and personal growth experiences.

***'Moving on an effortless journey'***

*I can just remember you know putting the paddle in the water and it sort of feeling really oily ... that morning when it's just so still, it's just cruising through – through, you know this big sort of, stand of trees on either side of you. And the sun just peeking over the horizon and, it's just an experience that – a feeling I suppose of, just inner peace, like – it's pretty hard to put into words. (Male Participant number 14, interview lines 97-102).  
(Wattchow, 2008, pp. 17-18)*

Articles from Wattchow's (2004b, 2007, 2008) phenomenological study of undergraduate outdoor education students and their lived experience of river trips in Australia, gather both written and oral descriptions of their experiences to provide insights into a place sensitive pedagogy for outdoor education. His evocative writing highlights the importance of place and fluidity of meanings as "meaning remains temporal, situational and reliant upon other people, other beings, and upon place itself" (Wattchow, 2008, p. 13).

Wattchow noted that a focus on technical paddling on moving water and a romanticised version of nature, limited the participants' understanding of place especially in regards to the local ecology and specific history. He did however suggest that some students were able to build deep connections through sensory encounters with slower flowing sections of rivers. He comments that there is a pedagogic need to develop responsive, reciprocal, and mutually interdependent awareness of place,

and that experiences which allow for slow intimate encounters are a step towards achieving that.

The relationship between socially ascribed and inherent meanings of nature is complex. This is evident in Wattchow's writing as he balances the need for language to explore the ineffable, and the dialogue of places being culturally determined within a deeper dependency of a more "direct and sensuous reality" (Wattchow, 2008, p. 15). More recently, Wattchow (2012) has expressed his ideas in poetry in order to harness insights into the meaningful qualities of lived outdoor experiences. However, as he points out, more research on place and pedagogy is still required to inform and develop alternative approaches to outdoor education.

### ***Aoraki Bound***

Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand has been influenced by practices from many countries based on the assumption that many outdoor education practices are stable and universally applicable (Brookes, 2002b; Maeda, 2005; Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). However, despite some internationalisation, there is a growing awareness that most countries have developed subtle differences in their outdoor education practices due to the historic and cultural values associated with the outdoors and the way it has been traditionally incorporated into education (see, Andkjær, 2008; Beery, 2013; Brookes, 2006; Cook, 1999; Higgins, 2002; Potter & Henderson, 2004; Sandell & Öhman, 2010). For this last reflection on practice, I return to Aotearoa New Zealand, where Brown reflects on an Outward Bound course run in conjunction with Ngāi Tahu. Meanings of the outdoors for each and everyone will be special as there are many ways in which socio-cultural meanings can be constituted (Barrett, 2006; Whitehouse, 2002). To understand places in this way requires immersion in the physical, historical, and cultural dimensions of land.

*The opportunity to literally walk in the footsteps of their ancestors on sections of a traditional pounamu trail, to hear waiata sung at the junction of the Arahura and Waitaki rivers, and to perform haka and karakia at Whakarewa and other significant places was a profound example of experiential learning 'in-place. This was not "cultural performance" divorced from its source but an embodied example of place, place both giving meaning to events and being inscribed with meaning through the actions of the participants. The connection with this place came through dwelling in, sensing, relating, and acting. Place was not an abstraction, but a lived reality of individual and collective experiences. Maori cosmology and the links to Whakapapa ground actions of the present in the past and the past in the present in a way that blurs distinctions which modern western society seems so intent on emphasising. (Brown, 2009, pp. 15-16)*

Brown emphasises the holistic nature of learning and the connections we have with culture and the land through embodied living in place. He emphasises the construction of meaning within rich and complex social and cultural milieus. In contrast to outdoor education conversations, where there is no specific location but just a disembodied outdoors, Brown draws attention to the importance of place-responsiveness. Abstract ideas in wide-open spaces, he believes, cannot teach about how to live in the world, for that embodied and tangible experiences of place are needed. His account indicates that Outward Bound, with its deep history of adventure learning and personal development, is changing at least some of its programmes to address the importance of appreciating where we learn and the deep engagement that can occur when activity, place, and humans come together in a meaningful way.

## Re-tying the outdoors and education

The development of outdoor education has left outdoor educators with a variety of perspectives regarding the purpose and practice of outdoor education. This at times has created tension and confusion. At the heart of this tension, lies the question –*what is the purpose of the outdoors for education?* While this question does not suggest there is one correct purpose, it does identify the need to determine what distinguishes outdoor education from other educational practices. When 'the outdoors' becomes a negotiable component of outdoor education, then it raises questions as to what outdoor education is and how it differs from education per se. Furthermore, the lack of attention given to the complexity and ambiguity of the term 'the outdoors' has allowed adventure, experiential learning, and pursuit skills, to dominate many outdoor education programmes, without full consideration being given to what the outdoors means to individuals and how those meanings influence their learning. It would seem that, even after 150 years of outdoor education, there remains a lack of clarity about the role of the outdoors in the philosophies and methodologies of outdoor education. As Barnes and Sharp (2004, p. 5) suggest, perhaps "the time has come for a new debate on what is the nature and identity of outdoor education."

As highlighted, outdoor education is sometimes divided into many strands which pull in different directions. As new terminology is adopted (e.g. adventure education, education outside the classroom, environmental education, place-responsive education) the role of the outdoors diminishes. A lack of concern for the outdoors limits an outdoor educator's ability to promote respect and care for the environment, because if they do not pay attention to it, neither will their students. Refocusing attention on the outdoors requires understanding the meanings outdoor educators currently hold, how those meanings influence their work, and what the outdoors contributes to education in

general. Thus, unpacking meanings and assumptions of the outdoors in Aotearoa New Zealand will help develop a deeper understanding about messages outdoor educators are perpetuating. For as Dewey (1934/1980) cautions, educators should be mindful about what they intend to do and what they actually do, for when there is a split between means and ends the message can be perceived as disingenuous.

## Chapter 4 – Research process

In the literature review, I identified that the meanings associated with the outdoors have not been extensively researched, particularly within outdoor education. Nevertheless, the ways in which the outdoors is interpreted is often as a universal construct, and educators need to be clearer about which outdoors they are referring to (Brookes, 2004b). Given these concerns, accessing the meanings that individual educators hold about the outdoors is one-step towards understanding the role that the outdoors plays in shaping outdoor education practices. To that end, the following research questions provide the focus for this study:

- What meanings do outdoor educators construct about the outdoors?
- How do those meanings influence the understandings and practices of outdoor educators?

As noted in chapter one, interpretive approaches to research are centred on meaning and understanding the experiences and perspectives of others. One way to access those perspectives is through the stories people tell. For while stories can never replicate experience, they nevertheless provide a window into meanings attributed to experience and how people experience the world.

### Interpretive research

The interpretive perspective is participant-centred, giving precedence to the way people construct differing and competing meanings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). It draws from a broad interdisciplinary field, which encompasses a complex array of theories, concepts, and assumptions about how we perceive the world and how we learn (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Schram, 2006; Schwandt, 2000; Silverman, 2006). In general, it seeks to understand the way people make sense of their worlds (Pope, 2006), and accepts that there are multiple conceptions of reality. Furthermore, interpretive researchers generally assume that

humans are simultaneously unique yet connected to the broader culture in which they live (Page, 2000).

Meaning, practice, and communication sit at the core of this study. Interpretive researchers attempt to engage with what their participants do and experience, or at least what is revealed in communication about the experience, with the aim of understanding the meaning of a phenomenon rather than generalising or predicting outcomes (Cranton, 2001; Czarniawska, 2004a). Specifics become important, for as Bevir and Kedar (2008) note, an interpretive orientation positions practice as meaningful when located within tangible linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts. This characteristic of focusing on the specifics of practice is relevant to this thesis because a key purpose is to explore the phenomenon of the outdoors from the perspective of outdoor educators.

Interpretive approaches require methods which allow participants to reveal meanings that are important to them. Gillham (2000) maintains there is a continuum of interview styles, ranging from unstructured biographical stories, semi-structured interviews, to tightly structured questionnaires. The semi-structured interview was employed because it allows research participants to identify what they see as significant and to tell stories in ways they want to tell them, but follows a schedule to attain some consistency across multiple interviews. This search for meaning aligns with the broad genre of narrative research where stories are "a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375).

While it is not possible to fully comprehend another person's experience, some common understandings can be gained by careful listening. Communication is a relational process – in listening to the stories of others they become intertwined with, and interpreted through, the lens

of our own personal experiences (Bruner, 2002). Acknowledging the collaborative and interactional elements of interpretive research processes places the focus on the way meanings subtly change, as the interpretations the researcher makes can affect the meanings held by the participants. Within interviews, the questions asked, the comments made, and the silent affirmations of the interviewer can direct what the research participant shares (Kvale, 1996). One implication of interpretive research as collaborative meaning making is that it accepts its own constitutive processes and the embeddedness of the researchers' own beliefs, with the proviso that researchers need to confront their own practice to uncover what key assumptions are influencing the inquiry process.

### ***A narrative approach***

*Narrative is retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience. Narrative is a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organising events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time.*

*(Chase, 2005, p. 656)*

Stories offer a way for people to organise experience and make meaning from their experiences. Meanings often emerge through stories as people sort ideas and select what is important for them to share with others. Thus, stories do not only transmit meaning, but their structure and style impose some sort of order on events which can influence the emergent meaning. In addition to people constructing stories to make sense of their experiences, shared narratives also shape people, and it is through the processes of both listening to and constructing narratives that a deeper understanding of self or a particular phenomenon emerges. A narrative approach to interpretive research taps into the

stories people share as they make sense of their world, their identities, and the things that happen to them.

The underlying methodology of narrative research values subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and meaning making by recognising the ways in which stories help us understand and give meaning to our lives and experiences (Andrews et al., 2008; Bruner, 2002; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Accordingly, stories are more than straightforward accounts of events; they are invested with assumptions, values, and beliefs. Narratives are both a vehicle for cultural, as well as individual meaning making. They draw attention to both the embodied and socially embedded character of knowledge construction, highlighting that "stories are fashioned by *somebody, somewhere*" (Gough, 2000, p. 115). Hence, many narrative approaches consider the stories shared, not in the realist tradition of mirroring a fixed external reality, but as indications of how people make sense of their lives (Denzin, 2001).

Some researchers use the terms 'story' and 'narrative' synonymously whilst discussing research (e.g. Riessman, 2008; Riessman & Speedy, 2007; Squire, 2005), whilst others (e.g. Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2008) suggest 'narrative' moves beyond personal accounts to include broader perspectives and retain the use of 'story' in reference to the basic plot-line of personal experiences. This blurring is inherent in the etymology of narrative, which "goes back to the ancient Sanskrit 'gna', a root term that means 'know,' and that comes down to us through Latin words for both 'knowing' ('gnarus') and 'telling' ('narro')" (Abbott, 2002, p. 11). Maintaining a distinction between 'narrative' and 'story' can offer clarity in some situations, but within the research interviews many personal accounts contained wider social and cultural 'narratives'. Hence, the convention used in this research is to use the term story when the focus is on individuals and narrative when referring to research methods and collective meanings.

There are a number of limitations when relying on narratives as a way of knowing. The notion of truth and credibility is sometimes raised, especially when the story becomes an object of analysis (Cresswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2002). Recollections of events and experiences can vary between each telling and, when the content changes, there is concern about its authenticity and trustworthiness. Phillips (1994, p. 20) notes that "an enticing story may tell us very little, what we usually want is a correct one". Such concerns are usually raised when stories are assumed to report facts, for then 'true' representations are both possible and desirable. If, however, stories are seen as a tool to explore possible understandings, rather than a fixed representation, then it changes how they are interpreted and valued (Josephsson, Asaba, Jonsson, & Alsaker, 2006). While interview stories can be critiqued as a way of justifying and even falsifying events in retrospection (see Atkinson & Delamont, 2006) they play an important role in sharing and unpacking meanings (Freeman, 2006). In general, narrative researchers regard every story as credible because they are an expression of the person at a certain time and place (Chase, 2005).

Another concern raised by Atkinson and Delamont (2006) is that the term narrative can be used to give an interview a celebrated status. This sometimes occurs when stories are seen to provide a privileged access to the authentic person who is narrating it. In some cases, this leads to stories being accepted in a naïve and unanalytical fashion (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Furthermore, celebrating personal experience stories can avoid confronting the cultural beliefs and dominant discourses that underpin them and perpetuate discourses that disadvantage minority groups (Melles, 2005; Silverman, 2006). Despite this, narrative-based research has been seen as one way to give voice to those not always heard (Lyons, 2007).

A narrative approach also implicates the researcher in analysing and interpreting meaning. For example, the questions asked during the

interview shape the responses, and this shaping continues in the analysis stage partly because there is no clear distinction between gathering the material and analysing it (Myers, 2009). Historically, data analysis in most forms of interpretive research was perceived as inductive and intuitive but, as Myers suggests, this is blurred by the researchers' involvement in meaning making as presuppositions are already embedded in the interviews. To clarify how meanings emerged or were co-created requires a clear description of the methods, techniques, and reasoning used (Hiles & Čermák, 2008). I do this by telling my own story of the research journey with its twists and turns for, as Czarniawska (2004b) notes, narrative analysis still remains a creative rather than a prescriptive activity.

An important element within narrative approaches is how the material is re-presented. Vignettes, plays, stories, autoethnographic, and poetic texts, have all been employed to capture meanings (Cahnmann, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Sparkes (2008) offers a robust rationale for adopting creative writing practices as a way of poignantly representing research and allowing the reader to participate in their own meaning making. For example, there are times when pauses, half-formed sentences, or a reflective sigh highlight a point. Poetic representation, which allows for repetition and rhythm, can sometimes capture such elusive moments. Similarly, Rinehart (1998) claims that some fictional devices can be very effective, especially when the credibility of the research relies on descriptions which are holistic, evocative, and emotionally engaging. This does not mean that all narrative research is written in creative ways only that those opportunities are available to help researchers draw the reader in, enhance understanding, and inspire people to improve practices and policies (Lyons, 2007).

Many people have difficulty in explaining their experiences, relationships and feelings, but most are able to tell a story about an event or occasion.

So while stories are not the experience, they could be the closest we come to human experience (Denzin, 2001), as they combine elements of the action with a conscious knowing or feeling of the action (Bruner, 1991). A narrative approach to interpretive research is a pragmatic way of trying to capture the experiences of people in terms of their own meaning making (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003). It engages research participants by asking them to describe their experiences in order to explore meaning. This aligns with the purpose of this study which explores the meanings outdoor educators construct about the outdoors and how those meanings influence understandings and practices of outdoor education.

## Research process

Encouraging outdoor educators to share stories about the outdoors and make links with their outdoor education practices was paramount to this study. To provide opportunities to explore these ideas in depth, three interviews were conducted with each participant. The following sections describe participant selection, ethical considerations, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, and writing.

### ***Participants***

This study was based around a series of three interviews with 11 outdoor educators. Purposeful sampling seeks out participants who possess a perspective or understanding of the research context which is specialised or more in-depth than the general population (Kvale, 1996; Smith & Eatough, 2006; Squire, 2008). The main criteria was that they had worked in the outdoor education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand for at least two years and were currently involved in delivering outdoor education programmes at schools, outdoor centres, or tertiary institutions. Five outdoor educators, who were previously known to me, were approached to ascertain their interest, willingness, and availability to be involved in the research. Those participants were asked to

nominate other people who they thought would be interested in exploring the links between meanings of the outdoors and outdoor education. From this additional group, a further six participants were approached. My long involvement in the field of outdoor education meant that I had had some previous contact with all but two from the group recommended. Everyone who was approached accepted the invitation to participate. All the participants had a range of outdoor education experiences and were open about sharing their outdoor experiences. Below is a brief description of the participants and their outdoor education roles at the time of the interview. Included in these brief descriptions is a direct quote from their transcripts, to emphasise the distinctiveness of each participant's beliefs about outdoor education practices.

**Dave** has worked as a primary teacher, outdoor contractor, snow safety manager and has been lecturing in outdoor education and sustainability education at a polytechnic for over ten years. About his work he said *"I see critical thinking as underpinning all education, that includes outdoor education, and the key problem that all educators face and outdoor educators are no different, is how do we encourage critical thinking in our students."*

**Chris** has worked in the outdoor sector since the mid-1990s, first co-ordinating a polytechnic certificate programme in outdoor leadership and then overseas as an outdoor instructor. He is currently working at a College of Education with teacher trainees. He suggests that outdoor education offers diverse opportunities *"when I am teaching in the field I want people to be able to learn some skills, I want people to gain some knowledge, I want people to enjoy each other's company and laugh, I want people to experience some quiet time on their own, and interact with the environment intimately."*

**Nicci** has a degree in outdoor education and is currently co-ordinating an outdoor certificate programme at a polytechnic. Previously, she worked on school programmes and as a kayak instructor. She describes one part of her role as an educator as *"giving them (students) a rocket or lighting a fire inside of them so that they are passionate about something and they will do positive stuff with their life."*

**Jodi** has worked in outdoor retail and coached rock climbers. For the last three years he has worked for a charitable trust designing and running outdoor programmes which *"help the young people develop and understand where they can develop both inside and outside school, but we don't change behaviour, they choose to do that to themselves."*

**Pete** started work as a mountain guide and outdoor instructor in the 1980s. He is currently teaching outdoor education at a special character school. He thinks outdoor education addresses all the key curriculum competencies and suggests that his work is about *"helping a group to achieve things that are meaningful for them."*

**Arthur** has taught outdoor education in schools over many years and has set up an outdoor education centre for local schools. Among other things, he is currently working with teachers to promote EOTC. He discusses being inspired by some students who had been on an outdoor education trip saying *"they were just so full of their achievements in the sense of getting to certain heights, being able to be resilient, being able to look after themselves and looking after each other, and they just loved the huge open spaces, ... they just had this absolute sense of fulfilment."*

**Sara** (pseudonym) has a Diploma in Outdoor Instruction and has been working at outdoor centres in the North and South Island for the last nine years. Currently she is freelancing as an outdoor instructor for a range of schools and centres. When thinking about her work she said *"it depends on the students really, but what I really want them to learn is that if they put their mind to it, they can achieve it."*

**Mark** (pseudonym) has had a variety of jobs in the outdoor sector over the last six years including managing an outdoor education centre for primary/intermediate students. Currently he is senior instructor at an outdoor centre, owned by a private school. He describes the purpose of his work as *"trying to help students overcome fear and different challenges and realise that they can do it and that they can make decisions in the future with that new learning."*

**Sharon** completed a Diploma in Outdoor Instruction in the North Island before moving to Christchurch to train as a teacher. She is currently an outdoor education and Māori language teacher. She says outdoor education *"helps complete a lot of these kids, it helps them manage the rest of their subjects because it adds to another part of their brain, and not just their brain, but their whole body– you can't underestimate the value of outdoor education in schools."*

**Wiremu** has been co-ordinating and instructing on health and education outdoor programmes within the community for the last five years. For him using the outdoors is more meaningful for his clients because they *"can do it practically, they can see it and be involved in it, and it's a great way for them to learn."*

**Stephen** (pseudonym) obtained a degree in outdoor education and then worked overseas for four years as an outdoor instructor and programme manager. He is currently training to be a teacher. His view on outdoor education is that it is about *"using the outdoors as a medium for education and development, whether it be personal development, or group, or environmental, or sustainability."*

All the participants had been involved with the outdoor education sector in a variety of roles. Their ages ranged from 27 - 64 years old, with three of the participants delivering outdoor education experiences for over 20 years. Overall six were fully qualified teachers and one was training to be a teacher. While two had experience in the primary sector all were

currently involved with secondary school students or young adults. Three of the 11 participants were women and three self-identified as Māori.

### ***Ethical considerations***

It was necessary to remain conscious of ethical issues throughout the research process to ensure that the study's findings did not detrimentally affect those involved. In completing the research, I adhered to the ethical guidelines and regulations set out by The University of Waikato's ethical committee (Appendix E). As Merriam (1998) points out however, ethics is not just a case of following a set of rules. This is particularly true when using qualitative methods where the participants often reveal personal episodes from their lives. Each situation was managed with sensitivity to minimise any potential problem.

With all research, there are elements of power. One way of sharing that power is enabling research participants to speak for themselves – to tell their own story. While it is sometimes necessary for educators to speak about their work, the personal nature of stories and the unpacking of assumptions may create some tension for the participants. While I recommended that they remained anonymous by selecting a pseudonym, several preferred to retain their identity. This is particularly relevant for the participants who identified as Māori, as 'who you are' and 'where you are from' is as significant as what is spoken for Māori. The limited number of people within the outdoor sector potentially creates some problems in regards to complete anonymity but where requested, biographical data was generalised, and workplaces, dates, professional backgrounds, colleagues' names, and specific events were deleted or changed. The information gathered was stored on a private home computer with password protection and backed up on an external hard drive. The details of interviews remained confidential and were only discussed with my supervisors.

Participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the research at the initial approach and then via an information letter (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B). It was made clear that they could decline to take part in the study or withdraw from the study. With the sharing of stories, there were also issues of ownership, as the point at which the story moves from a personal story to a shared experience cannot be clearly defined. The members of the research group had the opportunity to change or omit sections from the transcript and their personal vignette.

As an outdoor educator, I support and value the use of 'the outdoors' as a medium for learning. This has been disclosed throughout the research to avoid criticisms concerning a potential conflict of interest. It was not possible to put aside my biases; they are interwoven both explicitly and implicitly into the thesis. A key part of the research however, required me to examine those biases and challenge my beliefs and, through that examination, deeper understanding emerged.

### ***Interviewing***

Inviting each person to share stories about their outdoor experiences provided the starting point for the first interview as it allowed them to identify what was important to them. Before the interviews, each participant received a letter outlining the nature of the research (see Appendix A). This included a statement indicating that during the first interview they would be asked to share some stories about their experiences in and about the outdoors (see interview schedule Appendix C). Czarniawska (2007) suggests that it is important to prompt for stories, especially as many expect research interviewing to be analytical in nature. Very little probing or prompting was required as they shared multiple stories about their outdoor experiences. The second interview proceeded on similar lines with the participants being asked to share their outdoor education experiences. As a result, rich and novel accounts

emerged. The third interview built on the previous interviews by reflecting, unpacking meanings, and discussing links to outdoor education. I adopted an empathetic and appreciative approach whilst interviewing whereby the focus was on *what is working well*, rather than *what is not* (Barrett & Fry, 2002).

The three-interview approach is recommended by Seidman (1998), in order to generate sufficiently detailed accounts of a range of outdoor experiences, and allow time between interviews for the participants to reflect on the transcripts (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). The interviews were approximately one hour, with 7 to 10 days elapsing between them, as this allowed time to transcribe the interview verbatim and return it to the participant before the next one. Each interview was recorded digitally and backed up on audio cassette tapes.

The participants communicated openly and appeared to enjoy sharing their stories, although on several occasions, I was aware that my own background may have limited what they said – as they would sometimes look at me and say "you know what I mean" and I would instinctively nod. The act of listening is in itself an interpretive process and partly contingent on pre-understandings (Gadamer, 1990; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). As the interviews progressed, many commented that they had enjoyed the chance to talk about their experiences, and that it had prompted them to think about what they were doing at work more deeply.

## Analysis

Analysis is about trying to make sense of what you have seen and heard. There were two main stages in making sense of the interviews. Polkinghorne (1995a; 1995b; 2007) distinguishes between the 'analysis of narratives' and 'narrative analysis'. While both work with storied texts, the 'analysis of narratives' uses analytical procedures to produce categories and themes out of common elements. 'Narrative analysis' on

the other hand, is context sensitive, as "researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories" (Polkinghorne, 1995b, p. 12). The advantage of 'narrative analysis' is that it preserves the particulars of the individual story, whereas more structured analytical approaches remove the focus from the personal narratives and seek connections between the participants to construct themes. Such a distinction is difficult to sustain because there are times when the particular is influenced by the general, and vice versa (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). This research used a combination of techniques – to start I used 'narrative analysis' to explore personal outdoor meanings and, from that, constructed vignettes for each individual. This allowed me to focus on idiosyncratic meanings. Following on, I completed a more structured line-by-line 'analysis of narratives' to help bring together the participants' stories, identify themes, and delve into the shaping of outdoor education understandings and practices. The line-by-line analysis also serendipitously revealed comments unconnected to the main storyline that participants made whilst pondering on meaning. These observations were often made as the participants struggled to fully capture part of their practice. In bringing some of these phrases and aside comments together as a poetic representation, a stronger picture of practice emerged.

### ***'Narrative analysis'***

This section, details the 'narrative analysis' of the interview transcripts to address the participants' personal meanings of the outdoors. The notion of using some "creative analytical practices" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962) which blur the boundaries between data, analysis, and creative practices was instrumental in drawing out meaning. While exact processes of interpreting qualitative materials can be difficult to convey as some remain intuitive (Elliott, 2005), this next section describes the stages and processes that occurred whilst working with the interview recordings, notes, and transcriptions. For the purposes of clarity, the

process has been divided into different stages; whilst these may appear linear, the route taken was more erratic. I continually moved backwards and forwards through the stages, carefully planning some, reviewing and reworking others, and only understanding a few in retrospect.

### ***Interview notes and transcription***

The approach adopted was to work inductively with the interview material to avoid pre-set categories. Following each interview, I wrote memos to capture my intuitive responses, initial impressions, and the overall tone of the interview. This is in line with ideas expressed by Hiles and Čermák (2008) who suggest that the participatory nature of narrative research requires on-going and systematic reflexivity. These memos were useful in helping to interpret the interviews, personal reflections, and in addressing some of the interaction pre and post the recorded interview. Keeping records of initial thoughts was useful and I returned to them on numerous occasions to check against later interpretations, as recommended by Smith and Eatough (2006). Furthermore, Schram (2006) suggested that memos also help to explore ideas in a generative way, and achieve a more self-reflexive understanding of analytical choices.

As soon as possible after the interview, I transcribed the tapes verbatim as this is considered an initial part of the analytical process (Kelly & Howie, 2007; Riessman, 2008). After transcribing, I returned the interview transcripts to the participants for them to read and check, but they requested few changes. In speaking with the first three participants at their second interview, one participant had read the transcript in detail, but the other two had quickly skimmed them, mentioning that they found them difficult to read. In preparing these first three transcripts, I had retained the 'umms' and 'errs,' but after comments from these participants, I discontinued that practice. Despite this modification, several participants still made comments about the way

they waffled or how inarticulate they felt. As Kvale (1996) states "interview transcripts are often boring to read, ennui ensues in the face of repetitions, the incomplete sentences, and the many digressions" (p. 167). Much of what appears to be coherent in the course of a conversation is lost when written. Our conversational lexicon and structure is different from formal written language (Caulley, 2008).

### ***Developing ideas about outdoor meanings***

Working with the transcripts of one participant at a time, I identified blocks of text that contained stories of the outdoors. I brought those sections together in a separate document, combining material from the three interviews. Following on, I explored this material further by asking—how is the outdoors used? How is the outdoors portrayed? What do they feel when outdoors? What do they do outdoors? What constitutes their outdoor education practice? Moreover, what relationship does the participant have with the outdoors? To do this, I trawled through the sections on repeated occasions, noting my observations and interpretations alongside each section using the comment function. Through this questioning and commenting process, patterns of meanings began to emerge in the participants' descriptions. Polkinghorne, in an interview with Clandinin and Murphy (2007), suggests that narrative is about the particular and unique and much of that can be lost in analysing for common themes. Hence, I attempted to approach each set of interviews with fresh eyes in order to remain open to the nuances and unique histories of each participant.

This phase involved a close reading and re-reading of the transcripts to identify anything that appeared significant and relevant to the research question (Smith & Eatough, 2006). The transcribing and the transcripts started to take over as the 'data', and so it was a pertinent time to reflect on Kvale's (1996) assertion that interviews are more than the transcripts, they are living conversations. Furthermore, while narrative can be

systematically analysed, some researchers achieve plausible interpretations without recourse to formulaic analysis giving the "impression not of a researcher seemingly aspiring to unlock or crack some narrative code, but rather of him or her playing with ideas and narratives in an artful manner" (Smith, 2007, p. 393).

### ***Writing as analysis***

The process of interpreting the interviews evolved. There was no simple set procedure to follow. I was influenced by the work of Richardson, which explored the potential of narrative to acknowledge alternative ways of knowing using evocative language and forms of telling. According to Richardson "by writing in different ways we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it" (2004, p. 473). She encourages researchers to explore their own style through being present, honest, and engaged. I became interested in the ways that different styles of writing can help to make meaning from data and convey meaning to the reader (Cahnmann, 2003; Eisner, 2008b; Richardson, 2001, 2002; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Sparkes, 2008). These different styles can help make sense of interview material because the researcher becomes aesthetically immersed in the material (Barone, 2008; Eisner, 2008b). Eisner (1997) also noted that writing can spur the imagination, enhance empathetic forms of understanding, and increase our awareness of what is happening around us. While Smith and Sparkes (2008, p. 9) contend "that communication is at the heart of all research, that writing is a method of analysis, and that how we write is a theoretical and moral issue". The term creative non-fiction provided an opening to present real people in a way, which both adhered to tenets of being true to the participants, yet had the flexibility to present ideas in a way that strengthens the qualitative nuances (Eisner, 2008a). Several researchers, (e.g. Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Denison, 1996; Sanders-Bustle & Oliver, 2001) had used a series of narratives to capture the qualities of personal experience in ways which avoided an overly distanced

decontextualised way of knowing, and this resonated with what I was hoping to achieve. Writing well is, however, a challenge, "because of the difficulty of compressing volumes of descriptive information into an informative text without losing the richness and essence of the meaning" (Grant & Kluge, 2007, p. 408).

In order to maintain the participants' own words as much as possible and capture some of the diversity and richness of their outdoor experiences, I chose to construct a series of vignettes. A vignette is described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as a series of representative events with a narrative flow which portray the phenomenon in a vivid way. In writing a series of vignettes, I followed some of Polkinghorne's (1995a) suggestions for developing research narratives, including paying attention to cultural and situational contexts; goals and concerns; and the temporal nature of a storied experience. Writing the vignettes highlighted the complexity, contradictions, and on-going development of outdoor meanings. However, in maintaining the idiosyncrasies of the participant's own words and expressions in writing the vignettes, nuanced and personal representations of the outdoors were revealed.

### ***Constructing the participants' vignettes***

To describe the process in more detail, I recount the processes of constructing Jodi's vignette in Appendix D, which tracks the changes made to the original transcripts. The writing of the vignettes served both to help analyse the material by peeling the layers away to reveal a core story, and to represent the nuanced meaning from individual perspectives.

### **Jodi's vignette**

To start, I returned to the original notes, which had identified patterns of meaning about the outdoors, and reread the memos, transcripts, and comments. I collated blocks of text that referenced the outdoors and working in the outdoors into one document and then embarked on a

process of distillation. This condensed the transcripts by about half, making the material more manageable and comprehensible. This was similar to a process used by Berg, Skott, and Danielson (2006) in their research into the meaning of the caring relationship between nurses and patients.

Working with this document, my own questions and comments, and sections that seemed off the subject were removed. It was like carving a figure from a block of wood, meticulously working with the grain to let the figure take form. The overall intention was to maintain Jodi's voice, gain different insights into his experiences, and convey these through a short engaging and illuminating story. As I became more familiar with the material, it became easier to link sections and remove repetitive and redundant material although, as no story was recounted in a straightforward linear way, I preserved the over-lapping and cyclic nature of story-telling. As I wrote, I learnt a lot, a sentiment captured by Richardson (2001, p. 35) when she states "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it."

Over time, I also felt more comfortable with writing and making minor editorial changes to some sentences. Carless and Sparkes (2008) discuss using similar techniques. I realise that every change potentially alters what some might regard as the authenticity of the interview, but every report or presentation material involves making choices. Mishler, in an interview with Clandinin and Murphy (2007), discusses analysing chunks of data in detail, but then suggests that it was much harder to determine why those chunks were selected in the first place, or how they represent the larger pool of data. I can only describe some of my selection process as being in an empathetic zone where some phrases and sections seemed to leap out and convey a unique nuance into how Jodi was developing his meanings of the outdoors. Hence, while I used his phrases, and was careful not to alter the meaning of a statement by

taking it out of context, this is my representation of his story. Having conversations in and with the interview texts and using the actual words helped me to understand the emerging meanings, find patterns, and start to consolidate some ideas, while the cautious use of some literary adjustments helped the flow and readability (Coulter, 2009).

An alternative approach which is sometimes used, is to intersperse sections of the interview with commentary. While this removes the need to modify the participants comments, it can still alter the way a reader receives the narrative and change the way the participant's realities are represented (Rosiek & Atkinson, 2007). Hence, while there are parts of the narrative where language has been modified for the sake of grammar and flow, the overall story maintains the participant's phrasing, language, and meaning as closely as possible.

After writing the first vignette, I had a clearer picture of what Jodi was saying. On reflection, I realised I had not mentioned anything about his rock climbing. Jodi was a high performance rock climber and former national champion, but this first story did not refer to his climbing at all. I reviewed my original themes, checked the discarded material, and wrote a second story using only the rejected material. The first story revealed a caring humble instructor trying to reconnect with the land and his cultural roots, whilst in the second there was a sense of a more competitive person, driven by setting goals and reaching high standards. Given the context of Jodi's work and his present situation, the first story was a more accurate representation, but I was concerned that I had overly smoothed out inconsistencies in the search for coherence. Bringing parts of the two vignettes together added depth and complexity. I became more aware that I needed to avoid being too simple, stable, or singular in my writing.

It is a courtesy as well as a criterion of rigor and ethics to collaborate with the story-tellers and check that the story accurately represents

them and their words (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Gutkind (2008) recommends that if writers make any changes to quotes they should recheck them for accuracy with the parties involved. For quite some time, I lacked the confidence to send the vignette and found myself constantly revisiting it. Eventually, I built up sufficient self-belief to send it to Jodi for comments.

Jodi replied *"Thanks for that Jo. It looks good, no need for any changes."*

### **Chris's Vignette**

Having completed one vignette, I used a similar process to write one for Chris. His dialogue was vivid and descriptive, so initially it was tricky to discard material, but by keeping my gaze on the research questions and asking myself — what is going on in this section and what does it mean? — I was able to become more selective. In particular, I noted the connections between the personal experience stories and his professional practice. I selected sections that captured content, social and cultural context, causal connections, personal goals and life concerns, but paid closer attention to retaining some of the contradictions. Having learnt from writing Jodi's vignette to keep a focus on what was being peeled away, I frequently looked at the deleted material and reflected on why I had discarded it and what that had to say about me. Some I reinstated, and gradually the vignette took form. I sent Chris a copy and he replied *"What a wonderful gift you have given me. You have taken my words and created a story that I am proud to be associated with. I feel flattered by the story. I don't think I always live up to my standards but I do have that vision. Thanks so much."* While pleasing the participant is not a necessary criteria for research, to have Chris acknowledge that the story captured what he was trying to say was encouraging.

As I developed other vignettes, I used a similar format of carving out the meanings, whilst maintaining the nuances and subtleties of each

individual's story. Individual stories create the context for comprehending the participant's understanding of what meanings influence their work (Polkinghorne, 1995a). The vignettes presented in this thesis are abridged versions of the ones circulated to the participants, but should still provide the reader with a history of experiences that the participants have used to develop their meanings of the outdoors. The core plot lines elucidate meaning making, as stories encompass the temporality by which the overarching meaning of lives is pursued.

### **Limitations of using vignettes**

The use of the participant's voice in creating the story potentially masks my interpretive and editorial role. In trying to foreground the words of the participants, my own presence is obscured. Geertz calls these 'author-evacuated texts' (Geertz as cited in Sparkes, 1995, p. 161). Interview texts are jointly constructed and it is important that the researcher acknowledge and problematise their role in the construction of the transcripts (Blumenreich, 2004). I attempt to partly resolve this dilemma by reminding readers in the introduction of chapter 5 that they are woven together from extracts selected by me from interviews which I instigated.

In addition, the selecting, re-ordering, and eliminating sections from the transcripts, means that I re-present the participants' ideas. This style of writing can create an illusion of transparency and authenticity, whilst masking my involvement in reconstructing their experience. Thus maintaining an element of the unequal power relationships that exist between researchers and researched; something I was hoping to address by using narrative and the participants' voices. While I attempted to minimise this power imbalance by using an appreciative style of interviewing, the final decisions on what was included were mine.

As I was condensing and selecting material, I reflected on the deleted sections and what that might reveal about my own beliefs. Convery (1999) suggests we judiciously select and organise material to position ourselves and our work favourably. He also argues that researchers need to be aware of the narratives teachers tell because they are sometimes constructed as a way of justifying practice and may not critically address their impact on the students (Convery, 1999). I address this issue in more detail through the discussion and interpretation of the vignettes within Chapters 5 and 6.

***'Analysis of narratives'***

After writing a vignette about each participant, I returned to the original interviews and conducted an 'analysis of narratives' to explore common elements across the interviews especially in regard to the shaping of outdoor education (Polkinghorne, 1995b). This entailed returning to the blocks of text which had been identified as containing outdoor stories during the narrative analysis stage and conducting a line by line analysis. Following that, I consolidated my notes and comments to look for patterns of meaning. The following section is an extract from Mark's transcript.

Transcript block	Comments
<p>Mountain trips or some tramping trips where you have some ascent and descent, so you go over some high passes and get some views, I get a bit down if I do a lot of trips when I don't get to see</p>	<p>trips, tramping, mountains, natural  movement up and down  movement; high passes viewing, emotional response; trips, importance of views just bush, natural</p>

<p>anything and you're just in the bush I like to get out onto the open tops, some of the fun trips I've had with students when I was at Arthur's Pass were up Bealey Spur, where you climb up and then get out of the bush a little bit and I just love that, and just loved to share it with those students. The views and the grandeur and the beauty of the mountains, so a sense of scale and space, and you realise you're such a small part of such a big world and space.</p>	<p>environment</p> <p>expanding into open tops</p> <p>fun, enjoyable experience, working with students, relationships specific location climbing;</p> <p>bush to open</p> <p>enjoyable response, feelings sharing experience, relationships</p> <p>views, grandeur, inspirational experience mountains, natural environment large scale, space revelation experience, gaining perspective, relationship with world, space</p>
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Whilst initially overwhelmed with random comments I started to block them together and patterns began to emerge under five themes: locations, activities, emotional responses, relationships, and experiences of being outdoors. I then returned to the transcripts and colour coded key comments under these five thematic headings. From Mark's extract,

firstly locations were identified as the natural environment of mountains, high passes, bush, open tops and Bealey Spur as a specific area. Secondly, I highlighted activities such as kinaesthetically moving uphill and downhill, technical climbing and tramping, and viewing the surrounding land. The third theme included his responses, the emotional highs and lows, and gaining perspectives about himself. Fourthly, Mark developed relationships with others and the wider world. In working with other transcripts, a fifth category was present, that of living simply and being outdoors which did not align with activities. The activity grouping was thus split into two – pursuit-based activities and more general life experiences of living simply outdoors. As with most themes, there was some overlap, as what the participants did, and where they were, was linked to how they responded emotionally and the relationships they formed. The themes offered a framework to further explore and explain the influence of personal meanings on outdoor education. The five themes reflect the concept of the outdoors as geographic locations, which gain meaning from what we do there, what we value, and how we experience them.

### ***Representation of the research***

An important task of research is to communicate ideas to others in order to offer different possibilities. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest that qualitative researchers need to be storytellers so they can convey their messages in a way which encourages others to read them. The vignettes attempt to do that; they are short personal accounts which remain open to multiple interpretations. To build broader understanding, the vignettes can be read as an anthology where each story draws its meaning from others (Mello, 2002). This can create synergy, allowing the collection to reveal more than any individual story. Anthologies can also create a holistic sense, where meaning jumps from story to story and diverse perspectives are presented. The series of vignettes in Chapter 5, gives voice to the specific and individual

meanings of the outdoors while building up a picture of collective meaning.

In Chapter 6, which explores the shaping of outdoor education, ideas from all the participants are gathered together under five key themes, locations, pursuit-based activities, living simply, emotional responses, and relationships. Themes can help to give shape, make sense, and provide insight to different ideas, but they cannot "... completely unlock the deep meaning, the full mystery, the enigmatic aspects of the experiential meaning of a notion" (van Manen, 1997, p. 88). Hence, at the end of Chapter 6, poetic representation is used to further explore meanings and represent them in a vivid way. As Sparkes, Nilges, Swan, & Dowling (2003) suggest, poetic representation can offer the researcher a different lens through which to understand data, and is a powerful form of analysis and representation which brings forth meaning.

There are various ways to use poetry in research but, in this research, poetically styled text combines phrases and exact expressions from several participants in a compressed form in an effort to convey a central message or perspective. More specifically, I was looking for phrases, comments, and expressions, which hinted toward the complexity of learning outdoors, but which left me wanting to know more about what they were implying. The poetic themes emerged from particular observations and comments which were common across several accounts. By amalgamating these comments the repetition, rhythm, as well as literal word, brings forth meaning. As Denzin and Lincoln (2002) note poetic text can humanise the research as it "violates old norms of observer objectivity and promotes new forms of subjective understanding" (p. 156). For, while meaning is in part culturally generated, the subjective responses of others are not given or controllable, but generated from within their own personal and social experiences (Keifer-Boyd & Maitland-Gholson, 2007). The difficulty with using poetic text then is when it fails to generate a response and leaves

the reader confused about the meanings conveyed. Hopefully, the poetic representations can, as Richardson (1992) notes, encourage readers to engage in reflexive analysis and remain open to interpretation in ways that straight sociological prose does not.

The purpose of presenting vignettes and poetic representations in this study is threefold – firstly, to give voice to the participant's unique renderings of their meanings of the outdoors in a succinct and accessible format; secondly to build layers of collective meaning; and thirdly to engage the reader in their own meaning making of the outdoors. Bridging the vignettes and poetic text are my interpretations which highlight the collective perspectives and draw out some of the contradictions and paradoxes in how meanings of the outdoors influence understanding and practices of outdoor education.

## Summary

A narrative approach within an interpretive framework captures meanings that outdoor educators construct about 'the outdoors'. Stories provide insight into the world of the participants and provide in-depth accounts from which to explore what meanings are constructed. Meaning making is both an individual and a relational activity, and stories are an important way in which we share ideas and beliefs. The narrative approach suggested does several things: it highlights the social and personal construction of meaning, draws attention to the relational aspect of meaning making, recognises the importance of language, acknowledges the researcher's role in co-authoring the stories, maintains focus on meaning derived from personal experiences, and allows for the representation of those ideas in an informative yet compelling way. While there are dilemmas and concerns with gathering, transcribing, analysing, and reporting narrative research, it does capture elements of the participants' experiences that elude other forms of research.

## Chapter 5 – Outdoor meanings

In this chapter, I explore meanings outdoor educators construct about the outdoors and represent these meanings in a series of vignettes. These vignettes attempt to capture not only individually nuanced and storied responses to what the outdoors means, but how those meanings and personal beliefs are wound up in each participant's depictions and understandings of outdoor education. The purpose of using vignettes is to provide holistic descriptions, but most of all to portray the idiosyncrasies of an individual's meaning of the outdoors.

There are no straightforward causal links between events, meanings, and consequent behaviours, as meanings arise within a commotion of competing influences. The vignettes capture some of that commotion and the circular ways experiences, beliefs, and culture impact on one another. As the stories flowed during the interviews, it was evident that the outdoor educator's work practices were wound together with stories of their early outdoor encounters and the vignettes are able to encapsulate this relationship. What this relationship means for the shape of outdoor education is discussed in chapter 6.

Each vignette was written as an individual account of the participant's experiences but, when read as a series, the ideas, places, and practices flow from one to another, allowing the collection to reveal more than any one story. The collection highlights how meanings are not held in isolation, but share common elements that featured in different accounts. After the vignettes, the five themes identified in the previous chapter: outdoor locations, pursuit-based activities, living simply, emotional responses, and relationships, form the basis for further discussion on outdoor meanings.

To partly resolve the dilemma raised in chapter 4, regarding a researcher obscuring their influence in the interpretation and construction of participant accounts, I re-emphasise that I asked the questions, selected

the segments, and pared down the interview transcripts to form these vignettes. The interview responses however, although prompted by my questions, were the participants' own thoughts and ideas. So, while my influence remains deep-seated, the vignettes are constructed from the material generated during the interviews, and have been endorsed by the participants as representing their thoughts. Verbatim quotes taken from the transcripts, which are included in the following section, have been formatted in italics to clearly distinguish the words of the participants from my interpretive comments.

### In the caress of a wave –Wiremu

*When I was about 9 or 10, I used to go out to Port Levy quite a lot. It was a family home; my dad was born there, so there were a lot of connections. I would go and pick up mussels, or oysters, rock oysters, or put a net out and catch flounder – I always felt connected with something, with the environment, it pulled me there. But the creek has changed a lot now – back in those days we used to have a long drop, but now they have flush toilets and so there's pipes and things out into the creek and the quality now is pretty poor for eels. When I picture the environment in my head, I see two colours –green and blue – the dark green of the bush and the real blue of the sea, the beautiful colours of the sea, but I also think about how you can see pollution as well and how that can influence people's relationship with the environment.*

*I don't know whether it is just a cultural thing or not, but for me land is quite special, like your ancestors are buried in the land and our ancestors are always there, so there is the physical land, and there is the spirituality of the land too. Like I love surfing but, for me, it's quite spiritual – it's hard to explain, but when you're in the water, when you're in the surf, you're in the caress of a wave, you feel like you are being hugged, you know,*

*or that someone is embracing you, but it's the sea. For me, it's all about being connected and that's what the outdoors makes me feel like, it makes me feel connected, connected to family, connected to the sea, connected to the bush. It has that caring and nurturing element to it and that's what I try to share when I'm with clients.*

Wiremu explained that the first thing I should ask a Māori person is where they are from – as the land is their birthing place and part of who they are. He replied *my mountain is Mt Aoraki, and then I also have Mt Hikurangi from up north and my iwi are Ngāti Porou and Ngāi Tahu, but I also connect with Kahungunu ... but I don't really know much, all I know is the iwi and I kind of know some of the hapū, Ngāi Tahu, Koukourārata, you know Port Levy that is kind of my main marae and my main area.* This strong sense of coming from the land infused all his meanings and reflections. While Wiremu invoked Māori cultural frames to explain his connection to, and understanding of, the outdoors he also stressed his perspective that *people tend to think that it is a cultural issue, when it is actually not, it is actually a human issue.* For him, appreciating the bonds and connections we form with the land are integral to understanding who we are and how we should live respectfully with the planet.

Wiremu's early reflections of being outdoors frequently mentioned holidays at the traditional family home in Port Levy. Port Levy is a small village on Horomaka, Banks Peninsula, about an hour's drive from Christchurch. This was not a place, distant and remote, but a home, somewhere he lived, with family ties stretching back through several generations. Not all memories of Port Levy were positive, but from these early days the land gave him security and nurtured him. When walking along the beach or eeling in the creek he was calmed and strengthened through engaging with his ancestors and the spirit of the place. This spiritual meaning was more than a superficial knowing of the land, but buried deep within the land like the bones of his ancestors with

reminders of their presence all around him, accentuating the significance of cultural and social relationships between people and the land. For Wiremu, there appeared to be no gulf between the physical and the spiritual – they were continuous.

Wiremu's outdoor stories revealed attention to detail, learning from being there, taking care of himself, and occasionally cherished moments of working alongside other family members to skin and cook eel. The honing of observation skills through the act of gathering seafood and catching eels enhanced his practical knowledge of the land. His references to kai (food) seemed symbolic; it was less about putting food on the table and more about becoming connected to the land. Through living in the outdoors and gaining nourishment from it, he became part of the land. In later reflections, these childhood memories were overlaid by present day observations of declining fish and polluted waterways, which in turn led to more general considerations of the state of the environment and the responsibility humans have to care for it. The introduction of flush toilets to Port Levy with gushing sewerage pipes into the creek provide poignant imagery of how changes made with the best intentions of improving hygiene can sometimes lead to unforeseen problems for non-human life. This deterioration concerned him deeply; it was a wounding of the land he felt a responsibility to care for.

Perhaps the strongest imagery of Wiremu's account is *being in the caress of a wave* as he surfs, which describes a deep-felt sense of safety and security. The sea is a comforting presence when calm, and an uncontrollable force in rough weather. The outdoors becomes anthropomorphised as a friend and lover—*being a surfer, I love it, knowing there's a lot more going on than just having fun—you've actually got a relationship with something, and it gives you a lot more than just excitement and fun, it gives you a sense of belonging*. Such imagery supports Martin's (2005) contention that nature as a friend provides language through which to describe connections to nature. Belonging to

the environment in an embodied way disrupts rational discourses of control and separation from the environment, and builds a strong sense of connection. These embodied moments of being comfortable and secure outdoors, threaded their way through Wiremu's recollections and into the way he worked with groups.

In his work, he brings together his beliefs about spiritual–physical connectedness with his training as a counsellor at TeWhiuwhiu O TeHau, Waikato Institute of Technology. This allows him to create a sanctuary for all his students to learn and grow. Just as the land around Port Levy provided a safe harbour for him away from the ills of violence and alcoholism, he uses the outdoors as a place to help students build a sense of identity through feeling a deep sense of connection. Hence he was visibly upset when talking of programmes which use the outdoors as a *boot camp* or where students are told to *'be a man' 'harden up' or 'grow up' ...I'm not a big fan of yelling at kids, and punishing kids, in terms of their developing, I mean they get a lot of that at home anyway. I don't think it should be the young people who are referred to those camps; it is more the parents and the families that need to go.* Misusing the outdoors in this way undermines the love and care it offers and can leave the students feeling even more isolated and alone, which he believes is the cause of much depression and suicide. Developing a strong sense of belonging to the land *is one way that can help young people survive ...a lot of young people put all their trust into family and their parents and stuff, and it just doesn't come back, whereas the land is always there.* His work also built on a *strengths-based approach*, whereby each student is appreciated for who they are and their talents and strengths are valued rather than being seen as deficient.

Wiremu's view of the outdoors, which connects the natural, social, and spiritual, intimates a way of seeing the interconnection of all life. To capture and impart this sense to others, he uses metaphors and symbolism which draw on traditional Māori stories of creation. This is

portrayed in his description of taking groups caving: *we use the metaphors of birth and being inside Papatūānuku. The good thing about caves is that you go into the cold and dark and into the total silence, and then when you go back out again you can hear the environment and feel the sun and smell the different air. So once they are inside the cave, we turn the lights off and sit in total silence for a while – just think about things for a while. We then ask them to think about one thing they would like to change, and going back out is like a re-birthing, so that when they go back to their community they can work on that.*

The outdoors, the land, is part of him, to harm it is to harm himself and would show disrespect for his ancestors. He felt humble in its presence, and that humility came through descriptions of his work practices and the sensitive and caring way he spoke of the students he worked with. While he has worked with many young Māori who no longer knew their whakapapa or traditional kaitiaki (guardianship) responsibilities, he felt that being outdoors helped them connect with their ancestors and respect the land.

### So somewhere – Chris

*Cold, wet, and miserable – how can that be fun? I was a skinny 12-year-old when Dad took me climbing on Mount Taranaki, it was blowing a gale, icy, terrifying, and standing on the top with tears rolling down my cheeks, I thought I'd never survive. Yet thirty minutes later I was yelling, laughing, and bounding down the scree, what a thrill! All my early camps and tramps seemed the same – corduroy shorts, wet feet, labouring under a heavy pack, yet always wanting to go again.*

*I often have a dialogue with the area, when I'm tramping or climbing, a bit like talking with a respected elder. I'd wanted to climb Mt Tutoko for years – it's really sacred for some reason, but as I approached the summit I decided to leave it un-walked*

*on by me. The sun was beating down, the snow slopes were very, very loose, wet and unconsolidated. I was quite concerned about the descent, so it was kind of like a combination of respect for the mountain, but also some kind of contra deal where I was thinking 'if you let me get off you, okay, then I'll not walk on your summit.' The earth is more than a physical space; so I like to acknowledge the respect that I feel for the places that I visit, and express my gratitude.*

*Sometimes I can be in an office and it could be anyplace in the world, but when I'm actually in a natural spot – well that is so somewhere. It's not that I see the outdoors as an escape that would be a running away. I run to the outdoors like in the Sound of Music "I run to the hills when my heart is lonely." I go outdoors for physical, mental, spiritual renewal and hope that at least some of the students I take there feel that same thrill of being totally in the moment.*

Chris's recollections of the outdoors were initially embroiled with challenge and adventure. Reflecting on his first transcript, he noted his tendency to speak of *high-end, very remote type of experiences, and there wasn't that much about exploring creeks at home or just loving being in the park*. He admitted to valorising some adventures partly because that was what friends and climbing colleagues expected. Many adventure stories emerge from romantic discourses of the self overcoming nature, especially through the exploration of wild places. As Rose (1993) observes, this usually involves a male hero undertaking rhapsodic experiences while travelling through places which are potentially awesome and transformative. This epitomises some of Chris's early stories about revelling in arduous experiences, but attaining release once the sun came out and he was back in safer territory. Any negative feelings associated with encountering difficult or uncomfortable situations were quickly followed by joy, fulfilment, and a sense of achievement. His response to coping successfully

with challenging situations was expansive, even in his office as he reached that particular point in his story he would tilt his head backwards, drop his shoulders, expand his chest, and laugh. It was a contagious exuberant love of life. His outdoor adventures were not about seeking risk, but affirming life.

Robust physical challenges in aesthetic landscapes were particularly special – *when I'm feeling the sun on my back, the wind on my face, and I've got the horizon out in front of me and I'm surrounded by tussocks and trees and I'm dodging roots and breathing hard, then that is a wonderfully intimate robust discourse I'm having with nature.* This is more than adrenalin fuelled thrill seeking; he fully engages through all his senses and in doing so has built a deep love and respect for the land. Being physically immersed in the nuances of the weather, vegetation, and terrain extends his relationship with the natural environment. Symbolically, the outdoors was freedom from the constraints of mundane life, but he emphasised that going outdoors was not an escape, but a place he ran to with his heart wide open—somewhere to experience *physical and mental spiritual renewal.*

As he shared more stories, an extra element emerged, one of attentive engagement in the moment. He revelled in the delight of observing the minutiae of plant structures, fish feeding patterns, or patterns in the mud. These quiet moments of intense focus on one small piece of the environment were equally as inspirational as climbing in remote areas. This juxtaposition of intimate observation and vigorous activity was further enhanced on extended trips *when you are actually in a natural spot that is so somewhere. You know it by the plants and they are like old friends that you have seen before and all the peaks that you have come to know – it is so much more of a place.* On these longer trips, he felt fully absorbed and responded to the elements in deep visceral ways—*you can't just turn off, you appreciate the cloudscapes, the storms, the tumultuousness, and for some reason all of those moods are precious to me. It's all part and parcel, the full package deal – on nature's terms –*

*you're married to nature, you've got to take it for better or for worse and even the worse is better.* Wherever he was outdoors, he found infinite complexity and inspiration, which stimulated his love of life and education.

As well as adventure, observation, and exploration, he also shared ideas of a higher spiritual order; respect for nature; and the moral goodness of nature. Chris held the belief that the outdoors had an inherent life force—*an earth mother or sacred personality that I want to respect.* At times, he negotiated or held conversations with this presence and felt a level of reciprocity, *I sometimes get the feeling that I am given a gift in return for my care and respect, perhaps a close encounter with a bird or an unexpected view.* This on-going dialogue helped him form a deep spiritual and emotional attachment with the land, providing him with strength and comfort.

Chris acknowledges that activity and challenge discourses influenced his outdoor education practices, especially in the early stages of his career when *I focused on things like rock climbing, sea kayaking, white water kayaking, mountaineering, and tramping and went to places that I thought would be cool, and I guess I was novelty seeking.* Yet, even as he shared some of these early teaching experiences, he revealed a deeper sensitivity to the physical and cultural aspects of the area. This love of ecology and his desire to fossick around nooks and crannies was becoming more astutely defined through his involvement with pre-service teacher education. There is a sense of him adjusting his practice to develop a more intimate connection with the outdoors ... *last week sitting solo, the students could develop a relationship with an exact position, look at the trees, see patterns in the moss, watch the clouds go past the tops of the trees. It was just a 10 minute solo and the student feedback was that they really valued that time, it was an opportunity to explore a micro space, a space that is just around you.*

Being outdoors for Chris is a totally engaging aesthetic experience. He encourages students to become entirely absorbed in experiencing where they are. This involves feeling connected in active, visceral, emotional, and cognitive ways. He still values teaching in sites which are more natural than urban, regretting not being able to spend more time outdoors—*a challenge for me is to teach outdoor education inside in the classroom and yet still be able to role model that passion, because if they have passion then they will deliver good outdoor education. It's not that we are inside all the time, but I just feel that outdoor education should be more outside.* His enthusiasm and exuberance for the outdoors is irrepressible. Whether camping in the cold and wet, scientifically analysing ecological process, telling fairy tales to his girls, teaching skills, or chilling out, Chris believes the outdoor world has much to offer. *I mean there are students out there, like me, that have magical outcomes in the outdoors far beyond anything that you could have predicted, and even if only a few have them –isn't that a marvellous thing?*

### Not lonely anymore – Jodi

*Back in the day, when I first started going outdoors, I almost felt lonely out there. When I went to places with mountain peaks and granite faces I loved it, but there was always a loneliness or nervousness if I didn't have people around me. Now, I am able to walk through areas totally by myself and actually feel comfortable, and at peace with what's happening around me.*

*I wouldn't actually know myself without the outdoors. It has been part of me, as far as I can remember, back to the days of gathering kai moana with the whānau. When I was growing up though, I didn't really connect with my culture and being Māori, and thinking back that was not what I wanted. I'm Ngāpuhi, but my dad moved away from the extended family and homeland when I was three, so I don't have a strong*

*connection. What the land brings me is the values and philosophy of the people who are on it. It's been a long time coming to that realisation, but building connections to the land is one of the big guiding principles for me now both personally and in my work here at Waipuna.*

*My family suffers from depression, so I utilise exercise in the outdoors to help balance me out with that. When I have had a period of intense work or whatever, and I feel myself slowly going down, I know that I need to make sure I get outdoors and do something that helps bring me back up to where I need to be. I did get quite low a little while back, – I had a period of about six months, which was intense, and it was all about being in an office and not getting outside. That was a hard dark place to be, and if I didn't have the outdoors that's where I might be now.*

Although Jodi's iwi is Ngāpuhi, he chose not to seek out things Māori when he was growing up. That is now changing, and as he increases his cultural and spiritual understanding – he believes he can now connect with the outdoors in ways beyond the physical. *Not lonely anymore* was the evocative expression he used to acknowledge the spiritual presence of his ancestors. His attachment to *the land* is accruing from cultural and ancestral meanings as well as his personal experiences.

Early memories of going to the beach with the family instilled his love of being outdoors. This encouraged him to participate in school camps, work with the conservation corps, and take up rock climbing. He realised he enjoyed physical challenges which required some mental hardness, and rock climbing fulfilled that urge. He threw everything into climbing, training hard, travelling around the country and overseas to tackle many technically taxing routes. Rock climbing is perceived by some to be a risky activity, but Jodi considered himself to be a safe and calculating climber. *I've done my fair amount of soloing* (climbing without a rope)

*and if I went back and tried to solo now, I would certainly be risking it and I wouldn't want to do it now, but back then I was focused and fitter so it didn't seem like such a risk.* While enjoying an activity and mixing with others who are dedicated climbers can normalise certain risks, Jodi enjoyed climbing more for the sense of control it offered than for the adrenalin or danger. It was part of a process to learn what he was capable of, both mentally and physically, as well as providing opportunities to recreate in some amazing places.

For Jodi, the indoors was a cold dark place and if he spent too much time there he became depressed. He suggested that just being outside helped him recover, although the overall account of his relationship with the outdoors suggests more complex interactions between spiritual, emotional, and bodily states. While he noted that the physical activity was important, he equally enjoyed the peace a place could offer, with the ability to *just take yourself away from everything*. Getting away offered the space for him to relieve the stresses and pressures of everyday life, so being outdoors with '*green harmony*' '*sun on your back*' and a '*view out in front*' and other pleasing sensory images, provided him with physiological, spiritual, and therapeutic opportunities. Durie(2001) suggests that for Māori, alienation from land carried with it a severe psychological toll, and proposed *Te Whare Tapa Wha*, a holistic model of well-being which balances hinengaro (mental well-being); wairua (spiritual well-being); whānau (family well-being); and tinana (physical well-being). Although distanced from his tribal home, being outdoors helped bring these four principles together.

The organisation Jodi works for significantly shapes his practice, providing him with support to reconnect with his cultural roots. *So, by basically going on the same journey that I am currently going on, I can help other young Māori people reconnect with their culture.* He felt his own search for connection helped him relate to students who were also feeling lost and disenfranchised from their roots. His relationship was

also one of humility, sharing with the students that he was on a similar journey and he certainly did not have any easy answers. While much of his work was with Māori youth, *it's relevant for all young people— it involves a strengths-based approach building relationships, offering support, and honouring their wisdom. We don't try and change them—they have to do that themselves. It all seems easier outdoors, there's less distractions, and we can just work alongside them.* While being supportive was important, he also appreciated being outdoors for the challenges it offered, *they can't always take easy options —they can't flick a switch when they're cold, they need to collect the wood and get a fire going.* For him, the direct consequences of action or inaction set the parameters to discuss the choices that can be taken through life and the way the different environments and circumstances influence those options.

Jodi described how open spaces were less threatening for many students, as they could *move around and move away from each other when they need to — they don't feel trapped.* He also believed that they were more receptive to listening to the facilitators when out on camp; *they can see we are trying to help.* Specifically, Māori students responded with greater respect when at a site of special significance, as they sense a connection with their ancestors and the spirit of the land *—like climbing at Castle Rock we talk about it being a sanctuary for the warriors who escaped up there and the need for them to create sanctuaries for themselves.* Jodi draws on mythology, ancestral teachings, and symbolism to create the outdoors as a safe and supportive site of learning; one which enhances relationships with people as well as the land.

Why am I doing this? – Sara

*The snow was up to our thighs and I kept thinking 'why am I doing this?'—but standing on top was so cool. The height and*

*the views are amazing; looking at the land stretching out below is just awesome. I love the challenge of getting there, helping the others along the way, and all the rapport and camaraderie. It doesn't last long though— after five minutes with the wind howling it was 'woo hoo let's get back down again.' I've done my fair share of trudging in the wet, having epics and bivvying out in crap conditions, so now I would think twice before going in really bad weather, although I do still like the wind—it's exciting. Sometimes when I'm being challenged outside, I just want to go home and have that cup of tea, but then when I get home all I think about is the next trip. I just enjoy being outdoors with others. A friend asked me the other day when we were driving back 'How do you feel when you're driving back into Christchurch because I really hate it?' I said 'Well I don't actually mind because this is home to me – so I don't mind coming back, especially as I know that I'm going to leave again to do something else.'*

*While I still like to challenge myself I don't like to be very, very scared anymore. Now I'd rather do something easier, and if I don't get up to the top then I don't mind—I'll just sit and enjoy the view, and sometimes when I'm just sitting on top of a mountain looking out, I get a peaceful tranquil feeling, which maybe like a spiritual experience—I'm not sure—I'm not really religious. It's like a Zen state; I just feel part of the environment, a kind of moulding into the environment. At night too after a full day climbing, just lying and looking at the stars and clouds that is a good stillness time and it's just like it's all there for you.*

Sara did not talk much about her early experiences outdoors, as her passion for tramping and the mountains started in her late 20s. This interest grew because she enjoyed *the challenge of getting somewhere*

and *building rapport with people*. From teaching her niece and nephew to climb, sharing a bottle of wine with friends, or meeting new people, being with others was important as *the people you share it with make it more special*. The neutrality of the outdoors allowed relationships to form which broke down the social mores that exist at work and other urban settings. On outdoor trips *everyone is on a more equal footing and people seem to let their guard down a bit more. There is not the same society boundaries put on them, I know that sounds a bit weird, but it's more like just, –let's go and have some fun and enjoy the day.*

Her life story is presented as a series of discoveries: discoveries of new activities, new landscapes, new friends, and new opportunities. For her, unfamiliar terrain provided a sense of excitement where she felt alive, alert, and *in-tune* with the environment. That sense of connection did not require a deep knowing of familiar places, but the ease of engaged immersion in what she referred to as *the bush*, the *tops* and *the outdoors*. She loved longer trips in untracked terrain. Tracks were about moving across the land and *getting somewhere*, but off-track she felt immersed in places *which totally surround you*, negotiating over deadfall or *picking your way through wet bush while harder work is more intimate*. Her identity was built around this intimate connection with the outdoors, and as such it gave her a quiet confidence and modest self-assurance.

She was always planning a trip. The whole experience was important, from the initial pouring over maps and organising food, completing the journey, to returning home and showing the photos to others. This continuity of experience from home to the outdoors and back home were mutually implicated, one made more special because of the other. Travelling between home and the mountains had helped her become aware of the relationship between places as well as her changing moods as she arrived at one place and then left to go to another. This continuity

of anticipation, action, emotion, and narration were tied together as a total experience.

Sara was a freelance instructor, developing many of her ideas from working at centres including Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre, Whenua-iti, Hanmer Springs, Boyle River Lodge, and Castle Hill. She could not believe that she was able to work, and be paid, for something she just loved doing. Combining leisure and work challenges certain concepts of work, but she fully embraced this lifestyle option which required many nights away from home. From the sparkle in her eyes, I could tell she was passionate about helping others experience the outdoors. Her early instructing involved just going and doing activities, but at *Whenua-iti there was a lot of talking and facilitating, sometimes I felt more like a counsellor*. The programme involved working with unemployed adults with the aim of *getting them back into life*. Sara felt her instructing was more balanced now, but she still enjoyed the physical aspects of taking students *walking off-track...reaching the tops ... and being buffeted by the wind*. She was less convinced about running activities which just offered quick thrills *–they might be fun but its overnight camps and the trips with a bit more commitment they remember at the end of the week*. She felt the outdoors *offers so many opportunities to learn and enjoy learning*, but she also hoped the students would continue to get out and enjoy the bush and the mountains on their own because *there are so many great places to explore and they've given me so much pleasure*.

### The rhythms of being there – Pete

*My involvement in the outdoors goes right back to when my father and mother built a batch at Bealey spur. From that point on, I've been roaming and walking and being in the outdoors a lot. We spent a lot of time at the batch in the bush, building huts and going down to the river building dams. It was just the place we were, it wasn't anyway separate or special; it was just*

*part of our life. We'd go up in the holidays and it might take us a day to settle into the rhythms of being there and then all the niggling and moaning and everything else that goes on just melts away.*

*I dislike the outdoors being used as a gymnasium – it is disrespectful. It is a challenge, but I like to work with it, rather than against it. If I'm crossing a river, I'm not fighting the river, I'm trying to understand how the environment is working, –respecting the environment for what it is. I try to work towards the position where being in the outdoors is not an ordeal, it is just something that is familiar and normal. It's not that I see the outdoors as a spiritual experience, but then I am not a spiritual person—for me it's easier to see the environment organically, in the sense of being a bio-system, of which I am part, and that it has its own organic energy to operate. It is more about respect, like respecting the river when it is in flood, –the river doesn't care whether you go in it or not, the river is not going to change, you need to understand the river and the forces involved, but there is no being that is controlling that.*

*So you can use the outdoors for personal growth, but it is far more organic than that – it's also about giving back to the environment as well, so it's about how you place yourself in that environment. If you talk to my outdoor education class about where they are going or what they are doing, they are really amped about the whole thing. Because it is just different, it is just the whole atmosphere of what they get to do. I say to them we are going to go into the mountains, and if it's wet we are going to get wet, and it's cold we going to get cold, and if it's windy we'll get windblown – we are going to go out and we are going to do stuff, and they like that, they like being away with each other. One of the things that actually drives me*

*is that the outdoors has been extremely good for me, in terms of shaping who I am, and I like to be able to pass that on—for me that is the most significant thing, that desire to share my passion.*

Pete linked holidays and weekends at the family bach near Arthur's Pass with the outdoors. These early memories of playing and exploring down by the river without overt adult supervision developed his competence, confidence, and love of being outdoors. So now he encourages his sons to play in the bush, even although *some people may question the wisdom of letting these boys go down to the river by themselves, because they might get into trouble*, he was not concerned. The boys, ages eight and ten, were used to being there *—they're developing their own knowledge and respect and you have to let them learn that for themselves*. At Bealey, away from distractions of the city, there are multiple learning opportunities and *no television to allow you to be bored; you have the responsibility for what you do*. Active involvement, being at home outdoors, developing a sense of responsibility for living within the world, and independence, were key themes Pete returned to throughout the interviews.

During the third interview, Pete reflected on trying to rescue a friend who had been buried in an avalanche. It was still a traumatic memory for him, but he had partly come to terms with it by realising he had performed efficiently under the stress and done all he could. Some accounts in the media portray mountaineers as sensation-seeking or foolhardy individuals, yet as in Pete's experiences, it is much more complex. I asked if he thought risk was worthwhile and he was adamant that it was *—you can't live life without some risk ... which is worse, putting yourself at risk through an activity, or putting yourself at risk through poor eating habits and poor exercise habits—I know which one is going to be more expensive on society, the obesity is*. For Pete, participation in outdoor activities was a way of learning about how to

manage risk. While recognising potential hazards, his emphasis was on the outdoors as life enriching not death defying.

As a professional mountain guide, he spent several years honing his skills and being a mountaineer had become very much part of his identity. Climbing, at that time, was about performing competently, and trying to expand his sense of what was possible. Memorable moments were described as 'flow' where it is effortless *and smooth – not a grunt or hard work*. The concept of 'flow' was developed through a study of rock climbers, artists, chess players, and dancers by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and is described as a state of mind which is achieved through balancing, action, awareness, challenge and capability so the experience is intrinsically rewarding. He now achieves similar 'flow' experiences when orienteering, engaging in competition, not as an adversarial quest, but a place to learn and enjoy *without hurting yourself or damaging the environment and without making it hard for yourself*. This relates to his views of the outdoors as a place to be, not an obstacle course.

For Pete, the outdoors was organic, *in the sense of being a bio-system, of which I am part*, but emphasising that *it has its own organic energy to operate, but it actually doesn't care about me – it doesn't feel responsible for me being there. You need to understand and respect the power of the river and the forces that are involved, but there is no being that is controlling that*. He was sensitive to changes in clouds, weather, and terrain, integrating such knowledge into practices of waiting to cross a river, selecting a sheltered campsite, or skiing in fresh powder clear of avalanche zones. These practices were learnt experientially, and coalesce with his dialogues of working with the environment. He felt city life allowed people to ignore the basic processes of life – *water comes from a tap and toilet waste just disappears*, whereas being outdoors helped people understand the principles of living in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Elements of his instructing were pragmatic, teaching about sustainability issues, for example, by using *bokashi* composting systems and *poo-pots* whilst out camping, using public transport to travel to and from his trips, and sharing gear and resources with other schools. He was also fascinated by the way students changed their learning habits when outdoors. Direct consequences, immediate feedback, and extra responsibility he felt were important, but he also noticed that the mind-set of students changed just by leaving the school grounds. He felt they had learnt a set of passive behaviours to get them through, but really wanted to take control of their lives. Outdoors away from the structures and routines of school they took charge and were willing to *push themselves ...really stretch themselves fully and completely*. The advantage of being outdoors is that *we do things for real* they are not just learning *but emotionally, physically, and mentally engaged*, suggesting that talk and abstracted forms of learning yield substantially different forms of knowledge than the active engagement of being there and doing it.

### Being unruly – Nicci

*I was an active difficult kid never wanting to sit still, and I had allergies to sugar and that sort of thing, but I was lucky enough to live in rural areas so tended to spend hours running around – you know, just being unruly. Mum and dad were happy for us to just disappear all day and so we'd go eeling down at the local creek, go down to the beach, horse riding, all over the place, I just enjoyed being outside.*

*Then I got into kayaking and was just completely hooked and realised I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing that sort of stuff. I'm probably quite a talented boater, but my confidence gives me the most problems. Sometimes when I'm negotiating difficult sections of water I feel like I'm not sure whether I am*

*welcome or allowed. If I had a successful run then I feel I have been given permission.*

*When I'm tramping in the high more remote ridge tops, I just feel as though I am part of it. Being able to look out for as far as you can see helps give me perspective; it's a lot older and it's been here a lot longer than me, and I do like being reminded of my humanness. Life is more than just what you get sucked into on a day-to-day basis, it is so much more. But I just really love being outside, I need to go outside, and I need to take my students outside because that's where I get my passion and enthusiasm from— that's what keeps my batteries running. You know we can avoid the weather by driving in our cars, but then you get so far removed from the bigger picture of the planet and how it works and what is needed to sustain it. Just being outside and looking at the stars, and seeing satellites and shooting stars and tramping in the rain helps students to make links with planet and the origins of where they live. Sometimes in cities people are angry at each other all the time, for no given reason, they seem as though they are fighting with the environment, and that's not a sound way to live. I want people to be in environments and situations where they can learn to just live in a healthier way, be nicer to each other, and have more positive interactions with the environment they live in.*

Nicci draws a picture of someone who enjoyed growing up with physical sensory experiences in an interesting, richly detailed beach environment. Her non-verbal communication – arm waving, laughter, sobs, tears, added a richness and intensity to her interview. Somewhat embarrassed by her tears, she explains, *I don't know why I'm so tearful, well it is a very emotional place, well maybe it's not an emotional place – but I certainly experience a lot of emotion in those environments.* Her words remain a

small part of the passionate affirmation and emotional connection she felt for the outdoors.

Growing up amongst the dunes provided space away from adult control, and her remembrances create images of a carefree life. She refers to this as *being unruly*, which has connotations of resisting societal conventions. Roaming the dirt lanes, playing on the beach, and visiting neighbours was disrupted when she went to boarding school. Living in the city was a difficult unsettled period in her life, but realising that she was potentially heading into trouble, her brother encouraged her to enrol into a polytechnic course training outdoor instructors. Being outdoors, away from crowds, was therapeutic, and inspired her to help others find a similar sense of joy and fulfilment.

Whether it was stories of walking her dogs, running in the hills, or exploring the ecology of an area, her bubbling enthusiasm filled the room. Her talk about kayaking however, took on a different tone as she confessed to having doubts and lacking confidence in her competence. She aspired to perform at a high level, but the mental and physical challenges she set herself took her on an emotional rollercoaster. For her, it was a struggle to find a balance between enough confidence and over-confidence; too much could lead to mistakes, while backing away resulted in underperforming and frustration. These performance goals were not about competing with the environment but responding to and respecting the river and trying to give her best. Being immersed in the experience and feeling she was working with the river gave her a *bubble of happiness* which was a bodily response she used as a marker for qualitative aspects of experience.

While there is a strong element of personal agency in her descriptions of moving through the water, she also attributes some of her success, or lack of success, to the river itself. *When I haven't been successful I feel as if I haven't had permission to be on that stretch of water and that*

*permission comes from the river or the terrain. When I am successful or performing at a comfortable level then I feel I do have permission to be there and feel grateful.* Not liking the word spiritual, she describes it as feeling connected, linked, or part of the environment. As she discusses her connection and love of the environment there is an underlying sense that these feelings are occurring in the context of a relationship, and that this relationship is not unidirectional, but reciprocal. On some occasions, when challenge increased the rivers are no longer benevolent, welcoming, and nurturing, she felt their power helped her understand her place, as a human, within a greater force. She believes certain elements of risk and adventure help people consider their humanity and connection to the wider world by helping them focus on the present. *My 'Eureka moments' are when students are just totally immersed and completely loving what they are doing and right there in the moment.* For Nicci, there were no contradictions between building self-reliance through adventure and challenge and developing a trusting and respectful relationship with the land, they were mutually re-enforcing, especially if you were passionate about being engaged in life.

The outdoors for Nicci was a positive place whereas cities were angry places. So taking students away from the city was important, *sites that are further removed from town, tend to enhance learning more. When you are away, there seems to be a mental shift that says we are away now let's just leave all that other stuff behind, and just focus on what we're doing in this environment.* Space and time away from cities was important not just because the students were away from distractions, but because the outdoors was more positive and *closer to our origins.* In this way, she attributes a sense of moral worth to nature and by inference to the outdoors. As morally significant, the outdoors becomes a positive place for personal growth and development, and she suggests that helping students develop a love for the outdoors can make *a better society.*

## An ever-changing mind-set– Mark

*From the age of three, I was loaded into the front seat of the ute and taken out to the run. That's probably where my love of space started. The semi-high-country farm, has cattle, deer, and fine wool merino sheep up on the back blocks. The closest neighbour was about 14 or 15 kilometres away, so I have always grown up with space. You learn about the land through production, supporting yourself, growing food, and farming animals.*

*Working at Arthur's Pass was fantastic—I loved taking off with friends straight from my house, walking up the road, and heading onto the tops. One of the best trips was the Three Passes, reading about mining around Browning Pass and then going to see it, and trying to appreciate what it must've been like back when people were trying to use it as a mining site—just fascinating. I got a lot of energy from the area, and spending time in an area, you start to learn what is happening, like friends in DoC shared information about their projects with the orange-fronted parakeets—just little things like that creates attachments.*

*I'm heading back south later this year to be in a more rural environment. I find it quite hard in the city. I don't know if it's from growing up on my parents' farm, but being surrounded by space has had a huge impact on me, on who I am, and where I am at. Being there gives me energy, happiness, a sense of openness, joy, challenge all those things. I have an ever-changing mind-set of what I want to achieve in the outdoors, I appreciate it now as a place to be, not necessarily to go and do something, but just somewhere to spend time with the people I love.*

The overriding influence of growing up on a farm, 15 kilometres away from the nearest neighbours, was immediately apparent on Mark's meanings of the outdoors. There is a definite rural sensibility in his enthusiasm for getting on with job, working hard, and delighting in the open space when mustering in the high country. Initially though, he did not connect the farm with the outdoors, which he perceived to be more recreationally focused. Hence, he considered his first 'real' outdoor experience to be a school camp on Stewart Island.

While Mark was interested in environmental studies at university, activities, particularly climbing and mountaineering, were central to his meaning making. When he started work as an outdoor instructor in Arthur's Pass he loved *having a national park on the doorstep*. While the job involved long hours, Mark gained energy and re-invigorated himself by heading out into the hills – *I get a lot of energy from the area, I'm just inspired by the mountains and just always want to get out and about I don't know what it is specifically, I just really enjoy myself up in the hills*. Although climbing and physical activity were important, increasing his knowledge of the local environment and building a strong social network with the locals also played a large part in building up his feelings for the Arthur's Pass area. Even after leaving, Mark still feels a deep emotional attachment and relishes his memories of living, working, and climbing there.

Despite his practical farming background, the outdoors was usually perceived as remote or pristine. He often spoke of snow-clad mountains, wide vistas, and the pleasing aesthetic sensations of being in magnificent landscapes. This was particularly evident in his overseas mountaineering accounts, which revealed his explorer spirit. Aware of the poverty and hardship of Bolivian and Peruvian farmers, he remained surprised that it *didn't mean much to them that it was a national park – they had been farming that area for a long time, it was very sort of sustenance type living, ... and it was pretty heavily grazed. We were seeing animals up to*

5000 metres, and the plant life and things were just so heavily grazed that they were struggling to get ahead, to recover because of the animals and cows grazing – it was just bizarre. Mark was confronted with what Cronon (1996b, p. 79) calls the myth of wilderness where certain areas deemed pristine and 'virgin' by one group of people, have had on-going occupancy and are still considered home by others. His vision of national park status meant long standing traditional activities were inappropriate if they damaged the land, yet the recreational pursuit of mountaineering was acceptable.

Mark acknowledged the risks involved in mountaineering, but considered himself to be conservative in his decision making, although he did comment that having a six-month-old son had made him even more wary. This complex balance of adventure and safety is evident in one of his descriptions of climbing – *I was just very cautious in my movements on the rock, just a little unsure how it was going. The rock was quite solid, but we didn't have a lot of gear, so I had to run the rope out a bit, which was a great experience because I got fully absorbed into what I was doing, but I was always thinking – just don't make the mistake, just climb well – climb safely.* That climbing could offer opportunities for such intense committed engagement and focused decision-making was part of his fascination with being outdoors.

Productive labour and working hard are an occurring theme in his stories. The practices he associates with farm life, *just doing it and not worrying about the rain*, are echoed in his instruction. He felt engaging students in trapping stoats, clearing wilding pines, or communal cooking, helped them understand their role within the environment. He also valued more traditional pursuit activities as a way to both *help students make decisions, or at least overcome the challenge*, and to *gain an appreciation of the environment they are in*. He noted that taking a broader integrated approach to learning was easier at some of the outdoor centres where he had worked as the focus had been on more

*simple things and looking at the area, whereas other places focused on teaching skills.*

One of his greatest delights involved students building up a sense of connection to the area. *The students visit the centre numerous times. They spend over 20 days there, so it is neat when you drive there, they are pointing out some things that they remember, and sharing stories in the van about what has happened in previous years. They start to build a sense of place or a connection, especially when they see some of the areas they've camped in before. So now after the snow camp we stop and point out where they've been, so they can point it out to mum and dad or their friends and say – 'I stayed up there.'* Helping students build stories of their experiences is part of building their connection to an area and Mark seems intuitively aware of the significance of students knowing more about the places they learn in.

### Just being up there– Arthur

*From the start, I was probably more into taking people than doing my own trips. When I was a leader with my old scout group, hell of a strong group, we had annual adventures, starting off from Clyde camping ground on Boxing Day. We were really quite adventurous– the kids were 15 to 18, and I was probably a 22-year-old, in a leadership role. We'd also volunteer to work on the Routeburn track. DoC would do the blasting and we would do all the carrying away and that sort of stuff.*

*For me the outdoors is anywhere away from the built up environment – but even inside the built up environment there are some examples. I mean teaching at Kaiapoi we had it made– there was the river, the beach, some forest, the gravel pits just to the north, and right up to the mountains. There's so much more you can cover when you get out of the school and*

*go the river, I just don't know why other teachers don't go outdoors more. I probably do put a lot of emphasis on what I have done farther away, but when you collect up all the places that you have used for teaching, then there's a lot in the local area.*

*As a family we have done a lot together in the outdoors. I saw a strong sense of the value of the outdoors for humanity, for the person, for me, and family, and friends. Recently my family snow-shoed into the Two Thumb Range and had a great time. What made it great, was the company, the exercise, and the environment— it was just magnificent. When you are on the Two Thumb Range and look below you, it's not all natural, but a hell of a proportion of it is, and just taking deep breaths there, you know the air up there just seems right, it is hard to explain it – isn't it?*

Outdoor meanings were tightly bound to work, family, study, and a geographic sensitivity of the natural environment. The outdoors and outdoor education loom large in how he sees himself and are variously spoken of as being *my main thing; my big thing; and my greatest interest*. While Arthur enjoyed skiing, tramping, and climbing trips, his overriding interest was using the outdoors to teach and inspire others. Describing a personal skiing trip in the Tekapo area, Arthur quickly moves from talking about his delight of being up high and enjoying the fresh snow to spotting a school group. As a consummate professional, he could not resist talking with the group and the teacher and to find out what they were doing and where they were from. This chance meeting is then enthusiastically woven into stories about the value of taking students outdoors. Meanings of the outdoors and outdoor education were tightly woven together throughout Arthur's stories.

Arthur admitted that many of his early outdoor experiences involved just taking people on trips because it felt right. During those experiences

however, he realised that it much easier to teach as people were engaged and excited about learning. *There's always more going on – they learn about themselves and the environment* and he was excited about these layers of knowing and the way they could build bridges of meaning to other areas of their lives. Being curious, he wanted to know more about how to enhance these layers of learning. Two key opportunities to explore the processes and practices of outdoor education included an outdoor educators' course at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre and a scholarship to study at East Washington University. Through these opportunities, he developed his practices of asking reflective questions, giving feedback, provoking curiosity, and providing many opportunities for students to be practically involved in their environment.

He also enjoyed *the out and out physical activity, giving your lungs and heart a good going over*, but felt there was more to being outdoors. For him, the outdoors held value beyond the physical, and was surprised that more teachers did not recognise its potential to both expand learning and develop students' understanding of who they are and how the fit into the world. He appeared to seamlessly integrate many facets of learning into his sessions, as a geographer he could never pass by a river or rock without wanting to tell stories about why it was there. For him, outdoor education incorporated many layers of learning– it was engaging, holistic, relevant, and morally significant, but most of all *students just love to be outside learning, it's such a magnificent classroom*, so he took every opportunity to head outdoors whether it was down to the local river to look at flood damage or away on a ski trip. Most importantly, Arthur believed that being outdoors was an inspirational place to teach *you never quite know what will happen, there's an endless stream of possibilities, and you just have to ask the right question, the one that piques their interest.*

## The X-factor –Stephen

*Camping was a big thing for my family, but I didn't like it much. It was generally around my birthday, and it seemed that sleeping in a tent on my birthday was not the greatest thing in the world. What I did enjoy was grabbing lines and bait from the dairy, and fishing off the wharf. One of my best mates did some hunting of possum, rabbits, and turkey. We would go out in the evening with a torch and shotgun, or a 22, depending on what firearms were around at the time. We weren't terribly old and yet we were wandering around with firearms, just the two of us.*

*In Australia, going to Arapiles and the Grampians just has, I don't know, an X-factor, probably a combination of climbing, culture, and the environment. Sitting on a belay 100 metres up, you can look out across this very dry and not particularly beautiful land, but just know that off to the northwest it is hundreds, thousands of kilometres of just land— you just get that feeling of space. Other parts of the Australian bush were boring, sparse trees, little undergrowth and hot. There were some amazingly beautiful parts, but not quite the same as back here. I went for a walk around Lewis Pass after I came back and immediately felt at home in South Island beech tree forest. Last weekend, I was with a group in the Craigieburns and just getting out of van and looking up at the stars, I mean Christchurch doesn't have that much light pollution, but still it is just amazing what the night sky looks like when you are actually out of town.*

Stephen did not consider himself to be a story teller, more of an analyser. He was training to be a teacher when I interviewed him, and commented on enjoying the interview process as a way of exploring his own ideas and concerns, which to a large extent centred on outdoor

education and how society viewed the world. The outdoors was valued as a place to reflect on society, to step outside his daily routine and ponder *why things are the way they are*.

Physical viewpoints, as well as intellectual ones, were important for him. As well as being fascinated about the sheer scale of space stretching out from his belay stance on a climb in Australia, he also reminisced about the view from his parents' house *they have this most amazing view from their place out to the beach, and way out towards the Kaikoura mountains*. Likewise looking up at the stars and into space was inspirational. He thought wide vistas and open spaces extended his ability to think in global terms.

Stephen also enjoyed time indoors, working and playing on the computer, empathising with younger students who *expect cell phones and iPods to be part of their world and to use these devices in the way they want*. He did express regret though—*what is abnormal for us these days is the natural outdoor world*. Some of this tension was evident in his own life; he liked the comforts of home and the convenience of cities. He also valued the advances of science and technology and noted that some parts of the natural world were boring and uncomfortable. Yet being outdoors created a feeling, which while he had difficulty describing it, made him *feel good, positive, and more alive*.

In an interesting exploration of the differences between being outside and being outdoors, notions of activities, space, and leaving civilisation were all used as defining points. He could rationalise that nature included everything around him, yet the outdoors remained something different and distant, usually something natural, but also something with *an X-factor*.

In his teaching, Stephen felt he changed when outdoors—*in the classroom, I feel more pressure to keep people quiet and ordered, but it does seem unnatural ... students want to interact, do things, and learn*

*from experiences. Outdoors, he sat back, observed what was happening, and let them get on with it and work things out for themselves. This focus on doing it, working with others, and getting involved he felt was a more important part of the experience than reviewing – sometimes you just don't have time for reviewing. Many of the benefits of outdoor education involve having the time to develop relationships. Especially on extended camps, there was something special about the way students formed relationships with their peers and even with the staff –everyone just seems to get along better. He noted that this did not just occur during the activities, but that it's often during the communal cooking and food preparation with everyone working together that everyone just seems happier.*

Earlier in his career, as an instructor in Australia, he felt the programme kept the students quite busy and tended to be recreationally focused with a strong emphasis on fun and keeping the students entertained. *I don't think the schools themselves necessarily wanted to get any educational outcomes out of the camps ... but I was down at that lower level just trying to facilitate the group, so they would enjoy themselves and get through the activities and hopefully learn a bit along the way.* He felt many young instructors were happy just providing students with a good time, but after a while, they got bored and moved on to other careers. Those who stuck around for longer could see the potential for deeper learning, but were frustrated because that promise was not always fulfilled. Many teachers he felt were unaware of potential learning opportunities often falling back on generic objectives like personal development or teamwork. He did however note that describing these opportunities was difficult – *I don't have the vocabulary to describe in a precise way what happens in the outdoors. The reality of those types of things is that they can't be described precisely. When I mix an acid and a base together I will get neutralisation, I am going to get salt and water, that's a given, it's like one plus one equals two, if I get a*

*bunch of students together who knows what can happen. I don't know how to help people understand that, I have to hope they will.*

## **My mountain is Kahurangi– Sharon**

*My mountain is Kahurangi, the mountain never moves, it never changes. There are lots of places where old Māori people will still not make eye contact with the top of a mountain, they won't look at the top of Ruapehu or Tongariro because it is tapu, it's sacred. When you are doing your mihi your actual name is the very last thing that you say because you are irrelevant, it's not actually about you it's about where you are in the world, and the land and the place and who you've come from and that makes you who you are. I'm proud of who I am and where I have come from.*

*I have little things in my head where Dad would say to me 'don't turn your back on the beach' and 'always give the first fish back'. Spirituality was never explicitly spoken about and it wasn't until I learned about these things through the Kura courses that I thought that's why we do that, but I never thought to ask why we did them at the time, it was just the way it was. For me the spiritual stuff is quite important, but I guess not everyone feels that way about it, and I've seen lots of different ways of looking at it. I mean, I still climbed all the mountains in central North Island; I even called my Mum from the top of Ngauruhoe. I understood where the old people are coming from, but we always did a karakia before we went up and for me it was more about just respecting the mountain. You need to appreciate the environment for what it is. Ultimately the mountains control things, like they are the ones with the ultimate power, you're just allowed to use it and you definitely need to respect it at all times.*

Sharon's first recollections about the outdoors were her experiences at an outdoor centre, crediting those experiences with giving *me the confidence to be the first in my family to leave home and study*. As the interviews progressed however, she revealed how much she had learnt from her father, plant names, Māori traditions, and fishing, revealing that formal education is often not the beginning of learning, as much is already known. By spending time with him and the extended family, she began to absorb ways of connecting to the land, which she admitted to only just understanding now, as spiritual and cultural traditions were always present, but not explicitly spoken about. She self-identified as Māori *from a bi-cultural, multi-mix family*, recognising that a significant aspect of how she related to the land drew on Māori cosmology engendered by an awareness of Ranginui the sky father and Papatūānuku the earth mother.

Whilst studying in the central North Island, Mt Ruapehu erupted; *it was just showing you that well actually no one owns me, and if I wanted to I could be destroying you all, and I could destroy myself like Tongariro did blowing his top and I just really think we need to look after it*. In these statements, the mountains are anthropomorphised and in doing so are invested with a sense of agency. When an instructor told her about climbers and skiers who had died on the mountain, she imagined *all the ghosts on this mountain, which is why you just never head up there so cocky and arrogant –you need to appreciate the environment for what it is, because ultimately they control things, like they are the ones with the ultimate power, you're just allowed to use it, and you definitely need to respect it at all times. I think that is more of the Māori side coming out, when I think that way*. A strong connection between the human and non-human world is evident here, and while it is often positioned as a Māori perspective, it is much wider than that. In 1993, Tongariro National Park was the first site awarded 'dual world heritage status' for its cultural and physical landscape values (Kawharu, 2009, p. 318), recognising that value lay not just in pristine natural landscape, but also in the culture – nature nexus.

Sharon explained that she was an average student who did not always work as hard as she could have – *when my grandfather passed away I had to be away for about a week, and every time I put my hand up to try and catch up the teacher would roll her eyes and not help me. I just took that so badly and I thought okay then if you are going to roll your eyes then I am not going to worry about doing any work. It was a passive-aggressive approach and as a result I failed maths... now I always tell the kids at school – don't be like me, learn as much as you can and respect what they know.* Moving from struggling student to teacher presents a certain irony as she becomes part of the very system that was responsible for her marginalisation. Thus, her story moves from challenging some of the dominant educational narratives, to becoming complicit. Sharon identifies with outdoor education as developing good citizens, yet cannot escape from schools as disenfranchising Māori students. This creates challenges as she both, tries to fit in to an educational system which she knows holds inequalities, yet promote education as a site of transformation for students to become socially productive citizens ... *I tell them they've got to learn if they want to succeed.* She partly resolves this by teaching as much as she can outside the classroom, which has always been a more positive space for her.

Sharon spoke of the holistic nature of learning outdoors, which she described as being more about relationships than gathering a body of knowledge. She noted that outdoors they learnt in different ways, not just because they were more active, but they communicated differently, and were open and responsive. Nonetheless, while outdoor education was positive she felt that it was sometimes blamed for not being able to solve the world's problems. Troubled youth, inequality, and the state of the environment, were issues she tried to address, yet she noted that it was still considered a marginal subject - *being the outdoor education teacher is always an uphill battle with the staff who see themselves as more academic. I see value in every subject, you can't just be about*

*maths, English, or science you need think about the students and giving them the skills to live well on the earth.*

The outdoors was almost anywhere outside, especially when it was green or close to the beach. At times though there is a sense of language falling short for Sharon to adequately articulate the intensity, spirituality, and emotional scope of what the outdoors offers— *I don't know what words to use to explain it, it just feels good.* She described how she became ill working indoors —*it didn't have any windows in that place, and it was dark and it was dingy and it was cold, it was just awful and I got sick all the time.* She felt many students responded in similar ways, *they switch off inside,* outdoors she felt they were more relaxed and *got the point* of what she was talking about. Whether it was kayaking, gardening, or sitting under a tree teaching, it was evident that Sharon gained a lot of personal strength from outdoor spaces. Helping others gain a similar strength and contentment was a key reason for wanting to teach outdoors —*when you work outdoors at a centre it's just amazing the difference you see in the kids, but back at school it's probably only a couple of days before they're back to normal, but in a school you've got longer and even if it's only one child I could really make a difference to, then I'd be well rewarded.*

### Everything that is not inside – Dave

*I remember two trips down in the gully of my family's farm. We didn't live on the farm, but it had been in my family for five generations. The first time we spent three days there, just camping by a little stream catching trout and walking down to the beach to gather shellfish. I can remember catching an eel, then my dad showing me how to skin it and we cooked it on the fire and ate it. And those experiences of cooking and eating food that you'd caught were quite a big thing for me. Last Christmas time I went back and visited the farm and walked*

*down the gully with my son. It's a funny thing that sense of belonging – it's sort of how I understand the concept of turangawaewae as it might apply to our culture knowing where you come from and knowing where your roots are.*

*I remember when it was too hot to climb one day, we travelled up this river for about half an hour sort of exploring every nook and cranny as we went. And we found ourselves in this kind of key-hole shaped pool where we were able to boulder around the edges and fall into the deep water and swim to the side and then bask on this rock. And after we had all exhausted ourselves, we started to have this lovely deep conversation about sense of place and the importance of connections and social responsibility and environmental responsibility and cultural dynamics and all of these different things.*

*So now, when people talk about outdoors, I think of everything that is not inside. I think one of the problems is that we have tended to separate human constructed landscapes from landscapes that have not been human constructed, and we have these ideas of protecting, locking up, and conserving nature in little blocks. We are part of this environment not apart from it, and our daily decisions need to embrace that.*

When asked about how these early childhood experiences shaped him, he thought they had given him a strong sense of being connected through the generations, plus a need to live within one's resources. Many of stories are infused with a concept of sustainability, which recognises a general and widespread failure of much of society to engage with social and environmental issues, and the problems that threaten the life-supporting ecology of the planet. For Dave *immediate action is necessary as time is running out*, hence his educational goals involve empowering people of all ages and backgrounds to contribute to a better future. He believes sustainability education when linked with

outdoor education encourages people to ask questions, challenge underlying assumptions, and think for themselves.

There is a paradoxical bitter-sweet quality about the process of remembering childhood places – for Dave the family farm gives rise to a regional sense of identity, which was partially lost moving to the South Island. Being with cousins and maintaining strong family ties throughout his early experiences reveal meanings of the outdoors which stretch beyond the physical landscape. Dave goes on to explain that most of his family shares this sense of connection to the outdoors, and this sensibility remains evident in later stories of taking his son and nephews climbing and tramping.

Often his stories would incorporate some deeper level of reflection about the state of the world. Memories of a tramping trip to South America centred on the *way that people live and the impact that they have on the environment*. He found it difficult to reconcile how alpine farmers in the region *could crap right by the side of a river and in the river*, and how that affected the quality of life for those downstream. Likewise, on overseas climbing trips, social perspectives were woven in to his stories, whether it was the religious discussions on the rock at Penitente, or the war-based economy whilst camping at Joshua Tree. Places for him are constituted through layers of social and cultural practices and he enjoyed delving beneath the surface to explore these contested histories.

On occasion, his memories of sailing, climbing, and skiing revealed the exhilaration of moving, a sense of spaciousness, and the pure delight of being somewhere visually outstanding. These exposed a sensory immediacy that was missing from his intellectualised social analysis. In general, he downplayed his adventures, focusing more on social responsibility, as he believed he had learnt more from his experiences of inequality and social injustices than from climbing and skiing.

His outdoor education practices displayed similar elements. He was passionate about encouraging sustainability thinking, action, and change. The outdoors with its emotionally charged vistas and activities provided opportunities to challenge students about the way they lived and recreated. He felt many opportunities were lost when the focus was only on the activity and the adventure – *I mean what are we actually achieving if we take people out and teach them how to climb other than how to go out and climb. It seems a particularly shallow engagement really when it could be so much more. Skilful teaching both indoors and outdoors is able to draw deeper thinking out of students, it can prompt them in to deeper thinking, but I am of the sentiment that the outdoors provides a very powerful emotional setting for our students that we can utilise.*

### Shared meanings of the outdoors

These vignettes offer a glimpse into the personalised meanings of the outdoors. They illuminate the subtleties, complexities, and contradictory meanings of the outdoors which emerged from engaging with it and describe the specific contexts through which those meanings began to take shape. There is no simple unified meaning, as each outdoor meaning has evolved within different communities and cultures and is then woven into an individual's identity. Teasing apart each vignette revealed the complex and non-linear nature of the relationship between events and meanings. At times, past events were infused with present meanings and as situations changed so too did their understandings of the outdoors. Hence, many meanings remained fluid as work, life, and social circumstances changed.

People are also social, they listen to the stories of others, and the stories they choose to share are part of the bonding process. Within communities of practice, such as outdoor education, certain stories and ideas gain more credence; they rise to the surface and are more commonly spoken of. While each story is unique, it is told from within a

framework of cultural perspectives. These cultural perspectives begin to emerge when reading and analysing the vignettes as a group. The next section highlights the shared meanings under the headings of locations, activities, experiences, responses and relationships. These themes emerged in the 'analysis of narratives' as identified in Chapter 4. They bring together a web-like pattern of meaning which draws attention to the way personal meanings and socially constructed meanings intersect and shape each other.

### ***Locations***

Locations which first came to mind when talking of the outdoors, included wide-open spaces, honey scented beech forests, towering cliffs, sandy beaches, or relaxing by flowing water. These are often the well documented landscape images with which Aotearoa is presented to the world. Hence, it is not surprising that many stories referenced similar scenes. In addition, Chris and Mark noted that they often fell into the trap of sharing stories they thought colleagues would be interested in and took photos that would impress them. Thus, over time, certain ideas and landscapes become self-perpetuating and these shape the dominant views and expectations of what is known and valued about the outdoors.

In many of the participants' childhood stories however, the outdoors referred to places close to home. Wiremu spoke of visiting the family home, Nicci of the neighbour's backyard, and Pete of the family bach. These early recollections included locations, where memories of homeliness, play, and good times with friends and family dominated, very different to the scenic images portraying Aotearoa New Zealand as 100% pure. These early memories were influenced more by feelings of attachment and less by social depictions of the outdoors as a series of scenic landscapes.

As the interviews progressed, several participants also had revelations that the outdoors was broader than they first realised. Mark, for

example, did not initially associate his life on the farm as being outdoors, but later recognised that it was an integral part of what the outdoors meant for him. Jodi and Sharon both realised that family trips gathering kai moana were as much a part of their outdoor meanings as the school camps they first spoke of. As they recollected their childhood experiences, awareness of what the outdoors meant and how it had influenced them also grew. Hence, most participants started to talk much more freely about the local places where they had played, swum, and picnicked with family.

Many stories however, occurred in natural environments such as mountains, rivers, bush, beach, and backcountry, although what was deemed natural was complex. As Arthur explained: *I know it is not all natural, when you are on the Two Thumb Range and look below you, it is not all natural, but a hell of a proportion of it is, so it is inherent just taking a deep breaths there, you know the air up there just seems right, it is hard to explain it isn't it?* This comment reveals three key aspects of naturalness. Firstly, most land in Aotearoa New Zealand has, in some way, been changed by human endeavour deliberately or because of some indirect action, but that there remains a dimension which has not been humanly authored. Secondly, there is assumed to be an inherent quality within natural environments which is often associated with positive experiences, and thirdly the sensations experienced in such places can be hard to explain. Many attributed natural outdoor locations with having an *unexplainable level of specialness, which keeps my batteries running or helps physical, mental, spiritual renewal.*

The difficulty of defining naturalness meant the outdoors was sometimes easier to describe as non-urban or free of technology. At the time of the interviews all participants lived in Christchurch city but implicitly, and at times explicitly, blamed human endeavour and urban expansion for destroying the natural environment. Chris revealed some of the dilemmas when he noted *the soil under the city is still the same, the*

*plants are the same, but it has just been so dominated by human endeavour and design, which you would think would create a utopia, but that is so not the case, and it isn't until we are taken out of the city that we see it as a contrived superficial, and I believe ultimately destructive lifestyle and environment for people.* His comments build on the narrative of the outdoors being an utopia and an antidote to the corrupting effects of city life, which arose during the Romantic era's response to the industrial revolution and arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand with the early European settlers (Park, 2006). Several other participants emphasised natural environments as pure and morally superior, with cities being angry or unhealthy places. Sharon for example, described how her father's family became displaced when his family migrated to town and *Nana and Granddad sort of found out what it was like to go to the pub.* Life in the city provided different temptations, destabilising traditional values. Nicci also felt cities were negative, *they toot their horn, shout, and become impatient or irritable,* but in natural areas *people are friendlier and move at a slower more relaxed pace.* While Dave remained adamant that the split between cities and nature was something that needed addressing, most participants spoke of the outdoors in much more positive terms than cities.

While many stories were about remote locations, there were possibly more activities happening closer to home. Arthur noted *–I know I talk more about the trips I do further afield but really I spend a lot more time in the local area.* Thus, while many outdoor experiences were located close to family baches, farms, and gardens, wilder and sometimes more spectacular environments dominated their stories, perpetuating notions of the outdoors being well away from the city. As Nicci explained, *I love running in the Port Hills, but that's just an everyday activity, I'm unlikely to tell anyone about that.* By ignoring the familiar, local, and mundane, the well-marketed images of icy mountains, tumbling waterfalls, sunny

beaches, or placid lakes continued to be propagated as key outdoor locations.

The vignettes highlight that while natural locations and aesthetic landscapes play a significant part in forming meanings of the outdoors, because they offered a sense of specialness, equally important were the joyful descriptions of engaging with life close to home. This mixture of locations from distant to local, spectacular to intimate, natural to well marketed contributed depth and complexity to the meanings attributed to the outdoors.

### ***Pursuit-based activities***

Many stories included a range of activities when describing the outdoors, with the main ones being tramping, climbing, kayaking, surfing, mountain biking, skiing, and mountaineering. At times, there was even a suggestion that the activities were such an integral part of the outdoors that the activity was more important than the location. Stephen for example commented – *I'm not sure whether I'd consider the local beaches outdoors or not, I think it might depend a bit on what I'm doing, so if I'm kayak surfing then I probably think I'm outdoors, and would then be more inclined to think that the beach is outdoors.* Similarly, Jodi associated rock climbing at an indoor wall with the outdoors, highlighting the importance of the activity in constructing outdoor meanings.

While some of these outdoor activities are considered adventurous, the participants downplayed their predilection for danger or taking risks. Many enjoyed the activities because they encouraged full engagement with the environment and this helped them develop a deeper respect for, connection with, and understanding of, the outdoors. Jodi spoke of solo climbing for example, where every movement and every hold demanded his full focus and attention to the point he would feel part of the rock. Likewise, Nicci developed deep respect and affinity with the

river as she manoeuvred her kayak through the rapids. They all denied being adventurous or risk takers, although some stories suggested otherwise, for example, Jodi's retreat from a climb during a storm, Mark's mountaineering exploits in remote areas of Bolivia, and Chris's trip in Alaska. Others spoke of narrow escapes and accidents, whilst several reflected on losing friends. In doing so, they acknowledged the need for caution and respect, but maintained the view that the outdoors was relatively safe. Several alluded to the many risky activities that occurred on sports fields or in the city, which did not receive the same negative attention as outdoor accidents, proposing that what was considered risky was subjective and driven as much by societal opinions as by the actual chance of harm. As Pete commented, there are many health risks *with those who sit on the couch overeat and feel bad about themselves, they feel bad about their self-image, they feel bad about not doing things, they feel bored because they're not active or engaging with life*. Other participants spoke of reckless driving practices and alcohol consumption, which were widespread social issues that seemed to be tolerated and even promoted by society.

While the negative consequences of taking risks in the outdoors were usually downplayed, participants still revelled in the sense of excitement generated by some activities. They became very animated when talking of climbing icy peaks, skiing down glaciers, surfing a big wave, or kayaking over waterfalls. Often it was from the sheer effort involved and, at other times, it entailed total physical immersion. Sara explains *it could be just a two-hour walk on a track or a two-day trip, but you just don't know what's going to happen, it's just exciting and unknown. I feel more alive, more alert, I notice, I really notice the sounds, yes sounds, particularly the birds, I get much more in tune and notice a lot more of what is around me*. Participating in adventurous activities increased the intensity of the experience by encouraging them to tune in and observe their surroundings in astute ways.

For some participants, responding to the environment was an enjoyable full body experience. For example, several enthused about the moment of emerging from the bush and onto the open tops. As they spoke of that moment their posture often changed, shoulders arched back, chests puffed forward, and chins jutted a little higher. They expanded into the space and, in recounting those experiences, the body was more expressive than words. No matter how beautiful, passively viewing the land was not as delightful as getting sweaty, muddy, and physically involved. There was a growing feeling though that many of the taken-for-granted bodily skills of moving outdoors, such as balancing along a log, boulder hopping down a creek, or climbing up a muddy bank, were getting lost as young people had less opportunities to play in and scramble over natural terrain. According to the participants, this type of 'play' was crucial in helping develop a close and personal relationship with the land.

Many of the activities were enjoyable because they involved being part of a social group where friendships were forged. As Wiremu noted, *the surfing trip on the way home in the car was something special– we've had a shared moment and it bonds us*. Arthur and Sara also commented on the friends they had made and that sharing experiences with them made the event more memorable. These special moments last well beyond the activity because they are relived each time stories are told and retold. In this way, pursuit-based activities often play a dominant role in meanings of the outdoors, for it is often through stories and sharing experiences that meanings are consolidated.

Activities were a central part of outdoor meanings; one reason involved the camaraderie involved in participating in meaningful experiences and reliving those experiences by telling interesting stories. Some activities also enhanced a sense of connection with the outdoors, while for others, especially those who had spent a lot time climbing or surfing, certain pursuits had become part of their identity. In addition, social interaction

with climbers, kayakers, trampers, or skiers, influenced the participants' meanings as they became part of a community of adventure recreationalists. Through association, certain ways of behaving become absorbed and incorporated into their subsequent meanings of the outdoors, often in ways that reinforced the concept of the outdoors as a venue for adventure activities. It was also evident that there was a body of outdoor activities, which the participants as outdoor educators, strongly associated with the outdoors. Thus, while engaging in pursuit activities enhanced connection with, and engagement in, the outdoors, this range of activities also limited what was perceived as appropriate ways of recreating and acting outdoors.

### ***Living simply***

The participants delighted in simple pleasures, fresh air, and open spaces and spoke about learning to live outdoors by just doing it and being there. From crawling in the flax, to building dams and tree-houses, or fossicking in rock-pools, trying to unravel the mysteries of their surroundings were significant childhood memories. Many of these experiences had different qualities from the technical pursuits discussed in the previous section. They were playful, requiring fewer skills and little equipment, other than imagination. As they grew older some of the activities changed, but the focus was still on having fun, relaxing, socialising with others, and living simply.

While not dominant, the outdoors as part of living simply and responsibly pervaded many stories. Many spoke of leaving cell-phones and computers behind—*it's good to get away from those disturbances and just enjoy being with others*, said Mark. Similarly, Pete's experiences of the family bach were deemed outdoors because of the simple (or at least less technological) life of lighting fires, cooking on a wood range, and reading by a kerosene Tilley lantern. Often these nostalgic and symbolic references to the past were a valued part of the outdoor

experience, even when they occurred inside. They delighted in including a sense of pioneering or being stoic and self-reliant in the stories they told. Dave remembered times at the family farm, fishing, and a particular survival camp where they built their own shelter. Nicci too associated the outdoors with living simply and helping neighbours grow vegetables and bake bread.

Being able to skin an eel, light a fire, or help with the muster were significant markers in their childhood years, all activities associated with the responsibilities of growing up and helping out in practical ways. These responsibilities however, were tempered at other times by feelings of playful freedom, where they had the autonomy to choose where to go and what to do. Nicci and Dave recall the freedom of roaming on the beaches well away from the scrutiny of adults, Chris played by the stream with his sister, and Stephen enjoyed climbing trees. This juxtaposition of playful freedom and responsibility at times appeared paradoxical, and while the participants did not explicitly express concern, this tension infused their stories of outdoor education. The participants for example indicated some frustration with the regulatory requirements and assessment frameworks which limited their ability to deliver experiences of fun and freedom. This shaping of their outdoor education practices is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Working and being outdoors kept them in touch with living simply and responsibly. In urban areas, the participants felt there was a disconnection between actions and consequences; toilet waste was flushed away, rubbish collected, and food pre-packaged. For Pete and Mark, being able to live comfortably without all the trappings of society was part of the attraction of going on trips. Mark explained further, stating *carrying your own belongings forces you to be selective and take only the necessary food and clothing – it's a great way to get in touch with what you really need*. Without the distraction of heavy and

unnecessary consumer items and other electronic gadgetry, the focus shifts to friends, food, and warmth. They saw this as a way of treading lightly on the earth and in doing so became more conscious of reducing their 'ecological footprint' or the amount of resources they personally consumed.

Thus, while many outdoor meanings contained elements of technical pursuits, many other stories identified the outdoors as a place to slow down, relax, and sit around a fire socialising. Drinking hot cups of tea at the hut, snuggling into a sleeping bag, or cooking a meal with friends and family over an open fire were threaded into their stories as pleasant interludes, not the main event, but these moments were still critical in helping form their relationship with the outdoors. Whether observing the night sky, listening to the dawn chorus, lighting campfires, or appreciating the view, these relaxing times were important opportunities to attend to the nuances of the environment. Learning in this way was not planned or achieved through careful reflections after the event, but just happened as they spent time outdoors.

The vignettes capture the importance of quieter moments, which offset the vigorous pursuits and add depth to many of the participants' meanings. Feelings of relaxation intensified at the end of arduous trip, and a cup of tea tasted sweeter after a long paddle, and a day's climbing was appreciated even more after being hut-bound during a storm. Mark's trip to Bolivia and Peru captures some of this when he explains *–the trip was great, we probably didn't do as much climbing as any of us would have liked, we were plagued with illnesses and political problems, but we met some wonderful people and it was all those extra experiences that made it so memorable.* On occasion though, while these experiences of living simply play a significant role in the overall experience of being outdoors, their significance can get lost in stories that emphasise action and adventure. By downplaying these moments,

many stories continue to perpetuate adventure as the dominant social perception of what the outdoors means for New Zealanders.

### ***Emotional responses***

The outdoors as experienced drew out many physical and emotional responses. These responses accumulated over time and influenced the way the participants approached new settings. Common ones were joy and happiness, a sense of freedom, positive well-being, and feelings of belonging. A few stories reflected on moments of grief or frustration, but the majority were about positive and rejuvenating responses. In addition, the outdoors was attributed with a sense of goodness or moral worth that made the experiences meaningful and worthwhile. They laughed, sweated, and cried in actual outdoor places, but often applied these emotional memories to the whole of the outdoors. In this way many and varied outdoor sites accrued the attributes of one experience and these sites, activities, and emotional responses became collectively referred to as the outdoors.

The wind, wet, cold, and sun evoked visceral and emotional responses, which the participants appeared to revel in. The unpredictability and variety of weather associated with Aotearoa New Zealand was often a key element in their stories. Although most participants preferred the sun, experiences like leaning into the wind, drawing their hood tight in a storm, scraping ice from goggles, peering into the mist, or watching the waterfalls explode from the hills in Fiordland's torrential rain, added to the experience. As Chris noted, working in the dry arid climate of Arizona, *which pretty much guaranteed dry and sunshiny weather, I came to miss the cloudscapes, the storms, the tumultuousness, and for some reason all of those moods are precious to me.* Others too spoke of missing the familiar elements of the New Zealand outdoors when overseas—*it's so dry in Australia* Stephen reminisced. Wiremu enjoyed surfing in Australia, but *I felt as though I was disconnected ... I never*

*really felt connected to the place like I do here in New Zealand – it is hard to explain.* Familiar weather and terrain elements as well as a bodily connection to the New Zealand outdoors generated emotional responses kept drawing them back, even although some of the conditions were difficult and uncomfortable.

From their childhood stories of playful freedom to their more recent ones of returning from trips feeling refreshed and invigorated, there was an overwhelming sense that the outdoors was a great place to be. It was sometimes hard for them to hold back their exuberance when sharing their joyous experiences. There were also personal examples of how the outdoors had contributed to their health and well-being. Jodi spoke of how the outdoors helped him and his family overcome depression. Nicci believed that moving out of the city and closer to natural environments rescued her from a life of trouble which she was drifting into. Likewise, Sharon attributed her love of the outdoors with giving her the confidence to leave home, take on further study, and become a teacher. These personal emotional responses suggest the outdoors is more than a place to have fun or relax, but that it was invested with the attributes of improving health, thinking positively and developing a moral stance, which appeared to assist in generating deep feelings of attachment.

While feelings of love, care, and attachment often started in a specific place or during a memorable event, they appeared to be carried from setting to setting. Dave spoke of his deep connection to the family farm after observing a road *named after my great-great-grandfather, John Irwin, who was the original Irwin who came out from Ireland when he was 15.* He then expanded that sense of attachment to other areas of Aotearoa New Zealand by learning about the history of an area and sharing it with his son and nephews on tramping or mountain biking trips. Nicci transferred her feelings of freedom whilst roaming the beaches as a child, to her love of kayaking and wandering across the open tussock-land in the Canterbury hills. Similarly, Chris's interest in

biodiversity and plants was present when climbing in the wilderness areas of Fiordland, playing with his daughter, or mountain biking in beech forests. Each experience happened at a specific site, but at times their emotional responses blended into a deep sense of attachment for the outdoors in more general terms.

When travelling further afield, they still built attachment to areas particularly on longer trips when there was time to immerse themselves into being present in the whole experience. They enjoyed being able to settle in, go at their own pace, and adjust to the daily rhythms of life. *You tend to go to bed when it becomes dark and rise with the sun, knowing that you will have breakfast, pack your gear, and head off*, said Chris. While the intricacies of the day are unknown, there is a certain sense of familiarity and repetition, *night will fall, and the world will keep spinning*, explained Stephen. Attachment grew as they learnt about the environment by paying attention to weather patterns, changes in the snow pack, the ebb and flow of the surf and the rise and fall of rivers. As Pete noted, spotting those changes allows *you to respond, go with the flow, not fight it*. The ability to respond to changes and deal with unplanned events became key factors on many trips, something the participants believed was getting lost with so many experiences being tightly planned and squashed into ever-shorter blocks of time. Becoming attuned to what was around took time, and only then was it possible to respond with sensitivity to the subtle changes and moods of the outdoors.

The common responses of love, passion, and concern, also suggest a sense of belonging and desire to care for the land. Part of this attachment emerged from their playful engagement with the outdoors as children, which had generated pleasant memories, memories they did not want to lose. Hence observing a degrading environment where they could no longer swim, eel, or gather kai moana generated a personal sense of loss. Wiremu was frustrated at the pollution in his favourite

eeling stream, Nicci with the fences that stopped her roaming across the land, and Mark with farming practices in the Mackenzie country changing the colour and texture of the landscape. They responded to these feelings of loss by developing attitudes of care, well beyond the concern felt for the changes that first aggrieved them. Most participants had taken some direct action to slow down or reverse the trend of environmental degradation and each felt a commitment to live sustainability and reduce their own impact on the environment. They rode bicycles, recycled, favoured experiences over consumer items, used biodegradable products, and considered what to eat. Some of the changes were quite small but they were conscious of trying to make a difference.

The emotional responses described by the participants indicated a deep connection and commitment to the outdoors. Furthermore, it was clear that these emotional responses helped shape their subsequent behaviours and meanings of the outdoors. Many of these positive emotional responses accumulate over time creating a sense that the participants expected to have a good time whenever they went outdoors whatever the weather. The participants may have a specific emotional response in an actual outdoor place, but these emotional memories become part of their wider meanings of the outdoors. In turn, these emotional memories and feelings of attachment built a sense of responsibility and a desire to care for the locations they construed as the outdoors.

### ***Relationships***

The enjoyment and love of the outdoors for many participants arose from spending time with family, picnics on the beach, catching fish, or swimming in the river, *it was all about hanging out with the whānau*, said Sharon. They now take their own children walking in the bush, building tree houses, or playing on the beach as the participants believe

that spending time outdoors strengthens family bonds. This bonding did not just occur with family members, for as Sara noted, *it's more fun sharing the experience with others and good to see people meeting together for the first time on a club trip quickly develop a sense of camaraderie once they are outdoors working and walking together.* Likewise, Stephen remarked *—it seems easier to get to know people when you're doing things together in the outdoors.* Thus, being outdoors was not usually a time for the participants to search for solitude, but a time to engage with others.

Arthur described a trip, which had been extra special because he had met a group from Uruguay, and learning about their culture was fascinating. Mark too enjoyed learning about the local culture on his trips to Japan and Bolivia. Although for others there was a sense that they found it easier to share experiences with like-minded people. Sara explained that she had met some wonderful people on her trips, but would sometimes walk on past a hut if it was crowded and noisy. While some reasons for going outdoors were about getting away from the hype of the city, they still enjoyed sharing the experience with others and building relationships with friends and family. Whether it was doing things together, or feeling relaxed, many participants believed, as Arthur did, that there was nothing better than *being in the outdoors where significant people in your family, your wife, and your son, are enjoying the time together skiing or kayaking and where you can just talk about things you wouldn't if you were at home.*

Although relationships with others were a valued part of being outdoors, some felt that their experiences gained meaning when they had a relationship with the land. Wiremu told stories of visiting the family home in Port Levy, Mark of the family farm, and Dave spoke of how his great-great-grandfather, *bought the property there and it's a funny thing that sense of belonging—it's sort of how I understand the concept of turangawaewae as it might apply to our culture knowing where you*

*come from and knowing where your roots are.* This continuity of connection through strong family ties helped to develop a sense of identity and belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand. Family bonds though were not the only to develop a sense of belonging, stories of collecting shellfish, growing vegetables, hunting rabbits, eeling, and fishing, also helped them feel connected. Gathering food directly from the land was not seen as exploiting a resource, but a way of engaging with, and feeling supported by, the land. This deepening sense of connection was sometimes attributed to 'the land' more so than 'the outdoors'. There was a sense of sustenance coming from the land as Wiremu said, *there are different things you can get from the land like mahinga kai, when you collect food from the land there is learning and it supports you, provides for you.* Although at times Wiremu used the term outdoors in similar ways *it is all about being connected and that's what the outdoors makes me feel like it makes me feel connected, connected to a family, connected to the sea, connected to the bush, and I feel that it has that caring and nurturing element to it.*

Building feelings of connection to the wider world were clearly important for many of the participants, and they felt this was enhanced when there were no walls around them. What they meant by connection at times seemed vague and intangible, but was highly valued and spoken of with pride. It appeared to occur in five main ways: a feeling of belonging by having ancestral or family roots in the area; gaining sustenance from the land; a sense of enjoyment achieved which generated a strong and lasting emotional attachment; being comfortable and relaxed often from having numerous experiences; and having an identity which is bound up in the outdoors. However, whichever meaning they were building on, connection seemed to add shape and purpose to their lives, as they felt they were part of something bigger than the human realm.

The relationship some of the participants had with the land was quite spiritual. Wiremu, Jodi, and Sharon, who all self-identified as Māori,

referred to spirituality as an inseparable part of their outdoor experiences. As Wiremu explained *there is the physical land, and there is the spirituality of the land too that's really important*. Chris also acknowledged a spiritual element in his interactions with the land, whereas Nicci, Sara, and Arthur implied a special connection, but were reluctant to refer to it as spiritual. Nicci explained her connection as *–living in a different way that seems closer to our origins and seems healthier– I guess I do see it as a spiritual kind of thing, but I don't know if spiritual is quite right, because I don't really know what the word means so much*. Pete and Stephen, however, rejected the presence of a spiritual life-force outright, with Stephen stating *the outdoors is more of a physical space, as opposed to a spiritual space*.

It was evident that relationships were important and being outdoors helped the participants interact with both people and the land in ways which increased the enjoyment and significance of their experiences. Feeling a connection was spoken of with pride and added extra meaning to the outdoors. While there were differences in how they perceived their connection with the land, in terms of whether it was spiritual, aesthetic, or organic, it generated a sense of responsibility. Wiremu and Sharon explained their responsibilities through the concept of *kaitiakitanga* where the mantle of guardianship is passed down through the generations. Nicci and Chris talked about the intricacies of ecology and interconnected living systems, and Pete focused on *working with the environment*. Furthermore, by emphasising the importance of relationships between people and the outdoors, they dissolved some of the notions of being separate from the environment, signalling instead their interconnection with the world.

## Summary

Participants spoke of a kaleidoscope of locations, people, activities, feelings, memories, and relationships associated with being outdoors. Not only did they attach meaning to the outdoors, but they received

meaning from it, which contributed to their life story. Being outdoors appeared to provide them with a rich and fertile setting for a meaningful life. Their positive responses to playing on the beach, catching a fish, or exploring a mountain range emphatically suggested that the emotional and physical connection to the outdoors was a key part of their identity. Being outdoors was such an essential element of growing up, that at times, it was difficult to distinguish whether participants were talking about the outdoors or their lives. Either way their memories provided rich insights into their ideas and meanings of the outdoors.

Creating vignettes provided opportunities to retain the holistic and interrelated way individuals construct meanings of the outdoors and to appreciate the complexity of meanings ascribed to the outdoors. However, bringing the individual stories together helped to identify some of the social and cultural discourses which influenced the participant's meanings. The limited range of pursuit activities and dominant notion of adventure were two such discourses. Overall though, the stories suggest there are many experiences, emotional responses, and relationships which expand these discourses in very personal ways. In turn, these personalised connections often enhance feelings of attachment and a sense of responsibility to care for the outdoors.

Their vignettes revealed, in part, how some of their outdoor meanings were influencing their outdoor education practices. Wiremu built much of his work around creating a feeling of safety or sanctuary, Sharon valued activities which helped develop self-confidence, and Sara encouraged students to pursue the activities recreationally. The links between what the outdoors meant to them and their work practices were clearly evident in their stories and at times hard to tease apart. The following chapter further explores how these personal meanings combine with other influences to shape their outdoor education understandings and practices.

## Chapter 6 – Outdoor meanings and outdoor education practices

In this chapter the focus shifts more explicitly to the second question –how meanings of the outdoors influence the understandings and practices of outdoor educators. This question might suggest a one-way cause and effect approach. However, what became clear in the participants' accounts was that meanings are complex and continually shaped and re-shaped, not only through personal encounters with the outdoors, but by the people they associate with and where they work. Furthermore, the cyclic nature of meaning making would suggest that certain stories were retrospectively influenced by their current values, making it hard to tease apart whether the personal meanings influenced their outdoor education practices or the other way around.

In order to tease apart the way the outdoors influences outdoor education practices, this chapter first explores outdoor education through the five themes of locations, pursuit-based activities, outdoor experiences, emotional responses, and relationships that emerged through the analysis of the transcripts. These themes accentuate the multi-faceted nature of outdoor meanings and how each of these aspects can add a different dimension to the way outdoor education is perceived and delivered. Separating their stories into these themes however, failed to fully articulate the holistic aspects of outdoor education. Hence, there remained an underlying sense that the participants were suggesting that the outdoors offered something more to education.

On occasion, the participants expressed difficulty in explaining some of their core ideas about the value of the outdoors for education, noting that their descriptions were often *airy fairy*, *not rational*, or *garbled*. Yet they also shared many poignant moments during the interviews about outdoor education and learning, often as afterthoughts to the main

story. To more fully capture and represent some of the complexity inherent in their ideas about how the outdoors shapes their practice, I compiled a series of their comments as poetic representations. I deliberately use the term poetic representation as what I write lacks the refinement of a fully formed poem. Poetic representation has been used in research to encapsulate the rhythm and intensity of the spoken word in ways which are sometimes lost in conventional transcription into prose (Leggo, 2005). Using multiple points of view, repetition, and composite scenes, these short poetic representations attempt to relay some of what the participants felt they failed to express when they finished a story saying *you know what I mean*.

## Locations

Stories of the outdoors involved being somewhere or as Chris indicated *so somewhere... almost everywhere outdoors seems so much more vivid and memorable than this office or that classroom*. There was a sense that almost anywhere outdoors was better than indoor spaces, especially when teaching. However, while most participants acknowledged that the outdoors could be anywhere or everywhere outside, they usually associated it with natural locations. As Wiremu noted, the dark green of the bush and the real blue of the sea were the colours of the outdoors and most participants delighted in taking students away from the grey concrete of the city to the bush, mountains, rivers, and beach. Many natural environments and aesthetic landscapes provided the participants with a sense of well-being and they enjoyed taking students outdoors in the hope they would be similarly inspired. The participants were however also pragmatic, so on occasion the locations identified as outdoors were not spectacular or outstanding, but easily accessible sites which could support the goals and purposes of their programme. Thus, at times the organisational structure of where they worked influenced their choice of location and the meanings of those outdoor places.

When speaking of education outside the classroom (EOTC) for example, the outdoors became *a magnificent place to teach* (Arthur) and a way to enhance the curriculum. The EOTC teachers visited beaches, rivers, quarries, museums, marae, and parks and deemed them all as outdoors because they were outside the classroom. Arranging outdoor education sessions into the school day also meant that many locations were urban, not natural. Staying local though, was not just based on convenience, its importance lay in helping students become more aware of where they lived, and how they fitted in. As Wiremu noted, many students did not visit the local beaches, which were only two or three kilometres away from where they lived, so he would take them *to swim, kick a ball around, or talk about the day*, until they had sufficient confidence to visit the beaches on their own. Increasing familiarity of local areas also became a way to build connection between school learning and everyday life. As Arthur observed, visiting local rivers after a flood or the beaches after a storm, helped students not only understand more about local geography, but the way they fitted into the wider community.

Being outdoors offered the participants many opportunities to engage students in multi sensorial ways. Dave for example, spoke of inner city experiences, which draw on powerful imagery and theatre to engage the senses and evoke an emotional response ... *we meet at the bridge by Oxford Terrace where there are always homeless people stashing gear and spending time. I drag everyone underneath the bridge, and I stand in the river and talk about the impact of health reform on people with mental illness, and I talk about the iniquity of wealth distribution in the country. It is just right there in front of you, I mean you have somebody's toothbrush and toothpaste stuck up in the rafters, and someone's blanket shoved underneath there, and it just really drives home to the students that this is real stuff. If I stood in the classroom and told people that, it would not stick in their mind, but when you take them there, and then trot down to the emergency shelter, and see men with bottles of*

*methylated spirits, or bags of glue, sitting outside the gates, that's powerful experiential stuff, and it's learning about inner-city living.* He would then encourage students to reflect on the gap between the world as it is and the world as it could be. In this way, Dave recognises the complexity of learning and attempts to make aspects more relevant by locating them in the context of the student's lives and communities. By selecting locations which engaged multiple senses visual, kinaesthetic, olfactory, tactile, and audio, he reinforced the message and made it an emotional and memorable experience. Dave's goal in delivering emotional experiences was connected to his wider practice of increasing awareness of acting in sustainable ways, which for him started with the need to feel a greater sense of responsibility for the planet as a whole.

Most of the participants however, tended to select locations with natural features or a feeling of naturalness, especially when working with senior secondary school and outdoor education centre programmes. The moral worth, or that ineffable specialness, of natural outdoor locations was particularly valued on programmes stressing personal and social development. From her own experiences of leaving the beach environment and moving to the city as a teenager, Nicci passionately believed that *being outdoors, where it's clean and green, and away from all that city stuff, people are just nicer to each other, just live in a healthier way.* She felt cities promoted negativity and anger, whereas the simple life and being close to nature channelled energy encouraging people to be positive and happy. The inspiration gained from the rejuvenating power of the rivers, mountains, and bush, combined with the lack of technological distractions, helped her develop a style of teaching which enhanced the well-being of others. A belief in the moral worth and the sense natural environments being *good healthy places* were recurring themes in many of the participants' personal stories and these themes were equally important elements in their accounts of practice. They took students into *clean green spaces* and believed that

such locations would help create positive experiences, which were fun, achievable, and active, because that is what had helped them feel re-energised.

Jodi and Wiremu, who both work on specific adventure therapy programmes, selected outdoor locations which provided a safe place or *sanctuary* for the students. Finding comfort in the outdoors was something they spoke of in their personal lives and clearly carried those meanings across into their practice. Wiremu was frustrated that some outdoor programmes tell students *they have to 'be a man' 'harden up' and 'have to grow up' and they use that kind of a military style and that's not going to work is it? –how do you build someone's self-esteem using that type of model. We use a strengths-based model– we don't blame them we just show them some other options.* Hence, at the start of their programme, they visited the ocean, hills, and waterways on the outskirts of Christchurch, away from the streets, malls, and parks the students usually hang out in, but still close enough to home that they could re-visit them if they wanted to. Jodi also observed that sites which held cultural significance, were particularly useful when working with Māori students as they helped build a strong sense of ancestral connection. Thus, he would often tell stories about the landscape that helped students understand more about the history and culture of an area. Taking students outdoors was also beneficial as it removed students from school and city environments, which potentially held negative connotations. As Wiremu noted *–the outdoors offers more space, more opportunities to be active – it seems to help trust– you show trust in them, and they feel less hemmed in and threatened.*

Depending on where they worked and the purpose of their programmes, outdoor locations varied from inner city streets, museums, local hills, and beaches, to those perceived as more natural and away from the city. Their work practices expanded their notions of the outdoor locations, but this created confusion as some meanings separated the outdoors

from the city, whilst others firmly positioned the outdoors as being everywhere. Dave, for example, took strong exception to the outdoors only referring to natural locations. He was concerned that taking people away from cities made it harder to address urban issues—*it's all very well to teach people not to throw litter down, when we are walking in the bush, but if we can't teach them to do the same thing in an urban setting, then it is not so relevant.* He remained sceptical of being able to transfer respect for the natural environment back to the city where most people live—*one of the jobs we have as educators is to encourage students to challenge this idea of nature being out there and locked up, and that when they return back to town, they are no longer in nature anymore.* This perspective of the outdoors influenced his practice as he would always seek out sites that would highlight social, political, and historical issues not just those relating to the natural environment. On one trip, for example, he described climbing up into the Port Hills to visit old gun emplacements and then encouraging students to find out more about their parents or grandparents role in the war, and contemplate what they would be willing to fight for.

In probing whether Dave believed 'the' outdoors was different to everything that is not inside (his definition of outdoors), he responded, *I no longer separate nature from where we are now. For me those are one and the same thing, and there is no longer a dichotomy of nature and urban or human altered landscapes, human altered landscapes are nature; it's just that they are human altered nature.* The outdoors being everywhere was a perspective that Stephen was also wrestling with, but one strategy he used to reduce his confusion was to substitute 'the outdoors' with the term 'nature', an approach Dave also used. The meaning of complex terms like nature or natural depends on the context of use. In everyday vernacular, nature often implies something other than human, although Dave clearly argues for humans as a part of

nature, which clearly influences his approach of drawing together sustainability and outdoor education.

Other participants took a pragmatic approach, crediting the many and varied locations they referred to as the outdoors and the work they did there, with helping students learn more about themselves and their place in the world. It was not about separating the outdoors from everyday life or the school setting, but helping students build a connection. Sara's approach acknowledged that we live in a mobile world and that there is an inevitable blurring of what happens indoors, in cities, outdoors, and journeying between. She moved seamlessly between urban and outdoor locations, happy to think about home when outdoors, or plan the next outdoor trip whilst back in the city. The idea of the outdoors being distant and separate becomes dissolved, to some degree, once the focus moves to Sara's pragmatic accounts of travelling to and from Christchurch. In her work she often drives groups 80 kilometres to a centre, and notes that they like it because *it's different, but not that different – it's still part of their school*. Learning at the outdoor centre thus added balance to what happened in the classroom and in the city and for her travelling to and from the centre was as much about education and every day as remaining in the city. In this way, she brought the outdoors, school, and urban life together focusing on their dynamic interplay rather than their differences.

The participants' personal and professional stories revealed that meaningful outdoor locations varied from the small and intimate, a particular spot for a solo or community garden, to those on a grander scale, such as the ocean, the wilderness of Fiordland, or an entire mountain chain. Feelings of comfort, safety, and security arose from the intimate experiences, whereas those on a larger scale provided opportunities for exploration and a sense of freedom. These meanings were not polarised, but brought together in many stories as interdependent relationships, as it was often the mixture of intimate and

expansive moments, movement and rest, adventure and security, which provided valuable learning opportunities. Thus, the participants tried to build an understanding of the interconnection of outdoor places, school, and everyday life by highlighting how places intersect and how meanings involve understanding comings, goings, and travelling between places.

Sometimes outdoor locations were valued because they provided a balance to what happened in the classroom and their difference could be used to challenge students thinking and perceptions. Pete often spoke of the different mind-set that the outdoors encouraged, so for him being outdoors helped students take more responsibility for their learning and engaged them in building a better understanding of everyday life and community issues. Chris and Nicci, on the other hand, argued that the outdoors created opportunities for reflection by forging a separation from everyday life. In particular, Nicci loved taking groups into the hills where they could look down on the Canterbury plains and contemplate the impact humans had on the land. While these two perspectives appear dissimilar, with one suggesting the outdoors helps students engage with everyday life and learning and the other suggesting it forges a separation, both scenarios generate thinking and learning about how humans live on the planet, by providing opportunities to view the world from alternative perspectives.

Thus, the participants' understandings of outdoor locations shapes outdoor education practice in many ways, from the outdoors being an engaging classroom, a good healthy clean green space, a sanctuary, to somewhere that promotes thinking about how to live responsibly in the world. Locations were valued for what they offered the experience and the way they could be integrated into the overall experience. Most participants valued multi-sensory learning, and sought locations with varied terrain, vegetation, and aesthetically pleasing views. In addition, the interrelated and open-ended possibilities of the outdoors helped to draw together many areas of the curriculum and everyday life. There

was also an indication that some outdoor places gained meaning from symbolic meanings attributed to the outdoors. Hence, many outdoor locations were associated with freedom, excitement, and a sense of well-being, which the participants believed created a positive setting for learning. Many accounts also intimated that in more natural areas the students changed, possibly because they became emotionally engaged. This is summed up by Stephen's comment—*some people could create an amazing experience just using indoor environments and certainly some do, but I still do believe that there's something about using the natural environment which just has a power of its own, and that is almost outside of what we can put a worth on as humans*. This belief in the outdoors offering an extra 'something', offered confidence and conviction to their teaching, but remained somewhat elusive in their descriptions.

### Pursuit-based activities

Most of the participants' personal stories focused more on what they did than where they were. The stories of taking students outdoors were similar with most emphasising action and activities. *I love getting out there with the students, running through the mud up at the Boyle, all that dirt it's so exhilarating. – It's as if they could kayak all day, when they're playing on a wave. – The fresh air is so healthy up in the hills, they're using their bodies and they are free to move around. – One young lad just ran around in circles waving his arms and laughing – I couldn't believe it. – Squeezing through caves, building snow shelters, paddling down rapids they love it and want to do more* – were just some of the ways the research participants expressed the joy students gained from moving in, and physically engaging with, the outdoors.

The participants told many stories about a specific range of outdoor activities, which were closely aligned to outdoor education. Tramping, climbing, kayaking, surfing, orienteering, and snow caving were

commonly cited, creating a picture that these activities are inextricably entwined with the outdoors. Many New Zealanders though, associate the outdoors with fishing, hunting, and barbecues, but apart from a few accounts of gathering kai moana these popular activities were not considered to be part of outdoor education. Likewise, while Jodi played hockey and Wiremu and Arthur had enjoyed playing rugby, none of the participants spoke of sport in relation to outdoor meanings. This was not an indictment of competition as Dave had skied and sailed competitively, Jodi had been a national rock climbing champion, Pete and Chris competed in orienteering events, and other participants had entered adventure races. Competition remained on the fringe of accepted meanings, something they did personally, but which did not quite fit into their understandings and practices of outdoor education.

The general population often regards the outdoor pursuits, most commonly mentioned by the participants, as adventurous. The participants though, appeared very sensitive to the negative connotations associated with risk and adventure. An accident in the Mangatepopo Gorge in the Central North Island, where seven people died on an outdoor education camp, was receiving media attention at the time of the interviews, and there was a rising tide of social and professional critique on risky activities (e.g. Brookes, 2011; Knight, 2010). Several participants openly stated they were pulling back from taking students into demanding terrain. At the same time, some thought young people were getting soft, placing blame on society trying to overprotect them. This presented a double bind, as participants both critiqued society for *bubble-wrapping* children whilst contextualising their own practices as being safe and conservative. The role of adventure in outdoor meanings appeared to be further complicated by images of daring, fun-loving, and confident adventurers, which attracted students to enrol in their outdoor programmes. Hence, many participants used images of risky activities to market programmes and entice students

*–they enrol in the programme because they expect it to be exciting,* noted Sharon. In doing so, their marketing continued to promote the view that adventure was part of being in the outdoors, arguably making it even harder for them to disassociate their programmes from discourses of risk and adventure.

While high-risk adventures were deemed inappropriate, many participants included activities with a focus on endurance and perseverance into their programmes. These activities were credited with helping groups work together, develop responsibility, and encourage self-reliance. The culmination of many programmes involved a multi-day trip where the students had to work together to overcome a series of challenges. As Jodi explains – *wading in chest deep snow with our group of nine boys was a really good learning experience for them – they had to dig deep and help each other.* These trips were often underpinned by nostalgic pioneering values of living simply without the luxuries of modern life. An acceptance that being outdoors required taking responsibility and looking after each other meant activities associated with quick thrills such as bungy-jumping were frowned on. Sara was adamant that activities should *not just be irresponsible thrill seeking* as the students handed over responsibility to the expert running them. In addition, being outdoors was valued as an opportunity to address the consumer driven, *instant gratification culture of the cities* (Jodi). Stephen noted however, *that's the way students live and outdoor education cannot turn back the clock.* He felt that outdoor experiences should not be uncomfortable or unpleasant, as it was important to engage students not turn them off. Other participants however, still valued developing a stoic sense of the pioneering spirit and deliberately removed cell phones, i-pods, and expected students to cook for themselves on cookers or campfires.

All the research participants included activities in their programmes which encouraged students to physically extend themselves as they

travelled across land and water, noting that for many students it was a new experience. To achieve this most programmes included some multi-day camping and tramping experiences often in areas of native bush. *Taking them off-track is amazing, explained Sara—most haven't experienced terrain like that and it takes them a while to move through it without getting tangled up.* Scrambling over logs, squeezing between saplings, or clambering down banks whilst hanging onto branches, are physically intimate experiences which immerse people in the bush and for many students it is those experiences which they remember at the end of the course. While off-track scrambles through the bush were often perceived more engaging than travelling on gravelled tracks, even more special was that moment when they pop out of the bush onto the tops; *they get this 'wow' factor and their faces light up* (Sara). The change from an enclosed space to having views enhanced the visceral as well as the visual experience. These changes in the terrain, vegetation, and views were planned to both engage students and offer them a range of physical experiences which they might otherwise not be exposed to.

While the participants personally enjoyed rigorous physical activity outdoors, physical movement per se was rarely perceived as a strong enough rationale for taking students outdoors; outdoor education was meant to deliver more. Chris, who exuberantly waved his arms, sung and laughed when he recalled his own experiences was now, like many other research participants, questioning the role of physical experiences: *I enjoy journeys, novelty, moving, travel, skill learning and those physical aspects, but that can detract from the environmental appreciation and sense of place.* Likewise, Mark noted that *activities are just a medium; it's about trying to use the activities to do other things, not just for the activities sake.* Dave more directly challenged the role of outdoor pursuits—*I would not criticise people going out and using the outdoors as a playground or as a site of conquest, but it is a wasted opportunity to not have other threads drawn into it. Many activities perpetuate ideas of*

*conquest in natural settings, perpetuating this idea of nature as a playground, or nature as a gymnasium, or nature as a source of utility. We go to nature, use it and come back, that is my perception and that is the pervasive understanding of outdoor education.* There was a sense that the role of activity and physical exercise within many programmes was being questioned, despite many research participants building up their love of the outdoors through physically immersing themselves in a range of pursuits. Furthermore, none of the participants spoke at any length about teaching specific technical skills or emphasised skill development as a key element in their programmes. Despite this undercurrent of questioning however, most programmes continued to include many traditional outdoor pursuit experiences as they provided opportunities for students to engage in a variety of environments.

While Dave believed the outdoors as an adventure playground was a *pervasive understanding of outdoor education*, all the participants vehemently denied treating it as such. Pete emphasised that when he took groups outdoors, it was about working with the environment not fighting it or trying to conquer it. Several mentioned however, that 'other' programmes maintained a singular focus on adventure activities, with Nicci being annoyed that some outdoor instructors only appeared interested—*on going faster, higher, and harder and using it like an assault course or gymnasium.* When recounting their personal experiences, most spoke animatedly of extending themselves, training hard to improve their technical skills, and enjoying the physical exercise, but framed them as building a connection to and respect for the natural world. Yet when adventure was incorporated into 'other' programmes, it was deemed irreverent, conquering, and annoying.

An additional complication in how they valued and incorporated activities into their programmes was that, in secondary schools, teaching pursuit activities and rewarding high performance levels were part of the health and physical education curriculum. Sharon and Arthur both felt

that being an accepted part of the curriculum helped outdoor education gain some credibility, as there was a clear structure for attaining NCEA credits. There was a downside however—*you don't want to be, but you are directed by assessment. You don't teach to assessment, but you almost have to sometimes*. Sharon was horrified when she found herself using the outdoors *like a piece of equipment, and it is just staggering to think of it like that, because that is not what it is to me*. What we measure becomes meaningful, and education now is all about credits, Sharon protested, *so at times even the students do not really understand the big picture of what they are learning*. Thus while linking to the curriculum provided some academic status, at times it challenged some of the research participants' core values and clashed with their images of the outdoors as an icon of freedom, spontaneity, and appreciating the moment.

Thus, the participants associated a specific group of activities with the outdoors and often incorporated those activities into their programmes. However, the purpose of using these activities did not always align with their personal experiences. For example, their personal participation in adventure activities was valued as way of building connection and respect for the outdoors, but they stated that the way some programmes incorporated adventure activities perpetuated anthropocentric attitudes of conquest and control and treated the outdoors as a playground. Furthermore, despite the participants enjoying kinaesthetically engaging in activities, for most of the time they glossed over the positive qualities of movement in different environments, and placed more emphasis on working in teams, developing self-reliance, and increasing environmental awareness. The meanings associated with outdoor pursuits were thus problematic, as the participants were drawn towards promoting adventure, whilst also trying to distance themselves from being adventure focused. This adventure conundrum is explored further in chapter 7. In addition, the

activities had become so engrained into meanings of the outdoors, that at times it was difficult for participants to imagine alternative ways of delivering outdoor education programmes.

### Living simply

The vignettes identified that many vivid memories of the outdoors involved playing and picnicking with family and friends, or roaming around rivers and beaches. As Malpas (1999) notes, childhood memories of place are an important part of the narratives we develop about our lives, how we see ourselves, and our capacity for self-reflection. These leisure experiences of being outdoors with family and friends added a different dimensionality to the physicality of adventure activities, and hence interspersing play and quieter moments with pursuit activities was something they tried to incorporate into their programmes.

A key element in their early family memories involved living simply and learning about the land by just being there and doing things together. These early outdoor experiences of learning by playing and working things out for themselves have arguably influenced their affinity to teach in similar experiential ways. All the participants described their preferred teaching style as one which encouraged students to learn through active engagement and discovery. Thus, being outdoors was sometimes a medium for encouraging students to learn in holistic experiential ways rather than delivering a pre-programmed plan – *it's a process rather than an endpoint*, said Jodi. Sharon explained, *you have to let them try things so they work out what's best for themselves*. This style of education often involved the students actively engaging with their environment and accepting the consequences of their actions. Whilst some participants spoke of encouraging reflection on experiences and ran formal reviews, others inferred that students learnt by becoming emotionally involved and embodying the experience. *If you talk too much it changes the whole experience – they learn as they go*, said Nicci.

Thus, supporting students to solve problems, look around, and learn by becoming involved was an important element in their practice.

The focus on active engagement meant that at times the quieter moments in between the formal activity sessions received less attention. This was particularly noticeable in the first stories some of the participants shared about their outdoor education practice. Many of their personal stories involved living simply and becoming acquainted with the bush by just being there, but while these life skills were an integral part of their programmes, they were not always initially included in stories about their outdoor education programmes. Later in the interviews however, Jodi spoke of students sharing food, Mark of groups helping to cook meals, Chris of toileting in the bush, and Dave of sitting on the riverbank discussing the way we live in the world. These quieter experiences were credited with helping students learn about the responsibilities of living together and respecting the outdoors. It was evident that general life skills were a valued, if understated, part of their programmes, but a part that was under pressure. *We have to cover so much in so little time that it's hard to fit it all in*, said Sharon, *it's about being super efficient, but then you don't have the time to sit down and talk with the students*. Pete too worried about the pressures of costs and time changing the focus of programmes, *some schools set up an almost impossible situation for contractors. They have 70 students to quickly get through an abseil, because they are going horse riding in the afternoon and then that becomes a conveyor belt style of approach. It's just the reality—it comes down to efficiency, value for money, but it misses the point. You need to spend time with students, get to know them, and let them take responsibility*.

The research participants also talked of experiences with '*real*' opportunities for the students to take on responsibility and look after one another, emphasising that the learning was more powerful because with '*real*' experiences came '*real*' consequences. Many of their own

powerful learning experiences had occurred when confronted with 'real' consequences. Dave had learnt about sharing and conserving resources on a trip where they had run out of food and Chris had learnt about staying positive and helping others when a storm destroyed their tents. In a similar way, Jodi explained how after getting caught in a southerly storm the students realised –*if they want food they have to light a fire and then cook it. Back home they would just head out and buy some at KFC; it is all about instant gratification, but nature is unrelenting so they have to think about others and plan ahead.* They spoke of allowing students to learn from nature even if they made some mistakes. Often these consequences were believed to hold some deeper authority which would help redress negative attitudes by alerting students to a greater force which they needed to respect. As Chris reflected, knowing *I was going to get a real consequence from nature was really liberating for me, to feel that shift from maybe anthropocentric rules to be something beyond that was empowering.* Participants felt some students were rebelling against authority and deferring to nature's consequences helped those students more readily accept responsibility for their actions.

There were other more structured experiential learning sessions which had direct links to the curriculum. Arthur enthused about teaching geography in holistic experiential ways—*it's such a hands-on and holistic way of learning. It's all right there, they are in the middle of it. Like after the abseil, sure there are things happening in your mind about this experience, but there is more to it, because the rock that you are now standing on is incredibly twisted and contorted, and just nearby there is an opportunity to talk about glaciers, or throw a few stones into the river and say maybe we can go down to Kaiapoi and pick them up.* Learning about an area in this way is driven by engaged, relevant, and immediate practices, which stimulate the senses. Integrating elements of the curriculum in holistic ways was possible because the research

participants themselves had broadened their knowledge of the environment by acquiring astute observation skills. They had become adept at building connections and spotting links. Recounting an experience of taking a group to Queenstown, Arthur effortlessly wove together aspects of climate change, skiing, career enhancement, tourism, tramping, Chinese settler history, risk management, jet boating, and hotel management. *Things are just so more relevant when they are there and you can tell they are interested their eyes light up and they ask questions*, he said. In the medium of the outdoors, away from the more bounded and structured spaces of school, students worked and learnt in an environment which itself demonstrated the interconnectedness of living systems.

Many participants believed experiences of living simply, relaxing, and recreating in the outdoors helped students develop a greater understanding of ecological processes and how everything is connected. However, they felt that young people had fewer opportunities to spend time playing outdoors than when they were growing up. As Stephen observed, many students are now more comfortable living in virtual worlds and are losing basic skills and knowledge of how to respond to and live in the outdoors. Thus, the participants provided opportunities for viewing sunsets, sunrises and the night sky, observing wildlife, and studying cycles of life and death in the bush. In this way, they felt students could learn more about the ecological processes of the world and understand their role within it, as they had done.

While learning in experiential ways was deemed important, the significance of these general life experiences is often lost as they seldom feature as the main event of a story. Yet being outdoors was often as much about sitting around the campfire, cooking food, and watching sunsets as it was about learning to kayak or climb. While these quieter experiences were recognised as critical moments to address living respectfully on the planet, the condensed sessions, pressure to achieve

outcomes, and desire to keep students active and busy, meant that there were fewer opportunities for students to *just be outdoors*. This focus on skills and activities potentially changes the way students perceive the outdoors, as they often miss out on exploring and experiencing the outdoors for themselves. While the participants were aware of the need to allow students to learn through a range of experiences, they sometimes found themselves being more directive as they felt pressured into fitting more activity into shorter timeframes.

### Emotional responses

The participants consistently commented on feeling refreshed and invigorated from their outdoor experiences. As Wiremu noted, *hopping in the sea, can be powerful, it can be a relief ... it is amazing how powerful the environment can be when you let it soak in*. Sharon and Jodi also spoke of how the outdoors reduced their feelings of stress, whilst Nicci spoke of it enhancing her *bubble of happiness*. None spoke of returning from trips, no matter how arduous, feeling exhausted or worn out. These positive emotional responses and reactions to being outdoors provided the participants with a strong motivation to share these opportunities with others. As Pete noted, *the outdoors has been extremely good for me, in terms of shaping who I am, and I like to be able to pass that on and share it with other people, for me that is the most significant thing about being an outdoor educator, that desire to share that passion*.

Encouraging positive feelings was a key reason for taking students outdoors. As Jodi commented, just sitting on the grass and looking down on Christchurch the group of girls said *this feels different, this feels really good*. The participants noted however, that emotional or inspirational experiences were hard to predict, because it was often small and unpredictable things that piqued the students' interest. Sometimes spotting wildlife made a trip memorable, with karearea (falcon), robins, dolphins, eels, and even mayflies all being mentioned as captivating the

attention of the students. On other occasions, a challenging trip in the snow or a sunny day swimming in a creek provided an inspirational moment, but as they indicated these emotional responses were spontaneous and could not be planned. Some of the best learning moments outdoors were what they called eureka, serendipitous, teachable, and 'aha' moments, when the students responded to a situation and *a whole lot of things just fall into place for them* (Nicci). Comments such as these suggest that the outdoors itself did the teaching and that the participants had little influence over what the students learnt.

The research participants also alluded to some extraordinary experiences outdoors, which generated a sense of connection or heightened states of consciousness. The sense of intimacy such as being *caressed by a wave* or *nurtured by the river* were powerful signifiers in their own lives, but as Nicci noted, while they are wonderful when they happen, *they don't seem to occur when you go looking for them*. Chris agreed, *they catch you unawares*, but he felt personal time and solo experiences could help. Even after a short solo experience, he had observed students sharing some amazing reflections. Other research participants remembered students becoming emotionally moved by watching a karearea in flight, skiing over hoar frost crystals, and lying down in a snow storm with their mouths open. Every student is so different – *you just need to provide the opportunities and hope something stirs them* (Nicci). While difficult to plan, many outdoor education practices involved not only helping students intellectually understand their interconnection with the world, but emotionally sense it.

Responding to, and becoming immersed in, the outdoors was an important part of their personal experiences so, for many participants, taking groups into rich sensory environments with time to slow down and absorb what was around in conscious or unconscious ways became

an important part of their practice. Sensory responses to the sun, wind, rain, and other elemental forces were an inevitable part of being outdoors in Aotearoa New Zealand and they wanted the students to experience a range of them. Pete anticipated complaints when he set out with a group in very heavy rain, but *what actually astounded me was they delighted in being cold and wet and every time they banged into a bush the water would pour on top of them, and they were getting soaked through, but they really enjoyed it because they don't normally do that.* Other research participants noted how students squealed with delight leaping into a glacier-fed mountain stream, or when buffeted by the wind. For Chris these visceral and emotional responses were the ultimate aesthetic experience and he tried to take groups into environments which would stimulate these responses. He described one trip whilst working in North America where *the trees were all balanced like pickup sticks across the ground. Students were teetering along the tops of these logs two or three metres in the air and, as we made our way through this incredible terrain, we had to keep calling out for bears because we were in full on grizzly country. There were also mosquitoes, just clouds of them in the swamps, and it was fantastic. Every sense was activated and they were totally in the zone.* This total concentration on what was around them was something Chris felt the students did not experience much elsewhere, as cell phones, technology, and other social pressures distracted them from living in the moment.

Another emotional response was the participants' expressions of love for both specific outdoor places and for the outdoors in general, which often generated a personal sense of loss when those areas became polluted or degraded. The storyline of a fragile planet, in need of care and protection from human exploitation occurred in several accounts, with many participants integrating environmental issues and the need to change how we live on the earth into their teaching practices. Mark for example integrated possum and stoat trapping, tree planting, and the

removal of wilding pines into his programmes, while Pete explored different ways of managing waste. Dave and Stephen were more sceptical however, believing that many adventure styled outdoor education practices contributed to the looming environmental crisis by encouraging attitudes of control and conquest, wasted resources, and were by implication supporting a consumer driven society. They felt it was essential to introduce a more social and political agenda into outdoor education. On the other hand, some participants believed that both positive and negative emotional responses generated in the outdoors could help raise awareness of environmental issues and generate a desire to instigate some lifestyle changes. They suggested that by cultivating love and respect for the earth, students would respond with feelings of care and concern, just as they personally had done. As Chris observed, students have to learn *to love life and the land* before they develop the passion to save it. Sharon also noted that it was important for students to have fun outdoors as this made them happy and positive, whereas *too much talk about doom and gloom turns them off*. The outdoors was thus seen as being under threat, but these threats and signs of degradation could generate enough concern to instigate action and help students address some of the critical issues about the way they lived and used resources.

The findings indicate that emotional responses have a powerful influence on student learning, and being outdoors appears to offer multiple opportunities for emotional engagement. However, it was not always possible to predict which activities would stir the students, so the participants tried to provide a range of experiences which they hoped would engender a sense of well-being, feelings of attachment, and attitudes of care and concern. These included taking students into different terrain to experience the elements, teaching pursuit skills, engaging in environmental conservation activities, and watching nature unfold. While the majority of participants believed that pursuit-based

activities provided opportunities for students to emotionally connect with the environment and begin to adopt more environmentally responsible attitudes, Dave contended that adventure-styled outdoor education practices contributed to the looming environmental crisis and believed radical changes were required. Radically changing the activity focus was not fully embraced by all the participants who remained adamant that many pursuits promoted positive responses and were wary of approaches which might induce negative responses such as blame, guilt, or hopelessness. As Chris and Sharon explicitly noted, a love of life was more likely to encourage positive environmental action.

## Relationships

*The outdoors is all about relationships*, said Jodi. Other research participants agreed, noting that being outdoors could help build trust and respect and that students seemed more able to talk and share their thoughts when outside. Sharon was convinced it was the space and fresh air; *it's just more relaxing for everyone outdoors*. Wiremu thought it was about power and control—*in a classroom someone is instructing you, or telling you whatever you have to do, but in the outdoors you can learn a lot from participating and being involved just being amongst it all. In a room, there is limited space, and for young people that can be quite a threatening environment – quite a power environment*. For Wiremu, walking a group down to the river, throwing sticks and watching them float away, provided an opening for students to start talking about their lives. It is not always about teaching *stuff, facts and figures—building relationships comes before any learning can happen*, Wiremu reiterated, *outdoors you walk and talk side-by-side, which is less confrontational*.

The participants suggested that shared outdoor experiences foster friendships as well as opportunities to bond with nature. As Sara noted, groups walking together and having a good time with others makes the whole outdoor experience more memorable. This perspective has led

some of the participants to develop teamwork and encourage group bonding as part of their practice. As Pete commented, after a few trips together the students *start to realise they don't need to climb over other people, but by working with other people, they can achieve what they want*. Being outdoors tramping and camping can provide a different social environment where winning is less important than working together and learning to help and rely on one another.

Building relationships with the wider world was also a valued part of their practice, something the participants felt was enhanced when there were no constraining walls around them. Chris suggested the *outdoor natural environment provides people with an insight. Sure there is harshness, but there is great beauty, and a hope of belonging, to be part of something that is so natural and so deep in history, that when they come back to the urban environment, they can look at it with new eyes*. Likewise, Sharon observed how some boys would arrive *at the centre with gang colours*, but after a day outdoors, *they get rid of all this mentality that is attached to harm, like gang stuff, and all the staunchness that they need to live up to. They lose that, not quite a mask, but you know all that sort of stuff, and they seem just happier*. Nicci and Stephen also noted that being outdoors could change the students' perception of the world and their role within it. *Looking down on Christchurch from the Port Hills, they'll notice the haze and smog, see the expanse of the city, and just get a different perspective on where they live*, said Nicci. Wiremu however, believed the connection was even deeper: *I think the land is kind of like a birthing place, the place that we come from and we have responsibilities to nurture and care for it. We also need to make sure that the environment around us, like relationships that we have, are all positive, because the environment is in the air, you know, it is the air as well between people and things*. Māori, have a whakatauki, or saying, "Ko au te whenua, kote whenua ko au – I am the

land, the land is me" which challenges the notion of bodily separation from where they were born.

Dave was less positive about the relationship we have with the earth, declaring quite simply that there are too many of us, and we use more of the earth's resources than we should. These driving forces are causing inequity in the distribution of wealth, the globalisation of consumer culture, widespread habitat destruction, the mass extinction of species, and climate change. He believed that some emotionally charged outdoor experiences could help inspire students to take action, but this was very different from encouraging students to love the outdoors. Hence, many of his sessions were about creating memorable experiences which highlighted inequality, the plight of planet, and the unsustainable way we lived. While other participants also felt the need to take action it did create challenges, as Stephen explained, *it's like talking about sustainability and good nutrition to students, and yet I stopped and had McDonald's from a drive-through last week. It was just easy to do that, but it goes against a lot of the ideas I'm trying to get across.* The pressures of work and life routines make it difficult at times for educators to consistently engage in sound environmental practices, which can then undermine the messages they are trying to communicate about building sustainable relationships. However as Nicci noted, *much of what I do is about raising awareness ...nobody can be perfect all the time.*

The main threats to living sustainably, for Wiremu and Jodi, arose from their observations of the disparities in socioeconomic circumstances. In particular, they felt Māori lifestyles fell short of the standards of a fair society, leaving many Māori struggling economically and educationally. Considering the long-term consequences of their actions were low priorities for many of their students, especially when their immediate well-being was threatened. Jodi and Wiremu felt it was vital to develop a safe place for the students to learn about themselves and to look for the

strengths each person has. They believed the outdoors provided a learning environment which avoided some of the negative connotations of school and had the added benefit of helping the students feel closer to their cultural roots. Thus for Jodi and Wiremu, the outdoors was not a place under threat which needed help, but somewhere which could help their students understand more about their ancestral connections and place in society. They incorporated metaphors and symbolism into their practices, such as talking about re-birthing as they emerged from caves, washing away issues as they surfed in the waves, and the land providing a cloak of sanctuary. This relationship with their ancestors and the land, they believed provided a sense of security and identity for students who were struggling in their everyday lives. Wiremu described one course where they went out on a waka (canoe) and the seas got very rough, so they started talking to Tangaroa, the god of the sea, *by bringing the stories of the gods into the present, things were coming alive for them, and they started feeling closer to them. For many young people who have problems or are maybe thinking about suicide, it's often associated with isolation and the young people not being connected to anything. So if they feel as though they are making connections not necessarily with people, but with their ancestors, with the land, or the environment, then that's one way that can help young people survive.* While this style of teaching seemed especially appropriate for Māori students, Jodi emphasised that all students needed help to feel connected and valued for who they are.

Given these experiences of relationships, the participants integrated opportunities to be outdoors in the fresh air and away from some of the constraints imposed by walls and indoor spaces. While some outdoor education practices hinted at escaping from the city in a search for peace, most were about affirming life, developing a sense of belonging, and engaging with the world. Some of the connections involved spiritual beliefs and, while there was evidence of different cultural approaches,

many participants hinted that understanding the outdoors was part of becoming a New Zealander and provided students with a sense of nationhood. There were concerns however that all education including outdoor education was encouraging power relationships of control and conquest which were adding to the environmental crisis. Jodi and Wiremu stressed that the crisis was socially driven and that, when approached respectfully, the land offered a sense of continuity and connection which could help all students overcome feelings of isolation and abandonment. Accordingly, the outdoors was valued for its ability to help students build and support relationships both with other people and the land itself.

### Bringing together outdoor meanings with outdoor education

The five themes reveal that whilst each participant held an idiosyncratic set of outdoor meanings based on their personal experiences and culture, there were commonalities when they integrated these meanings into their practice. At times personal meanings appeared to seamlessly flow across into their work practices, for example Dave's strong sense of sustainability, Arthur's holistic teaching style, Wiremu's strengths-based approach, and Nicci's belief in the moral worth of the outdoors. However, for others the disjunctions between personal and professional belief systems were more evident, with Sharon's view of using the outdoors as a resource, and the difficulties faced by Stephen in trying to implement holistic education into schools striving for academic achievement. It was also apparent that current understandings of the outdoors and outdoor education had been incorporated into their personal stories and childhood memories and, in doing so, had retrospectively invested them with meaning. I highlighted this in Chapter 4 as a limitation of narrative research, whereby stories can evoke a strong sense of coherence even when meanings are changing.

The different strands of outdoor education such as EOTC, personal development camps and centres, school curriculum, adventure therapy, and education for sustainability (EfS), which the participants were involved in, also shaped their outdoor education practices. For example within EOTC, the outdoors was almost anywhere outside the classroom, which provided opportunities to teach students in holistic ways. Those working on school camps often referred to the outdoors being akin to 'green' locations which offered opportunities for personal and social development and could build an understanding about the interconnection of life and our role in the world. Outdoor centres and senior school courses used wilder spaces which encouraged a physical response to being outdoors and the ability to learn skills. Therapeutic courses built on the concept of the outdoors as a sanctuary, which encouraged cultural, spiritual, and caring relationships with the wider world. For the tertiary courses which embedded EfS into their programmes, the emphasis on needing to change the way we live on a fragile planet meant outdoors had become a contentious concept which was implicated in supporting unsustainable practices. Many participants were working for organisations, which had compatible goals and ideologies to their own, so they were able to deliver programmes which melded well with their outdoor meanings and educational beliefs. This did mean though, that some values and practices became self-reinforcing as the organisation's promotional material and the community of educators employed there, repeatedly told similar success stories.

All participants believed there was something *very special* about taking students outdoors, and while adamant that it was more than fun and having a good time, they were sometimes flummoxed and frustrated to explain what was learnt. In bringing their voices together, their concerns became clearer and could be expressed as – *sometimes other teachers think we've just been going out and playing, that it's not 'real education'*

*and when we try and explain, it can all just sound so airy fairy. What we do is meaningful, it's just not always easy to measure or explain, you just have to be there to see it all happening.* The idea that you had to be there seeing, feeling, and experiencing, in order to understand is indicative of the research participants' beliefs that learning was more than a cognitive event, but involved emotional, embodied, and sensory experiences.

What was clear in the participants' stories, was that the dynamic and interrelated character of outdoor environments required different approaches, which often required flexibility and the ability to adapt to the elements. As Sara stated, *you just never know what is about to happen or how the group will react. You need to be on your toes and willing to be flexible.* Others spoke of being spontaneous and working with teachable moments. *In a classroom, you follow a plan—last week a student had one of those 'aha' moments, explained Nicci, but I just ignored it and carried on with the lesson – I would never do that outdoors.* The research participants thought it might be the size of the group, non-threatening spaces, or fewer time pressures. *You have to work with whatever the weather dictates, said Pete – it's no use fighting it.* It was as if they revelled in the unpredictability of responding to the moment, and valued role-modelling spontaneity and flexibility as a way to help students learn and experience things beyond human influence and control.

Yet this level of spontaneity sometimes made it hard to explain their practices, as Stephen emphasised, working within a holistic experiential framework can be serendipitous with many unplanned outcomes, which are sometimes rewarding and significant partly because they allow students to explore new areas. At times, this led to tension as some participants valued flexible plans and spontaneous responses, yet craved the academic acceptance associated with meeting clearly stated educational outcomes. As Chris explained, *at times I have been too*

*focused on tangible outcomes and not enough about the magic and the unknown. Many programmes over-programme and have become chockablock with activity, but I want to allow more space for intimacy, magic, and relationship with the environment, and that just happens spontaneously, when there is fun and joy.*

A key element in many of the stories was that there always seemed to be more learning happening when they were outdoors, than what could be described through rational language. Five areas which were common across many of the participant's accounts related to: the unplanned opportunities to learn; different mind-sets when outdoors; a sense of bodily rather than rational knowing; physical engagement; and a relevance to the world outside school. As noted in Chapter 4, poetic representations often provide a counterbalance to scientific and rational communication. The poetic form can also emphasise what 'standard' prose cannot, by using rhythm and repetition to stress ideas. The next section brings the voices of the participants together to explore what was difficult for them to explain.

### Poetics of practice

*Thought, I love thought.*

*But not the jiggling and twisting of already existent ideas*

*I despise that self-important game.*

*Thought is the welling up of unknown life into consciousness,*

*Thought is the testing of statements on the touchstone of the conscience,*

*Thought is gazing on to the face of life, and reading what can be read,*

*Thought is pondering over experience, and coming to a conclusion.*

*Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges,*

*Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending.*

More pansies, thought (Lawrence, 1932, p. 31)

D.H. Lawrence encapsulates a pedagogical approach in this poem which encourages the welling up of new ways to perceive the world. In just a

few lines he portrays engaged experiential creative thinking, which challenges the "self important game" of passing on a fixed set of existent ideas (Lawrence, 1932, p. 31). Outdoor education, from the participants' perspectives, involves more than passing on information. It helps grow perceptions of the world and open up other possibilities of being in the world. They felt working in this way did not always fit with common conceptions of education, making it difficult for people to understand. Language influences what we learn and how we live in the world and, as Nicci identified, communicating the essence of her work involved using a different type of vocabulary which was more emotional and less managerial, resource-based, or scientific. In essence she felt what she did was emotional, deeply felt, complex, and arguably more poetic.

A key part of this research has involved incorporating the participants' voices to capture outdoor meanings and the shaping of outdoor education. Many of their ideas about learning however, were not presented in logically structured ways, but revealed in short snippets, or afterthoughts, which were sometimes lost in the overall story. This next section draws together some of these phrases to reveal the different ways the outdoors contributed to their understanding and practices of outdoor education and the learning they hoped to achieve. I took phrases from the interview transcripts and then linked them together with others who I believed were expressing similar ideas. Compiling comments from the collective accounts and amalgamating them in poetic format allows for the repetition of voices to strengthen the messages shared during their interviews.

*Moments of wonder*

*Under the open skies*

*So somewhere*

*Tangaroa rocked us*

*Like magic*

*Eyes light up,*

*Aha, Eureka, Wow,*

*They get it.*

*It's not planned*

*It can't be planned*

*But*

*In that moment*

*Something changes*

*They connect.*

The participants believed that the practical and experiential nature of being outdoors helped to place students at the centre of their own meaning making and keep the wonder alive. Thus, the participants were willing to take a risk and allow time for unstructured experiences where students could explore ideas that were meaningful and interesting for them. They were conscious of keeping student needs at the forefront of their teaching and attempted to engage students in learning which was intrinsically motivating and relevant to them. This was easier outdoors, as the physical activities, stimulating environment, and group work helped keep the students emotionally engaged. Responding to student interests was not about trying to find entertaining activities, as often that would result in the students being passive, but selecting experiences which were culturally relevant and involved working together. The participants felt that the habits and structure of classroom learning often made it difficult for students to become active learners, but once outdoors there were more opportunities to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. Pete for example noted that when students made the shift *to be a rock climber as opposed to being a student who was rock climbing*, they took charge of their learning. Once students were involved in actively 'being' rather than passively receiving knowledge, then personally relevant connections were made, which increased the wonder of learning.

Holistic being and spontaneous knowing often lie beyond dominant forms of representation as they involve lived moments, which are difficult to grasp in any concrete way. The outdoors for the participants offered opportunities for students to learn by and through engaging the body and sensing the world around them in both pragmatic and spiritual ways. Linking learning to those lived and somewhat intangible moments can help students realise that there is no simple body of knowledge to acquire, but that learning involves being mindfully attentive and allowing a welling up of the unknown (Lawrence, 1932). In this way, the unplanned and unexpected become vital aspects of a style of learning which is on-going and responsive to changing circumstances.

This next poetic text is taken from an account by Dave when he changed his climbing session in response to the elements and took the students on an unplanned scramble up a mountain creek.

*Heat oozed off the crag*

*We bagged climbing*

*Hiked up the river*

*Swam*

*Lolled on the rocks*

*Started talking about sense of place*

*They opened up*

*Intimately shared*

*Who they are*

*What they're doing*

*What's important*

*How they relate to others and the world around them*

*For an hour or more.*

*A couple of years later recalling that experience*

*Engaging and meaningful, they said.*

As was frequently mentioned by the participants, students would open up, discuss, and engage in learning in profound ways when outdoors. What was harder for them to explain was why this occurs. Some participants attributed this willingness to share ideas and thoughts to the trust that built up amongst students and between students and educators when working together outdoors. Wiremu discussed how he enjoyed walking side-by-side as it changed the balance of power and made it easier to talk with students not to them. He also noted that allowing students to move around was less threatening for them than sitting in a classroom. For others being outdoors involved providing time to slow down and share their thoughts, *there's time to sit and listen*, said Jodi, *and that time is important for relationships to develop*.

It also appeared easier for students to express ideas when the discussion itself was grounded in a practical activity. For example, scrambling up a creek, building snow shelters, surfing, or caving, offered students the chance to explore different perspectives and possibilities of living in and responding to the world. Learning through practically engaging in life was thus seen as one way to help students to grow and evolve with knowledge rather than have decontextualised ideas handed down to them. In addition, Chris noted, that physical activities can also quieten the mind and sharpen the ability to see the world from a different perspective. Equally important for engendering discussions were the fun, exciting, and stimulating experiences, which generated emotional responses and encouraged the sharing of feelings.

At other times a change of weather, scenery, or activity were credited with challenging perceptions of the world as something hitherto unknown was experienced. These new experiences allowed personal habits to be challenged and students could respond to the strangeness of the experience in ways which were sometimes perceived as significant life-changing opportunities or memorable moments. In trying to make sense of new experiences students would discuss ideas, tell, and retell

stories of that event and in doing so incorporate fresh ideas into their patterns of thinking. Thus, travelling to different areas and having a change of scene was an integral part of many programmes, valued as a way to develop differing perspectives and help recall. The outdoor experience was often extended and linked to other learning by encouraging recall, especially when back in a school setting. This helped students re-engage with ideas and discussions in different settings.

*Assessment drives what we teach*

*You don't want to be, but you are directed by  
assessment.*

*You give credits and tick the box*

*Where's the learning in that?*

*Learning is holistic,*

*You shouldn't have to tell them – this is what you will learn*

*Because who knows what they will learn!*

*Being outside you let them learn*

*You ask questions*

*Incite curiosity*

*Sit back*

*Let them learn*

*They get right into it*

*They don't even realise they are learning*

*They take responsibility for their learning*

*They are just so involved so engaged*

*They want to learn as much as they can*

*Yes, what's important is they really want to learn.*

Sharon was shocked when she realised that she had started perceiving the outdoors as a resource to achieve learning outcomes, and that some students would only engage in activities which offered credits. To gain

credibility for outdoor education, she had started to accept an outcomes model of education, but felt there was more to learning outdoors than that. She like many other participants valued embodied knowing, yet clearly articulated measurable outcomes present a powerful and pervasive way of controlling what is known and building accountability into the educational system. So, while it was not easy to challenge politically dominant ideas, the participants felt the outdoors offered many holistic perspectives and took opportunities to engage with different educational values and practices. They noted that not only did their style of teaching change, but once outdoors the students responded by changing their mind-set and becoming active and involved learners.

Not all the outdoor education programmes discussed were tied to the secondary school curriculum and those programmes had more time to encourage holistic, practical, and embodied learning. This more open-ended approach also helped the participants to draw out relevant learning especially when addressing socio-environmental issues. As pre-determined outcomes and assessment diminished in importance, participants were freer to draw together ideas from different disciplines and consider the holistic development of the students.

*Scratched and battered*

*Cold and wet*

*Water dripping through the tent*

*Soggy gear*

*Misted goggles*

*Hood pulled tight*

*Uphill, downhill,*

*Scrambling and crawling*

*Wading through snow and mud*

*Dig deep, work together*

*Tune in and sing along*

*It's what we do*

*and*

*The students just love it.*

Learning by being immersed in the environment was central to numerous outdoor experiences. As Stephen noted, many students had not seen the night sky or walked in the bush, so it was essential to let them embody such experiences, for as sentient beings they required a changing array of environmental factors to fully develop an awareness of the world. The participants felt they had learnt so much about how to respond intuitively to changeable elements and terrain whilst participating in their own outdoor experiences that they wanted others to have similar experiences. Thus, for the participants, moving through the environment, and experiencing changing seasons, light and dark were key practices to include in outdoor education. For them, living, working, and recreating outdoors helped capture how practice and understanding evolved together. At times, they suggested that some styles of education isolated students from learning about the world which in turn limited what could be known. Hence, they promoted the idea that learning and living are closely integrated with each supporting the other. Accordingly, the participants planned a myriad of experiences which encouraged the students to develop environmental knowledge by becoming fully immersed in different outdoor places.

As Chris noted, in his description of taking students through the forest, the way they developed meanings and understanding originated in their bodily engagement with the environment. After a day of scrambling, crawling, balancing, and holding on to vegetation they had developed more attentiveness to what was around them. Different movements can change perspectives and sensory tactile stimulations help know the outdoors. The participants spoke of climbing over warm slabs of rock, smelling the honeydew, tasting the saltiness of kai moana, hearing the birds, feeling the sun on their back, and negotiating around roots and

boulders as they ran and biked. All these bodily techniques helped them produce a grounded understanding of the material and sensory environment and, as Arthur stated, students need similar experiences of moving through different environments so that they can more fully *know the world and who they are*.

*The colour of the water*

*Patterns in the mud*

*Texture of the snow*

*Darkening skies*

*It felt right, it felt wrong*

*Something was wrong,*

*We had to leave,*

*I don't know why, I just knew*

*You can't ignore the signs,*

*If you do the waves will teach you a lesson.*

The direct consequences of being outdoors helped make learning real and relevant. The participants had learnt to respond to the elements in ways they were not always aware of so, for them, learning was not just the act of acquiring information, but also practising how to apply it. Responding to dynamic situations was an integral part of being safe in the outdoors and they felt it important for students to realise that no one controlled the elements, so that it was necessary to trust intuitions, change plans, and work with the environment. One way Pete and Chris did this was to involve the students in planning and running the trips so they had direct experience of adjusting plans. Thus, building observation skills and then encouraging students to apply them in practice was perceived as a necessary part of developing sound risk management practices for both outdoor activities and life in the city.

Another core component of outdoor education involved encouraging the students to find value and relevance for themselves. Examples include

Jodi's account of a student realising how much he relied on his mother to do things for him, or Sharon's experience of a student acknowledging that helping someone was fun. These experiences helped expand horizons as they involved the student finding their own idiosyncratic meaning. In this way, learning moved from acquiring decontextualised content to learning which had relevance for their lives.

Many outdoor education practices incorporated elements of being spontaneous and responding to the moment, having fun, encouraging discussion, holistic development, and engaging the senses. These strategies moved beyond transmitting a fixed body of knowledge or teaching definitive answers to tangible problems. Ostensibly, this is the role of all educators, but Stephen notes while *The New Zealand Curriculum* captures an open-ended, forward-looking, and student-focused agenda in its vision, *in our senior schools with NCEA, the assessment at the end has not changed. So the endpoint of high school is still the same – we are saying let's teach them in more open and creative ways, but we still have to teach them this stuff so they can do this assessment to get these marks in order to go to university or get a job, make money, and be a member of society.* In this statement, he identifies the difficulties of meeting the curriculum's overarching holistic vision of innovation and creativity, when relying on a transmission approach to education focused on achieving predetermined standards, audit, and reporting outputs imposed by government agencies. While some outdoor education practices were embroiled in assessment and attaining credits, most participants valued outdoor education as a way to teach in holistic ways which built on perceptions of the outdoors providing opportunities to build connections with the wider world whilst offering a sense of freedom and excitement.

The participants accepted that they should be accountable for what they did, but believed the outdoors offered some quite different opportunities for learning which should be encouraged and developed,

not diluted. They felt spontaneous, holistic, and open-ended practices allowed for relevant, creative, and sensory learning, and such learning was vital in developing a sense of connectivity with the world.

## Summary

The significance of the outdoors for outdoor education was especially valued because it enhanced engaging, holistic, and interrelated learning experiences. The participants who attributed moral worth to the outdoors, also appreciated opportunities for developing personal potential, well-being, and spiritual connections. In addition, many outdoor activities were selected in order to develop feelings of care and responsibility for the wider world. None of these facets were employed in singular ways as the participants juggled combinations of different ideas and practices to engage students in learning about the world and how to live respectfully within it.

The participants were passionate about the outdoors and what it offered education. They had developed a love of the outdoor from their personal experiences and carried it with them into their work with students. This passion for the outdoors was a core element of their practice; it transcended their lives and was evident in the reported interactions with students. Whether close to home, or in some remote valley, they were thrilled when they observed students experience a special relationship or connection with outdoor places. They valued positive experiences and whether emphasising spiritual, environmental, social, or embodied knowing, being outdoors was credited with offering students a positive sense of well-being and an appreciation of the interrelatedness of life on the planet. This enthusiasm and belief in the value of the outdoors to generate positive feelings was potentially self-perpetuating, as the passion displayed by the participants when sharing their stories probably also motivated and captivated many students.

Yet despite this passion and enthusiasm for the learning that occurred, they often felt they failed to fully communicate the potential of the outdoors for education. Explaining what they did in practice was particularly difficult at times, especially when it did not align with some of the traditional discourses of education. These included: taking pedagogical risks and allowing for spontaneous learning moments; encouraging students to learn through exploration rather than by direct instruction; placing students at the centre of the learning process; challenging pre-determined and pre-programmed outcomes: and valuing other senses and other ways of knowing. They spoke of *intangible and magic experiences*, or a special element which was easier to sense and experience than explain rationally. However, in bringing their stories and comments together a clearer picture emerges—one where active engagement can promote a sense of wonder and different ways of seeing the world. This is partly achieved through the passion displayed by the participants and partly by the encouragement given to students to use their emotions and senses to immerse themselves in the world. To achieve this, the participants designed programmes which were web-like, offering a range of experiences and activities, and providing time for students follow their own passions and take charge of their own learning. Thus, outdoor education practices offered ways of thinking and learning which focused on building connections to the world, holistic development, appreciating embodied knowing, and understanding the interrelatedness of life.

## **Chapter 7 – The role of the outdoors in shaping outdoor education**

The findings in chapter 5 and 6 indicate that the outdoors, while inclusive of many locations, cannot be defined by physical attributes alone. It is a combination of locations, activities and experiences, emotional responses and relationships. Thus, understanding the role of the outdoors within outdoor education requires integrating many ideas and perspectives. In this chapter, I reflect on the findings and revisit the literature to discuss the relevance and limitations of the outdoors as a defining element of outdoor education.

Each participant responded in distinct ways to the outdoors, some of which evolved from their personal experiences, but other ideas and beliefs are incorporated from social discourses, media depictions, their place of work, and the outdoor education community. Not all of these ideas 'gel' into a unified understanding or body of outdoor education practice. The outdoor education sector thus remains quite fluid, and without agreed parameters it is up to each organisation to decide on their own boundaries. Teachers from other disciplines sometimes challenge this open-ended approach suggesting it lacks rigour, but retaining a degree of flexibility allows practitioners to be both proactive and responsive. As a result, several strands of outdoor education have evolved with quite distinct purposes and practices. This complicates discussions about what the outdoors has to offer outdoor education as purposes and practices vary, and what may be appropriate in one situation may be less so in another. By looking for common ground, I build on what many participants described as the interrelatedness of educating in the outdoors.

While there were many individual stories, at other times, the participants reiterate culturally accepted stories or phrases to explain what was happening. Accordingly, certain outdoor meanings remained

dominant. Exploring the nuances of individual meanings and the way they blend with, and differ from, academic and popular perceptions of the outdoors and outdoor education provides opportunities to unpack underlying philosophies and ideas. This is relevant for outdoor education practices, as some stories promote clichéd depictions, which create a simplified yet incomplete picture of outdoor education.

### Negotiating the role of the outdoors in outdoor education

It is clear from the range of stories shared that neither the outdoors nor outdoor education can be reduced into simple, singular, and agreed on components. Unpacking outdoor meanings into five themes however, has drawn out the multiple roles the outdoors plays in outdoor education. In particular, descriptions of the ways that the outdoors helps to build understandings of the interrelatedness of life underpinned many outdoor education practices. The role of interconnectedness emphasises the need to appreciate embodied knowing, holistic development, and serendipitous learning alongside the rational, pre-planned, and cognitive modes of education practiced in many secondary schools.

The complex network of relationships and open-ended learning can make it difficult for those not involved in outdoor education to understand the scope of what the outdoors offers learning. At times, the participants' themselves had difficulty in stating their programme outcomes clearly, suggesting that more was happening than could be anticipated and planned for. This supports Payne's (2000) assertion that discourses of learning, even in human development curriculum areas like outdoor education, are often reduced to a narrow understanding of intellectual achievement, rather than supporting students as they try to understand their lived experiences. When learning privileges the mind and intellect, then fully appreciating and confidently describing other more embodied ways of knowing becomes constrained. As identified, many outdoor education practices involve emotional responses and relationships which develop when the body engages with locations

through a range of physically challenging or reflective experiences. Thus, talk of open-ended agendas, spontaneity, holistic learning, embodied knowing, and responding to the students, appear to be strange modes of education as they do not fit well with dominant discourses which promote measuring and assessing intellectual achievement. The participants were not suggesting that scientific and rational knowledge be rejected; only that other ways of knowing can add to education and provide useful insights.

Whilst not always planning for and achieving clearly measurable outcomes, the participants were confident that being outdoors played a significant role in delivering positive learning opportunities. This passion and confidence, according to Lugg (2004), can blinker perspectives and reduce their ability to critically reflect on practice. Some academic writers (e.g. Brookes, 1993; Higgins, 2003; Payne, 2002), have also called this uncritical attitude naïve. In particular, Payne (2002) notes that there are many critical debates which outdoor practitioners do not fully engage in, and are probably unaware of. These include the role of criticality itself especially when addressing issues of place, adventure, learning, experience, personal development, and the pressing global changes which confront society. Payne (2002) and Hull (2006) however, are also cognisant of the way some debates are exacerbated when the critiques themselves adopt narrow totalising perspectives which trap people into polarising arguments. Hull suggests one way to avoid the paralysis of polarisation is to recognise infinite perspectives and optimistically seek solutions which actively pluralise relationships with nature and the world.

Several participants were frustrated by challenges to their practice from other teachers, especially when compared to a system of education they perceived as failing some students. They believed that many criticisms missed the holistic nature of their work and tended to assume outdoor education was only about entertaining students. Some of the other

participants however, agreed with scholars (e.g. Boyes, 2012; Brown, 2009; Hill, 2012b; Zink & Burrows, 2008) who thought outdoor education had developed a very narrow focus and those participants valued the well-considered critiques of taken for granted assumptions. They believed such analysis was vital, if outdoor education was to adapt to changing social and environmental pressures and fulfil its potential of helping people live responsibly in the world. Whether they agreed or disagreed with critiques of outdoor education practice, all the participants wanted to build on the interrelated and holistic scope of their work and not narrow down understandings of learning by thinking in binary or reductionist ways. Whenever possible, they focused on development of the whole person and cross-curricula learning, and believed the open horizons of the outdoors assisted in developing a sense of connectivity with the world.

Payne (2002) suggests that a theory–practice gap has emerged because theoretical thinking has progressed more quickly than practice. Hill (2012b) believes this to be the case in Aotearoa New Zealand, suggesting the ideas of academics are only slowly being accepted by outdoor practitioners. However, some participants believed their practice was ahead of theory, as some 'new' ideas such as education for sustainability, community-based education, student-centred learning, and experiential teaching practices had been incorporated into outdoor education programmes over many years. In support of other research (e.g. Davidson, 2001; Rea, 2008a; Zink & Burrows, 2008) the findings in this study suggest the meanings and practices of outdoor education are richer and more complex than many outdoor education texts (e.g. Gilbertson et al., 2006; Priest & Gass, 2005) or outdoor leader qualifications (e.g. NZOIA, 2007) might suggest. This was evident in the way the participants responded to changing times by integrating a pragmatic mixture of workable ideas and practical solutions into their

programmes which offered students a range of opportunities to learn about themselves and how they fitted into the world.

The potential of outdoor experiences to engender interrelated, holistic, and cross-discipline learning is however tricky to determine, both because of difficulties in articulating this style of learning and because it is troublesome to measure. This presents a challenge for academics and practitioners alike, as holistic, open-ended practices are worthwhile, according to *The New Zealand Curriculum*, but still not an accepted part of current educational orthodoxies, which are driven by the managerial and neo-liberal discourses of measured outputs (Boyes, 2012; Codd, 2005; Hill, 2011). While a lack of critical reflection on behalf of practitioners can result in normalising certain practices, some critiques themselves take a totalising position, which misrepresents the layers of knowing and teaching within outdoor education. Theory-practice gaps exist not only because theoretical ideas are slow to filter through to practice, but also because of the difficulty of grasping and articulating the nuanced and holistic practices of practitioners. The following sections address some of the disjunctions that emerged in the findings presented in chapters 5 and 6, and discuss ways of bridging the gaps.

### ***Locations***

As noted, the outdoors is inclusive of many locations, suggesting that while outdoor education occurs somewhere it may not be the so *somewhere* Chris alluded to. So *somewhere* included the particularities of a place with its specific vegetation, views, history, and memories which is more akin to descriptions of place. The notion of place-responsive education as a pedagogical and philosophical underpinning for outdoor education has been championed by Wattchow and Brown (2011) who suggest that the way people respond to place could help outdoor education "make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of both people and places" (p. 75). A deeper understanding of what

happens when people encounter place, they believe is a necessary part of helping students learn about themselves and their communities, as a sense of 'who we are' is built on a sense of 'where we are'. As identified, there are many different outdoor locations used for outdoor education and each one potentially affects the type of relationship and response experienced and thus what can be learnt. In addition, Wattchow and Brown argue that general concepts such as 'wilderness' with its persistent images of solitude and majestic nature promote a particular view of the outdoors and overwhelm personal experiences of particular outdoor places. Whereas specific places, provide opportunities to develop a depth of understanding and emotional responsiveness, which can then strengthen attachment.

The outdoors is sometimes used in similar overarching ways as 'wilderness', because it includes many locations, which are underpinned by popular social constructions that can influence emotional responses. There is for example, an extensive body of awe-inspiring images displaying snowy mountains, waterfalls, and crystal blue lakes, and these images undoubtedly influenced some of the stories shared by participants. Yet childhood memories of being outdoors included multiple references to picnics on the beach, visiting the family farm, or playing in the neighbour's garden. These childhood stories appeared less concerned with scenic locations and other dominant social constructions, relying more on feelings of having a good time, playfulness, and exploration. It was often these positive responses and feelings of well-being which were then applied to almost any place outdoors. This blending of local, familiar, and geographically specific sites with generalised symbolic understandings of the outdoors highlights the interconnectedness of places.

As participants shared their stories, the locations they associated with the outdoors sometimes blurred to suggest at times that the outdoors could be anywhere and everywhere. In speaking of the outdoors as

everywhere, several began to substitute 'the outdoors' with the term 'nature', as it appeared easier to discuss whether they felt 'part of' or 'separate from' their environment, when speaking of 'nature' rather than 'the outdoors'. This supports Bonnett's (2012) argument which suggests that beliefs about 'nature' intrinsically influence how we understand and treat the environment. Thus the term 'nature' allowed the participants to refer back to an original state of being, whereas the outdoors was unavoidably linked to culture through its antonym 'indoors' with associations of houses, buildings, and cities. Referring to nature in these discussions helps to distance 'the outdoors' from ontological debates on the culture-nature divide, whilst still highlighting their relationship. Similarly, Pete, Mark, and Chris would drift into using 'the environment' as opposed to 'the outdoors', especially when talking about educating in cities or school environments, implying that the outdoors was related more to natural environments and not quite so encompassing. It was more relevant to attach adjectives such as city, urban, and school, to the word environment, whereas understanding of 'the outdoors' was often based on its difference from schools and cities. Hence, while location was not the only defining part of the outdoors, the spatial elements of not being indoors and images of naturalness remained important to many meanings.

Images of a natural location away from the city potentially conflate the outdoors with wilderness. Some scholars suggest that outdoor education is stuck in the Romantic era, with practitioners viewing the outdoors as a pristine wilderness (Wattchow, 2004a; Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Zink & Burrows, 2008). While according to Hay (2002) it is hard to pin down what the Romantic era's response to nature actually is, or was, it often includes aspects of celebrating nature as a sacred space, retreating from society into wild and remote spaces in order to attain enlightenment, and personal moral growth. Romantic ideals value wilderness because it is beyond human control, enduring the test of time, undisturbed, and

original. Wattchow and Brown (2011) suggest the emphasis on solos, personal growth, felt sensations, and a belief in the importance of direct contact and experience with the natural world, all derive from this particular portrayal of Romantic ideals. For Wattchow and Brown, promoting the outdoors as synonymous with wilderness and therefore untouched by humans, potentially limits the connection students form with outdoor places. They expand on their concern stating "nature as wilderness is seen as pristine, fixed and simplified. But when nature is seen as place it is messy, contested and constantly changing" (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 33). This suggests that nature is best encountered through sensuous engagement with particular places; rather than through more abstract spaces called wilderness, for only in being *so somewhere* does a blending of personal, physical, and cultural understanding occur. Yet, the participants never mentioned taking groups into wilderness areas, as most outdoor education experiences occurred close to roads and lodges. The Port Hills, which many described in their stories of outdoor education, overlooks Christchurch and has been shaped by human endeavour as much as by seismic and volcanic activity. Many of the outdoor education centres where they worked inhabited sites left over from forestry, hydro, roading, or mining endeavours. They educated in areas not wild or pristine, but full of human history.

Some beliefs about wilderness can be pervasive (Wattchow, 2008); hence even experiences close to the road can promote a Romantic response to nature similar to the sublime accounts of wilderness. For example, Mark spoke of students feeling quite *isolated and away from everything* when only ten minutes from the road and where they could still hear traffic and Nicci spoke of a group feeling elated watching a sunset whilst on a ski-field. Many other stories however, described being physically close to the land and water as they scrambled over logs, soaked in hot pools, and drifted down the river exploring the intricacies

and minutiae of an area. Detailed observations of lichens, examining snow crystals, or searching for mussels in a rock pool suggest intimate ways of being and living within the world, reasserting the role of the body and all the senses in experiencing one's place within the world. This contrasts with Burke's (1756/2007) influential writing on the sublime at the start of the Romantic era, which highlighted the grandeur of mountains, oceans, and alluded to the sheer unknowingness of the natural world providing a pathway for transcendent experiences.

Romantic ideals of an individual striving for transcendent experiences in remote and pristine areas appear to be the exception rather than the rule for the participants. Yet for Hay (2002) and Cronon (1996b) even the mere suggestion of transcendent experiences can advance the idea of humans being separate from the natural world, as it intimates that they can rise above it. Comments from Jodi on *'not being lonely anymore'* and Wiremu's discussion of *'being caressed by a wave'* indicate an intimate bodily connection and sense of comfort generated from being part of a wider world. This suggests that while there may be 'something other', it is not inaccessible but a physical part of their life world. This highlights a further point of difference from the Romantic ideals of nature, in which the benefits of these encounters include "an increased personal relationship with wild lands, not romanticized, but of increased understanding" (Potter & Henderson, 2004, p. 79).

The broad and generalising qualities of the outdoors may limit certain personal responses, but at other times, some locations gained greater significance because they were grouped together within the overall concept of 'the outdoors'. Jodi, Sharon, and Wiremu for example all credited being outdoors with reducing stress and assigned that quality to many locations including the grass just outside the classroom and the home garden. This notion supports Stedman's (2002) findings, which identified that meaning is firstly attributed to places and then people become attached to the meanings as much as to the places.

As an encompassing term 'the outdoors' within outdoor education can become prey to competing social and cultural depictions. Place-responsive education as described by Wattchow and Brown (2011) on the other hand, highlights the specificity of places and contextualises learning, which deepens understanding about where we live, and helps develop realistic responses to local social and environmental challenges. While this is valuable, some learning is strongly embedded in a particular place, potentially making the transfer of those ideas to a globally interconnected world with a mobile population quite difficult. For when places are perceived as unique, they can sometimes be thought of as closed systems which do not relate to other places. The meanings highlighted in this research suggest the outdoors builds a sense of interconnectedness between places and acts as a unifying concept which reinforces the relationships between places. Thus understandings of the outdoors, with a focus on responding to specific places and the interrelationship of many outdoor places, helped some of the participants to build bridges between local knowing and living in the wider world.

### ***Pursuit-based activities***

It appeared much easier for the participants to tell stories of their personal and professional expeditions, activities, and exploits than describe the intricacies and sensations of being outdoors. Thus, many outdoor meanings were associated with a range of activities, which often held connotations of adventure. Participants stressed however, that despite popular conceptions, they participated in these activities because they enjoyed building attachments with the outdoors, rather than seeking sensations of trepidation or fearfulness. Likewise, they insisted that they did not incorporate "elements of danger or risk and uncertain outcomes" as suggested by Ewert and Garvey (2007, p. 22) into their programmes, but used pursuit-based activities to engage

students in learning and encourage them to astutely observe the environment.

Contradictions exist regarding the centrality of risk within outdoor education as many local and international scholars state that adventure activities have become the dominant focus of outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand (see, Andkjær, 2008; Boyes, 2012; Brown & Fraser, 2009; Hill, 2010; Irwin, 2008a; Zink & Leberman, 2001). Brown and Fraser (2009) suggest that risk overwhelms outdoor education because educators become focused on safety leaving little time to enhance student learning or broaden teaching strategies. However, some educators suggest otherwise. For example, in a survey of outdoor education teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Zink & Boyes, 2006, p. 17) teachers were asked to rank 15 belief statements. "OE can enrich all curriculum areas" and "OE is a fun teaching & learning medium" were ranked first and second and the statement "outdoor education is mainly focused on outdoor pursuits" was ranked 15th. Hill's (2010) research identified that outdoor educators valued environmental ethics of care and appreciation, personal and social development, community involvement and social action, ahead of teaching pursuit-based skills. Yet Hill (2010) in referring to the Zink and Boyes (2006) survey was sceptical of the results which indicated that teaching pursuits was not a high priority. The Zink and Boyes survey did have a low response rate of 14%, so Hill may be correct in remaining sceptical of the results. Similar surveys in Australia however, both by Lugg and Martin (2001) and Polley and Pickett (2003) revealed similar trends. They identified the development of group co-operation, self-esteem, and responsibility as the most important with fitness, survival, and recreation and leisure skills as learning outcomes of least importance. In addition, Gunn's (2006) phenomenological research into outdoor educators' experiences in Victoria, Australia, stated "very few teachers commented on activity

skill development as being a primary outcome for outdoor education" (pp. 31-32).

Findings from this study echo those in the above research, suggesting that when outdoor educators talk about their own programmes, risk and adventurous activities are not central, although several participants held a general perception that risk and adventure remained central to other programmes. One issue to emerge resides in the polarisation of risk into the chance of loss or benefit. This polarisation can however be misleading as objective understandings of risk in outdoor education concentrate on the minimisation of harm, whilst subjective understandings focus on benefits (Zink & Leberman, 2001).

Unpacking the participants' stories reveals further possibilities for this apparent confusion over whether or not adventure and risk are central to outdoor education practices in their own programme and that of others. In 2008, there was an accident at an outdoor centre where six school students and a teacher drowned in a gorge. This resulted in extensive media critique about exposing students to risk as part of outdoor education (Knight, 2010) and the participants were keen to distance themselves from this. Hence, at the time of the interviews several participants were adjusting their programmes to reduce activities that could be associated with risk, suggesting that prior to the accident they had done more. This does not account for comments in the 2006 survey however, indicating that pursuits were not central even before that incident. Another reason for the discrepancy, as Hill (2010) indicates, could be that there is 'abnormal' group of educators who respond to surveys and who are selected to participate in research projects. Certainly most participants in this research were experienced and some had also been involved in other research and surveys about outdoor education. A third explanation of the disjuncture between adventure being perceived as central in everybody else's programme and the lack of it in their own, relates to individuals becoming desensitised to

'normal' levels of adventure. Authors in the adventure genre (e.g. Bonington, 2000; Krakauer, 2007) write about adventure being addictive and demanding ever stronger doses of it. Mark, Jodi, and Chris, all told stories of extreme personal adventures in quite understated ways. Thus, what may be adventurous for others was no longer perceived as adventurous for them. This supports Zink and Leberman's (2001) suggestion that while discourses of risk management have become pervasive, many outdoor educators have not explored their subjective understandings of risk which usually positions them as having a sense of agency whereby they feel in control and are therefore not taking a chance.

If however, risk and adventure are actually not central to outdoor education, then continually referencing their dominance in popular and academic literature may be occurring because it is the accepted norm of what happens in outdoor recreation and the difference between recreation and education has not been well defined. Aotearoa New Zealand is marketed as an adventurous tourist destination and several high profile thrill style activities are offered at key tourism destinations (Adrenalin, 2012). These activities are appealing as they offer a level of excitement which can be up-lifting and highly memorable. Thus, perhaps for the general public, the outdoors and adventure have become synonymous (Kane & Tucker, 2007). While the participants were sceptical about including thrill activities in their programmes exciting images were still used to promote outdoor education; hence, the students who selected outdoor programmes often expected to have adventures. Sharon, Arthur, and Mark also indicated that the students were happy to keep the myth alive, as many enjoyed being identified as adventurous. So even if their experiences were not risky or daring, the stories they chose to tell continued to promote adventurous aspects. In addition, it was easier for educators to tell adventure stories than describe other experiences of living and learning which may have

occurred. During the interviews, many participants started describing their programmes in terms of activities. For example, ten minutes of abseiling over a waterfall, was the first event described out of a five-day camp. Busy lifestyles and the hectic workloads potentially limited opportunities for the participants to move beyond short commentaries of particular events or adventure stories when talking about their outdoor education programmes, promulgating the assumption that risk and adventure activities remain the main purpose of outdoor education.

The physical education achievement standards (which include outdoor education) also require students to perform a physical activity to nationally developed standards and as such are directly linked to achieving credits (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2010). While Sharon and Stephen did not believe skills played a key role in outdoor education, they noted that students were often driven by achieving credits so became focused on the performing the activities. With so much attention placed on assessment and qualifications in general, the assessed elements gained greater status. This resonates in part with Hill's (2010) study where four New Zealand based outdoor education teachers also identified contradictions between the benefits of outdoor learning and the curriculum pressures and assessment practices required in senior secondary schools.

This is not to imply that pursuit-based activities have no value or role in outdoor education, many of the participants had developed their passion for the outdoors through participation in a range of activities. In addition, research from many disciplines supports the health benefits of the outdoors, not only in promoting higher levels of strenuous physical activity, but also enhancing wider well-being (Nielsen & Hansen, 2007). Yet as noted, physical experiences are often downplayed or linked to adventure and challenge, which averts discussion from the health benefits associated with being active outdoors. Despite the level of enjoyment expressed in descriptions of their own personal experiences,

the participants appeared hesitant to acknowledge the exhilaration of movement as a legitimate domain of outdoor education. In defending outdoor education within secondary education, it appeared that physical activity was only acceptable when overlaid with attributes of responsibility, teamwork, or training bodies to be hard working responsible citizens. Yet their personal stories included many instances of revelling in the sensory delights and bodily engagement of mucking about on the beach, or learning to surf, kayak, and climb.

Meanings associated with learning skills, such as spatial awareness, rhythmic knowing, proprioceptive movement, and physiological adaptations to the elements were present within their personal stories, but mostly absent in their accounts of outdoor education. Likewise, many outdoor texts place little emphasis on the learning, which arises from becoming more attuned to how the body moves and interacts with the outdoors (e.g. Gilbertson et al., 2006; Plummer, 2009; Priest & Gass, 2005). Auer (2008, p. 10) for example, acknowledges that "sensory perception makes students aware (literally, sensitive to) of their own biological connections to the environment" but focuses just on the five traditional senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) underplaying the potential of movement. Auer fails to mention the sensory qualities generated from kinaesthetic activities such as walking, balancing, scrambling, climbing, and sliding so evident in many of the participants' stories. Bourdieu (1988) stresses how we often forget that "there are a great many things we understand only with our bodies, at a subconscious level without having the words to say them" (p. 160). A greater attention on movement repositions the body as a source of knowing rather than as a sensory conduit reliant on the mind to fashion it into knowledge (Barbour, 2004). These are important elements of being outdoors, but often overwhelmed by predominantly associating activities with discourses of risk.

In addition, the participants described students developing attachment to places especially when active and engaged. This supports Barbour's (2004) work on embodied knowing which suggests that a focus on movement and activity may help expand awareness of how to relate with the world and how the world impacts on us. Barbour describes how embodied knowing gained through moving our bodies and reflecting on how we move "can contribute significantly to our knowledge of ourselves, of each other and of the world around us" (Barbour, 2004, p. 235). As Stephen noted however, opportunities for young children to relate with the outdoors appear to be declining, resulting in many lacking the confidence and skills to move over rough ground. Learning and moving outdoors is thus becoming more relevant, not only because where we learn influences what we learn, but also because some young people do not have the chance to move their bodies in response to changing terrain. As such, being outdoors and moving through it, allows students to begin to experience how to live in, care for, and adjust to different environments.

There are many arguments for and against the inclusion of activities, skills, and adventure within outdoor education. As Boyes (2012, p. 27) points out however, "in effect, it is not the activity itself that is contested but the underlying logic of the outcomes". He summarises these outcomes as an on-going struggle between "outdoor education as adventure and outdoor education as outdoor learning with environmental education also being a factor" (p. 30). The findings in this study suggest that no simple demarcation exists between pursuit-based activities, learning, and environmental education as there are multiple elements embedded in all outdoor experiences. Outdoor activities were incorporated not as a deliberate search for risk or adventure, but as opportunities for engaging students, increasing environmental knowledge, gaining insights, interrupting the everyday, improving athletic performance, building social networks, developing a love of the

outdoors, and having playful fun. The participants were always juggling a combination of these learning opportunities depending on the focus of the programme and the students' needs. At the same time though, many used the appealing imagery of adventure in their marketing, which could mislead public and student perceptions into believing that outdoor education was a constant platter of exciting and thrilling activities. It was evident the blending of the outdoors with adventure can be difficult for outdoor educators in Aotearoa New Zealand to extricate themselves from. Consequently, many of the potential benefits of kinaesthetic knowing achieved by playing and moving in the outdoors are masked by discourses of risk and adventure.

### ***Living simply***

The participants' stories did not always differentiate between activity, living simply, experience, and experiential education. During their childhood, they had spent much time playing, exploring, and learning in practical ways and now appeared to value similar hands-on experiences as a way to actively engage students. Many of these early experiences of being and living simply outdoors provided significant markers in growing up and were credited with influencing values and attachment to the natural world in later life. This supports the work of Waite (2007) who noted that many practitioners working with young people outdoors hold memories of quality childhood experiences which sustain and support their continued engagement with educating in the outdoors.

The value of experiences was viewed as paramount in outdoor education. Yet, despite the participants describing their own experiences in terms of bodily engagement, living simply, and joyful play, Kolb's (1984) constructivist experiential education model appeared to be so ingrained within outdoor education that it was still accepted as best practice by the participants. This reflects the argument presented by Seaman (2008) that outdoor educators remain attached to a learning

cycle model which assumes that learning is sequential despite critiques and evidence which suggests otherwise.

The pedagogical approach commonly described, involved the students being *in the middle of it, living, and being there* (Arthur). Learning emerged or co-evolved as the student intermingled with the world and others, and did not require students to systematically reflect on and articulate their insights. The holistic nature of learning outdoors involved the students wholly engaging in the moment or event, and as such could not be broken down into definable stages. As Nicci noted *when they're involved learning happens all the time so separating them* (reflection and activity) *is pointless*. Fenwick (2001) highlights a similar critique of experiential learning cycles when she identifies that experience cannot be divided into discreet moments and separated from the person who is experiencing life. The emphasis on being and engaging suggest co-emergent and social ways of learning from experiences, which are somewhat different from the common interpretations of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model used in outdoor education. Yet, while describing alternative styles of teaching and suggesting the learning cycle model did not always work, there remained an overriding assumption that it was 'best practice', dominating other pedagogical styles of learning in, from, and with the outdoors.

A simplified 'plan, do, review' learning cycle model was also described by some of the participants. Being outdoors however, demanded flexibility as group needs and weather changed, which meant most sessions could not be overly prescriptive. There were also contradictions evident between descriptions of experiences requiring organised reviews for learning to occur and those emphasising living simply and being engaged as the central elements of learning. Chris identifies the challenges of integrating cognitive and embodied learning in his reflections on an *article that suggested novel environments detract from learning. I read it and I thought 'how are they defining learning?' It must have been*

*straight information in and exam results out because the learning from trips like that is so much deeper and so much more powerful than the classroom learning. Becoming a hermit and trying to refine and remove all of the distractions, so that you can increase knowledge in one area is just pointless academic stuff.* He clearly identifies with a style of learning, which involves the whole body and learning about life, not just acquiring facts. For him and several other participants, the life skills of living simply, playing, eating, and general corporeal experiences were valued learning opportunities. This is similar to Johnson's (2007) depiction of meaning originating in the body, not language, and how a person's life experiences are part of learning and cannot be separated out.

Just as the outdoors was closely associated with the idea of adventure, learning in the outdoors was infused with learning cycle models of experiential education. The participants' descriptions of learning as doing, being, and participating however, resonate with Fenwick's (2001) alternative schemas of experiential learning including involvement in actual work situations, learning through everyday living, taking social action, and co-emergent knowing. It was outside the scope of this research to explore the intricacies of experiential education beyond how the outdoors generates opportunities for embodied learning through life experiences. Hence, further research on how practitioners use outdoor experiences and embodied knowing to enhance learning and the problems and possibilities which arise as a result, could provide fruitful insights for a range of pedagogical strategies.

### ***Emotional responses***

Many outdoor education programmes advance the idea that experiences outdoors positively contribute to both an individual's self-concept and their ability to contribute to society. The participants all had stories of both themselves and others having positive psychological, social, and emotional experiences in the outdoors which improved feelings of well-

being. They also commented on students talking about how much happier and confident they felt both during and after some of their outdoor experiences. A body of research corroborates some of the claims of personal and social development occurring on outdoor education programmes (see Hattie et al., 1997; Rickinson et al., 2004b). Hattie et al's (1997) meta-analysis however, pointed out that while there was some indication to suggest outdoor programmes successfully enhanced personal and social development there was often little indication of how that happened. Some elements of personal and social development are credited directly to being close to nature (Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007), while other scholars (Priest & Gass, 2005) suggest that such development requires the skills of facilitation and metaphoric transfer in order to enhance learning and increase the likelihood of it being useful in other situations. The participant's stories brought these elements together. They indicated that meaningful outdoor experiences engaged learners and created powerful educational opportunities which could trigger further discussions about self and the way the students wanted to live in the world.

Some scholars (Brookes, 2003a, 2003b; Brown, 2010; Wolfe & Samdahl, 2005; Zink, 2010) believe that the personal and social improvements generated on outdoor programmes are often exaggerated or overemphasised. Brookes (2003a, 2003b) for example, argues that there is a pervasive attribution error in many studies of personal growth, as changes in behaviour are falsely attributed to the person and their disposition, not to changes in the situation. Central to his argument is that learning occurs in response to the world because of social and cultural ways of being. He meticulously builds a case as to why changes noted in one situation are not easily transferable to other situations. In particular, he is critical of short courses that claim to achieve long-term changes in behaviour. Most participants were aware of some of the

critiques around transfer of learning, but continued to hold persistent beliefs in the benefits of being outdoors for personal growth. Such strong beliefs in the benefits of outdoor experiences has led Wolfe and Samdahl (2005) to suggest that critiques of the positive outcomes of challenging outdoor activities are usually resisted because they are embedded as foundational tenets and therefore remain unexamined assumptions. This raises questions as to whether emotionally charged learning in the outdoors has any lasting impact, or indeed relevance, for enhancing self-concepts and addressing broader societal issues.

As noted, many participants held meanings which alluded to the outdoors having intrinsic values which could generate feelings of well-being and a close relationship with nature, as well as be spiritually and culturally enriching. Thus, many of their outdoor education practices emphasised opportunities to address social relationships, engagement in learning, attunement with nature, and connection to the wider world. While some research (Davidson, 2004; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Williams, 2001) suggests that outdoor values are socially constructed and not intrinsic, Bonnett (2012) argues that natural things and places do have intrinsic value as their inherent mystery is an infinite source of mental and spiritual enrichment. In addition, environmental educators Ballantyne and Packer (2009) and Heimlich and Ardoin (2008) note that building positive emotional connections with the environment through multi-dimensional experiences is an important step in enhancing pro-environmental behaviour. Although Liefländer, Fröhlich, Bogner, and Schultz (2013) suggest that a sense of connection is more easily established with children under 11. Recent psychological research supports similar claims, indicating that time spent outdoors has positive effects on well-being, interpersonal relationships, environmental responsibility, and learning (e.g. Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2009; Frumkin, 2001; Kals, Schumacher, & Montada, 1999; Kaplan, 2007; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007; Wells & Evans, 2003). One explanation emphasises

attention restoration, whereby contact with natural outdoor settings reduces mental fatigue and enhances mental rejuvenation (Cole & Hall, 2010). An individual, who is over stimulated for example, may become mentally tired, lack the ability to concentrate, and be irritable, stressed, and accident-prone. Kaplan (2007) though, suggests that being outdoors can be arousing and stimulating and encourage a person to focus on the present and become intensely aware of what is around. The participants' stories supported both explanations with some telling of increased focus and being tuned in to the environment and, at other times, of students being less stressed, either way the lack of external and technological distractions and resultant enhanced engagement appeared important.

There were also personal and professional stories that suggested outdoor experiences enhanced a sense of holistic well-being. Research on positive emotions (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2009) indicates that experiences, which enhance happiness, help to develop resilience, social skills, and physical health. Fredrickson (2006) asserts that positive emotions broaden perspectives whereas negative emotions narrow our focus as problem solving and survival needs dominate. Hence, positive feelings encourage creativity and exploration, extending options for how we live, solve problems, and manage future threats. Many of the participants' stories, which described students, enjoying themselves, engaging in learning, and excitedly exploring different ways of living, corroborated this.

While being outdoors may induce positive feelings and rejuvenation, the issue that Brookes (2003a, 2003b) and Brown (2010) raise about the transferability of these changes in behaviour across situations remains pertinent, as skills and behaviours are not acquired, but emerge as we respond to the world. Billett and Somerville (2004) propose that adherents of situated learning often de-emphasise the attributes which individuals have acquired over their life-history. For example, all the

research participants had spent a lot of time recreating and working outdoors and that way of life was part of their identity. They frequently commented on being *outdoorsy* or an *outdoors person*, which in turn influenced their perspectives of the world. This gradual process of internalising knowing acquired from spending time outdoors is referred to by Haluza-DeLay's (2006b) as *ecological habitus*; a term which builds on Bourdieu's (1990) more well known concept of habitus or the embodiment of social and cultural norms. While different situations draw out specific responses, some responses become more practiced and durable over our life spans. Outdoor experiences may not directly induce change, but it was evident that emotional responses add to life stories, habitus, and meanings of the world.

Challenges to the role of personal and social development in outdoor education are important to consider especially when they infer an ease of transfer from one situation to another. However, critiques based on situated learning do not mean that outdoor educators should discontinue their attempts to help individuals learn about themselves and their role in the world. As the participants described, many outdoor experiences elicited responses which encouraged students to look at the world from different perspectives and discuss options of how they want to live in the world and what they value. While it was difficult to predict responses, the participants observed that in general contact with natural environments was rejuvenating and enhanced a sense of well-being. Whether the values attributed to the outdoors are intrinsic or culturally constructed, they influence how we respond. These responses along with constructing life stories, embodying knowing, and the role of habitus, are all part of internalising learning. This shifts the emphasis from the transfer of behavioural skills from situation to situation, toward helping individuals focus on their responses to different situations, as suggested by Brown (2010). While foolhardy to exaggerate claims of the outdoors being a panacea for all learning and social development needs,

emotional experiences in the outdoors can influence the way we perceive the world, and might subsequently extend options for how we live within the wider world. Thus outdoor experiences which generate emotional responses, potentially have both lasting impact and relevance for enhancing self-concepts and addressing broader societal issues, for as Seligman et al. (2009) state "*more well-being is synergistic with better learning*" (p. 294, italics as in original).

### ***Relationships***

Developing positive relationships with others and the wider world were, according to the participants, enhanced by being outdoors. In particular, the holistic elements and interrelatedness of being outdoors helped build connections between school and everyday life, increased levels of responsibility, and encouraged students to consider their dependence on non-human life and the ecological cycles of the planet. These observations support some recent empirical investigations into human-nature interconnectedness and the degree to which a person's feelings of closeness to nature also predicts their pro-environmental values and behaviour (Davis, Green, & Reed, 2009; Heimlich & Ardoin, 2008; Mayer et al., 2009; Perkins, 2010; Schultz et al., 2005; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007). Although some research (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) suggests the gap between values and action is much more complex because of the overarching infrastructure, promotion of a consumerist society, and lack of positive external incentives.

Those who self-identified as Māori also spoke of a deep connection with the land and a seamless transition between the physical world and the spiritual world, in ways Pākehā participants seemed to struggle with. Zapf (2005, p. 634) notes, "perspectives from traditional knowledge could be a key to expanding our understanding of the person/environment relationship, the profound connections between ourselves and the world around us", especially the natural

environment's connection to spirituality. Māori ways of knowing emphasise a holism of spirit, body, and land and avoid Western tendencies to fragment and rationalise experience. While most Pākehā participants expressed a deep love for the outdoors, they spoke of the outdoors as separate from them, which is quite different from the spiritual connection that underpins a Māori worldview.

The participants observed students developing a relationship of care, concern, and responsibility for the outdoors as they spent time there. This is similar to the findings of Martin's (2005) research which identified tertiary students building relationships of care as they spent more time outdoors. To draw out the journey of building relationships, he developed a framework identifying different stages of 'kinship' with nature including alienation, travelling through nature, caring, and then integration. Martin's model is however somewhat linear, whereby becoming a part of nature is viewed as morally superior, because interdependence with the environment is assumed to demonstrate greater bio-centric and eco-centric concern (Dunning, 2002; Schultz, 2001; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007). The participants however, were often more concerned with the pragmatics of caring and helping students identify their role in nature. Their stance was anthropocentric as it focused on encouraging students to pay attention to the way they lived and the consequences of their actions from the mind-set of being human. Rather than try to change overarching values and belief systems by encouraging eco-centric thinking, many participants saw environmental change happening in small practical and comprehensible ways. These small steps were valued as they helped students start on a journey toward more social and environmental awareness, without overloading them with the responsibility of tackling the world's problems or making complex moral choices relating to eco-centric and bio-centric values.

Whilst developing a positive relationship with the outdoors often enhanced caring attitudes toward it, the relationship between outdoor education and environmental education remained problematic. For several participants they were inseparable, especially when addressing issues of appreciating and caring for the natural environment. Yet for Dave, outdoor education had so completely failed to engage with major socio-environmental issues that it was seen as yet another form of education which exacerbates environmental degradation. Dave, and to a lesser extent Nicci, and Stephen, were critical of using any activities which supported consumerism or competition. They believed a key goal of environmental education was to challenge capitalist attitudes, which promote individualism, social equity, constant growth, and development at the expense of long-term resource usage. These are similar to difficulties identified by Martin (2005) and Hill (2012b), who noted that creating a sense of belonging and willingness to engage in sustainable behaviour was limited when encouraging adventurous activities with elements of competition or overcoming adversity. This highlights one of the key perceived divisions between outdoor education and environmental education.

From a historical perspective there is a body of evidence which suggests a mix of environmental education and outdoor pursuits is standard practice when educating outdoors (see Lynch, 2006). Arthur, Pete, and Chris who had been working in the sector for a long time assumed a healthy overlap. Yet questions raised about the adequacy of environmental learning in the outdoors suggest there are different understandings about what makes up outdoor education. This has resulted in several authors (Brookes, 2006; Brown, 2009; Nicol, 2003; Stewart, 2008) separating outdoor education into 'outdoor adventure education' and 'outdoor environmental education'. While this separation highlights different approaches, compartmentalising adventure and the environment seems contrary to notions of holistic education. As

described in chapter 6, most participants blended many aspects of environmental education, health and well-being, and challenge-based outdoor pursuits, rather than separate them out. This blending appeared to work for much of the time, although care is required, for while the term outdoor education unites environmental education and adventure education, it can do so somewhat uncritically, allowing one idea to dominate the other.

Another factor, which contributes to these polarised views, is that similar to outdoor education there is no agreed form of environmental education. Environmental education encompasses experiencing the outdoors, nature study, environmental care, conservation education, outdoor activities, education for sustainability (EfS), and/or a strong social and political agenda for change. Some of these entail a radical transformation of the way we live and educate. Over the last decade, in response to climate change, resource overuse, and social inequality, there have been increasing calls for the incorporation of socio-ecological, sustainable, and place-responsive approaches when learning outdoors (Hill, 2011; Irwin, 2010; Irwin et al., 2012; Martin, 2005; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). These calls to action are compelling and seek to dramatically change some of the traditional practices embraced by many outdoor educators. They do so however, from a position which does not always situate the outdoors at the centre of pedagogic practices. EfS for example, encompasses global, social, economic, and political environments and addresses issues of resource use, health care, equity, and justice. These are ethically compelling issues, but –are they what outdoor education is best suited for? Hill (2012b) and Irwin (2010) are adamant the answer is 'yes' we have no choice. From a place-responsive perspective, Wattchow and Brown (2011) are more modest suggesting there are no predetermined answers and outdoor educators need to respond to social and environmental challenges locally.

Most participants supported taking a more modest stance as the outdoors offers many opportunities to integrate respectful ways of living on the world, but has the bonus of generating feelings of positive well-being through physical activity away from the stresses of everyday life. Several participants indicated that while it was important for students to be aware of a range of environmental viewpoints, they first needed to develop a relationship with the environment before they could develop their own set of environmental beliefs and values. To focus on political, social, and global issues rather than engaged positive experiences would undoubtedly change the focus of outdoor education but, as Chris pointed out, *students need to experience the magic of the outdoors before they want to take action to protect it.*

Some of the tensions between outdoor education and sustainability discourses escalate when framing environmental issues as either-or debates; you are either on the side of the environment or against it. Thus, it might appear that when outdoor education does not challenge the status quo of capitalism or fully engage with social issues, it is assumed to support them. However, rightly or wrongly, many participants did not focus on trying to solve environmental issues, but on engaging students in positive outdoor experiences which would hopefully encourage them to form a relationship with, and increase understanding about, the world they depend on. Like Fredrickson (2006) and Harré (2011) they believed that uplifting experiences encourage people to expand their sense of what is possible and increase the confidence to seek out new ideas. Even if the full significance of the sustainability discourse is not realised, integrating it with positive outdoor experiences helps to mobilise interest. For as several participants noted, their own attitudes towards the environment had changed over the years, and as they developed a strong attachment to the outdoors their desire to take action increased. Thus, while outdoor experiences may not directly advance pro-environmental behavioural

changes, they can offer rich opportunities for building an appreciation of human-nature relationships. More focused research in this important area of how to develop a stronger environmental ethic is required, but this research indicates that providing opportunities for students to build relationships and encouraging pragmatic actions are important steps toward cultivating an attitude of care and responsibility.

### **Integrating the outdoors into outdoor education**

Perceptions of the outdoors reveal its open-ended, interrelated, dynamic, and holistic characteristics, rather than a simplified one dimensionality, which some descriptions of outdoor education assume. In *Outdoor Adventure and Social Theory* (Pike & Beames, 2013) for example, the editors suggest that addressing the meaning of 'outdoor' is easy, as it refers to open air and is the opposite of indoor. Pike and Beames focus much more on the contested nature of the term adventure, but in doing so miss the opportunity to address the multiplicity and plurality of relationships which form with the outdoors.

The participants described a relational approach to their work, whereby they integrated learning, people, active experiences, and the physical landscape. When evaluating outdoor education the participants were most critical of programmes and understandings that tended to emphasise singular aspects such as adventurous pursuits, experiential learning activities, physical challenges, assessments, or environmental sustainability. These aspects were all acknowledged as key components of outdoor education, but required weaving together to complement one another. The participants perceived these elements to be both permeable and dynamic, gaining added significance when brought together. This is significantly different from the stance taken by Hill (2012a) for example, who advocates for radical changes in the philosophy and practices of outdoor education in order to align with the principles and purposes of sustainability education. He suggests that travel, adventure, and inspirational natural landscapes are all potentially

incompatible when critically addressing sustainability and therefore distract, rather than enhance, messages of sustainable living. The findings in this study indicate that it is the integrated and holistic body of outdoor education practices which engages students, develops their sense of well-being, and draws them along on a journey of thinking and living sustainably. This recognises that engaging students in the importance of living responsibly on the planet is complex and requires a multi-faceted approach (Heimlich & Ardoin, 2008). Foregrounding the interconnectedness of the outdoors focuses attention on the way each element is balanced and supported by the others to create a body of outdoor education practice which is greater than the sum of its parts. Hence, radically changing outdoor education by limiting the range of experiences that can be included may in fact be detrimental to the promotion of sustainable attitudes.

Away from the more bounded and structured spaces of school, students worked and learnt in an environment which itself demonstrated the interconnectivity of living systems. This connection appeared more difficult for the participants and their students to sense when bombarded with electronic messages, work schedules, concrete infrastructure, and marketing images advertising a vast array of consumer goods. In discussing connection, some participants used the term 'holistic' to stress a style of outdoor education which linked physical, academic, emotional, practical, spiritual, and social opportunities. At other times, holistic referred to a greater appreciation of the role humans play within the ecosystem rather than perceiving a separation. Both these holistic meanings credited the outdoors with having attributes, which contributed to developing the whole person and grounding the person within the environment. This builds on the ideas of Durie's (2001) *Te Whare Tapa Wha* model, which emphasises balance between mental, spiritual, family, and physical well-being. Furthermore, Durie empathetically reinstates the connection Māori, and other people,

have to the wider environment as the cornerstone of holistic wellbeing. For as Durie (1999) identifies, well-being is hampered when the environment is polluted by,

*... contaminated water supplies, or smog which blocks out the sun's rays, or a night sky distorted by neon lighting, or earth which is hidden by concrete slabs, or the jangle of steel which obliterates the sound of birds. Something is lost when the spiritual connection between people and the environment is felt second hand through a television screen or via a computer simulation. (1999, p. 3)*

This quote captures what many of the participants raised in their stories of actually being outdoors for learning and the sense of well-being it generated.

Paradoxically, whilst emphasising integration, being outdoors was also valued as a point of difference from the city or classroom. These outdoor opportunities provided alternative perspectives on life and learning and gained significance because they added balance to the spectrum of educational opportunities. Thus, many outdoor education and classroom experiences complement each other rather than compete or detract. Not all participants agreed with this, believing, for example, that separating the outdoors from where most people lived exacerbated the looming environmental crisis. Pragmatically though, many participants thought that as we live in a mobile world students needed to experience variety in order to learn how to respond to different situations. This supports the work of some scholars (e.g. Carter, 2009; Curthoys & Cuthbertson, 2002; Cuthbertson et al., 1997; Potter & Henderson, 2004) who believe journeying between and connecting to multiple outdoor places promotes care and connection to a larger whole. In addition, whether close to home or further afield many participants spoke of students becoming more aware of treading lightly on the earth when immersed in the daily rhythms of living simply in the outdoors. They felt

this awareness of the difference between city life and the simple life was more striking because being outdoors away from technology was something many students were becoming less accustomed to.

Experiencing a range of outdoor locations also provided students with opportunities to learn in different ways. Ingold (2010) highlights how what we can know is influenced by where we are, when he states that when the ground is coated in asphalt or concrete it becomes "level, homogenous, pre-existent and inert" (p. 120) and as such, we are inclined to think we live on the world rather than in the world. Many outdoor environments on the other hand teem with life and activate the senses. In moving through and physically engaging with the environment, the body becomes an important way of knowing and learning about the environment (Atherton, 2007; Barbour, 2004). Many students though, have become accustomed to believing education occurs indoors rather than learning through living and breathing in the world. Hence, while varied outdoor locations create opportunities to integrate learning with life, some students, managers, and teachers do not always relate outdoor experiences to education, especially when they appear to be fun.

There were also examples of participants using fun experiences and pragmatic activities to humanise environmental issues. In crossing a river, gathering seafood, setting stoat traps, or picking up litter students could begin to understand the small steps and personal actions that were required to make sustainable changes. Outdoor educators took students camping, climbing, and surfing not to compete with the environment, but to enjoy and appreciate it. In doing so, they built on feelings of well-being to encourage students to think about how they could live responsibly in the world. These practices correlate with the ideas presented in positive psychology, which has identified connections between positive well-being and an outward looking focus on solving problems (Fredrickson, 2006; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Harré, 2011;

Seligman et al., 2009). As noted, the participants themselves were positive about their own outdoor experiences and while they were aware not all students enjoyed being outdoors, they believed for the many who did a sense of well-being was generated.

Despite valuing various possibilities for different styles of learning outdoors, and articulating integrated practices, many participants also resisted change to their outdoor education practices. This is a concern of some scholars (e.g. Hill, 2012a; Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Zink & Burrows, 2008) who believe that many claims made by enthusiastic outdoor educators are over exaggerated and hence need to be challenged and changed. However, a level of resistance is not surprising as adventure, personal development, and experiential traditions were deeply engrained in many of the participants' understandings of outdoor education and had provided them with a rationale for going outdoors over many years. These established traditions and beliefs also contributed to the way participants identified with and developed their sense of connection to the outdoors. While understanding how people build an identity as an outdoors person requires further research, this study indicates that holding such an outdoor identity can help develop values of care and concern for the natural environment. Strong identification however, also means that change to certain practices and dominant rationales will likely be resisted.

## Summary

No one element of outdoor education highlighted in this study was supremely important; indeed overemphasising one component appeared to upset the delicate balance of trying to help students understand the roles and responsibilities for living well in the world. Instead, meanings, activities, and ideas require careful juggling. Blending ideas together does not devalue the importance of variety and difference, but stresses the importance of offering multiple opportunities for students in order that relevant, spontaneous, and on-

going learning can occur. One example that emerged was the way physical activity often enhanced critical dialogue amongst students and educators. In addition, active engagement provided learning opportunities beyond dominant rational tendencies and encouraged embodied knowing. In doing so, the outdoors can provide symbolic, holistic, and spatial opportunities, which offer a range of experiences so as to afford the conceptual freedom to allow new ideas to flourish.

The participants were positive about the advantages of educating outdoors and felt their own programmes were successful in promoting responsibility and expanding the ideas of their students. This positivity meant at times that they believed there was no need for change. Hence, even when there were contradictions between espoused theory and their practice they were so positive that they did not always observe the paradoxes. For example, certain outdoor education discourses particularly adventure, assessment, personal development, and experiential learning cycles had become so well established that it was difficult for the participants to move beyond them, despite describing their practice in alternative ways. This resistance suggested that change in outdoor education is more likely to occur by building on the positive than by replacing existing practices with completely new ones, especially those which may be inconsistent with their own experiences, meanings, and values. A holistic focus, as well as expanding and integrating multiple meanings of the outdoors, still requires programmes to include pursuit skills, positive experiences, personal development opportunities, and learning about the land. However, experiences of appreciating quiet time, journeying to and from outdoor locations, becoming aware of the role of the body in meaning making, and just being outdoors, also need to be emphasised. These elements are not new, they were present in the participant's stories as critical parts of their practice, but often not explicitly stated.

In particular, this research has highlighted the web-like nature of outdoor education, whereby the interconnectedness of many elements of living, working, and recreating outdoors combine together to create a powerful learning environment. Webs can change in size and structure depending on the environment, but their strength lies in weaving individual strands together. In separating strands and polarising ideas some of their utility is lost, especially when the end result is to engage students in learning about themselves and their relationship with the world.

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## Chapter 8 – Closing the door

More than 40 years ago as a physical education teacher, I sensed the potential of the outdoors to engage students. Since then, I have had an on-going passion for taking groups outdoors to enhance learning and engender a love of being outdoors. In a more formal sense, this study began with an open-ended goal of exploring – what meanings do outdoor educators construct about the outdoors, and how do those meanings influence the understandings and practices of outdoor educators? Outdoor educators were at the heart of the research; it was their stories, their experiences, and their practices, which both constructed and revealed meaning. Using a narrative approach offered an alternative insight into not only the complexity of outdoor meanings, but also emphasised the way learning in the outdoors afforded the freedom to allow new ideas to flourish.

Stories proved to be a rich resource (Smith & Sparkes, 2009) for drawing out the participants' experiences and meanings of the outdoors. It was, however, important to respect that each story is a significant life event, not just data to be analysed or categorised. This re-enforces the need to attend to the particularities of what is said and listen with an open mind. Initially, I thought three interviews would allow sufficient time to ask challenging and critical questions, but found that an empathetic and appreciative approach built trust and drew out a depth of responses, which were heartfelt as well as illuminating. Such an approach remained challenging, as it still required delving into the many stories about what is believed to be relevant and effective for education.

Re-telling these stories, as a researcher, is not only about applauding practise, but intended to inspire outdoor educators, fellow researchers, politicians, and others in positions of responsibility, to think about their practices and look at ways of improving them (Lyons, 2007). In accordance with interpretive narrative research, I chose to represent the

findings through a variety of genre and, in so doing, brought what Cahnmann (2003) describes as a 'freshness' to the way beliefs and experiences of outdoors educators are represented. In essence, I have produced a text (in Chapters 5 and 6) that retains the richness and complexity of what the participants were saying or, as Denzin (1997) explained, a version of the real in a way that still "allows readers to imaginatively feel their way into that being described" (p. 12). The use of vignettes and poetic representations is an example of abandoning assumptions of a singularly coherent meaning to better capture understandings of the outdoors and teaching practices. In particular, the vignettes drew out individual perspectives and variations that can be easily missed when the phenomenon under investigation is perceived as permanent and coherent. Despite sharing some wonderful stories, many participants still felt they failed to fully articulate the learning potential of the outdoors, hesitantly stating—*you just have to be there to understand*. The use of poetic representation and the blending of comments from many participants created snapshots of this learning potential, whilst highlighting the need for education to cater for students at very different stages of readiness to learn.

The remainder of this chapter reflects on some of the thoughts and aspirations of the participants and pragmatics of their practice to indicate future directions for incorporating the outdoors into education in general, but more specifically into outdoor education.

### Early experiences

The participants' childhood stories described living with nature as just a normal part of everyday life. The outdoors was not pristine and special, the search for a utopian state of harmony, or a battle against the elements, it was about having fun, playing, and living simply. Stories from their teenage years however, subtly changed to include portrayals of physical activity, adventure, and a different way of life. Being outdoors was no longer normal but something special. This lends support to the

work of Liefländer, Fröhlich, Bogner, and Schultz (2013) who contend that children start to lose their attachment to nature between the ages of 10 and 11 as they gain independence. They do contend however, that feelings of connectedness can be strengthened with continued exposure to positive outdoor experiences. In addition, studies in Scandinavia (Andkjær, 2008; Beery, 2013; Sandell & Öhman, 2010), suggest that students from schools which programmed regular time in the outdoors, spoke of feeling part of nature, and not separated from it. Likewise, the participants suggested that time spent playing outdoors and living simply contributed to their development of pro-environmental attitudes. The corollary is that with children spending less time outdoors a sense of connection and care for the environment may never form.

While appreciating that our connection to nature should be normal, the gap between humans and the non-human world appears to be widening (Ingold, 2000, 2010). The participants aspired to bridge that gap through their practice, not only because feelings of connection provide students with a sense of belonging to the wider world, but also because some environmental problems have been linked to humans' disconnection from nature (Jordan, 2009; Takano et al., 2009). Changing social trends is not easy, but the participants were aware that part of their work involved helping students gain sufficient skills and confidence to go outdoors as just a normal part of everyday life. However, as some students will always have difficulties accessing the outdoors, using the outdoors as a regular part of schooling is also important.

While the amount of time spent outdoors varies considerably from school to school, the opportunity for students to partake in outdoor camps is no longer a regular or normal part of school life. This raises questions about how many of the next generation of Aotearoa New Zealand children will learn about their connection to, and reliance on, a healthy environment. Furthermore, what sort of training and qualifications will be required so both primary and secondary teachers

can confidently and regularly take students outdoors for safe quality experiences and do so in a way which helps to bridge the gap between humans and the non-human world.

### Terms and tensions

The narratives presented in this research encapsulate a wide variety of outdoor education practices, but there remained concerns that many programmes were often too skills or adventure based. This supports other researchers (e.g. Boyes, 2012; Brookes, 2006; Hill, 2011; Irwin, 2010) who contend that adventure pursuits dominate outdoor education discourse, which diverts attention from environmental issues, principles of sustainability, and eco-justice. This has resulted in an attempt to shift the emphasis away from pursuits by using alternative labels such as education for sustainability, place-responsive education, critical outdoor education, and outdoor environmental education. Some of these terms however, are equally contested, as there is tension between advocates of environmental education who value environmental protection, and sustainability educators who wish to address social justice (Reid & Scott, 2006). Promoting pro-environmental behaviour is complex, but in drawing out stories of practice, many positive and pragmatic steps to address issues of sustainability and responsible action were identified. Rather than promote radical changes, the findings indicate that introducing small but practical steps into programmes can help students modify their behaviour and actions towards to the environment. Participants strongly suggested this would be more successful than promoting radical changes, a process argued for by other researchers (Hill, 2011; Irwin, 2010).

With the notion of change in mind, this research highlighted some key connections between sustainability or socio ecological perspectives and adventure activities. The findings echo the compelling call for outdoor education to address sustainability (e.g. Hill, 2012b; Irwin, 2010; Lugg, 2007). There were however, some subtle differences regarding the

relevance of engaging students in challenging physical activities. Developing a connection is a necessary stage in learning to care about the environment, with some scholars (e.g. Ballantyne & Packer, 2009; Bonnett, 2006; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007) suggesting that sustainable behaviours are enhanced by extended periods in natural environments. In this research, the participants' voices were central to the meanings made and this accentuated the way attachment built up over time, often through participating in pursuit style activities which drew them back to certain locations time and time again. In contrast to some researchers (e.g. Boyes, 2012; Irwin, 2008b; Loynes, 2002; Wattchow & Brown, 2011), who suggest that adventure pursuits cause a rift between people and the environment, this study indicates that on-going engagement in outdoor activities may be an important part of developing connectedness and pro-environmental behaviour. The open agenda of allowing the participants to tell their own stories encouraged them to share some of their extreme adventures, as well as opportunities to reflect on the role of the outdoors. In doing so, many spoke of the deep respect they felt when physically immersed in an activity and the steps they took to act responsibly. This suggests that issues of sustainability can be addressed by offering multi-dimensional experiences which encourage students to positively engage with the outdoors in different ways. For it is the positive experiences of living well and engaging in active outdoor lifestyles that can help motivate students to care for the environment.

Integrating many ideas, activities, and values into outdoor education means no one standardised format is prescribed, allowing opportunities to deliver programmes which can best respond to local needs. The findings also drew attention to how varied meanings of the outdoors and outdoor education encourage dynamic practices, and these can respond to the changing needs of society. With that in mind, it would seem outdoor education remains an appropriate and understood term,

especially when more emphasis is placed on its holistic character of merging many educational ideas, theories, and environmental practices.

### Outdoor education as a part of education

One purpose of this study has been to pay closer attention to where learning and education occur for, as Ingold (2010) contends, where we learn and how we respond to our environment influences what learning might occur. In doing so, as advocated by the participants in this study, effective programmes need to adopt multiple practices and holistic modes of learning, which allow students to engage with the wider environment. While the potential for creative teaching and engaged learning exist in the outdoors, curricula pressures along with administrative school structures, societal pressures, and neo-liberal agendas can place limitations and restrictions on holistic ways of delivering outdoor education, especially within secondary schools.

*The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) emphasises the need to prepare students for the future, but success in many secondary schools is primarily determined through objectified measurable outcomes (Campbell-Price, 2012). Although outcomes-based assessment is suitable for acquisitional modes of learning (Codd, 2005), the serendipitous and holistic style of outdoor education, as practised by many participants, does not always resonate with current educational orthodoxies. As the findings illustrate, this can result in outdoor educators feeling caught between a system which promotes lifting achievement by assessing pre-determined outcomes, and *The New Zealand Curriculum* which endorses the value of engaging students in learning that directly relates to them.

Many teachers struggle to overcome the public perception that teaching is a simple process of presenting information to willing learners (Labaree, 2005). This of course is not the case; all learning is complex, but particularly student-focused holistic learning, which often occurs in non-

linear and seemingly random leaps and bounds. The participants who described working outdoors as *wonderfully unpredictable* endorsed this. There was always uncertainty as to which experiences would capture a student's imagination because they are all at a different stage of readiness. This endorses the thoughts of Heimlich and Ardoin (2008), who advocate moving beyond uni-dimensional perspectives of teaching in order to capture the interest of all students. While Heimlich and Ardoin focused on changes in pro-environmental behaviour, their emphasis on unpredictability, and the need to integrate many experiences, activities, and styles of delivery, is similar to the stories of *eureka and aha moments* described by the outdoor educators in this research.

It is evident that the current structure of an outcomes-based agenda in secondary schools can leave many of the spontaneous outdoor education practices that frequently occur undervalued. The participants were adamant these 'not always planned for' learning situations play a valuable role in engaging students, and developing problem solving skills and flexible attitudes. Coupled with a planned programme, these frequently occurring situations highlight how outdoor education has much to offer, especially to a curriculum which values innovation, curiosity, diversity, respect, and ecological sustainability (Ministry of Education, 2007). There are of course dangers with this position, because if outdoor education continues to align itself with open-ended agendas, future evaluations and audits are likely to fare poorly when compared against the measurable outputs of other curriculum subjects.

### Positive outdoor experiences

The participants viewed outdoor education as a way of advancing social change. Each approached that lofty goal in a different way—some were modest, others pragmatic, and one believed in the need for radical action. They all however, differentiated thrill style activities from rich learning experiences where students could accept responsibility for their

actions. These rich experiences, they believed, held the potential to encourage students to both enjoy life and appreciate their relationship with the world.

Many outdoor experiences were characterised by intense emotional responses which were both reinvigorating and relaxing. These feelings of well-being are similar to the ones identified in positive psychology research (e.g. Fredrickson, 2006; Seligman et al., 2009) and in a body of empirical research on the value of spending time in nature (e.g. Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007; SPARC, 2008; Wells & Evans, 2003). It remains unclear however, whether positive responses generated by being outdoors are innate, socially constructed, developed through lived experiences, or co-emerge with the environment. The participants for example, identified that some students developed positive feelings by just being outdoors, others appeared to be uplifted by a spiritual connection, whilst many arrived with the prior expectation about the outdoors being adventurous and fun.

Social expectations of what the outdoors means do influence responses. As identified, this can be problematic especially when responses are over generalised, but when these expectations generate a positive response, there are some advantages. Most participants were happy to continue to endorse the outdoors capabilities of generating well-being, as personal good health and happiness appeared to engender respect and care for the environment. This supports Harré (2011), who suggests that feelings of well-being enhance a willingness to engage in a journey toward becoming more pro-environmentally sustainable. The issue of changing behaviour to live more sustainably is, of course, much more complex than providing positive outdoor experiences but, as Harré (2011) notes, it is important to start people on the journey of social and environmental consciousness. All participants felt some responsibility for initiating this journey for their students. Given the concerns about climate change, resource use, and social inequality, further research on the extent to

which positive experiences potentially influence people to change their lifestyles is recommended.

### Outdoor education's web of practices

The gestalt position of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts underpinned many of the participants' understandings of the outdoors and outdoor education. Many of the successful teaching strategies for example, involved bringing together ideas and activities into a holistic web of practices. Critical thinking, emotional responses, personal development, physical activity, and fun experiences were frequently interlinked to create engaging sessions. In addition, the participants drew attention to the way people learn with their bodies, especially when moving in the outdoors. This strongly suggests that emotional engagement, sensory experiences, embodied knowing, and physical activity, as well as the ability to communicate ideas in rational and logical ways, need to be brought together for a well-rounded education system.

The value of embodied knowing has been raised by a few outdoor education scholars (e.g. Brown, 2009; Mullins, 2009; Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Wattchow & Brown, 2011) but, in general, it is an understated component of many programmes. Wattchow and Brown (2011) and Payne and Wattchow (2008) expand awareness of embodiment by offering theoretical explanations, practical examples, and imaginative activities. In particular, they discuss the value of slowing down, attending to sensory engagement, and the specifics of place. Similarly, many of the participants spoke of learning *by being there and slowing down*, but also tended to emphasise *active engagement and robust exercise*. Cultivating embodied knowledge happens incrementally, but appeared to be enhanced when excitement and challenge preceded quieter moments. This accentuates the way programmes are strengthened by incorporating a range of activities and building on the dialectical relationship between them.

The interconnectedness of the outdoors also drew attention to travelling and the way bonds can be built with many places without predicating those bonds on ownership, home, or rootedness. This focus on travelling between many places resonates with the work of Cuthbertson et al. (1997) and Potter and Henderson (2004) who suggest that we need to build a storied appreciation of places beyond those of home, as developing positive relationships between places is a more contemporary response to current mobile lifestyles. Building congruent links draws on broad outdoor meanings as well as the specifics of the place. This can generalise both experiences and locations, which as Wattchow and Brown (2011) point out, may lead to some meanings become romanticised and idealised. While this can be problematic, many meanings of the outdoors, as identified in the findings, were not fixed, but constantly being formed and re-formed. They change as people mature, switch jobs, or are rocked by earthquakes, floods, and droughts. Thus, rather than one outdoors, many different outdoors were confronted on a daily basis. Recognising that there are many outdoors can help avoid some of the entrenched and idealised perspectives that potentially limit outdoor education discourses and experiences.

The many meanings of the outdoors does not suggest that everything has the same value or requires the same attention, only that looking for points of connection offers more potential for learning than fragmenting and polarising perspectives. Currently, outdoor educators intuitively juggle many meanings, components, and activities, as they respond to the environment and needs of the students. Maintaining a degree of flexibility bodes well for dealing with students who are at different stages of readiness to learn, but requires educators to acquire a set of attributes and skills which are not always easy to quantify.

### Training Pathways

Many practitioners, according to Zink and Boyes (2006), are enthusiastic teachers who learn about educating in the outdoors on the job. When

training was sought, it usually involved gaining activity-based skills and qualifications, such as those run by the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) and Skills Active (Industry Training Organisation for recreation, sport, and fitness). In part, this is because outdoor programmes are required to meet safety standards, such as those identified by the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) Adventure Activities Regulations, or good practice safety audits such as OutdoorsMark (Outdoors New Zealand, 2012). To comply requires demonstrating competence and often an appropriate outdoor industry qualification is the easiest way to achieve that, but schools are currently exempt from the Adventure Activities Regulations. Nonetheless many Boards of Trustees prefer their teaching staff to hold relevant industry qualifications.

Other training pathways include the outdoor recreation certificates and diplomas run by polytechnics. Currently, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is reviewing all outdoor qualifications from level 1 to level 6, which includes certificates and diplomas, through the Tertiary Review of Qualifications (TRoQ) process, in order to establish a unified framework of qualifications. To a certain extent, this is because competition amongst organisations delivering qualifications has led to duplication, confusion, and fragmentation across the sector (Shaw, Zink, & Lynch, 2012). The impact of the TRoQ review on training pathways for outdoor educators is currently unknown as the qualifications are still in draft form. However, the level and scope of the proposed qualifications, while not prescriptive, suggest they focus predominantly on safely delivering a range of pursuit activities.

The skills and knowledge required for delivering holistic outdoor education programmes are very broad, but many outdoor qualifications focus primarily on technical and safety skills. Alternative training pathways are available, Skills Active for example, have recently developed an on-line certificate for teachers working in EOTC. In

addition, a number of tertiary institutions offer outdoor education streams at the diploma and degree level. For example, Christchurch Polytechnic (CPIT) offers an outdoor education degree programme with a strong sustainability focus and the University of Waikato offers several outdoor education related papers which are available to students irrespective of their degree. Canterbury University also offer teacher training in outdoor education and many other teacher-training programmes integrate EOTC and ways of using the outdoors to engage learners. These various offerings often combine environmental, sociological, managerial, and educational strands, alongside the skills recommended by the industry for instructing groups in the outdoors. In addition, many participants spoke of learning directly from passionate and enthusiastic educators. To that end, introducing a mentoring scheme could be valuable for maintaining a focus on the holistic structure of outdoor education. This could be a valuable initiative to explore, not only secondary schools, but also Skills Active and other organisations offering industry qualifications.

The participants in this study held a range of qualifications, including industry awards, diplomas, and degrees in a variety subjects. This combination of qualifications, while somewhat fragmented, is valuable because many outdoor education programmes are multi-dimensional and require educators who are well-rounded and able to address quite complex issues, such as sustainability, place-responsiveness, and human-nature relationships (Martin & McCullagh, 2011). Yet despite outdoor educators having a range of backgrounds, there was a feeling amongst the participants that an industry award held more weight when applying for jobs than did their degrees and diplomas. These industry awards tend to focus more on technical competence, something that is more easily measured than some other forms of knowledge and thus easier to implement and assess (Zink, 2003). Hence, in a social and political climate driven by concerns for health and safety and agendas of neo-

liberalism, industry qualifications are an efficient way to meet the requirements of audits and accountability. One of the concerns however, is this can skew the message of what outdoor education entails, and discourage teachers from other curriculum areas becoming involved in educating outdoors.

Concerns about what occurs under the rubric of outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand (and possibly elsewhere) becoming too narrow is not new. Dumble (2003) for example, contended that the tendency to simplify and objectify knowledge into neat packages would undermine the very hallmark of outdoor education. Yet the participants in this study concurred with Cosgriff, Thevenard, & Campbell-Price (2012b) that there are many holistic programmes in New Zealand that combine a range of curricula opportunities to educate holistically in the outdoors. Thus, although the concerns raised by Dumble are worthy of attention, perhaps some have not yet eventuated because the passion of outdoor educators to protect the holistic and student-centred ethos that frames their profession still prevails amongst those who work in this area.

Training outdoor educators requires balancing vocational awards, health and safety concerns, personal experience, educational theory and practice, and broad holistic knowledge. This calls for valuing experience as well as qualifications, educational skills as well as technical skills, and innovation as well as efficiency. While some re-structuring of current qualifications may be necessary to remove duplication, it is also important to retain diverse training pathways in order to cater for the complex and multi-dimensional nature of educating outdoors. Whether this is possible might depend on the outcomes from the Tertiary Review of Qualifications and the way they are then enacted by tertiary institutions.

## A final comment

The notion of the outdoors being more than the sum of its tangible parts is not new, but was a compelling element of the findings in this study. This incorporates relationships and a sense of belonging to an interconnected world, something that underpinned the distinct nature of outdoor education practices. A focus on engaging with different environments is vital, because as Suzuki (2003) argued, only when humans make the effort to understand the world around them do they learn to become part of it.

The research approach in this thesis draws on the voices of practitioners currently working in the field, but I appreciate caution is required as there can be a tendency when relying on narratives to find the stories we go looking for. While the research participants commented on the status of outdoor education in schools and were concerned about the costs and potential exclusiveness of some outdoor education programmes, they were all extremely positive about taking students outdoors for education. They were adamant that being outdoors engendered a sense of well-being and helped those in their charge feel more connected with the natural environment. Consequently, they were diligent about designing and refining sessions and activities which promoted and reinforced those values. The corollary of this however, is that education in the outdoors could be used or abused for other aims or values, such as survival of the fittest, ethnic domination, resource exploitation, or as Chris noted *a beginners course to bulldozing*.

The capacity to overlay the outdoors with personal values requires ongoing vigilance. There are neither absolute truths nor a singular right way to educate, so deciding what could and should be taught outdoors is something to be continually and openly discussed. It is not something that should be left to chance. Consequently, there is a need to keep exploring the multiplicity of nuanced meanings in order to unpack some of the values imposed on the outdoors. Thus, rather than allowing the

outdoors as a place for learning to remain in the background and subsumed by discourses of adventure, personal development, and experiential learning, more focus and attention could, and should be, given to the many ways the outdoors supports learning.

On one level, teasing the outdoors into locations, pursuit-based activities, living simply, emotional responses, and relationships appears atheoretical to holistic thinking. It did however, build up a picture of the integrated nature of outdoor education, highlight the complexity of the outdoors, reveal many outdoors, and shed light on the way the outdoors embodies tensions central to the paradoxical ways we live and learn. The tensions are ontological, particularly beliefs which dwell on the culture-nature divide; epistemological, around lived bodily experiences and the prominence of rational thinking; and axiological when we address the value of the wider world and non-human life. In general though, being outdoors for education has tended to focus on the practical, sensory, holistic, and embodied ways of knowing and being. This helps provide some balance to the rational and sedentary nature of much classroom-based secondary school education.

Hence, a key contribution of the outdoors lies in helping humans understand how their actions and all life is interconnected. This is no easy task, but by integrating many ideas and activities, there are opportunities to build relationships and links with many dimensions of a person's life. Focusing on the holistic character of the outdoors thus helps retain the relevance and effectiveness of outdoor education to engage students in learning to live respectfully in the world –a world I hope will sustain humans for many years to come. This however, puts a degree of responsibility on me and other outdoor educators to consider carefully how our meanings of the outdoors influence the students', and our own, relationship with the planet.

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## Appendix A

University of Waikato

School of Education

Department of Sport and Leisure

DATE

### **Information Sheet for Participants**

#### **Meanings of 'the outdoors': Influences on Shaping and Constraining Outdoor Education.**

Dear (participant name),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. This letter is a follow up to our recent telephone conversation and provides you with some extra details about the types of topics we will talk about during the interviews. If you have any concerns or questions please feel free to contact me.

#### **What is the research about?**

The central concern of this study is to explore meanings of 'the outdoors' and how these meanings have shaped and constrained outdoor education. I will be interviewing 12 people who are actively engaged in delivering outdoor education programmes. In order to gather your stories and then explore your beliefs and practices up to three interviews will be required, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. To start, I'd like you to recount some stories about your personal outdoor experiences from the early days to your more recent experiences as well as some of your outdoor education experiences. Then we'll explore and discuss in more detail your beliefs and practices relating the outdoors and its connection to outdoor education. These discussions will require you to look critically at current practices in outdoor education and express your views openly, however you will not be pressured into saying more than you feel comfortable sharing. In order to capture an accurate record our conversation will be recorded on a digital audio recorder. I will then transcribe it, and then send a copy to you for verification.

Your personal experiences and outdoor education practices will be constructed as a separate section/vignette in the report and this will be sent to you for comments and verification. At that stage you can request that

sections be deleted or modified. Interpretations based on these interviews and reflections will be presented in a PhD thesis and in a series of articles or conference presentations. If you wish to remain anonymous (recommended) then you will be asked to select a pseudonym and certain personal details will be removed or changed. Only my supervisors will access to the interview material. For confidentiality purposes the material will be stored on a personal computer and any additional notes kept in a home office. All information collected during the project will be archived for five years as required by the University of Waikato Human Research regulations.

### **Declaration to participants**

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time up until submission of the first draft.
- Ask any further questions that occur to you during your participation.
- Make changes and recommendations to your individual vignette/section.
- To receive a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

Before commencing the first interview you will be asked if you are happy to sign the enclosed consent form. This is standard practice when conducting this type of research and an ethical requirement of the University of Waikato.

I will telephone you again in a few days and if you are still interested in participating will arrange a time and place to meet for the first interview.

Thank you for your willingness to participate. I look forward to meeting with you.

Jo Straker  
56B Bowenvale Avenue,  
Christchurch  
03 9424766 (H)  
[jobrian@es.co.nz](mailto:jobrian@es.co.nz)

## Appendix B

University of Waikato  
School of Education  
Department of Sport and Leisure  
(Date)

### Consent Form

#### Meanings of 'the outdoors': Influences on Shaping and Constraining Outdoor Education.

I have read the information sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I also have the right to

- Ask further questions at any time.
- Withdraw from the study at any time up until the first draft is submitted.
- Decline to answer any particular questions.
- Read the transcripts from the recorded interviews, request changes and/or verify accuracy of the researchers interpretation.
- Be given a summary of findings from the project when it is concluded.
- Read any written report that includes information from the interview(s) in which I participated.

➤ I **approve/do not** approve of the researcher using information and stories from the interview(s) in reports about the project.

➤ I **wish/do not** wish to remain anonymous.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**NB** As the researcher I will adhere to an accepted code of ethics for conducting research prescribed by the University of Waikato and behave accordingly.

## Appendix C

### **Interview Guide**

Each interview will be open ended and with the exception of the opening request to share stories about personal experiences in the outdoors. Each interview will then follow its own path, but cover similar topics. The following questions and related points will act as probes and guide the interviews.

#### **Could you share stories about some of your personal experiences in the outdoors?**

Prompts -

- general background interests
- what got you interested in the outdoors
- other influences
- early experiences
- types of environments you prefer/dislike
- who were some of your early influences
- more recent outdoor experiences
- When you think about the outdoors what images come to mind?
- Regular and close to home trips
- Inspirational moments

#### **Please could you share stories about some of your outdoor education experiences?**

Prompts -

- recent work experiences
- what do you enjoy about your work
- other outdoor work experiences
- training and other courses
- early influences
- influential figures

- current role and responsibilities
- personal philosophy of outdoor education
- frustrations and set backs
- positive and negative experiences
- future aspirations

**In this next conversation let us look more closely at some of the stories you've shared and explore some of the meanings about the outdoors which are emerging and how they might influence outdoor education.**

Prompts – outdoor meanings

- What meanings do you see emerging about the outdoors in your stories?
- What has influenced your thoughts about the outdoors?
- When you think about the outdoors, what do you envisage?
- How does being in the outdoors affect you?
- How do you think the outdoors has impacted on you?
- Can you remember any times when you've disliked being outdoors?
- How would you describe your outdoor philosophy?
- How have your thoughts about the outdoors changed/developed in recent years?
- How would you describe your connection to the outdoors?

Prompts – shaping outdoor education

- What connections can you see between your perceptions of the outdoors and your teaching/instructing
- Recognising that every situation is different, what might an excellent outdoor education experience involve?
- What elements of outdoor education would you like to change?
- What kinds of outdoor education experiences are most desirable and least desirable for the students?
- What is the significance of the outdoors for education?
- What do you do to help make 'the outdoors' conducive to learning?
- What beliefs and principles guide your work?

- What shapes and constrains your practice?
- Can you share some of your future aspirations about outdoor education and your role as an educator?
- What sort of threats do you think there are for OE?
- What role(s) does the outdoors have in OE?
- What are the problems with different cultures and students having different beliefs about the outdoors?
- Can you share your views on what outdoor education offers that is different to more traditional forms of education?



## Appendix D

## **Appendix D**

### **Jodi – outdoor meanings**

Three aspects of Jodi's identity emerge in the interviews:

**Carer/counsellor** – someone who is student centred, honours their wisdom, walks alongside them, remains modest, listens and develops an ongoing relationship with them.

**Seeker/ learner** – someone trying to reconnect with culture and the land and finding personal satisfaction and personal growth opportunities through that. This manifests as someone sharing his journey in developing the cultural and environmental connections.

**Performer** - who seeks mental and physical challenges, these manifest as someone who challenges students and enjoys pushing them.

Some emerging themes around outdoor meanings:

- **Location** – rock climbing sites, mountains, lakes, bush, beach, Stewart Island, Port Hills, close to town but prefer West Coast, Yosemite, cultural locations, moved away from tribal land, almost anywhere outside
- **Activities** – rock climbing, tramping, adventure, challenge, consequences, mountain biking, mental toughness
- **Experiences** – kai moana, hanging out, cooking, sharing food, culture, recreation, fun, picnics, fishing, experiential learning, active, doing and being, consequences, communication, helps growth and development, closer connection to Māori ways of learning.

- Emotional response - sanctuary – physical and mental, avoid stress. extension of self, safe place, rejuvenating, not lonely, comforted, at peace
- Relationships - Stories and mythology, Māori Kaupapa and reconnection, learning place, who I am, part of me, family traditions, whakapapa, Socially - builds relationships, being with friends and clients, being humble Land – attachment and connection, spiritual, health and well-being, ancestors.

The vignette is created from the interviews with some minor grammatical changes, these are tracked in the comments. The first number is the interview and then the line (39|87 3<sup>rd</sup> interview line 87). The section in the report has been further condensed by removing some descriptive details.

### Jodi – outdoor meanings story

Back in the day, when I first started going outdoors, I almost felt lonely out there. I was in awe, nervous, whereas now, I feel more connected and understand my connection. When I went outdoors, to places like Lake Adelaide with the mountain peaks and granite faces I loved it, but there was always a loneliness or nervousness if I didn't have people around me. Now, I am able to walk through areas totally by myself and actually feel comfortable, and at peace with what is happening around me.

**Comment [J1]:** Jodi uses Back quite a lot in his interviews – so it was a strong way to start. It also links with the themes of connection and reconnection while touching on the spirituality, sanctuary and specialness of outdoors places and how the outdoors is a part of him.

**Comment [J2]:** 39|87 back in the day when I first started going there was more of an awe and more nervousness, and it was more that I almost felt lonely being out there, whereas that is changing now actually, and I'm feeling more connected and understanding more my connection with it.

**Comment [J3]:** Jodi talked about Lake Adelaide in 2 interviews and the comments have been integrated

**Comment [J4]:** 29|22 And another place would be at Lake Adelaide because it is just so vast in there – just a beautiful lake - being in a nice big rock bivy and you just have all these mountains around you and you have all these peaks and granite faces around there which you could go and climb.

**Comment [J5]:** 39|87 there has always been awe when I walk into places like a lake Adelaide obviously with the vista, but with the power and the energy of the place, but there is always that loneliness or the nervousness if I didn't have people around me, but I'm now more able to relate back to the land and feel more comfortable and at peace and I actually feel as though I'm not lonely anymore.

Places like Lake Adelaide do still have a certain awe, power, and energy, but I get that sense of specialness and connection almost anywhere outdoors. Last Saturday, being out on the bike, I had a fantastic ride over the tops of the Port Hills, and just sitting down on the grass and having something to eat; I got this feeling that this is an amazing place to be. Last Tuesday too, we were out in the hills with a group of students at Godley Head, and sat down on the grass, and they were commenting on it, they were saying this feels different, this feels really good.

**Comment [J6]:** Links to place as special and amazing, also recreational activity cycling and being in green spaces more local. Introduction of working with others and outdoors as an educational resource and place to build social relationships.

**Comment [J7]:** 3987 there has always been awe when I walk into places like a lake Adelaide obviously with the vista, but with the power and the energy of the place.

**Comment [J8]:** 3989 I personally get that sense almost anywhere I'm going outdoors, in terms of being out on the bike, I went out last Saturday and had a fantastic ride over the tops of the hills, and just sitting down on the grass and having something to eat, I just got this feeling that this is an amazing place to be. And on Tuesday, we were out in the hills with a group of girls at Godley Head, and sat down on the grass, and they were commenting on it, they were saying this feels different this feels really good, so it doesn't have to be in a specific or special place.

I wouldn't actually know myself without the outdoors. It has been part of me, as far as I can remember, back to the days with whānau. There is a fantastic place called Doctors Point which was great fishing and a fantastic place to pick mussels and we would just go down and hang out with the family. It was a really positive time, just camping as a family and now part of me wants to reconnect with family and what we used to do.

**Comment [J9]:** Outdoors as part of identity. Reconnecting with family through recreational activities fishing, camping and kai moana. Gathering kai moana reveals outdoors as a life-giving resource.

**Comment [J10]:** 39103 I wouldn't actually know myself without it. It has been part of me as far as I can remember, back to the days with whānau, I can't see a time when I wasn't involved.

**Comment [J11]:** 1992 There is a fantastic place called Doctors Point, and it was great fishing and a fantastic place to pick mussels and we would just go down and hang out with the family and every summer weekend we would normally be out there either for a day or stay overnight, it was just a really positive time, just camping as a family on the domain out there. I can see how that for me, at the moment, is just part of me wanting to reconnect with family and what we used to do.

I know that I personally need outdoor activities or exercise to keep myself balanced. My family suffers from depression, so I utilise exercise in the outdoors to help balance me out with that. When I have had a period of intense work or whatever, and I feel myself slowly going down, I know that I need to make sure I get outside and do something that helps bring the back up to where I need to be. I did get quite low a little while back, I had a period of about six months, which were intense, and it was all about being in an office, and not getting out and doing what I needed to do to look after myself, and for me that is being outside doing exercise and being active. Well it's definitely being active, and the outdoors is what motivates me. That was a hard dark place to be, and if I didn't have the outdoors that's where I might be now.

**Comment [J12]:** Outdoors meaning sanctuary and place of activity and exercise and motivation. Importance o outdoors for self and health. Some details of where he worked edited out

**Comment [J13]:** 39103 my family suffers from depression and so I utilise exercise in the outdoors to help balance me out with that, so I know when I have had a period of intense work or whatever, and I feel myself slowly going down I know that I need to make sure I get outside and do something that helps bring the back up to where I need to be, so I did get quite low when I was working at the flooz, when we were setting it up, I had a period of about six months was intense and it was all about being in an office, and not getting out and doing what I needed to do to look after myself, and for me that is being outside during exercise and being active, well it's definitely being active and the outdoors is what motivates me, that was quite a hard dark place to be, and if I didn't have the outdoors that's where I might be.

**Comment [J14]:** Conservation corps, development and influences of outdoors as learning place and reconnecting via kai moana. Outdoors as resource. There were several references to the conservation Corps as being influential on his ideas about the outdoors and leadership.

Just after leaving school when I was in the Conservation Corps, we visited Stewart Island; it was fantastic. It's one of the best spots, the accessibility to things like kai moana helps that sort of re-connecting to the land. When I was down there, we were fixing

**Comment [J15]:** 1912 That was probably where my outdoors interest developed really, there err through the conservation Corps, tramping, and the like, working at hut maintenance, and then going down to Stewart Island for a couple of months to do a plastic survey



interested and wanting to be outside, to doing some outdoor education classes at school, to helping with the Conservation Corps, to personal outdoor experiences like rock climbing, to working in the outdoor industry, to owning a gym, to now working in the outdoors using it as a youth development tool. So that is kind of taking me back to the fishing, gathering kai moana, and reconnecting with the land and my culture.

**Comment [J22]:** 217 It might seem a roundabout way, but it seems to be like a full circle thing for me. Some fishing and outdoor stuff with my folks at the beach - through to using that as a stepping stone to being interested to be outside - to being outdoors at school - to personal outdoor experiences like rock climbing - through to working in the outdoor industry - through to owning a gym - through to now working in the outdoors using it as a youth development tool and having a lot of people around me who are helping me reconnect with my culture. So that is kind of taking me back to the fishing going back to kai moana and reconnecting that way.

I was in to high performance rock-climbing for a while and had some amazing experiences. I went over to Yosemite for a month, to do some big wall climbing, I'd always said I would never do aid climbing, as I thought it was cheating. Anyway, I climbed Zodiac with a friend, and found there is a lot more to aid climbing than just pulling on nuts – technically, physically and mentally. I was full of apprehension because I had never climbed anything more than two or three pitches, and this was a 15-pitch route. I was going to be sleeping on ledges, and doing something totally new, so it was quite an adventure. We took three days, spending two nights on the wall, which was really quite fast, my mate was quite surprised we did it that fast, but he did most of the leading, and he's pretty efficient. We did a bunch of other long routes over

**Comment [J23]:** High performance is my addition - Jodi was modest but he was National sport climbing champion for several years running. Outdoors as a training ground for physical and mental challenges, risk adventure

**Comment [J24]:** Several references to climbing e.g. 154 I was really into my rock climbing it was mainly what I did.

**Comment [J25]:** Condensed from 213 215 and 154

there as well which was fantastic. On one climb at Tuolumne, we were caught by a storm and had to abseil off which was a serious epic. I've also done my fair amount of soloing, I would certainly not do it now, but back then I was focused and fitter, so it didn't seem like such a risk and I was fit enough that it wasn't a risk. I think if you are at the high end of a particular activity then you need some mental hardness.

**Comment [J26]:** Condensed from 2[1]6 and 2[1]8

**Comment [J27]:** 1[5]8 I've done my fair amount of soloing and if I went back and tried to solo now, what I did then, I would certainly not do it. I would certainly be ricking it and I wouldn't want to do it now, but back then I was focused and fitter so it didn't seem like such a risk and I was fit enough that it wasn't a risk

**Comment [J28]:** 1[6]2 I think if you are at the high end of that particular activity then you need some mental hardness

I think in general, outdoor education is a bit activity focussed and it could be more about kaitiaki, guardianship, and mythology and linking those back to the outdoors. While gathering kai moana isn't something that we usually do on this programme, it happened once down at Purau Bay and it was the Māori boys that started it. They gathered kai moana and encouraged all the other Pakeha boys into it as well. They got really into it, but they also understood it, and what needed to be done in terms of guardianship. They said a karakia before they ate it, didn't pick the small ones and if you break it you eat it kind of scenario.

**Comment [J29]:** Kaitiakitanga, respecting customs and protocols spiritual connections – brings in tension between different outdoor sectors

**Comment [J30]:** 3[1]7 whereas outdoor ed is more activity focussed.

**Comment [J31]:** 3[6]3 I think it could be more about kaitiaki, guardianship, and mythology and linking those back to the outdoors

**Comment [J32]:** while gathering kai moana isn't something that we usually do - but we did do it on one of our last water-based coastersings down at Purau Bay and it was the Maori boys that actually started it and so they actually gathered kai moana and got all the other Pakeha boys into it and they got really into it - they understood it and the reason why and what needed to be done - in terms of guardianship - so they didn't pick the small ones and if you break it you eat it kind of scenario

Castle rock is called Te Tihi o Kahukura and is quite a spiritual place for Ngai Tahu, a place where 100 Ngai Tahu warriors escaped to and found sanctuary. So if we are using there as a rock climbing venue, we talk about the mythology and stories, and the importance of it, in terms of the places they can go to find sanctuary, and how the warriors may have felt, and what they feel, and you can relate all that back. In a similar way, going out to Kura Tawhiti and talking about the Guardian who sits on top of the tor over-looking the valley, and just linking back all of that mythology with the environmental usage, and bringing that sense of being a part of the place again, and the stories being part of them.

**Comment [333]:** outdoors as metaphor for sanctuary, caring, guardianship, building connections, and recognising spiritual significance. Importance of stories importance of local and specific

**Comment [334]:** 3963 Castle rock is called Te Tihi o Kahukura and that is quite a spiritual place for Ngai Tahu, a place where one time a lot of Ngai Tahu escaped to the top of Castle rock. So if we are using there as a rock climbing venue, we can talk about the stories behind it and the importance of it. Going out to Kura Tawhiti and talking about the Guardian who sits on top of the tor over-looking the valley, and just linking back all of that mythology with the environmental usage and bringing that sense of being a part of the place again. The stories being part of them and the young people actually owning the stories and actually believing what they do mean.

**Comment [335]:** Outdoors as challenges, learning resource, activities. Building relationships

**Comment [336]:** 399 It was definitely more about the practical and the knowledge learning, how to do it, physical challenges and the technology around keeping safe, we did touch a bit on codes of conduct, environmental, but that didn't seem such an important thing, and being an adolescent male we were keen on doing activities. And 3915

**Comment [337]:** 39101 activity is not the main aspect of it, but it is a catalyst of the things around it, a vehicle for learning about yourself and others.

My own outdoor education at school was about physical challenges, doing activities and experiencing, but here we use the activities as a vehicle for helping the students learn about themselves. We talk about honouring the wisdom of the young

people themselves, that we are not experts, we are definitely not experts in their life, they are experts in their own life. We try to help them understand that they have options and opportunities in front of them and we help them go where they need to go.

**Comment [338]:** 292 Honouring the wisdom of the young people themselves - is another thing we talk about a lot - that we are not experts we are definitely not experts in their life - they are experts in their own life - and getting them to understand that, and that they have the options and opportunities in front of them to help them go where they need to go - and it could be at the moment where they are going - if you are looking from the outside it might not be so good for them, but it might be something they need to do

I am on a journey myself of trying to re-connect with my culture, and what drives me is being able to share what I have learned in the past from my whānau. I prefer to be walking along side the

**Comment [339]:** Conclusion how his journey through outdoor experiences has influenced him and how it influences his work. How he is changing and developing with others.

students, rather than telling or displaying. I work by listening, by

**Comment [340]:** 396 and 397 What drives me in life at the moment is being able to share what I have learned in the past from my family,

not judging, by offering challenges to their way of thinking about stuff, and being consistent, and being humble if I am wrong. I am

**Comment [341]:** 399 I prefer to be doing rather than telling and displaying, walking along side them.

not the expert, I think it is important to be humble, and then you are open to learning from other people around you. I respect the

**Comment [342]:** 397 By listening, by not judging, by giving constant challenges to their way of thinking about stuff, and being consistent and being humble if I am wrong, you are not going to be the expert

young people, and in turn, I hope they respect me. So last night

**Comment [343]:** 399 I think it is important to be humble, and then you are open to learning from other people around you.

we had our graduation, and all these young men would come up

**Comment [344]:** 397 as well as giving a lot of respect to all the young people and I hope that in turn they will be giving some to me

to you and shake your hand, and give a bit of themselves. It just

makes you feel great, because it makes you feel that you can

provide something of value to them, and it makes you feel part of

their journey.

**Comment [345]:** 393 - 35 So last night we had our graduation and all these young men would come up to you and shake your hand, and give a bit of themselves which gives me some mana.

How did that make you feel?

It just makes you feel great, because it makes you feel that you can provide something of value to them and it makes you feel part of their journey.

## Appendix E

### MEMORANDUM

**To:** **Jo Straker**  
**cc:** Professor Bevan Grant, Dr Holly Thorpe

**From:** **Dr Rosemary De Luca**  
School of Education Research Ethics Committee

**Date:** 2 June 2009

**Subject:** Research Ethics Application

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Thank you for submitting the amendments to your research proposal:

**Meanings of 'the outdoors': Influences on shaping and constraining outdoor education**

I am pleased to advise that your application has received ethical approval.

Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the School's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if any changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

**Dr Rosemary De Luca**

Chairperson - School of Education Research Ethics Committee