

CRITICAL FACTORS IN THE ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCE OF AN  
OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study was based on the experiences of a sample (n=15) 14 and 15 year old students at Sea to Sky Outdoors School, an experiential outdoor education programme located on Keats Island, British Columbia. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the experience of an outdoor education programme from the perspective of the students, and to discuss issues of gender in the context of this experience. The retrospective data was collected using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954). The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was based on creating categories of critical incidents based on the themes expressed by the students. The results reflect common themes which describe the experiential outdoor education programme from the perspective of the students.

The findings of this study led to the general conclusions that; 1) outdoor and experiential education is a positive experience for most students; 2) there are differences between the males and females both in the expression and type of critical incidents recorded and 3) outdoor experiential programmes can be beneficial experiences for enhancing relationships, increasing awareness and providing an opportunity for enjoyable experiences for both sexes. In addition to these general conclusions, the findings of this study identify several important characteristics of "voice" in adolescents and provide preliminary support for the idea that participation in outdoor education programmes serves to decrease sex-role stereotyping in adolescence. The study also identifies several important aspects of an outdoor education programme from the perspective of the students.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

We hiked along the trail on a bright sunny day in May on Keats Island. The majority of students spread out ahead of us, laughing, talking and teasing each other. They were all in Grade 8 and about 13 years old. The boys ran and jumped, trying to touch the lower branches of trees and challenging each other to jump higher. The majority of the girls walked in small groups talking and giggling with each other. They walked around mud puddles, while the boys ran through them. I talked with Wolfie, one of the other female staff members, as we watched the dynamics of the group before us. "What happened to the girls?" I wondered out loud. "When did they become so careful and concerned about looking good?" "I don't know," she answered, "but it is certainly a big contrast from the Grade 4 groups we get here. The girls in Grade 4 are more outgoing than the boys." Then I noticed Nuriah, walking alone just ahead of us, listening to our conversation. She was in Grade 10, slightly older than the Grade 8 students, and had been invited along on the trip as part of a small group of student leaders in training. She was a bit uncertain of her role and not sure if she should be mixing with the other students or walking with the teachers. I asked her what she thought happened to the girls around this age and if she remembered why she had stopped running and jumping. She looked at me with a profound look of certainty and wisdom as only a 16 year old can muster, "I grew breasts Miss, that's what happened." I was reminded of Simone deBeauvoir's comment that "to lose confidence in one's body is to lose confidence in oneself." This brief interaction sparked the central question of my thesis: What are the factors which enhance or detract from the early adolescent's experience of an

outdoor education programme and is this experience shaped by gender, body image or sense of self?

### **Sea to Sky Outdoor School - Background and Programmes**

Keats Island is home to the Sea to Sky Outdoor School, founded by Tim and Wendy Turner as a limited corporation in the business of environmental education seven years ago. It is registered as an outdoor school, yet receives no government funding. The school employs a staff of 12 people. Students pay between \$160 and \$180 (depending on group size) for a 3-day residential experiential education programme. This fee also includes a pre-programme school visit, and a follow-up media literacy programme. The school rents the grounds and buildings of a Baptist Church Camp on Keats Island, but Sea to Sky has no religious affiliations. This arrangement allows Sea to Sky School to focus exclusively on programme concerns and leaves maintenance of the physical site to the landlord. The programme is open to all students between Grades 4 and 12 in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

The programmes offered at Sea to Sky School are aligned with the province's Ministry of Education curriculum for Physical Education, Environmental Education/Sustainable Societies and Media Education (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1995). Generally, the programmes focus on environmental sustainability and leadership training. The Pathways Programme, focuses on environmental sustainability and the Connections Programme focuses on communication skills and leadership training. The main principles of these programmes are that direct experience is the basis of learning, human decisions and actions have environmental



consequences, responsible action is a consequence of environmental education, and responsible leadership demands self awareness as well as awareness of others and the environment. Sea to Sky School programmes are primarily educational in nature, but they are also blended with recreation so that the students learn through activities, group problem solving and metaphoric transfer of activities onto other areas of their lives. These programmes fit well with the increasing demand for more holistic and diverse curricula and point to the many common objectives between physical education and outdoor education, including skill development, social development, improved interpersonal interactions, environmental interdependency, enhancement of learning and physical fitness (Bunting, 1989).

The Sea to Sky programmes are designed to enrich and expand the public school curriculum by taking recent research in environmental economics and using this information as a theoretical guide to programme design. The work of people such as Robert Costanza (1997) and Mathis Wackernagle and William Rees (1996) provide the theoretical backbone of the Pathways programme. Increasingly, the programmes tend to merge leadership training with eco-literacy, as the students are encouraged to make informed choices and recognize the role they play in designing their futures. Typical environmental education programmes focus on enhancing the student's sense of wonder in Nature. The Sea to Sky programmes introduces new ways of seeing Nature, not as separate from the everyday, but linked to the human economy and the inescapable umbilical cord of life.

The programmes are outdoor activity based, and the days are very busy (See Appendix D for a typical schedule). The students start the day with morning "polar dips" in the ocean, a paddle in a Voyager canoe or a run through the ropes course. The rest of the day is occupied with outdoor workshops, hikes, free time, sports, solitude spots, simulation games and evening campfires. The activities are taught in a student centred way. Students and teachers live, eat, play and learn together. The atmosphere is one of fun, support, and equality.

Prior to beginning the activity sessions, students are asked to commit themselves to working together co-operatively, to keep an open mind to other's suggestions and feelings and to maintain certain safety guidelines. This was referred to as using your "Power of One", and is similar to what Schoel, Prouty and Radcliffe (1988) call a "full-value" contract. This allows participants to get full value out of the experience without harbouring any negative feelings or attitudes.

Students participate in a variety of adventure pursuits and personal and group initiative tasks which experientially illustrate their impact on the world. Through time spent in the woods, students are educated about the environment and the impact of their actions on the environment. They also gain insight into themselves. The process is based on structured activities which use the natural environment to identify individual and group strengths and weaknesses (Miles & Priest, 1990). Adventure, drama, orienteering, sensitivity hikes and night hikes all expose students to a wide range of fears and gives them a chance to learn by doing. For example, fear of public speaking is addressed during the theatre sport sessions, and fear of the

dark is evident on the night hikes. Fear is discussed and debriefed. Debriefing is an important aspect of the programme where students are given a chance to share their insights and feelings. This gives them a chance to reflect on the learning process that occurred.

Initiative tasks also give students access to overcoming their fears. Climbing a wall and relying on others to lift you was a scary experience for some students. Some of the other activities require group effort to solve a problem with no solution or direction given by the leader. A few of the initiative tasks included in the Pathways programme are:

- The Wall: In this activity, the group is challenged to get everyone over a 12-foot wall. Spotters are used for safety reasons. The group must form a plan to get every member of the group over the wall and take into account differences in agility and ability within the group.
- Toxic Pit: The group is required to swing across a fictional Toxic Pit. They must carry all of their belongings without dropping anything into the pit. If they do touch the pit, they are to complete the task blindfolded. They must stay in a certain area on the other side of the pit until all group members are safely across.
- Spider's Web: The "web" is made of rope with various sizes of holes. The group must pass each member through the holes without touching the web. Once a hole is used it can't be used for someone else.
- Land Skis: These are two long wooden planks with ropes attached as handles. The groups walk on the skis and eventually race each other by standing on the skis and working together to coordinate lifting the skis in time to their footsteps.

- Nitro transport: The group makes use of a circle of rubber tubing attached to four long ropes. Their task is to lift a bucket of water (nitro) out of a designated area without spilling any of the water or stepping into the designated area. They then lift and tip the water into a large drum. The group is instructed to complete this task silently.

Initiative tasks are designed to build group cooperation, decision making and problem solving (Hammersley, 1992). The programme also uses individual challenge activities such as a low ropes course, and trust exercises. The trust exercises teach spotting techniques necessary for the initiative tasks and build safety and concern for others into the group. Trust building for oneself and for others can not be taken for granted, it has to be developed (Wright, 1997). These activities focus on taking responsibility for others, and on a willingness to take risks. Some of the trust activities include:

- Two Person Trust Fall: Groups of three are formed with one person 'falling' between two catchers. The person falling keeps their body stiff with arms folded across the chest and keeps their feet in one place and then falls backwards. The people catching gently hold and move the person falling back into an upright position.
- Willow in the Wind: A group stands in a circle around the person falling. The group members gently catch and push the person falling in different directions to be caught by others.

The groups also participate in a variety of activities in small groups on the trails. Most of these activities are designed to enhance awareness. Some of these activities are:

- Solitude Spot: The students sit silence in a spot where they can't see or hear others and then spend some time alone reflecting on their surroundings and inner thoughts.
- Camouflage: One student is "it" and the other students hide in the woods such that they can see "it". "It" then tries to identify people hiding in the woods. The winner is the person who is hidden closest to "it" without being spotted.
- Wolves and Deer: One student is a "deer" blindfolded in the middle of the group. The remainder of the students are "wolves" who try to sneak up on the deer and touch it without being heard.
- Rock of Perception: Choose a rock, the rock is guarded by one student in the middle of the circle and others try to steal the rock without being tagged.

The programme also includes large group meetings to review what was learned in the smaller groups and activities and to visually summarize the lessons using teaching aids and wooden signs. The summary session helps to "bring it all together" for the students. Singing songs summarize the lessons in another way. Slide shows, improvisational comedy, workshops and simulation games requiring moral and ethical reasoning were all used deliver the programme curriculum.

The general focus of the programme is to help the students make sense of the world that shapes them and realize their potential to shape the world. The programme encourages questioning of the predominant cultural norms, and the messages of advertising and the media. Students are given opportunities to make choices, take risks and try on different ways of being.

The programme uses a majority of co-operative learning strategies and what Rohnke (1989) calls "pedagogic play." Dunn and Wilson (1991) described the benefits of cooperative learning as higher academic performance, greater sense of locus of control, improved social relations and better language skills.

I wondered what the students would come away with after participating in such an intense programme at such a formative time of their lives. What would remain significant to them after they returned to their everyday lives? What aspects of the programme either enhanced or detracted from their experience of the programme? Would this experience be interpreted and given meaning by the girls one way and by the boys in a different way?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Loss of Voice

The research which informs this study is based on the still controversial research about the specific developmental needs of young adolescents. The controversy began with psychologist Carol Gilligan's (1982) publication of In a Different Voice, in which she noted that the major studies and theories of moral development in our Western culture are based primarily on male subjects, with the data analyzed only from a male perspective. As a result, she set out to investigate girls' and women's developmental perspectives. One of her major findings was that the passage from puberty into adolescence was concurrent with a profound shift in the way girls described themselves and their world.

Girls in the 12 to 13 year old age group had never been systematically studied before Carol Gilligan, her associate Anne Rogers and other researchers at the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development focused on this population, qualitatively mapping the nature of the adolescent journey for females. To do this they developed ways of listening that enabled them to distinguish different voices within any individual speaker. They also found it necessary to confront their own personal histories of adolescent transformation as well. Reading these studies is an eye-opening experience. These researchers have generated a new understanding of female development in our androcentric culture, and I gained respect for the honesty and personal growth which they reported in

this process. One of their more interesting findings is the suggestion that because girls place a high value on connection, even at the risk of their own rights and well-being, girls often find themselves questioning their feelings and altering their judgments in deference to others.

When the taped interviews of the girls were analyzed, the researchers found that the "girls watch the human world like people watch the weather" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.3). They are much more attuned to people than they are to objects and accomplishments. They "see a world comprised of relationships rather than people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through a system of rules" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 29). This is in contrast to Erikson's developmental model which emphasizes male-oriented issues of autonomy, separateness and independence, and fairness. Brown and Gilligan argue that this reflects a difference in identity development which splits along the lines of gender. For boys, this generally involves separation and independence, while for girls it involves relatedness with others and interdependence. This has led to the conclusion that there may be different paths to maturity for males and females and different concepts of maturity itself. Some researchers even suggest that female ways of being may result in different experiences for females than males (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Traule, 1986; Chodorow, 1989; Miller, 1986).

Brown and Gilligan (1992) have also suggested that age 12 or 13 is a watershed time for girls, a time of "central relational crisis" (p. 184). Before this age, girls are assertive, self-empowered, unafraid to speak their minds. But as girls change physiologically into women, their psychological identities dramatically shift as well. Suddenly, there is an onslaught of intense social



pressure to conform to what it means to be feminine in our culture. In reaction to this change in their relational environment, girls go through a process of self-silencing and the suppression of thoughts and opinions which researchers in the Harvard Project referred to as 'loss of voice'. The first sign of this process is an increase in the girls' confusion about what they know and are willing to discuss. They become tentative and often answer questions with "I don't know" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Rogers, 1993). The girls withdraw and forsake authenticity in their relationships. As time goes by, the girls gradually forget their internal voices and become the mask they were trying to project. This sets the stage for risk of serious psychological problems in adulthood.

In a review of the literature, Stern (1991) confirms that girls lose significant psychological ground during adolescence. Girls are more depressed, have more negative self-assessments, and have poorer general emotional well-being. Compared to boys, adolescent girls have more negative body images, lower self-esteem, yet also a higher degree of social awareness and higher commitment to others. An interesting exception to these generalizations occurred in a study of girls who were in an accelerated academic achievement group. They reported higher levels of self-esteem and rated the boys as significantly below themselves (Robison-Awana, Kehle & Jenson, 1986). This may provide support for the idea that aspects of self-esteem are situationally determined (Savin-Williams & Demo, 1983).

The conclusion of the researchers was that it is next to impossible for a girl of 12 or 13 in this culture to maintain congruence between her inner self and her outer relationships as she moves through adolescence. There is an

overwhelming tide of cultural pressure bearing down on her at the same time as she is young, inexperienced and vulnerable. This leaves a challenge for educators and therapists alike. Is there any experience which may strengthen the resilience of the adolescent girl's sense of self?

### Development in Connection

The idea that relationships are the key to knowing and acting in the world for women has also been supported in the literature coming out of the Stone Center at Wellesley College. Developmental theorists such as Jean Baker Miller (1991) challenge Erikson's (1963) stages of development. Miller points out that in Erikson's scheme, after the first stage where basic trust is developed, every other stage, until young adulthood, aims for increased autonomy and separation. It is not until the stage called "intimacy" is reached that a person strives for connection with another person. Ironically, this is after spending all prior development striving for autonomy. Miller (1991) and other colleagues at the Stone Center have pointed out that Erikson's developmental model is based on male samples and male ideals derived by male researchers. She suggests that perhaps women and men alike develop within the context of relationships, and that women are encouraged to develop their relational abilities in a culture which values independence and undervalues relational capacity. It is true that society could not exist without the ability to nurture and build relationships, but as Miller (1991) notes, there is no real prestige or value given to those who adopt these roles.

Fellow Stone Center colleague, Surrey (1991), contends that for women the "self" is always defined in the context of relationship. She promotes the

idea that healthy female development does not progress towards autonomy or individuation, but rather follows the self-in-relation model in which relationships are vital to the developmental process. Her assumption is that the self is organized and developed through relationships with the goal of increasing development of mutually empathic relationships. She contends that these mutually empathetic relationships are a sign of healthy development in both sexes (Surrey, 1991).

Another aspect of this alternative view of development is Jordan's (1991) theory of mutuality, in which relationships are mutual or based on give and take and require the care of all participants in order to thrive. Beyond this, she submits that people need mutuality for psychological well-being. "Relational mutuality can provide purpose and meaning in people's lives, while lack of mutuality can adversely affect self-esteem" (p. 81). Relationships allow us to appreciate our deepest sense of ourselves. As Jordan (1991) points out, "In many ways we know ourselves through relationship" (p. 96). Relationships are undoubtedly a factor in the adolescent's developing sense of self as they allow the person to experience both their similarities and differences in connection with others.

### **Maturational Risks**

In a society which values independence and downplays the importance of connection it follows that healthy development may be difficult to achieve, especially for females. Adolescence is a more stressful developmental period for girls than boys (Mann, 1994; Pipher, 1994). It seems that females are more

vulnerable and affected differently by the challenges of adolescence (Mann, 1994; Pipher, 1994). Developmental stresses, which are especially challenging to girls, leave them more prone to depression and psychological difficulties than boys (Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992). Mary Pipher's (1994) book, Reviving Ophelia, pins the blame on Western culture for "splitting adolescents into true and false selves" (p. 37). The shift occurs as girls enter into adolescence and put their true identities at risk. The resulting silence of their true voices may mean that they are internalizing their problems as they see their environment as unchangeable. This internalization increases their tendency to ruminate about problems rather than actively deal with them, and increases their risk for depression (Rice, Herman, & Petersen, 1993). Boys on the other hand are more likely to act out and assess the situation as changeable. It follows that they are generally less prone to depression and more prone to conduct disorders (Compas, Orosan & Grant, 1993). In addition to this, female adolescents are more concerned with their weight and body image, while males are more concerned with popularity and achievement. This is perhaps due to the fact that in our society there is a greater emphasis on thinness for women (Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992). Cultural expectations and pressure to conform to an ideal image loom large for young women and may result in eating disorders and general dissatisfaction with their personal appearance (Rhea, 1998; Millstein, Peterson & Nightengale, 1993).

Social stress and relationships are another area where gender differences make females more vulnerable. This is not surprising in light of the self-in-relation model outlined earlier. Girls are mostly concerned with interpersonal issues and worry about feeling self-conscious, being criticized,

not being heard or not speaking up for themselves (Millstein et al., 1993). In general, girls seem to be more sensitive than boys to interpersonal relationships. They tend to rely more on others in assessing their own abilities and sense of competence (Loeffler, 1997).

Physical change and puberty can also affect the mental health and general well-being of adolescent girls (Rice et al., 1993). The timing of these changes for girls tends to coincide with school transitions. Any negative effects of changes are compounded when they occur at the same time as other transitions (Rice et al., 1993). The timing of maturation is also an issue. Early maturing boys seem to have an advantage relative to late maturing boys in many aspects of emotional and academic functioning. They are stronger than their peers, thus better at sports and have higher self-esteem and popularity. The opposite is true for late maturing boys who are concerned with body image issues such as not having big enough muscles (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). Early maturation does not have the same advantage for girls. Those who mature early tend to be shorter and weigh more than those who mature later, and this difference persists throughout their lives (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). This contributes to poor body image and may put them at an increased risk for eating disorders. These girls also have fewer friends, as girls tend to choose their friends partly on the basis of physical status and those who mature earlier would have a smaller network of friends to choose from (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). In general the average age of puberty onset is dropping. Menarche now occurs at approximately 12.5 years of age (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). This means the accompanying stresses of maturation are now occurring when children are younger and perhaps even more vulnerable than in the past.

Another aspect of female maturation is that girls are often suddenly restricted from participating in activities which are too "masculine." A girl "experiences a sudden limit of opportunities that are confined to her sex role" (Schonert-Reichel & Offer, 1992). Thus maturing girls have been taught that participating in sports and outdoor recreation activities is inappropriate and unacceptable once they become women. "Women's femininity is often called into question when they go into the woods, a place they have been told over and over again that they don't belong" (Loeffler, 1997, p.119). Ironically, Pate (1997) has shown that sex role stereotypes change after participation in a wilderness course and the data showed "that all of the adolescents became less traditionally oriented by the end of the course" (p.164). This makes sense as notions of femininity constantly shift, are unstable and contested (MacDonald, 1997). Also, recent research on the study of gender differences and emotion has shown that there is far more similarity than difference between the sexes (Brody, 1997; James, 1997; Riger, 1997). With participation in outdoor experiences, females might begin to accept the idea that they don't have to be restricted by their gender. This type of realization would increase their sense of competence and self-esteem. As Pate (1997) puts it, "In general, these adolescents might learn to become more complete human beings by allowing both themselves and others the freedom to live their lives to the fullest" (p.164).

Clearly, cultural messages, relationship concerns, the timing of puberty and the cultural environment can make adolescence a more stressful developmental period for girls than boys. Despite this discrepancy, there is a need to understand what is happening in the lives of both young men and

young women at this age. There is no balance in generating perspectives on gendered experience if we ignore the male point of view. As Marshall and Arvay (1998) point out, "A further explanation for gender discrepancies could be the striking omission of in-depth qualitative interviewing approaches with adolescent boys" (p.5). Some researchers (Marshall & Arvay, 1998; Way, 1997) have begun to fill this gap by using feminist research methods to include the perspectives of adolescent boys. There is likely a contribution to be made to the issues of gender under discussion by listening to both the male and female point of view. This may be especially relevant if gender shapes a common experience, such as participation in the Sea to Sky programme, or outdoor experiential education programmes in general, and results in a fundamentally different characterization of the experience by boys and girls.

### **Outdoor Experiential Education**

Outdoor experiential education relies primarily on the use of challenging physical and mental activities to involve students as completely as possible in an activity. The assumption is that learning will happen more effectively if the intellect, emotions, and body are all part of the process (Crosby, 1981). "In outdoor education the emphasis is placed on RELATIONSHIPS, relationships concerning people and natural resources" (Priest, 1986, p. 13). Through exposure to the outdoors, individuals learn about their relationship with the natural environment, relationships between the various components of the natural ecosystems and personal relationships with others and their inner self. There are a wide variety of programmes which fall under the umbrella of experiential education. Some are predominantly recreational in nature and others are geared toward

educational or therapeutic goals (Priest & Gass, 1993). Whatever the programme goal, adolescents have made up a significant part of the programme participants. This is likely due to their "youthful energy and propensity toward risk-taking" (Cason & Gillis, 1994, p. 40). Many practitioners intuitively "know" that this type of programming is effective for adolescents, but they are at a loss when asked for research data to support these claims.

The problem is that research has not been approached in a very systematic fashion (if it has been approached at all) in a myriad of different programs in existence in Canada and the United States today. Davis-Berman, Berman and Capone (1994) conducted a survey of all programs that were members of the Association for Experiential Education in 1991 and 1992. They found a general lack of theoretical foundation for practice and an almost total lack of method for evaluation or description of the therapeutic or educational process (Davis-Berman, Berman & Capone, 1994, p. 52). With the exception of one meta-analysis done by Cason and Gillis (1994), there has been no attempt to statistically integrate the general research findings on adventure programming with adolescents. No studies to date have linked adolescent developmental issues concerning sense of self with experiential education programming.

To conduct the comparison, Cason and Gillis (1994) coded the programs according to duration of the programme, participant categories (i.e., normal adolescents, delinquent adolescents, emotionally or physically handicapped adolescents or unspecified populations), average age of the participants, type of outcome measures (i.e., self-concept, locus of control, behavioral



measures), dates of publication, form of publication and a design rating (a score they gave to represent the rigor of the study). This system allowed them to examine effects such as the length of the programme, or the difference in effect for delinquent youth compared to non-delinquent youth. They also computed the average effect size for the variables and looked at the correlation between effect sizes and programme variables (such as the length of the programme). The researchers found that adolescents who participate in adventure programming are better off than 62 percent of those who do not participate.

Analysis of the programme effect sizes found by Cason and Gillis (1994) revealed a very large range of values. The effect size ranged from -1.48 to 4.26 with a mean of 0.31 and a standard deviation of 0.62. The greatest effect sizes were seen in clinical scales, school grades, school attendance and attitude surveys. Locus of control, self concept and behavioral assessments were also significantly distinct categories in terms of effect size.

Cason and Gillis (1994) also examined the relationship between the quality of the research (based on a rating system that took into effect random vs. non-random sampling, timing of the testing, use of a control group, and follow-up for the control group) and the effect size. They discovered that the studies with the highest rigor showed the smallest effect sizes. However, when the length of the programme is added to the picture, it becomes clear that there is a definite relationship between the length of the programme and the effect size. For both rigorous and non-rigorous studies, the longer programs have a positive correlation with larger effect sizes, but "this

analysis was unable to determine the optimal length of adventure programming" (Cason and Gillis, 1994, p. 45).

Cason and Gillis attribute a large part of the variation in effect sizes to the lack of standardized protocols for investigating outdoor experiential programs. They advocate new research which pays attention to such variables as the length of the programme, the type of activities, the size of the group, and the characteristics of the group leadership. I would also add gender of the participants and gender of the leaders to this list as an important consideration in examining programme effects. They also question the validity of using quantitative measures in a field with such low reliability of the measures used for assessment. They suggest the generation of more qualitative data as an additional source of information (Cason and Gillis, 1994, p. 43).

In another significant, but dated, review of the literature, Crompton and Sellar (1981) looked at claims in outdoor education which pertain to interests, attitudes, moral and ethical values and social skills (the affective domain) rather than intellectual knowledge, skills or abilities (the cognitive domain). They divided the affective domain into three sections and sought literature which addressed the impact of outdoor education experiences on; 1) self-concept; 2) socialization and 3) attitude towards the outdoors as a learning environment and towards school (Crompton & Sellar, 1981).

In terms of self-concept, nine of the eleven studies they reviewed found a positive impact on self-concept. The studies mostly used a pre- and post-test design and made use of various self-concept scales such as the Piers-

Harris Self-Concept Scale, the Lipsett Self-Concept Scale, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale or discrepancy scores between the ideal self and the self concept. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale has commonly been used to evaluate Outward Bound programs because of the simplicity of the scale and the ease of administering it. Participants generally described themselves in more approving terms after the outdoor experience and they also described the ideal self in more realistic and attainable terms. There was also a significant shift in locus of control orientation towards a more internalized sense of control, meaning the individuals believed that they had control over the things which happened to themselves, after participating in an outdoor education camp designed to improve both their physical competence and problem solving skills. In terms of SES effects, Fletcher (1973, cited in Crompton & Sellar, 1981) found that economically advantaged girls exhibited the greatest improvement in pre- and post-test scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, followed by advantaged boys, disadvantaged girls and disadvantaged boys.

The two studies with dissenting findings in this review (Konle, 1976; and Gilette, 1971; cited in Crompton & Sellar, 1981) each had significant methodological differences from the other studies examined. Konle developed a seven-week reading programme for students with learning disabilities which included one week and one weekend at a rural camp. She hoped that the outdoor experience would improve their attitude towards both themselves and reading. This result was not supported by the findings of the study. This may mean that the positive self-concept effects supported by the other studies are more global and do not apply to specific improvements in academic subjects. In the other dissenting study, Gilette used a Q-Sort

technique to identify changes in attitude after 34 students participated in a 21-day Outward Bound type programme. Eighty-five percent of the statements did not change in placement during pre- and post-trip testing.

Despite these two dissenting studies, overall the research reviewed by Crompton and Sellar (1981) supported the claims that outdoor education enhanced the students' self-concept, peer socialization and racial integration. Also, relationships between teachers and students were improved. They caution that these conclusions must be seen as tentative, as the "cumulative body of evaluative literature from which they are derived is relatively sparse" (p. 28). They also note that there are few assessments of long term impact and samples were small and not representative of the populations studied. They advocate the outdoors as a more stimulating learning environment for relevant topics if the programme is of sufficient minimum threshold duration.

In more recent years, there is only one further study which looked at self-concept and outdoor education. In 1990, Hazelworth and Wilson assessed four sessions of a co-ed outdoor adventure camp to determine how the programme effected the self-concept of the teenage participants. They found the "overall analysis of self-concept for the four sessions showed significant positive changes in moral-ethical self concept, identity, and self satisfaction" (Hazelworth & Wilson, 1990, p. 36). They also noted that there was a significant negative change in self-concept in the area of self-criticism. They attribute this to increased awareness due to social intimacy. "For when you get close to someone, no matter whether ... a family member, or a friend, you bring into awareness the very barriers that must be dissolved in order to

relate to that person's true self with your own true self" (Hendricks, 1982, cited in Hazelworth & Wilson, 1990, p. 36). They viewed the negative change in self-criticism as a positive step to increased self-awareness and more authentic relationships.

In the more general literature on self-esteem and mental health in early adolescence, a longitudinal study by Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart & Halfon (1996) (n=219; M age: 12, 13, 14) showed that there is no significant change in self-esteem in early adolescence. It is a relatively stable construct. Changes do take place in the areas of social and scholastic competence and appearance. The decrease in self-esteem with respect to appearance seems to be related to negative experiences with physical development. Their research confirmed most other research in the field, which concludes that girls have lower self-esteem than boys. They suggest that this may be due to the fact that "girls' self-esteem is more global and less differentiated by domain while boys separate the scholastic and behavioral part of their experience from the social. Global self-esteem has more influence on the level of depressive mood in girls than in boys" (Bolognini et al., 1996, p. 233).

Nylund and Ceske (1997) have used a narrative approach to inquire into the effects of depression on young girls and look at the cultural and gender prescriptions that promote depression. They point out that "despite the rhetoric about Western society's emerging enlightenment in regard to women, many of the messages troubling teenagers today are similar to those that influenced me 20 years ago" (Nylund and Ceske, 1997, p. 373). They speak of the double standard in society with respect to young women maintaining their own voices. "Young women seem to have two choices: conforming to

society's mold of femininity and giving up one's sense of self, or insisting on one's own ideas and being chastised, insulted or shunned by others" (p.375). Despite this, they note that recognizing one's own uniqueness is a powerful anti-depressive strategy. Spirituality plays a role in this strategy. As Linda, one of their teenage co-researchers recommends, "other adolescents should find a way to carve out their own unique, unconventional spirituality" (p. 375).

It is important to note that the literature on outdoor programs also goes beyond the traditional measures of self-esteem and locus of control and touches on spirituality. The benefits of these programs are unique and have been used by some practitioners as a form of therapy (Gass, 1993; Berman & Davis-Berman, 1989). Many of the positive results of therapy were duplicated in a shorter experiential model. As Rohde (1996) summarizes, these included: increased feelings of "self-esteem, empowerment, control, competence and trust, the development of healthier coping skills, including new ways to cope with fear, and a decreased feeling of powerlessness, hopelessness and disconnection" (p. 51). She also notes that "being in a natural setting can ignite a sense of spiritual connection, order and continuity that can help restore an individual's faith in the existing larger order. Many individuals who attend wilderness programs report feeling more grounded, empowered and spiritually connected to themselves, humanity and nature" (p. 51). This is a powerful endorsement, especially in light of Cushman's (1990) rather nihilistic portrayal of the modern self as empty and shaped by materialism and advertising. Interestingly, the Sea to Sky Programme does challenge students to examine advertising and question their personal consumption levels both while at Keats Island and when they return home.

Mitten (1992) has run outdoor programmes exclusively for females since 1977 and reports that they derive both short term and long term benefits from the experience. They immediately enjoy the benefit of these trips, and in retrospect they recognize and acknowledge the strengths and skills they gained. Mitten (1992) cautions that for girls and women to feel empowered in the outdoors several factors must exist. These factors include; 1) a programme philosophy that respects women, 2) leaders who are skilled at implementing the programme philosophy and 3) participants who have choices about the activities they participate in. She found that "women often discover their own power and expand their self-images ... and go past both society-imposed ideas of what is possible both as individuals and as women" (p.57). Pushing beyond imposed limits results in feelings of higher self esteem and more self reliance (Mitten, 1992).

There is a growing inclusion of spirituality as part of self-esteem and development of personal autonomy that excludes theology and religious content in the academic literature (McGowan, 1997; Seaward, 1991). In education, theology and religion are the domain of the parochial schools, while most public schools operate in a kind of self-imposed vacuum when it comes to attempts at ethics or values education. Students are encouraged to form opinions, but not supported in this endeavor, with cultural or community resources beyond the teacher. As the Sea to Sky School programmes recognize, there is potential for growth and a chance to find increased meaning and purpose in life through outdoor experiences. In light of the epidemic increases in adolescent suicides, homicides, teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse, eating disorders, thefts, gang involvement, violence, and the ineffectiveness of current strategies for

dealing with these issues (McGowan, 1997), there is compelling evidence that it is time to explore experiential education programs as a possible solution to the crises of early adolescents.

Opportunities to experience nature and outdoor pursuits can result in a sense of personal and social empowerment (Henderson, 1996) and may be part of the solution of developing a healthy resistance in adolescence which allows teenagers alternatives to "turning inwards and becoming psychologically corrosive" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 168). Instead, they can "stay in the open air of relationships" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 168).

The rationale for this research study is to explore the outdoor experiential education experience of a specific programme from the perspective and voice of the teenagers themselves. The above review of the literature on outdoor education and feminist developmental perspectives confirms that there are significant gaps in the literature. As Cason and Gillis (1994) point out, there is a general lack of systematic qualitative studies in the field of outdoor education. Further to this omission there is a significant gap in the outdoor education literature in terms of gender and research which includes the voice of all participants (Bell, 1997). These studies are necessary to provide the foundation for solid theory building in the area. There have also been very few studies on adolescents which use qualitative methods and include the voice of both genders in their research. Marshall and Arvay (1998) is the notable exception to this.

Researchers have used outdoor education settings to study variables such as self-esteem, socialization and attitudes towards school and the



outdoors. These studies assume that these variables are significant and structure their research accordingly. No systematic qualitative studies have been done in this area to confirm that these variables are indeed significant programme factors when generated from the perspective of the adolescents themselves. This study hopes to contribute information useful for theory building, programme design and guidance for future research on themes that are important in outdoor education programs from the perspectives of adolescents involved. The following section outlines the proposed methodology for achieving this.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### Situation Within Qualitative Research

It is clear from the literature review on gendered development and outdoor experiential learning that the research is in need of ongoing contribution and attention. This is a relatively new area of research, so it is appropriate to use a methodology that is both exploratory and descriptive. Qualitative methods are well suited to this purpose. Their descriptive approaches allow subjects to tell their story using their own words. For research focused on adolescents, this is a valuable aspect of hearing their "voice". The voice centered, relational approach to psychology and education was pioneered by Gilligan (1982) and others at the Harvard Women's Project on Women's Psychology and Girl's Development, and entails representing verbatim the voices of girls and women, including the voice of the researcher. As Rogers (1993) points out, "This voice centered, relational way of conducting research, I believe, is vital to educational research and educational practice - because it reveals human differences and limits the power of the researchers' interpretations and generalizations" (p.267). Generally, qualitative methods allow for a shift from the researcher's perspective to that of the participant. This prevents researchers from falling into the trap of assuming that the adolescent's perceptions and understanding of a particular experience are the same as their own.

Also, as Kolb (1991) points out, qualitative methods are preferred in outdoor experiential settings because of the problem of finding quantifiable methods that measure all aspects of the programme or experience. Most

qualitative methods emphasize context, but not generalizability, as an essential aspect of generating meaning. There is wide variation in experiential education programs, and qualitative methods can take into consideration individual differences in the experience, as well as account for the differences between programs. As a result, qualitative researchers seek in their work primarily to augment practical programme understanding (Denzin, 1998)

Ewert (1987) states that research must begin to ask the why and the how of established outcomes in order to get programme outcomes that can be repeated and improved upon. He suggests that qualitative work can provide "theoretical insight" which may help to explain and generalize the results of the quantitative studies (p. 6). In order to gain this insight from the perspective of the programme participants and focus on what was meaningful to them, the Critical Incident Technique is the method of choice for this study. As Woolsey (1986) points out, critical incident studies are particularly useful in the early stages of research because they generate exploratory information for theory or model building. This research is exploratory and such suits this method. It also represents a method which fits the concrete information needs of programme designers and educators (the intended audience), rather than evolving from an abstract philosophical perspective (Denzin, 1998).

## Critical Incident Technique

Warren and Rheingold (1993) suggest, "To validate the experience of women and girls, it is crucial to include real issues of *their* lives" (p. 29; emphasis added). I believe this validation of experience applies to all people regardless of gender. The sense of self is located in the person's experience and understanding of their own socially produced life story. As such 'the self' can never be disconnected from the components of life experience and it is important to discover what the critical factors of a shared life experience are for a group of adolescents, each having a unique perspective.

The Critical Incident Technique, developed by Flanagan (1954), offers one approach to focus in on these factors. The technique is an exploratory method which has been shown to be both reliable and valid in generating a detailed and complete description of the content domain (Andersson and Nilsson, 1964). The Critical Incident Technique uses interviews to collect information from people about their direct observations of their own and other's behavior (Woolsey, 1986). The incidents must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where consequences are definite enough to leave few doubts about the effects of the incident (Flanagan, 1954). The two basic principles of the Critical Incident Technique are that factual reports of behavior are preferable to ratings or opinions based on general impressions, and that only factors that make a significant contribution to the activity studied should be included (Woolsey, 1986). As Kvale (1996) points out, this means that the reporting is not simply re-representing the views of the participants along with the researcher's viewpoints and interpretations. The interview itself is a social

construction where the researcher's choice of writing style, incidents and perspective provide the researcher's view of the participant's world.

There are five steps required to implement the critical incident technique. These are: 1) determining the aim of the activity to be studied, 2) setting plans, specification and criteria for the information to be obtained, 3) collecting data, 4) analyzing the thematic content of the data, and 5) reporting the findings (Woolsey, 1986).

### **Methodological Considerations**

The rationale for choosing the Critical Incident Technique is based on the exploratory nature of the research question. The aim of this study is to determine what aspects of Sea to Sky outdoors school significantly enhanced or detracted from the adolescent's experience of the programme. These factors can be elicited by asking the participants to describe experiences which were perceived to enhance or detract from their experience of the programme, i.e. critical incidents. It is possible that the themes drawn from the participants' perception of the experience, may point to factors which are important in developing a sense of competent self and contribute to theory building in this area. Woolsey (1986) advises it is important to avoid jargon and use simple everyday language, in order to ensure that the aim of the study is clearly understood by all participants. The degree to which the aim can be clarified and simplified will affect the ability of participants to recall relevant incidents or events.

The methodology is not considered a feminist methodology, but it is congruent with the feminist ideology and theory of development which supports this paper. Feminist researchers often prefer qualitative approaches which illicit narrative accounts from the participants, gives them a voice, and relies on a dialogue between the researcher and the researched (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991). A significant aspect of this study is concerned with "voice" and preserving the richness of the adolescent's experiences and perceptions in a way which focuses on factual observable events. The Critical Incident Technique provides for a somewhat structured approach to the data and interview. This should improve the quality of the study by helping to keep personal biases in check.

Another important factor in choosing the Critical Incident Technique as the methodology was the trustworthiness of the data generated. The trustworthiness of a qualitative study relates to the degree that different people can use the categories generated with confidence (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). This can be achieved through the use of independent judges to sort incidents into categories and check whether or not the categories can be replicated. Inter-rater agreement is achieved by the correct classification of 75 to 85 percent of the critical incidents into categories and 60 to 70 percent of the sub-categories (Anderson and Nilsson, 1964). Checking the categories with the participants also serves to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

The trustworthiness of the Critical Incident Method can also be enhanced by the researcher's ability to identify and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant incidents or events. Also, it is important that the researcher remain open and avoid leading the participants during the

interview. The chances of leading the participants are lessened if the researcher has no prior relationship with the study participants and remains open to the reported findings of the participants, rather than pointing them in the direction the researcher believes to be important.

The Critical Incident Technique is a feasible research methodology which focuses on reporting facts and observable behaviors to achieve the aim of the study (Woolsey, 1986). The focus on facts and events, clear and concise language, a structured interview, inter-rater agreement for the data analysis, and participant feedback to confirm the categorization of the data, helps to increase the standardization of the Critical Incident Technique. Also, these safeguards limit researcher bias to a greater degree than many other qualitative research methodologies.

### **Methodological Limitations**

There are limitations to the critical incident technique. First, the potential for bias still exists, but this can be minimized by being aware of not leading the respondent in the interview and performing the trustworthiness and validity checks outlined earlier. Also, using empathetic listening and paraphrasing skills helps to minimize researcher distortion. Second, the critical incident technique is a qualitative method which allows for a relatively small participant sample. This limits the ability to generalize the research findings to the population at large. Third, the critical incident methodology uses interviews to collect information about observable events (Woolsey, 1986), because of this, global factors contributing to the enhancement or detracting from the student's experience of the Sea to Sky

Programme may be overlooked. Participants may be unable to recall specific incidents to illustrate qualities of the programme such as the intellectual stimulation, meaningful activity or mental challenges. Similarly, the nature of the programme environment (dynamic, fun, creative, thought provoking etc.), or internal emotional experiences may be difficult to capture in the context of specific observable incidents. A fourth limitation of this study concerns the sample. The majority of the participants are from Caucasian, middle to upper class families. There are also significantly more female than male participants in this sample. More information on the participants is outlined in the following section.

### **Participants**

This study interviewed Grade 9 students at a public secondary school, who participated in the Sea to Sky Outdoor School experiential education programme on Keats Island in May 1998. There were few limitations on sampling in order to get as wide as possible a range of critical incidents and complete coverage in the content domain (Woolsey, 1986). Volunteers were recruited by posters placed in the school and announcements read over the school's PA system. A teacher in the school recorded the names of students who were interested in participating in the study and arranged interview times which did not conflict with the student's academic studies. The researcher interviewed all students who volunteered with parental consent. The recruitment notice was worded in such a way that it would attract students who had negative experiences at Sea to Sky as well as those who had positive experiences (see poster, Appendix A) Retrospective data is permissible in Critical Incident studies, and in general the more recent the



events the better (Flanagan, 1954). In this case, the experience took place within the year and due to the salience of the experience it is expected that the respondents will still have a direct and clear recall of the incidents.

Recently, when members of this group, now in Grade 9, were asked to talk about their experience to generate interest and inform a group of Grade 8 students planning to attend Sea to Sky this year, they experienced no difficulty recalling and discussing activities and events which occurred during their visit. And as Flanagan (1954) points out, if the details of the events are full and precise, the information can be taken as accurate, but if the reports are vague, some of the data may be incorrect.

### **Procedure**

A small pilot study was conducted with two female Grade 10 students from a small private school who attended the same session of the programme. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine if the wording of the interview was clear and comprehensible for the average student. These students had no difficulty with the wording of the interview, or in generating critical incidents.

Interested participants at the school were provided with an introductory letter, and a consent for both themselves and their parents (Appendix B). The letter explained the purpose of the study, how the results will be used, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Due to the age of the participants, signed consent of their parents was required for the students to participate in the study. No data was used without the informed consent of both the parents and students. After

the consent forms were returned to a teacher at the school, interviews were arranged and held in a spare portable classroom at the school. At the interview the student was first asked a few demographic questions. This information included their age, gender, cultural background, parental education status, and family income. This information was used to describe the sample, but used for any other data analysis. A structured audiotaped interview was then held with each participant using the following outline:

### **Focus of the Interview:**

"The purpose of my study is to explore what the experience of participating in an outdoor education programme was like for you and what ongoing meaning this experience may have for you. I'd like you to think back to your time at Sea to Sky School on Keats Island last Spring. Please focus on what factors enhanced or detracted from your experience at Sea to Sky school."

- Criterion checks:** "What are some of these factors?" (list)
- Context:** "Think of a particular activity or aspect of the Sea to Sky School that enhanced your experience."  
"What was happening then?"
- Critical incidents:** "Please describe a particular incident or incidents when you did something or something happened at Sea to Sky School that significantly enhanced your experience."
- Check effect of incident:** "In what ways did this enhance your Sea to Sky experience?"

(search and clarify other incidents using the above format)

- Context:** "Think of a particular activity or aspect of the Sea to Sky School that detracted from your experience."  
"What was happening then?"
- Critical incidents:** "Please describe a particular incident or incidents when you did something or something happened

at Sea to Sky School that detracted from your experience."

**Check effect of incident:** "In what ways did this detract from your Sea to Sky experience?"

(search and clarify other incidents using the above format)

The interview followed this structure until the participant could no longer illicit new and different critical incidents. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis**

Themes were extracted from the content of the transcribed responses in three steps, as suggested by Woolsey (1986). First, the frame of reference was selected. In this study, the frame of reference was critical events which either significantly facilitated or hindered the adolescent's experience of the Sea to Sky programme. Second, categories were formed by grouping similar incidents together. Headings and sub-headings served to organize the data and establish a level of generality, while still maximizing the distinctiveness of the categories (Flanagan, 1954). Incidents which fit in more than one category were copied and categorized accordingly. These categories can be thought of as the structure of the adolescent's experience and they condense and embody the meaning and imagery of the participant's language and story. The source and the context of the incident were included to provide a social context for the findings in keeping with the voice and developmental stages of identity as recognized by Gilligan (1982). The critical incidents of males and females were compared, based on the content of the incident, the number of incidents reported in each category and the participation rate for the category

of incidents. The experience of the participants was framed by the larger social context of experiential education and the current perceived roles of gender in adolescents.

This information was based on inference and observations of the programme participants made by the researcher while attending the same session of Sea to Sky School as a teacher of another small group of students from a different school. This helps to provide a perspective on the interviews as both a participant and an observer of the programme, and hopefully prevents what Kvale (1996) calls "a tiresome series of uninterrupted quotes, refraining from theoretical interpretations as if from some dangerous form of speculation" (p. 255).

Following the categorization of the data, a validation interview was conducted with the participants in order to allow them an opportunity to respond to the researcher's interpretation of their experience. During this member check, participants were asked if they wished to make any corrections or additions to the transcriptions and to check the categorization of their statements. This validation interview helped to ensure that the participants felt understood by the researcher, and provided a balance for any suppositions that the researcher may have allowed to colour the categorization of the data.

The reliability of categorical and sub-categorical classification was further established by the use of two independent judges. These judges replicated the classification of more than 75 to 85 percent of the critical incidents into categories and more than 60 to 70 percent of the sub-categories correctly in order to surpass the level of inter-rater agreement recommended

by Anderson and Nilsson (1964). The first judge, a female Ph.D. student in Counseling Psychology at another university, categorized 90 percent of all incidents into matching categories and sub-categories of the primary researcher, and the second judge, a male with a college level background in psychology, placed 85 percent of all incidents in categories which matched with the categorization of the primary researcher. Based on this agreement the categories can be considered trustworthy.

### **Implications of the Study**

This study will benefit the area of research pertaining to adolescent's experiences of an experiential education programme in a way which focuses on incidents which enhanced or detracted from their experience. This information is combined with the evaluator's perspective as each are "stakeholders in the literal creation of evaluation data" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 55). The study considers the impact of gender on their outdoor education experience by comparison to the literature in this field. It is possible experiential education programs may play a protective role in terms of an enhanced sense of competence and prevention of loss of voice in adolescents. There are very few perspectives on gendered experience in the literature of experiential education (Bell, 1997). Compounding this deficit, there are only two studies in the literature (Marshall & Arvay, 1998; Way, 1997) which considers the adolescent male point of view in contribution to the issues of voice and gender under discussion. This study will include the voices of both males and females and allow for comparison of critical incidents and themes in terms of gender. The research will further the experiential education literature, allow for direct feedback on a widely utilized

programme operating in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and further our understanding of adolescent meaning making and the developing sense of self.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

A sample of 15 participants volunteered from the population of students who attended this session (May 1998) of the Sea to Sky Programme. Eleven females and four males comprised a sample with almost a 3:1 ratio of girls to boys. This represents a slightly higher ratio of females to males than found within the population from which the participants were drawn. Of the 41 students who attended this session of the Sea to Sky programme, 25 were girls and 16 were boys. Also in attendance at this session were four Grade 10 participants (3 girls and 1 boy) from a small private school. Two of these Grade 10 students were used to pilot test the interview but none of them were included in the final research sample. Forty-five students (28 girls and 17 boys) attended this session of the programme. This represents almost a 2:1 ratio of girls to boys. Consequently, the larger proportion of females in this study was taken into consideration in the interpretation of the results.

All 15 study participants were 13 or 14 years old and in Grade 8 at the time of their Sea to Sky visit. At the time of their interview eight months later, eight participants were 14 years old and seven participants were 15 years old. Three boys and four girls were 15 years old at the time of their interview, the remaining eight girls and one boy were 14 years old. This places this sample exactly in the age window established by Bolognini et al. (1996) in their longitudinal study of self-esteem, and is also comparable to Harter's (1998) cross sectional work on level of voice in adolescents between

12 to 15 years old, and Gilligan's (1992) work on adolescent girls' perspectives on sense of self.

All 15 participants described themselves as Canadian. One participant described herself as "white and Native" and the remaining 14 participants described themselves as "white", meaning Canadian of European heritage.

At the time of the interview, all 15 participants were in Grade 9. The education level of their parents was varied. One participant had a mother who finished Grade 11, and she did not report on her father. Another participant's father graduated from a technical school and her mother finished Grade 11. Two participants had parents who graduated from high school; two participants had mothers who finished high school and fathers who graduated from college or university. One participant's mother graduated from college and her father finished high school. Six participants had parents who both finished college or university, and two participants had both parents with graduate or professional degrees. Generally the parents' education level in this sample of participants is high, and education level of parents is a good predictor of the education level of their children.

Five participants described their family income as medium, (\$20-\$60 thousand Canadian dollars per year) and ten participants described their family income as high (over \$60 thousand Canadian dollars per year). Generally, the socio-economic status of the participants was middle to upper-middle class.



None of the participants had attended the Sea to Sky Programme before. One participant had been to a friend's cottage on Keats Island previously and five participants had been on a class canoe trip in Grade 5 to the Bowron Lakes. The participants all live in a small but growing community north of Vancouver. The primary industries in this town are logging and tourism.

### Data Collection

Data was obtained by a brief demographic questionnaire and an interview employing the critical incident methodology to collect descriptions of their own or other's behavior (Woolsey, 1986). Specifically, the participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves and then describe events or activities which enhanced or detracted from their experience of the Sea to Sky Programme. All interviews were audiotaped and ranged from 20 to 60 minutes in duration. Most individuals required 30 to 45 minutes to complete their recollection of critical incidents. Understanding the methodology proved difficult for some participants and relatively easy for others. The most common problem for the participants with difficulties related to their inability to recall a specific example of an event illustrating the enhancing or detracting nature of an identified factor. Some participants also spoke in general terms about the programme and how it affected them. These statements could not be reported within the parameters of a critical incident, yet they contained valuable information and insights which are reported in a section on non-incident related comments. Some participants also related experiences which took place either before or after the actual three days of the programme. These incidents were included in the data if they included a

specific event which enhanced or detracted from their experience of the programme. Therefore, events which occurred around fundraising for the trip or travel to and from the island, for example, were included as aspects of understanding the complete experience of the participants. The other problem some participants experienced was not understanding the wording of the research questions. Some students required definitions of the words "enhanced" and "detracted". Definitions were provided if this was a problem. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and critical incidents were copied onto cue cards for ease of category sorting.

The 15 participants who took part in this study reported a total of 303 incidents which enhanced or detracted from their experience. There were 263 critical incidents (87percent) which enhanced the participant's experience of the Sea to Sky programme. The average number of enhancing incidents was 18 incidents per participant, with a range of 6 to 48 incidents, and a median of 13 incidents. There were 40 incidents (13percent) which were reported to detract from the participant's experience, with an average of three incidents per participant, (range of 0 to 6 incidents, median of 2 incidents). Eighty-three percent of the detracting incidents were reported by the females in this group.

One male participant described "leaving" as the only factor which detracted from his experience. This factor was not described in enough detail to be considered a critical incident, and it related to the programme in general rather than a specific activity or aspect of the programme, as a result it was not considered acceptable data. Aside from this participant, all participants reported at least one incident which detracted from their experience. Only data that described a specific event or aspect of the programme were classified

as critical incidents. Critical incidents were divided into categories which had a common theme. Some categories include a number of sub-categories. In some cases, different aspects of a critical incident fit into different categories. In this case the incident was classified in two or more categories.

Inter-rater reliability was achieved for both the categories that described enhancing and detracting factors. After the incidents had been initially grouped, a second group interview was held with the participants to obtain feedback and further explanation regarding the information they had provided. Several participants made corrections or additions to their transcripts at this time and were astonished that "This is how I really talk?". None of the participants changed the initial categorization of the incidents.

The following tables summarize the factors which the participants described as enhancing their experience of Sea to Sky Outdoor School for the entire group and for each gender group. The categories are ordered by participation rate for that category. Participation rate is the number of participants who reported an incident which fell in the category, divided by the total number of participants, expressed as a percentage. Number of critical incidents reported is also recorded on the charts.

Table 1. Summary of critical incidents which enhanced the programme.

FACTOR	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PARTICIPATION RATE
<b>Relationships</b> a) new friends b) deepening established friendships c) seeing peers/ teachers in a new light d) being with the girls/ guys	51	93%
<b>Enjoyable Activities</b> a) sports b) morning wake-up c) singing d) theatre sports e) other	40	80%
<b>Increased Awareness</b> a) of senses b) of others c) of Nature d) of inequities in society	33	80%
<b>Team Building</b> a) problem solving b) group co-operation c) risk and trust	29	80%
<b>Active Learning</b> a) games with a purpose b) metaphor	24	67%
<b>Freedom and Choice</b>	10	60%
<b>Novel Experience</b> a) activity b) wildlife c) setting	15	53%
<b>Comfort</b> a) food b) cabins c) weather d) other	15	47%
<b>Time to Think</b>	13	47%
<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>	14	33%
<b>Sense of Self</b> a) increased self awareness b) increased self acceptance	11	33%
<b>Getting away from it all</b>	8	27%

Table 2. Critical incidents which enhanced the programme for males.

FACTOR	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PARTICIPATION RATE
<b>Enjoyable Activities</b> a) sports b) morning wake-up c) singing d) theatre sports e) other	12	100%
<b>Team Building</b> a) problem solving b) group co-operation c) risk and trust	6	100%
<b>Relationships</b> a) new friends b) deepening established friendships c) seeing peers/ teachers in a new light d) being with the girls/ guys	12	75%
<b>Increased Awareness</b> a) of senses b) of others c) of Nature d) of inequities in society	5	75%
<b>Comfort</b> a) food b) cabins c) weather d) other	3	75%
<b>Freedom and Choice</b>	3	75%
<b>Novel Experience</b> a) activity b) wildlife c) setting	3	75%
<b>Active Learning</b> a) games with a purpose b) metaphor	4	50%
<b>Time to Think</b>	6	25%
<b>Sense of Self</b> a) increased self awareness b) increased self acceptance	4	25%
<b>Getting away from it all</b>	1	25%
<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>	0	0%

Table 3. Critical incidents which enhanced the programme for females.

FACTOR	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PARTICIPATION RATE
<b>Relationships</b> a) new friends b) deepening established friendships c) seeing peers/ teachers in a new light d) being with the girls	39	100%
<b>Increased Awareness</b> a) of senses b) of others c) of Nature d) of inequities in society	28	82%
<b>Enjoyable Activities</b> a) sports b) morning wake-up c) singing d) theatre sports e) other	28	73%
<b>Team Building</b> a) problem solving b) group co-operation c) risk and trust	23	73%
<b>Active Learning</b> a) games with a purpose b) metaphor	20	73%
<b>Freedom and Choice</b>	7	55%
<b>Time to Think</b>	7	55%
<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>	14	45%
<b>Novel Experience</b> a) activity b) wildlife c) setting	12	45%
<b>Comfort</b> a) food b) cabins c) weather d) other	12	36%
<b>Sense of Self</b> a) increased self awareness b) increased self acceptance	7	36%
<b>Getting away from it all</b>	7	27%

## Enhancing Critical Incident Themes

Overall, there were 263 incidents which described positive aspects of the students' experience of the Sea to Sky Programme. This makes up 87 percent of all reported incidents and speaks to the fact that this was a positive experience of the majority of students in the sample.

### Relationships

Participants cited incidents which were categorized in Relationships most often with 51 reported examples (overall participation rate 93 percent). These incidents describe some aspect being with their friends, making new friends or seeing people in a different light. Included in this category are relationships with teachers and staff which initially were separated into peer relationships and teacher relationships. However, in many ways this is contrary to the inclusive egalitarian nature of the programme, and as a result, this category includes all types of relationships that the participants may have had at Sea to Sky School. Many of the participants recognized qualities and talents in both their peer group and teachers which they were not previously aware of. They remarked how everyone seemed "more equal" when they were at Keats Island. For example, Butterfly states:

*"When you are at camp the kids seemed to respect the teachers better. At Keats they seemed to have more respect for them. I think it's maybe because they're acting more like us. They're singing and playing and staying in our cabins and doing stuff that teachers just don't do."*

Making new friends was also an aspect of the Sea to Sky experience for male participants. As Frank states:

*"The G.A.P time [go and play, go and pee, go and prepare] was great. I really liked that because I got to interact with kids from school that you usually don't with. Like there was kids there that I don't usually hang around with at school, then we went to Keats and we were stuck in a group. We were almost forced to become friends, but it didn't matter if we were forced or not. We enjoyed it and we had fun. "*

Along with making new friends, aspects of the Sea to Sky Programme offered participants a chance to recognize previously unknown qualities in their friends. As Lynn describes:

*"I got to learn about people by those activities. I would learn more about people and more about my friends and like make better friendships ... Like the skits we had to do one night. We'd go up by ourselves with the pop bottle and just do it- [Improviseational Theatre]- even like the shy people and stuff, even people you would never imagine going up there. You just had to think of something. It expressed who you were I guess a little but it was nice and everyone had a chance and everyone could do it."*

Incidents describing relationships were reported frequently by both male and female participants, but the females described more than three times as many incidents focusing on relationships than the males. Also the female participation rate was 100 percent for this category, compared with 75



percent for the males. This might not be surprising given the higher number of female participants in this study, but this factor may not be the only explanation for this discrepancy. The discrepancy may indicate that female participants are more relationally minded than the males, who tended to focus more on incidents centered around activities.

This factor was noted by Sunny when she says:

*"Inside the cabin it was just the girls not the boys too. That made it better. If there were boys probably [laughs]they wouldn't be as personal as us and say as much stuff ... I don't know. They just don't seem like people that would share what they've done before and what they liked about it and what they didn't like about it. That's what we did."*

This report is in contrast to information provided by Tom, when he discusses an incident which highlights what the boys did in their cabin at night:

T: *"At night we'd play joke games and stay up until two in the morning playing and joking around and stuff."*

R: *"Tell me what happened, tell me about a particular incident."*

T: (laughing)*"Well we'd play Truth of Dare right? And we'd go out and like we'd ask them questions and stuff and if they said "Dare" we'd have to get them to do something to makes fools of themselves."*

R: *"How did that enhance your experience?"*

T: *"Well is was just funny, laughing at the stupid stuff they made them do. It was very funny."*

For Tom, the focus of this incident is the enjoyment gained by watching others make fools of themselves, rather than any enhancement of

relationships which may have come from sharing the "Truth" with each other during this game. This incident was categorized as an Enjoyable Activity as outlined in the following section.

### Enjoyable Activities

The next most frequently reported category of incidents described Enjoyable Activities. These were activities the participants participated in either in their free time or as part of the non-instructional programme at Sea to Sky School. The primary qualities of this category are fun, satisfaction and enjoyment derived from an activity. It is a significant category as joy pleasure and enjoyment are related to long term participation in a sport or activity (Griffin, Chandler & Sariscsany, 1993). This was the most identified category for the males in terms of both the number of incidents and participation rates (12 and 100 percent respectively). It was the third most reported category for the females with 28 critical incidents and a participation rate of 73 percent. The category is characterized by incidents in which the participants were playing together or enjoying a sport for the sheer joy of it. In this category they also frequently reported on the method the staff used to wake them up in the morning. For example Emily states:

*"The way they woke us up in the morning... it was really neat not hearing my beeping alarm clock. You'd wake up when you heard the drums and horn... I knew right away when I woke up I was at Keats Island just because you could hear the drums and horn outside. It was really cool."*

Participants often reported that they enjoyed singing and learning new songs while they were on the island. As Tabby states:

*"I liked the singing. It was kind of fun because we don't sing much anymore. It's kind of like we got to act like little kids again and it didn't really matter because everyone else was too."*

This comment also speaks to the lack of self-consciousness many participants enjoyed while they were there.

Another frequently reported group of incidents (9) in this category centered around a tire swing that the participants played on during their free time. The tire swing developed its own sub-culture as it became the medium through which the males and females interacted. For most other free time activities, such as soccer or broomball, I observed these participants forming same-sex teams. At the tire swing it was different. As Tom explains:

*"Well we would get free time and go on the rope swing and see how many people we could get on it when we were only supposed to have like two people on it and we got like 13 on it all swinging. Then everyone would fall off and all the girls would go 'Oh! oh! oh!'*  
[speaking in a breathy high-pitched voice to imitate the girls] *and start closing their legs because they would be wearing shorts and the guys were trying to peek underneath. That was the best."*

Also included in this category were enjoyment of other miscellaneous aspects of the programme: evening bonfires down by the rocks, skits put on by

participant weather reporters at meals, and the "Mystery Box," a contest where participants tried to identify various natural objects. Included in this category are examples when the participants described incidents where they saw the humour and ironies of life. One such incident is described by Twig (a female):

*"Well we weren't supposed to waste our food. There was this bucket where you were supposed to put all your extra food, and if at the end of the week you could see white at the bottom of the bucket we would get something, but the raccoons came in the night and ate it all, so it didn't work. That was funny. It was like the raccoons were helping us out."*

The males reported incidents in this category equal in number to the Relationships category, but with a higher participation rate (100 percent). This category was universally commented on by the boys. There was a slightly lower female participation rate in this category (73 percent), but the number of incidents reported in this category was second only to Relationships for the girls. This may be attributed to the boys' satisfaction with the programme being more contingent on external factors such as activities than the girls. Two of the boys specifically stated that they liked the active athletic nature of the programme. No girls specifically stated this.

### **Increased Awareness**

The third most frequently reported category overall was Increased Awareness. This category included incidents where the participants described a shift in some aspect of their awareness. This category included their sensory

awareness, their awareness of others, their appreciation of Nature and their increased understanding of global inequities. Many of the activities at Sea to Sky School were intentionally structured to open up awareness, starting with the student's awareness of themselves and working outwards from there. Night hikes, giving up their watches, keeping track of their garbage, filling out a daily sheet on the size of their ecological footprint, spending some time alone in the woods, or browsing through an AdBusters magazine all helped to open up new realms of awareness for these students. As Tabby reports, the awareness could be sensory and enjoyable:

*"I liked the walks where we stopped and did all those activities ... like that time we got to go barefoot and walked through the trails. It made me more aware of what you're walking on. You usually don't really use all your senses like walking through the bush. That time we got to use touch which we usually don't. I kind of expected it to be mucky, the ground, but it wasn't. It was just kind of soft. It was nice walking; it felt really nice on your feet walking through it."*

The awareness could also be global. One day lunch was structured to mirror global inequity on a smaller scale. As Lynn explains:

*"One day we had lunch and only certain tables had food. They had a lot of it and it just showed if they noticed if anyone else was eating and they were pigging out ... we were wondering where ours was. It made me think about people who go through this every day. Food is taken for granted and I could see everyone not even noticing ... I guess it's how we are today. We don't really notice what people go*

*through. We ended up getting to eat afterwards but it wasn't the same. It was a really powerful lesson for me."*

In terms of general awareness, each participant seemed to work at their own level. Some described the lunch activity as a "prank" for example, that left them feeling confused and a bit angry that they were not getting fed right away. Others realized just how much they take food for granted.

The incidents reported in this category show that the participants enhanced their awareness of their senses, others and the greater world around them. They recognized their personal impact and realized that they had a say in their actions or non-actions. Rhea explains:

*"Something that really stood out for me was (the lesson on)'The Power of One' and realizing what you can do to help other people. If you see something that is wrong, you can go to talk to the person and use your 'Power of One' to make their day better. If there's something in their way, like even when you are walking, like a stick or something, you use your 'Power of One' and move it out of the way so that person won't get hurt."*

Interestingly, more incidents in this category were reported by girls than boys (28 vs. 5 events). This discrepancy may reflect our societal tendency for females to be more focused on others than themselves. It may also indicate that the females were more reflective and continue to look at things through the lens of their expanded awareness. An example of ongoing reflection was provided by Lynn:

*"We had to fill out sheets. They were about water you use and how much transportation you use by car and stuff. We got points for certain things. . . I still have that at home with me in my room. It made me notice things that I didn't notice before. When I look at the sheet I guess I don't waste as much and it changed me as a person to do better things and like more things for the Earth I guess."*

The predominance of female responses may be partly explained by the greater number of females in the sample, however the difference is not likely to be completely explained this way. In comparing the male and female responses in this category, all of the males' incidents related to increased sensory awareness or appreciation of Nature. Increased awareness of others, or the lunch exercise which highlighted global inequities were not mentioned by the boys. The boys responses were more specific and concrete than the girls. They dealt more with direct experience rather than impact or emotional response.

### **Team Building**

The fourth category most often cited as enhancing the participants' Sea to Sky experience was Team Building. This category had an overall participation rate of 80 percent and included 29 reported incidents. All of the males in the sample reported incidents in this category, and 73 percent of the females described incidents which involved working with a team or group. This category is characterized by incidents which focus on cooperation, problem solving, overcoming challenges and building trust as a group. This

category also speaks about being a constructive and contributing member of a social group. Sometimes the participants commented on their experience of initiative games such as The Wall, Toxic Pit, and The Web. And other incidents suggested that their appreciation of collaboration and teamwork expanded beyond activities organized by the programme staff. The participants also commented on feelings of cohesion and power when they paddled the Voyager Canoes and successfully cleaned broken Oreo™ cookies off the floor of the boys' shower. The incidents all reflected the participants' awareness that they had to work together to achieve success.

As George explains:

*" We would do these few things . . . like there was a bucket of water and a rope thing with an elastic and you had to get it around and move the water. That was pretty funny because everyone had to work together. It was different, um, it was funny because people kept spilling. Everyone was trying to do it themselves because you thought no one else could do it and everyone had their own ideas of how to do it and eventually we did get it."*

An interesting observation on this activity was that the participants were instructed to complete the task without talking. This seemed to prevent the talkative extroverts in the group from dominating. The group I observed failed on their first attempt and the males were definitely more directive and animated in pointing and signaling their ideas to the others. They were then allowed to talk and plan a second attempt. During the debriefing time, some of the girls spoke up, but the activity remained primarily directed and executed by the boys. The group succeeded on their second try at this activity.



A sub category of these incidents is Trust. For many participants relying on others was a novel and somewhat scary experience. As Frank, a tall athletic boy, comments about being lifted over the wall:

*"I've never actually had this happen because I've always been the biggest one in the group . . . some person lifted up my leg and then propped me up and it worked because of the team work . . . it was pretty cool because I was up and I was like 'Oh, nifty', I was kind of scared because they were so little and I'm like 'Oh, don't drop me' . . . At first I didn't trust them but then after I gained the trust . . . we did it again and that second time I really trusted.*

All of the boys described at least one critical incident related to Team Building. The participation rate in this category was lower for the females perhaps reflecting some anxiety or ambivalence about these aspects of the programme. One participant in particular seemed very anxious during a Trust Fall activity which preceded climbing The Wall. Sunny's main concern was safety:

*"It made me feel a lot safer when we did the circle thing - when a person stands in the middle and everyone falls around. That makes me feel safer because they always caught you. You didn't fall down which you thought you were going to do . . . It makes me feel safe and it makes you not worry what would happen and that [voice trails off] I shouldn't talk this way."*

This type of concern seems to display the more cautious and careful attitude which was observed in many of the girls. She also censors herself from voicing her concerns about safety and verbalizing her fears that she might fall. This comment seems to speak directly about loss of voice. She was placed in a situation where some of the activities involved a high perception of risk. It is possible that many of the girls in this type of situation would be torn between participating with the team or listening to their own internal concerns about personal safety.

### Active Learning

For female participants, the fifth most frequently reported category was Active Learning. Sixty-seven percent of the participants reported incidents in this category for a total of 24 reported examples. These incidents centered around the concept of learning while doing. The incidents included singing songs which summarized the lessons, teaching which took place on the hiking trails, games, groups discussions, and the exploration of metaphoric transfer of the activities to other areas of life. Most participants enjoyed the active, relevant and creative ways they were taught. For example, Finn states:

*"We had to go up a wall. It was a 10 foot wall and we had to lift each other up. That to me was really important because it related to a lot of the P.A.T.H.S. they told us [People, Awareness, Truths, Habits & Simplicity or Simply Free]. People and Awareness because you couldn't drop me, you had to get in the habit of doing things well, and its Simple, you're not using any tools and it really showed that to me . . . I realized that the acronym P.A.T.H.S was actually real and that each one*

*of those letters would have something to do with almost everything that I would do in real life. It's not like school where you learn something in math about triangles and wonder 'When am I ever going to use this? What's the point of it? I'm not going to use it anyway'. . . It actually kind of scared me because like now I'm thinking 'Just get through all my work' and I like, hate school. It's not fun. It's just repetitive. I thought as soon as this is over I'm going to do something that's different, something that doesn't repeat itself, and there I was. They didn't repeat themselves . . . I learned more there than I would have in a month of school because they never repeated themselves and it stuck with you. I don't know how they did it, but it was the best teaching technique that I've ever seen."*

Here Finn focuses on the relevance of the teaching rather than the teamwork required to scale The Wall, but the incident was also reported under the category of Teamwork.

Some participants were initially reluctant to get involved but ended up enjoying themselves. As Julia states:

*"We had to walk to the highest peak when we first got there. We were like 'Oh, no, we don't want to'. Then once you actually get walking and learning things it was a lot of fun. You get to be with your friends and learn in a different way, like going on a Nature Walk instead of sitting in your social studies class all day. It didn't seem like you were learning".*

Many participants were amazed at the time of the interview just how much of the lessons from Keats Island they still remembered. Their recollections were fresh, accurate and detailed eight months later.

A greater proportion of the females than males responded with incidents which were classified as Active Learning. This may point to a trend remarked upon by many of the participants that girls tend to take school more seriously than the boys at this age. This information came from interview questions asked of the students but not included in this study. It is also equally possible that the students were responding to the researcher as a teacher. Some of the students seemed to respond to the interview questions as some sort of memory test. They listed almost every aspect of the programme. When this occurred, they were reminded that they only needed to report incidents which *significantly* enhanced (or detracted) from their experience. The girls tended to comment more on specific aspects of the programme early in their interviews and only mentioned non-academic programme aspects such as playing on the tire swing later in their interviews.

### Novel Experience

The next most frequently reported group of critical incidents with 15 incidents reported in the group and a participation rate of 53 percent overall was Novel Experience. The identifying aspect of this group of incidents was the sense of newness and exploring something they had never or rarely tried before. For many participants being on an island, or exposure to a marine environment, was something new for them. For others being lifted up by others was new. Many of the water sports and activities were also out of the

ordinary experiences for these students. For example, canoeing was new for George:

*"I liked the canoeing. That was new. It's something I don't really get a chance to do that much."*

Some participants focused on the wildlife that they were more aware of when they sat quietly by themselves in the woods at night. For Finn, not only was this an experience which heightened his sensory awareness, but also allowed him to have a new experience with wildlife:

*"Then we did the solitude spot at night,... After about five minutes out there I could see perfectly and it was different than in daytime. Like there was so much to see because everything looks different in a different light but you could still see clearly ... you could almost hear the ants running around. You could smell ... you could smell the deer. You could smell like the barnyard and I could tell they were close, but they never really came that close. Then there was a skunk that walked by. You couldn't smell it because it wasn't spraying but you could hear its feet because it's so quiet--I've never been able to hear or heard an animal walk by because they are so quiet, but during that time I could hear it. It was amazing."*

There was a wide range of incidents in this category from observations of animals and sea creatures never seen before, to "neat" experiences like swimming in ocean water for the first time.

In this category a smaller proportion of the girls made more of the incident statements. Three out of four of the boys responded in this category and provided one incident each.

### Comfort

The next most frequently responded to category was labeled Comfort. In this category participants discussed incidents or aspects of the programme which related to their physical comfort. Incidents in this category tend to relate to the foundation level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Incidents centered on food, clothing, shelter, the weather, and organizational structure of the programme. There were 15 incidents reported in this category with an overall participation rate of 47 percent. The participation rate for boys in this category was 75 percent compared to 36 percent of the girls. This may be explained simply by the fact that food is more of a focus for boys at this age than girls. Two of the boys commented on the meals, while only one of the girls talked about the food. As George recalled:

*"Well, eating was always fun ... It was different because after a whole day you've been outside running around and you are so tired and you are so hungry and you will eat anything. And sometimes you had to eat anything [laughs]. It wasn't always extremely good food, well actually most of it was really good food. There were some things I didn't like personally but most people did. I was looking forward to meals a lot more than normal."*

The girls tended to comment more on incidents which related to being more relaxed about their dress and appearance. As Julia states:

*"At camp nobody wore make-up. You wore sweatpants and stuff which nobody would wear at school and you didn't care... You are all just wearing whatever is comfortable for what you're doing."*

She went on to comment how girls who did wear make-up at camp ended up looking foolish and the guys they were trying to impress were not interested. This comment seems to support the idea that adolescents become less sex-role stereotyped after participating in an outdoor education experience.

### **Personal Accomplishment**

The category with the next highest number of reported incidents (14) was Personal Accomplishment. Interestingly, this category was the only positive category composed of incidents reported exclusively by the girls. This could be a factor of the small sample of boys in this study. The focus on this group of incidents was aspects of personal achievement, successfully learning a new skill, or overcoming previously imagined personal limits. There was an aspect of competition or achievement which characterized many of these incidents. For example when the programme was complete, all participants were given a clay medallion. For Emily this was significant:

*"The little clay thing we got at the end, it made you feel like you completed this and made you feel special sort of. I'd show it to people and stuff and I took a little piece of leaf and I would rub it on the back*

*so it got a little green on it. It was sort of like bringing the island back with me."*

For other girls, they learned a new skill like orienteering. As Twig comments:

*"We had to learn how to use a compass and find spots around the field ... at first it was boring because I didn't understand how to use it and then someone showed us how and I got it! Then it was really fun."*

Overcoming fear was another incident which led to a feeling of personal accomplishment for Rhea:

*"We were going up The Wall and I was scared and I fell ... but there was someone down at the bottom who was there and they caught me. I said, 'No, no, I can't do this anymore,' and they all said, 'We have to get everybody up and over the wall.' so they boosted me back up and I managed to get over the wall. It was kind of neat."*

An interesting distinction here is her use of the personal pronoun "I" when she states, "I managed to get over the wall." This points to the fact that she views this as more of a personal achievement rather than the result of teamwork.

The girls seemed to appreciate being challenged and showed a competitive side denied by most women in our society. Typically women downplay their achievements to make others feel comfortable (Tannen, 1990).



It is possible that the girls came away with more of a feeling of personal achievement because they were participating in rugged outdoorsy pursuits which many still see as men's domain. It is also equally possible that the males did not report any incidents related specifically to personal accomplishment because they did not learn a new skill, the male sample was too small or they spoke about their achievement more in terms of team building or novel experience as Frank did in a previous section.

### Time to Think

For male participants, the fourth factor most often cited as enhancing their Sea to Sky experience was the category Time to Think. However it should be noted that these six incidents were all provided by one male participant. The remaining seven incidents were contributed by six females, for a total of 13 incidents in the category and a participation rate of 47percent.

This category was composed of incidents which usually took place when the participants were on their solo spot. The participants had several opportunities to do this during the three day programme, including one opportunity to find a quiet spot and sit alone at night for 10 to 15 minutes. Frequently the participants reported that this was something they never did at home, and for some, like Rhea it was one of her favorite aspects of the programme:

*"I really liked being able to go to a spot and just being able to think about things. You just like it. It was quiet and they'd take you to nice places and you could just reflect on what you did during the day*

*and just think about different things and try not to fall asleep [laughing]. That was one of my favorite things I liked doing ... Often I would imagine I was a bird because you'd sit there and you'd feel all the wind and stuff and you felt like you were flying."*

Participants reported they had a chance to reflect on Nature. As Lynn states:

*"My mind was pretty clear, like you could just think about anything basically. It felt like you were more free from anyone and from anything. It was nice being alone in Nature and stuff. Just everything was so nice, the smell of the trees and the wind, the weather, everything. It made me think about Nature more. I wasn't like thinking about boys or school or anything you know. It was mostly nice just being outside."*

Other participants used this time for some quite profound reflection on their lives. Finn for example seemed to reach a level of existential awareness:

*"When we were outside on our solitude spots on the last day, I almost fell off the cliff, but just then I realized I wasn't invincible. Like when you are a kid you think, 'Wow, nothing bad can ever happen to me.' But as soon as you actually think about what could happen, when actually your worst fear becomes true ... like I could die. And like still I don't really worry about it because I'm just a kid right? But you learn you are not invincible, that you are going to die soon, you think a lot different when that happens ... you have to take everything as real now. You have to. Take your jobs. They are just little now but they are*

*going to get bigger and bigger until finally you retire and you won't have anything to worry about. It made my day seem much more vivid like I could see clearer. I don't know why, but I could see clearer. I didn't just take things for what they literally meant. I looked to see what they could be saying."*

Giving the participants a chance to think about their lives, for some, was like bringing water to a desert. They thirsted for this kind of processing time and lamented the lack of it in their daily lives. As Marie remarked, "That's not something I do at home. I don't usually take time out for myself like that." The pace of modern life, "relaxing" in front of TV, or constantly blocking out the world with a portable stereo seems to have removed reflective time from the life of the average teenager. Taking time for reflection may be especially important at this critical developmental juncture when questions of meaning, purpose, and "what do I want to do when I grow up?" need to be pondered.

### **Sense of Self**

Thirty-three percent of the participants reported 11 incidents falling into the category titled Sense of Self. This category includes events which enhanced the participants' sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance. Included in this category are incidents around the experience of choosing their own "Island Name" and insights on who they were gained via participation in the various activities and solitude spots. Like the previous categories, all of the male incidents (four) were provided by one boy (Finn), and the remaining seven incidents were contributed by four females.

Once again, climbing The Wall provided both an opportunity for self-awareness and a novel experience. Cliff (a female) describes the following incident:

*"At the wall people were actually able to pick me up and I'm like, 'Whoa!' Because generally I don't get to experience that because I have kind of accepted that I am one of the big ones so I'm the one who stays down and helps other people up."*

Later, also at the wall, she realizes:

*"I was still the strongest person, even in my group which had a lot of guys ... I like it because it's actually very unfeminine ... I can generally out power most of the guys."*

Being strong and "unfeminine" seemed to be a point of pride for this student. She was known as an outsider in the group and seemed to have decided, as many students do in this situation, that if she could not join her peers, she was going to beat them.

Choosing their own camp name was mentioned as an enhancing factor for three female participants. As Rhea describes:

*"I liked having camp names. I didn't get to choose what my name is now, so when you have a camp name it is almost as if you can choose the name that describes your self and that you feel is a good name for you. You are your own individual person - even though you*

*always are - but when nobody else shares the same name as you, it's kind of neat to have a change."*

Some of the participants gained insights on their sense of self during solitude spots. Finn for example:

*"When I was sitting by myself, I learned a lot. I learned in the nighttime that I wasn't as tough as I thought I was. I was afraid. I was thinking about what might be out there ... You can brag and boast about how you're not afraid of the dark, but when you are alone in the dark it's different. You can't do any of those things you think you can ... you lose all sense of confidence. To be really confident I think you have to be not scared and really not afraid during the night when you are alone. That's what makes you sure of yourself and really being human. There's nothing you can't do if you are not afraid of the dark."*

Interestingly, two participants in this category garnered insights through activities at Sea to Sky School which are contrary to the stereotypic gender roles. Cliff realized she was strong and "unfeminine" and Finn realized that he was scared when he was alone in the dark. These comments seem to confirm that outdoor education experiences may be a valuable tool for dissolving gender barriers and enhancing the adolescent sense of self.

### **Freedom & Choice**

Seventy-five percent of the males and 55 percent of the females reported incidents which were classified under the heading Freedom and

Choice. This category included events which were described as being able to do what you want, feeling less bound by the rules, or more able to relax and play like a child. There were nine incidents reported in this category with an overall participation rate of 60 percent. This means that few participants were able to describe more than one incident which fell in this category. Activities that occurred during the participants' free time formed the majority of these incidents.

As Amy comments:

A: *"I liked having free time when you could just go and do whatever you wanted. You had to stay in certain areas but they had lots of stuff to do there."*

R: *"What about that enhanced your experience?"*

A: *"The freedom I guess. Just being able to do what you wanted."*

Playing on the tire swing provided a chance for the teenagers to experience bending the rules. As George reports:

*"It [the tire swing] was different because there weren't a whole lot of rules, well there was, but no one really followed them. Sometimes like 3 or 4 people got on the tire swing at once and they were like spinning and going crazy. It was fun."*

Along with experiencing a heightened sense of freedom, it seemed particularly important for some participants that they had a choice of activities, and they could decide for themselves. In the words of Tabby:

*"The free time was really fun because we got to play on the tire swing. It was neat because it didn't seem like there were boundaries as much. We were allowed to do pretty much whatever (we wanted) so it was nice. We got to play on the tire swing"*

As these participants entered a development stage characterized by testing the limits, pushing the boundaries and choosing who they want to become, it is not surprising that this theme surfaced in the incidents reported by many of the participants.

### **Getting Away From it All**

The final category of incidents was grouped under the heading "Getting Away From it All." This category is composed of eight incidents provided by four participants (3 girls, 1 boy). These incidents are characterized by an aspect of leaving the familiar and venturing into a new setting or set of experiences. Participants mentioned incidents in this category which focused on the island wilderness setting of the school, the experience of giving up their watches, traveling by ferry and getting away from home.

As Rhea states:

*"You're on the island. You're so far away from everything else and everything, like if you had any troubles at home and when you are there you forget it. It's neat not having any traffic or street lamps ... also there's not telephones or stores you can go to."*

She goes on to report another aspect of Getting Away from it All which enhanced her experience was:

*"Just being away from your mom and everything. No one's nagging you. You still had to keep your bunk tidy and stuff but there wasn't like chores and stuff like there is to do at home."*

A more subtle aspect of Getting Away From it All occurred when the participants were asked to give up their watches and go on "island time" for three days. As Tabby reports:

T: *"Giving up our watches was kind of neat because a lot of people are like, 'Oh, 10:22, oh no! I'm 2 minutes late.' Things like that."*

R: *"How did that enhance your experience?"*

T: *"It just made it all seem more relaxed, like you're getting away from it all."*

### Summary of Enhancing Categories

When the top four categories of factors most frequently reported to enhance experience of the programme for males and females were compared, there is considerable overlap. Relationships, Enjoyable Activities and Team Building all appear in the top four categories in terms of the number of incidents reported by each gender. This suggests that there are three core elements that contributed to a positive experience of the Sea to Sky Programme by this group of participants; Relationships, Enjoyable Activities and Team Building. Due to the small number of male participants in this study, rankings and comparisons based on the number of reported incidents



must be viewed with caution. It is easy to see in this sample how one individual's enthusiasm for reporting incidents on a certain activity can skew the category. However, it is possible to suggest that these categories contributed to the adolescents' enjoyment of the programme, but are not sufficient to provide a complete insight into the student's experience of the programme. The ranking factors which enhanced experience of the programme are summarized in the following chart.

Table 4. Ranking of factors which enhanced the experience of the programme.

TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
1. Relationships	1. Enjoyable Activities	1. Relationships
2. Enjoyable Activities	2. Relationships	2. Increased Awareness
3. Increased Awareness	3. Team Building	3. Enjoyable Activities
4. Team Building	4. Time to Think	4. Team Building
5. Novel Experience	5. Increased Awareness	5. Active Learning
6. Comfort	6. Active Learning	6. Personal Accomplishment
7. Personal Accomplishment	7. Sense of Self	7. Novel Experience
8. Time to Think	8. Comfort 8. Freedom and Choice 8. Novel Experience	8. Comfort
9. Sense of Self	9. Getting away from it all	9. Freedom and Choice 9. Time to Think
10. Freedom and Choice		10. Sense of Self
11. Getting away from it all		11. Getting away from it all
12. Getting away from it all		

## Factors which enhanced the experience not linked to a particular incident

There were several comments made by the students about their experience of the programme which they could not link to a particular incident or programme aspect. Often these comments are comparisons to their typical school experience. These comments provide insight to the student's experience and some of them are summarized in this section. Most of these comments were general statements about the staff, the uninhibited atmosphere of the programme, and the quality of relationships. As Sunny reports:

*"It felt a lot different from school. At school everybody is always in different groups and they're all in different places, but when you are there (at Sea to Sky School) everybody is just exactly the same person, the same level...nobody's rejected. Then you feel safe because you can count on them and they are not going to go behind your back"*

Commenting on the staff, Lynn states:

*"Just the words they spoke I guess,. They seemed 'free from everything' people. I don't know, they didn't have any worries and they always looked for the positive things and they would make you want to do better things for the Earth I guess."*

Finn also compared his experience of the Sea to Sky staff with regular school:

*"At Keats they (staff) were learning from us as much as we were learning from them. It was way different than school because teachers are always up here, and we're just down here. (pointing up and down*

as he speaks) *They were pretty much like big kids. They weren't like teachers, they were like our peers."*

These comments speak to the shift in relationships and increased sense of trust many student noticed when they were on the island.

In an interesting section of one interview Finn goes on a tangent after mentioning he was afraid of sitting in the dark. He talks about confidence and the things he does to make himself feel better about himself:

F: *"Like when I'm driving down to Vancouver to play basketball I'll be talking about all this stuff that I'll be doing like, 'I'm going to score 50 points' and all I'm really thinking to myself is "Holy- I better score like 15' I guess bragging actually makes you do better because you have to do something even to live up to half of what you are saying. ...But at night when you are by yourself and there is no-one to prove yourself to except yourself, there's no-one that you are showing off for ... that's when you are most aware of who you are as a person."*

R: *Who are you as a person?*

F: *I don't know and that's probably one of the hardest things to find out, who you are and I'm only 15 so I've got (time). I just don't know. I think probably the surest people, the people who know who they are, probably are the most different from us because they are sure enough in themselves that they can be as different as they want to be and they don't care. I'll take Dennis Rodman, for example, I probably think he is the most confident person... I know he's confident in himself to dye his hair, dress like a woman, have all these body*

*piercings, have these tattoos and play basketball his way and do what he wants to do...he's sure of himself.*

It is interesting that Finn recognizes his bragging as something that motivates him. It is just talk and he and he knows he won't even live up to half of what he promises. It is possible that rather than losing their voice, young men are taught to exaggerate and brag in a way that is equally hazardous to genuine relationship building as the loss of voice is for girls.

Finn also chooses an interesting role model in his search for an example of someone who is "really sure of himself." Dennis Rodman is one of the few openly bi-sexual basketball players in the NBA. He flouts conventions of gender. Finn seems to view this as liberating proof that Rodman is confident and strong enough to defy social norms. Perhaps the societal pressures on men to behave and dress in a certain way are just as restrictive as they are for women. Perhaps they are even more restrictive as the sexuality of any male who defies them is immediately called into question. Way's (1997) study of male friendships speaks of this fear of being labeled "gay" as a major inhibitor to close male relationships.

The remaining comments that were grouped in this section do not add new information to this study. The comments tend to fall into the same categories as the critical incidents do, the only difference is their general rather than specific nature.

### Factors Identified as Detracting from the Experience of Sea to Sky School

Participants generated 40 critical incidents based on factors perceived to detract from their experience of the Sea to Sky Programme. The factors identified in these critical incidents were classified into six categories as follows:

**Table 5. Summary of critical incidents detracting from the programme.**

<b>FACTOR</b>	<b>NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</b>	<b>PARTICIPATION RATE</b>
<b>Lack of Freedom and Choice</b> a) strict or arbitrary rules b) lack of free time c) early wake-up time	15	66%
<b>Physical Discomfort</b>	6	40%
<b>Negative Social Interaction</b> a) complaints of others b) teasing c) loneliness/ rejection	11	33%
<b>Didactic Teaching</b> a) sitting and listening b) biased	4	27%
<b>Un-enjoyable Activities</b> a) fear b) increased self-consciousness c) boredom	4	27%
<b>Un-met Expectations</b>	1	6%

Table 6. Critical incidents detracting from the programme for males.

FACTOR	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PARTICIPATION RATE
Physical Discomfort	2	50%
Negative Social Interaction a) complaints of others b) teasing c) loneliness/ rejection	2	50%
Didactic Teaching a) sitting and listening b) biased	2	50%
Un-met Expectations	1	25%
Lack of Freedom and Choice a) strict or arbitrary rules b) lack of free time c) early wake-up time	0	0%
Un-enjoyable Activities a) fear b) increased self-consciousness c) boredom	0	0%

Table 7. Critical incidents detracting from the programme for females.

FACTOR	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PARTICIPATION RATE
Lack of Freedom and Choice a) strict or arbitrary rules b) lack of free time c) early wake-up time	15	91%
Physical Discomfort	4	36%
Negative Social Interaction a) complaints of others b) teasing c) loneliness/ rejection	9	27%
Un-enjoyable Activities a) fear b) increased self-consciousness c) boredom	3	18%
Didactic Teaching a) sitting and listening b) biased	2	18%
Un-met Expectations	0	0%

## Lack of Freedom and Choice

All incidents reported in this category were reported by females, and even without male input, this makes it the most reported category of detractions with 15 incidents and a participation rate of 60 percent overall. Surprisingly, there was a very high participation rate (91 percent) of all girls in the population incidents describing Lack of Freedom and Choice as a detraction from their enjoyment of the programme. No males in this sample reported incidents in this category. Incidents classified here centre on the enforcement of rules, lack of free time and having to wake up too early in the morning. For most of these incidents the participant reporting them felt unfairly treated. Marie explains:

*"Once we were playing this game on the dock and I pushed my friend off the dock and then I got sent up. It was unfair. She asked me to surprise her by pushing her in because she knew she wasn't going to be able to get herself in, and I did. Then Ivy [staff] sent me off the dock and that was pretty disappointing...I was also angry. I was pretty angry (laughs). But I got joined by two other people who got sent up so it wasn't that bad. I wasn't all alone."*

It is interesting to note that the sting of being punished seems to be alleviated for this student by the fact that she had company in her misery. She states "I wasn't all alone" and seems to imply that being alone would be worse than the shame of being sent off the dock. The girls in this group seemed very focused on issues of fairness and justice, yet they were not necessarily willing



to argue for their cause. They would talk amongst themselves, but I never observed them directly challenging a teacher in the entire three days they were on the island. It is also interesting that when interviewed, three other girls commented on the same incident and the "unfairness" of how their friend was treated.

The lack of male response in this category in comparison to the high female response rate may be the result of several possible factors. It is possible that the boys are less internally focused than the girls and do not remember or ruminate over this type of incident. More simply, is also possible that none of the boys got caught breaking the rules. Earlier comments in the Freedom and Choice category clearly indicate that they were consciously breaking the rules by overloading the tire swing and spinning it around. Part of the appeal of the activity seemed to be bending the rules for some boys. So they reported it as something which enhanced rather than detracted from their experience.

### Negative Social Interaction

Incidents which fell into this category involved relationships with other individuals that made the Sea to Sky Programme uncomfortable, lonely or hurtful. There were incidents in this category made up of responses from two of the boys and three of the girls, so while this category had a fairly high number of incidents the overall participation rate was only 35 percent.

One girl, Cliff, recognized herself as an outsider, and despite the fact that she carried on many long conversations with the adults present, she still longed for conversation with someone her own age:

*" Well, basically one thing which I really didn't like was how I ended up inside a bunk with girls which I really wasn't good friends with them. I didn't get along with S. you know . . . I didn't have anyone my own age to talk to. Talking to adults is very important, but you want to talk to your peers too because they see things the same way you do."*

Reaction to Cliff was something that resulted in Emily feeling uncomfortable and provides another example for this category:

*"Well, there's one girl who's not really shy but she's an outsider I guess you'd say and lots of people would make fun of her and stuff and she was in our cabin and people would be teasing her and talking about her behind her back and stuff like that. I felt sorry for her but I really didn't want to stand up and say 'Hey, stop this' because, you know, I didn't want them to think, you know. But I also, I was friendly to her. I'd hang around with her a lot to make her feel better".*

During the interview Emily's body language and voice seemed to indicate she was uncomfortable with her own lack of ability to stand up for the fair treatment of another. To justify her actions, she tries to find middle ground. She did not directly confront the perpetrator, but she did try to be "friendly" to the teased girl and "make her feel better." This is a clear example of a loss of voice and also loss of genuine relationship, as Emily tries to be polite and keep everyone happy.

Also included in this category were incidents of the girls reporting that the boys teased them on their choice of island names or ability to play soccer. Ironically, they were accused of "playing like girls". This teasing took place between the groups of students who were still playing in same sex groups (not the Tire Swing Gang). Likely, this was a misguided attempt to get attention.

The only male responses in this category centered on their annoyance with the negative attitude of some others. As Tom reports:

*"Some people didn't have a good attitude towards it... some people didn't really care and fooled around and didn't take anything very seriously...I think I did a few times. I was like fooling around. It was just like we'd be doing something, like a solitude spot or something and they'd [the leaders] have to stop and wreck everything because someone was goofing around. You'd get caught up in it and then it was gone because someone sort of wrecked it.*

### **Physical Discomfort**

The next most frequently reported category of incidents concerned Physical Discomfort. Like its opposing category on the positive side, Comfort, this category includes incidents where the students report that their basic needs of comfort were not met. There were six incidents in this category; two from males and four from females. Each incident was contributed by a different individual, leading to an overall participation rate of 40 percent for this category (50 percent for males, 36 percent for females). Incidents in this

category are straight forward and speak about the participants being uncomfortable, tired or hurt during their Sea to Sky experience.

As Amy complains:

*"I didn't like how we had to carry our big backpacks up the hill. My pack was really heavy and I was tired trying to get to the top."*

Lynn provides another example:

*"Not having a pillow. It was harder to sleep. I have to have a pillow like I have at home. It makes me feel better I guess."*

### **Didactic Teaching**

Four incidents, (2 male, 2 female) were provided under the category of Didactic Teaching. All incidents in this category speak about the participants dislike of "sitting and learning". These aspects of the programme were not seen as challenging or as exciting as other aspects of the programme. Frank also felt that some aspects of the programme may be biased against his family's vocation. He states:

*"The slide show, it went pretty long and it had a lot of stuff about how you should not do this and not do that so others can have this and I just don't want to be here because 'Oh, look how we might end up. This might happen.' It goes against how I've been brought up. Like our family is supported by logging and I felt like some of them [the staff] were against that. It made me mad because without it we wouldn't have any money for anything. I wouldn't even have been able to go to the camp. I felt like they were against logging or like they were tree*

*huggers sort of. When they were saying this sort of stuff it made me mad because they don't understand the whole thing."*

As an observer, this comment surprised me. My impression of the programme was that the staff went out of their way to present a balanced perspective on resources and the global economy. They openly acknowledged that this province's economy is largely supported by natural resources. They even went so far as to place a large pricing barcode sign outside on a living tree. The fact that consumption is necessary for survival was never ignored, but rather the students were challenged to consider how and what they were consuming and to compare their lifestyle to the lifestyles of people in other parts of the world. They were encouraged to make informed choices and to question some of the pervasive consumer mentality messages in our society.

The other interesting thing about Frank's comments is that he never voiced his concerns or questioned the staff while he was at Sea to Sky School. This could be due to the unavoidable power differential between the student and teacher which left him feeling silenced. It is possible that in situations where there is a power differential, not necessarily based on gender, boys feel a loss of "voice" just like the girls do.

### **Un-enjoyable Activities**

The next category of incidents which the students reported detracted from their experience of the Sea to Sky Programme is titled Un-enjoyable Activities. Four incidents were reported by three girls. No boys reported incidents in this category. Incidents which fell into this category involved

specific programme activities which resulted in fear, heightened self consciousness or boredom for the participant. Two students disliked the solitude spots and one student felt fat and unfit during the hiking and initiative games. Cliff explains:

*"Well, when we were doing the cooperation thing . . . The Spider's Web, I remember feeling bad because I couldn't squeeze under the bottom . . . I couldn't squish down enough and I ended up tripping it and that made me feel sad. You feel unhealthy, you feel wrong, you know, you feel fat."*

It was also interesting that the most enjoyable aspect of the programme for some students (Time to Think) turned out to be a detraction for others. Twig notes:

*"They made us be quiet in the woods for like, 15 minutes, and that is a long time, so you'd just start talking to your friend across the forest or something and they'd get really mad. They would tell us to stop. But after 10 minutes we were getting really really really bored. It didn't do that much for me. We were supposed to think about what was happening and stuff but I didn't. It doesn't sound like that much fun for me to sit and think about something in the forest."*

### **Un-met Expectations**

The final category of detracting incidents was composed of only one incident (one male) and is titled Un-met Expectations. The participant described an incident when his hopes or expectations were not met. Finn was disappointed because he did not see a deer or other large wildlife:

*"The fact that I didn't get to see a deer. I didn't see very many animals, but it was okay because I knew they were there."*

Despite the fact that there is only one incident in this category and the participant is clearly really not that disturbed by the issue, the category is reported for two reasons. First, due to the small sample of male participants the incident may provide useful information about their experience of the programme. Second, there were relatively few detracting incidents reported in this study. Only 13 percent of the total incidents fell into the detraction categories. This shows that not only was the Sea to Sky Programme a generally enjoyable experience for most participants in the sample, but also when they did think of something that detracted from their experience it was likely worth reporting.

#### **Other Detractions Not Linked to a Specific Incident**

There were four comments made by the participants which related to a general detraction from the programme rather than a specific aspect or incident which occurred during the programme. The comments were all on the theme of wishing the programme could have lasted longer. As Finn states:

*"I loved Sea to Sky School, like that is probably the best school I've ever gone to, but it might have been better over a longer period because they wouldn't have to pound it into us so quickly. It's always rushed. I would love it if you could first take it easy, you'd be able to*

*learn things at your own speed . . . you could just take your time with it . . . I would like to take a month there.*

Students wishing that an educational experience could be longer speaks to the appeal this programme had for the adolescents who attended. As was mentioned in the literature review, there is also a evidence in the Outdoor Education literature that programme length is a factor in achieving the outcomes desired by the programme. There is no conclusive evidence on what the ideal length of programme is, but the Sea to Sky director Tim Turner is currently redesigning most programs for older students to run for five days.

## Summary

During the interviews it was apparent that the students loved their experience at Sea to Sky School. They enjoyed the sense of belonging and playfulness, while at the same time learning a lot about relationships, awareness and sustainability. As Rhea puts it:

*"When I got home I said 'That's the best thing I've ever done' That was my best experience . . . I've been a lot of places and done a lot of things, but being there, going there, that was the best thing I've ever done."*

The enthusiasm displayed during the interviews for this type of programme was universal. Many of the students reported that they still kept their medallion from the programme or still looked at their Ecological



Footprint Sheets. The clarity and detail of their recollections also says a lot about the long term impact this programme has had on the lives of these young people. They were taught to value their perceptions, make decisions about their lifestyles and recognize their personal and group power. These lessons all took place against the backdrop of a beautiful semi-wilderness setting and resulted in core level changes for some participants. Even Tom, a bit of a trouble maker, who by his own admission, "fooled around and didn't take anything very seriously," came away from the programme having "learned to value people more." He felt at the end of the programme "everyone was more nice to each other . . . I just respected them more". The programme was perfectly timed for these students as they entered adolescence, the time of increased self-awareness and self-reflection.

There were very few detracting experiences reported by the students. Those that were, were overwhelmingly reported by the girls in the group. These incidents were primarily concerned with fairness and justice. They also concerned violations in relationships such as being insulted, left out, humiliated or talked about behind one's back.

As Carol Gilligan (1991) writes, "If psychological health consists, most simply, of staying in relationship with oneself, with others and the world, then psychological problems signify relational crises: losing touch with one's thoughts and feelings, being isolated from others, cut off from reality" (p.23). Sea to Sky School is consciously structured to enhance relationships with the self, others and the planet, as relationships are the basis for growth. There is no doubt that students at this age can be cruel to each other. At the same time

students came away from Keats Island with their eyes opened to healthier possibilities for themselves and others.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### **Implications for Educators and Counselors**

It is apparent from the results of this study that there are a number of aspects of the Sea to Sky Programme which left the students with an enhanced sense of self, fun, relationships, co-operation, novel experience and personal accomplishment. There were differences between the genders on these themes, but these results must be treated with caution due to the small sample of males in this study. Notably, there was the lack of incidents related to personal accomplishment reported by the males, and the majority of negative incidents in general were reported by the females. This seems to support the idea that girls are more prone to negative thoughts and perhaps this is an explanation for the higher incidence of depression noted in teenage girls by Schonert-Reichl and Offer (1992). The report of instances of personal accomplishment and success while at the Sea to Sky Programme by the girls may be a positive factor in 'depression proofing' these females.

It is interesting to note that Relationships was an important category of incidents for both males and females in this study. The idea that girls are intrinsically more relational than the boys is debatable. The boys talked about the themes of seeing people in a new light, making new friends and deepening their established friendships in the same way the girls did. There was one boy who did not focus on this aspect at all (Finn). He seemed to derive great satisfaction and enhanced inner meaning through the opportunity to spend some time by himself.

Time to think was a significant aspect of the programme commented on by more girls than boys. It was also a new experience for many of the students to take some time alone and just think about who they were becoming and reflect on their surroundings. There is very little time allowed in our current culture for this type of reflection. Programme designers should note this important factor when considering what works and what does not work in the field of outdoor and experiential education.

Many students reported the joy and peace they felt they gained from this programme. It was obvious that the lessons had stuck with the students in their long-term memory. This is a programme which requires few if any technological resources and is very cost effective. As Steve Lott, president of the B.C Environmental Educators Association, commented recently in an April 1999 issue of the Georgia Straight, "Students need to look beyond their computer and TV screens and see the world unfold as it really does, day by day, hour by hour, season by season. Schools have a significant role to play in reconnecting students to the alienated natural world" (p. 3).

Sea to Sky Outdoors School is one mainstream way that the lives of teenagers can thrive and gain resiliency, perhaps preventing some of the despair and crisis which seems to be so prevalent at this developmental stage. The school provides programmes and contexts for reframing the problematic and stereotypic values and beliefs that adolescents internalize. There is an opportunity explore feelings, to overcome past barriers to performance, and to try on new ways of being in relationship with themselves and others. This supports a fundamental goal of counseling for females which Nelson (1996)

describes as allowing maximum self definition without invalidating relational tendencies. Also, Berman and Davis-Berman (1989) write that personal growth and change are rapid when there is an outdoor component to therapeutic practice, and that adolescents who have taken part in a wilderness training experience score better on a variety of psychological and behavioural measures than those who participate in traditional therapy alone (p.66).

In terms of being silenced, or not listened to, by people in authority, the students commented that they felt more respected and more equal to teachers while they were at Sea to Sky School. This seems to support the idea that aspects of 'voice' are possibly situational rather than strictly gender based. There was also support for the findings of Arvay and Marshall (1998), that girls will silence themselves to stay in relationship, while boys will silence themselves to submit to authority. Also there is some preliminary support for the idea that males may exaggerate their 'voice' by boasting and bragging in order to motivate themselves and raise their status in the eyes of other males.

### **Implications for Further Research and Programme Development**

The findings of this study indicate that a broad range of factors enhanced and detracted from the students' experience of this programme. Peer and teacher relationships, enjoyable activities, increased awareness, team building and active learning stood out as the most commonly identified factors that enhanced the experience. There were some differences between genders on these factors, but the small sample of boys makes it hard to draw

conclusions. With caution, it could be stated that the boys seemed to focus on the more activity based, less reflective aspects of the programme. The girls formulated more incidents around the actual teaching content of the programme and relationship incidents. With a greater degree of variability between genders, negative social interactions, lack of freedom and choice and physical discomfort stood out as the main detractors from the programme for this group. There were far fewer negative than positive incidents reported overall, which speaks to the general satisfaction and enjoyment most students had with this programme.

The themes and patterns arising from the information provided by this group of research participants suggests that they were oriented towards relationships, activities and working as a group to enhance their enjoyment of the programme. It seems that the lack of these factors detracted from the programme for some students. It should also be noted that the only student to report feeling more self-conscious and lonely as a result of participation in the programme was a female, Cliff, described by both herself and her peers as "as bit of an outsider". There may be a bias in this study towards students who had a positive experience with the programme. The sample was based on volunteers and perhaps students are more likely to volunteer to talk about an experience they enjoyed rather than a negative experience.

Instructors in the area should note that certain activities, such as going through The Spider Web and touching the ropes, can make a student feel fat and self conscious. Teenagers are hyper-aware of themselves, and activities need to be properly and sensitively debriefed to ensure that no student is left feeling like a failure.

An implication of this study is that young people have many identities and live within a variety of contexts, all of which contribute to their developing sense of self. Outdoor education contributes to identity formation by providing opportunities for self-reflection, enhancement of self-esteem and the development or enhancement of intrinsic motivation. Students come to develop their world view and understand themselves through relationships with others and the world through programmes like the ones offered at Sea to Sky School. As a result of this role, it is critical that outdoor education providers continue to question their underlying assumptions about young people, gender and the myths or stereotypes that have contributed to what we know about adolescents.

The small sample, and especially small sample of males, in this study limits the ability to generalize these findings. Also, the difficulty encountered by some students in using the critical incident methodology suggests that further research is necessary to validate or refute the findings of this study. It would be interesting to replicate this study using a larger sample, which crosses over more than one session at the school and includes a wider range of ages, programs and time spent at the school. It would also be interesting to re-analyze the data using a different methodology. Perhaps a narrative or phenomenological approach would be better suited to address questions of meaning and significance of an experience like this. The critical incident methodology resulted in information which was more concrete and less subjective than other methods may have produced. It tended to illicit events which were action oriented and observable rather than reflective of the overall experience.

Another possibility for further research is looking at the transcripts in terms of language, both spoken and body language, especially around the use of the phrase "I don't know." As Gilligan and Brown write,

"Adolescence is a time of disconnection, sometime of dissociation or repression in women's lives, so that often women do not remember ... the phrase "I don't know" enters our interviews with the girls ...and we see an inner division as girls come to a place where they feel they cannot say or feel or know what they have experienced."(p.4)

It would have been interesting to use a video recorder to tape the interviews with these students as subjectively, it seemed to me that both the girls and the boys frequently responded with "I don't know" and often blushed and did not give detailed accounts of some critical incidents. They also frequently spoke in the third person, and repeated the phrase "you know," perhaps as an attempt to draw me into the circle of their experience.

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The intent was not to provide a definitive answer for all teenagers as to what works or doesn't work in this programme, but rather to bring increased clarity as to what the student's experience of this programme is like and provide insight on how programme designers can make the experience more meaningful and relevant for the participants. These initial findings may be beneficial in further defining the constructs that underlie outdoor and experiential education programs and help to provide a basis for theory building and programme comparison, which is largely missing from the current literature. An expansion of sample size and the application of an alternate research



methodology is necessary to further ascertain knowledge regarding the experience of outdoor and experiential education from the perspective of the student.

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APPENDIX A  
POSTER TEXT

**Were you at  
SEA TO SKY OUTDOOR SCHOOL  
on Keats Island  
last MAY?**

If so I want to interview you about that experience

I am a graduate student in Counseling Psychology at the University of British Columbia conducting a study of students who have had an Outdoor Education experience. If you went to Sea to Sky School on Keats Island last May and are able to volunteer for two one hour interviews, please give your name to Mme. Desjardins. You can also contact me directly by phone at (604) 739-6948, or if you are on the Internet, send me an email at [alisonjm@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:alisonjm@interchange.ubc.ca)  
All names and information collected in this study will be kept confidential.

THANK YOU

*Jane Mauchan*

## APPENDIX B LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS

### Student Informed Consent Form

#### Critical Factors in the Adolescent Experience of an Outdoor Experiential Education Programme

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Norm Amundson, UBC Department of  
Counseling Psychology (604) 822-6757

**Co-investigator:** Jane Mauchan, Master of Arts Graduate Thesis,  
UBC Department of Counseling Psychology  
(604) 739-6948

#### Purpose of this Study:

The purpose of this study is to discover what factors enhance or detract from the experience of participating in a 3 day residential Outdoor and Experiential Education programme (Sea to Sky School on Keats Island). The investigators are interested in what ongoing meaning this experience has for the participants and how it relates to their sense of self.

#### Study Procedures:

Participants who meet the study criteria will take part in a semi-structured interview regarding their experience at Sea to Sky Outdoors School and any ongoing influences this experience may still be generating. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. After the data has been collected, transcribed and analyzed, there will be a follow-up focus group session. The purpose of this session is to give each participant a summary of his or her interview and to check for accuracy and understanding of what was expressed. At this time, any concerns or questions the participants may have will be answered and the researcher will provide a sense of closure to the experience. This session will last about one hour. Each participant will receive a letter with the results of the study when it is finished.

Total time required for participation should not exceed 2 hours or interfere with class time.

**Confidentiality:**

All information collected in this study will remain confidential. All audiotapes, computer files and documents will be coded with a number and kept in a locking filing cabinet. Computer files will also be protected with a password. The researcher will be the only one to listen to the audio tapes. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have direct access to the transcripts. In addition, names will not appear on any reports of the final study. Audio tapes will be erased at the completion of the study.

**Contact:**

If I have questions or desire further information with respect to this study, I may contact Dr. Norm Amundson, at (604) 822-6757 or Jane Mauchan at (604) 739-6948

If I have any concerns about my treatment or rights as a research subject I may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Richard Spratley at (604) 822-8598.

**Consent:**

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to my class standing.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to participate in this study.

-----  
Student Signature

-----  
Date

-----  
Signature of a Witness

-----  
Date

Dear Student,

Thank you for your interest in this study. This is an exploratory study which will allow you to express what your experience of the Sea to Sky School was like and how this experience affected you. This is a chance for you to make your views known and to allow others to hear what you think. Your participation will help us learn more about this type of educational experience and what students take away from it. Your views may even contribute to changes in the Sea to Sky programme. This is also a chance for you to experience what it is like to participate in a university level research project and contribute to what is known about adolescence. I want to hear from YOU!

Participation in this study requires that you were part of the group that went to Keats Island for the Pathways programme, and that your parent or guardian consents to your involvement in this project. Beyond that, all are welcome to contribute, and all opinions and experiences are welcome. You will be interviewed by the researcher for 45-60 minutes and this interview will be audiotaped. The taped interviews will then be analyzed and incidents of your experience will be grouped into themes. Once the data has been analyzed, we will meet in a small focus group so you can provide feedback on the developed themes and to ensure that they accurately reflect your experience. When the research is complete you will receive a copy of the results.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and opinions. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me, Jane Mauchan, at (604)739-6948 or [alisonjm@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:alisonjm@interchange.ubc.ca) by email. You are also welcome to contact my advisor at UBC, Dr. Norm Amundson, at (604) 822-6757.

Sincerely,

Jane Mauchan

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student at the University of British Columbia and a teacher with an interest in outdoor or experiential based education programs. I am conducting research for my thesis at B. Junior Secondary School with students who participated in the Sea to Sky Outdoor School Pathways Programme on Keats Island last Spring. The purpose of the study is to learn what the experience of this programme was like from the adolescent perspective. What lasting influence (if any) has it had? What meaning has your son or daughter made of this experience? How does this experience relate to their commitment to specific beliefs or values they hold? Were the critical factors of this experience different between the girls and the boys? Has it had any effect on how they see themselves in the world? These are just a few of the questions I hope to answer by learning more about your child's experience.

There are many potential benefits to this study. It will provide an in-depth look at your child's experience of this programme and insights into any lasting protective influences this type of experience may have on their early adolescent sense of self. It may provide clarity for your child in considering who they are becoming in the world. It will provide educators with feedback on the student's experience of the programme and allow for consideration of gender issues or learning style differences in programme planning and delivery.

The following consent form outlines the study in more detail. Your signature is necessary for your child to participate in this research. The total time commitment is a maximum of two hours. Participation is entirely voluntary. You and your child will receive a copy of the research findings at the completion of the study.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me, Jane Mauchan, at (604)739-6948 or [alisonjm@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:alisonjm@interchange.ubc.ca) by email. You are also welcome to contact my advisor at UBC, Dr. Norm Amundson, at (604) 822-6757.

Sincerely,

Jane Mauchan

## **Parental Informed Consent Form**

### **Critical Factors in the Adolescent Experience of an Outdoor Experiential Education Programme**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Norm Amundson, UBC Department of  
Counseling Psychology (604) 822-6757

**Co-investigator:** Jane Mauchan, Master of Arts Graduate Thesis,  
UBC Department of Counseling Psychology  
(604) 739-6948

#### **Purpose of this Study:**

The purpose of this study is to discover what factors enhance or detract from the experience of participating in a 3 day residential Outdoor and Experiential Education programme (Sea to Sky School on Keats Island). The investigators are interested in what ongoing meaning this experience has for the participants and how it relates to their developing sense of self.

#### **Study Procedures:**

Participants who meet the study criteria will take part in a semi-structured interview regarding their experience at Sea to Sky Outdoors School and any ongoing influences this experience may be generating. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. After the data has been collected, transcribed and analyzed, there will be a follow-up focus group session. The purpose of this session is to give each participant a summary of his or her interview and to check for accuracy and understanding of what was expressed. At this time, any concerns or questions the participants may have will be answered and the researcher will provide a sense of closure to the experience. This session will last about one hour. Each participant will receive a letter with the results of the study when it is finished.

Total time required for participation should not exceed 2 hours and will not take away from class time.

**Confidentiality:**

All information collected in this study will remain confidential. All audiotapes, computer files and documents will be coded with a number and kept in a locking filing cabinet. Computer files will also be protected with a password. The researcher will be the only one to listen to the audio tapes. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have direct access to the transcripts. In addition, names will not appear on any reports of the final study. Audio tapes will be erased at the completion of the study.

**Contact:**

If I have questions or desire further information with respect to this study, I may contact Dr. Norm Amundson, at (604) 822-6757 or Jane Mauchan at (604) 739-6948

If I have any concerns about treatment or rights of research subjects I may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Richard Spratley at (604) 822-8598.

**Consent:**

I understand that my child's participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that he/she may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to class standing.

I have kept the upper part of this consent form for my own records.

-----  
(tear off and return this section)

I consent/ I do not consent (circle one) to my child's participation in this study.

-----  
Parent or Guardian Signature

-----  
Date

-----  
Signature of a Witness

-----  
Date



January 6, 1999.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]

I am a graduate student at the University of British Columbia interested in conducting M.A. thesis research with the students at B. Junior Secondary School who have completed an experiential environmental education programme called Pathways at the Sea to Sky Outdoor School on Keats Island. The purpose of this study is to determine what factors enhance or detract from the experience of participating in a 3 day residential Outdoor Experiential Education programme (Sea to Sky School on Keats Island). The investigators are interested in what ongoing meaning this experience has for students and how it relates to their sense of self.

The proposed study offers many potential benefits. First, it will document the Sea to Sky School Pathways programme, providing a concrete model of the programme and the ways in which it encourages students to think beyond their personal selves. Second, it will allow an in-depth study of the participant's experience of this programme and insights into any lasting protective influences this experience may have on their early adolescent sense of self. Third, it will provide educators with feedback on the participant's experience of the programme and allow for consideration of gender issues or learning style differences in programme planning and delivery.

This will be a qualitative study, using a semi-structured interview to gather information from the students. Students will be asked to consider how their experience at Sea to Sky was meaningful to them and an attempt will be made to tap into their personal experience as fully as possible. From this interview themes will emerge and be grouped. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour and will be conducted outside of class time. Following the analysis of the data, participants will be given the opportunity in a focus

group to give feedback on the themes developed to ensure that the themes accurately describe their experience. This second group meeting will last about 60 minutes. Total participation time should not exceed two hours.

Students will be given consent forms to sign if they decide to volunteer for the study. Participation is entirely voluntary and they may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Students will also be required to have one of their parent(s) or guardian(s) sign a consent form. Following the receipt of parent and student consent forms, interviews will be arranged, at the convenience of the participants and teachers, in the school. Interview and feedback sessions will be audio taped and transcribed. The researcher will be the only one to listen to the audio tapes. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have direct access to the transcripts. In addition, names will not be identified on any transcripts and audio tapes will be erased at the completion of the study.

Please find enclosed copies of student and parent consent forms. This study will also be subject to ethical review by the U.B.C. Behavioural Sciences Screening Committee. If you have any questions you may contact me, Jane Mauchan at (604) 739-6948. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Norm Amundson, at (604) 822-6757 (w). I look forward to hearing from you regarding the above research.

Sincerely,

Jane Mauchan

cc. [REDACTED] School Principal  
[REDACTED] Teacher  
[REDACTED] - Sea to Sky School Director

## APPENDIX C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Focus of the Interview:

"The purpose of my study is to explore what the experience of participating in an outdoor education programme was like for you and what ongoing meaning this experience may have for you. I'd like you to think back to your time at Sea to Sky School on Keats Island last Spring. Please focus on what factors enhanced or detracted from your experience at Sea to Sky school."

### Criterion checks:

"What are some of these factors?" (list)

### Context:

"Think of a particular activity or aspect of the Sea to Sky School that enhanced your experience: What was happening then?"

### Critical incidents:

"Please describe a particular incident when you did something or something happened at Sea to Sky School that enhanced your experience."

### Check effect of incident:

"In what ways did this enhance your Sea to Sky experience?"

(search and clarify other incidents using the above format)

### Context:

"Think of a particular activity or aspect of the Sea to Sky School that detracted from your experience. What was happening then?"

### Critical incidents:

"Please describe a particular incident when you did something or something happened at Sea to Sky School that detracted from your experience."

### Check effect of incident:

"In what ways did this detract from your Sea to Sky experience?"

(search and clarify other incidents using the above format)

APPENDIX D  
PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

Sea to Sky Pathways Programme  
Three day schedule

**Our Purpose:** Sea to Sky Outdoor School provides quality educational programmes that help students understand and respond to the challenge of sustainability

**Day 1**

7:20 am	Depart on B.C Ferries from Horseshoe Bay
8:00 am	Arrive Langdale
8:15 am	Depart on Dogwood Princess and Gibsons water taxis
8:30 - 9:00 am	Arrive on Keats Island
	property tours
	community meeting and the 'Paths'
	• Cabins and GAP
	• Path Raps
10:30 am	Hike to Skookum Sky & lunch
2:00pm	P and A - Path - People and Awareness
	• initiative games - The Wall, Toxic Pit, Spider Web etc.
	• debrief and discussion on the trails
	• students find a natural solitude spot to complete
	• return for the Big Picture
5:00pm	GAP
6:00pm	Supper (& footprint pages)
	Adult meeting/GAP
7:00pm	Big Field Games
9:30pm	Campfire @ Crofton Circle
	Island by night hike, cabins & zzzzz

## Day 2

6:30 am	Wakey, wakey, rise & shaky! "OPTIONS" (polar dip, canoe, ropes course)
8:00 am	Breakfast (footprint pages)
9:00 am	T and H Paths - Truths and Habits •activities and discussion in groups on the trail •solitude spot •return for the big picture
11:00am	People on the Map
11:30am	Third World Lunch
12:30pm	Lunch (& footprint pages)
2:00pm	Hike/Canoe to Marine Park • orienteering • tidal pool exploration • ocean swim
6:00pm	Supper (& footprint pages) Adult meeting/GAP
7:00pm	Slide presentation
8:00pm	Home Spun Entertainment by firelight @ Salmon Rock (skits, songs theatre sports) Return to cabins by flashlight & zzzzz

**Day 3**

6:30am	Wakey, wakey, rise and shaky! "OPTIONS"
8:00am	Breakfast (& footprint pages)
9:00am	S Path - Simplicity/Simply Free •activities and discussions on the trails •return for the big picture
11:00am	Return to Outdoor School & commence Team Clean inspection by "Eco Dude"
12:30pm	Lunch (& final footprint pages)
1:30pm	"Use it or Lose it" •final look at the Big Picture
2:30pm	Closing Ceremony
3:10pm	Carry packs down the hill and board water taxis and Dogwood Princess bound for Langdale.
4:30pm	Depart Langdale for Horseshoe Bay