

An Indigenous Perspective in Wilderness Experiential Learning: Enhancing Relationships with Nature and Place

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Abstract

Modern Western society has grown apart from a close relationship with nature and place. There exists a need to re-establish a connection with nature and place in an effort to enrich the health and well-being of individuals, community, and society. A different perspective on this human/nature/place relationship is held by other cultures within Australia. This study explores one of these Indigenous perspectives and investigates how Western society can learn to better relate to nature and place from this alternate perspective through wilderness experiential learning.

A case study methodology was used for the study. Data collection was taken through participant observation during a four-day wilderness experience, participant interviews following the experience, and in-depth interviews with the program's facilitators, both of whom hold expert knowledge evolved within the Noongaburra Indigenous Australian perspective. The key aims of the study were to understand how the experiential program encourages people to learn about relationships with nature and place, and to find out how a wilderness experience that includes an Australian Indigenous perspective can affect participant's ways of connecting with nature and place.

It was discovered that there were five major ways in which this program worked towards enhancing relationships with nature and place. These elements were: treating time differently, seeing an ecological balance take place, recognising value in community and other's perspectives, taking comfort from past experiences and memories, and showing respect. Participants of the program benefited by way of discovering alternate ways of relating to nature and place, and by way of increased desire to learn more about other cultures and share knowledge.

Overall, this thesis provides possible options for outdoor facilitators to use in the wilderness experiential field when aiming to enhance connections to nature and place. It also provides a written documentation and insight into the Noongaburra perspective on this distinguished relationship. The program was applied to all aspects of life and community and was drawn from aspects of life and community in nature; in this way it is an ideal and applicable example of experiential learning.

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Chapter One – Introduction

Context of the Study

This study is about exploring perspectives of, and relationships with nature and place. There is a contrast in perspective and relationship with regard to nature and place between Western civilisation and ‘Indigenous’ Australians, or those who initially lived and occupied the land in Australia. With the emergence of the modern age, Western culture has experienced an increased feeling of disconnection with nature and place among much of the general urban population. There is a need in modern society to re-establish the human-nature connection for the sake of mental health and well-being, as

well as for the health of the planet. Traditional Aboriginal cultures regard nature, land, and place with a particular respect and experience a distinct connection to their environment. The aim of this study is to discover how personal connections with nature and place may be changed and enhanced through experiencing this relationship from one traditionally Indigenous perspective.

As I am a post-graduate student in the Experiential Learning and Development program at Victoria University, I took part in the experience that was studied previously during my initial year of post-graduate studies. I noticed, at the time, how this program had had a profound effect on myself and the people I experienced the program with. I was drawn to explore more about why this might have been and decided to base my research on this program, which was facilitated through Victoria University, the following year. My role for the following year had similarities and differences as I was now researching and participating. I took part in the experience as a participant-observer, and was also an interviewer of all participants and the facilitators after the experience had taken place.

The program being studied was facilitated by Jack,¹ an Aboriginal Australian. He is of the Noongaburra people from Goodooga in Northern NSW. He is also a well-known Aboriginal artist throughout Australia. Jack has substantial knowledge about the traditional culture of the Noongaburra people as he has been learning about his people for over forty years. Jack has had extensive experiences with various communities working on the land and with the people of this region since his early teens; this gives him a rare knowledge of different perspectives of both traditional Aboriginal culture and modern Western culture. Jack was a crucial part of this study; he acted as a valuable source of information for it and for the program at Victoria University that the study focussed on.

Jack and his partner Sally have facilitated programs, similar to the one at Victoria University, throughout Australia. They look at teaching and learning as a shared process in a group setting in natural places. Jack shares the traditional knowledge he has learned from the Noongaburra people with participants in a relaxed and unstructured way. He speaks of his cultural beliefs and stories, engages the group in his past artwork, and teaches about nature and place from his traditional perspective. Jack and Sally invited the

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for all participants in the study

group to respectfully listen and learn from one another's perspectives, and from nature itself, in a wilderness setting.

I decided to concentrate my study on this program because of its unique qualities. These qualities included learning about relationships with nature and place from a different cultural perspective, and engaging in some of the cultural practices and ways of relating to nature and place. There are very few organizations within Australia that implement wilderness experiential learning programs that base their content on traditional Aboriginal teachings and attitudes. The program's initiators, Jack and Sally, were well informed and eager to share their knowledge with all other cultures.

The experience was part of a requirement for students enrolled in a post-graduate course at Victoria University entitled 'Programming the Journey' in Experiential Learning and Development. It was a four-day wilderness experience facilitated by Jack focussing on experiences of people and place and culture and of land. The location of the experience was on a major inland river where the participants had previously spent time together.

This case study focussed on a small group of eleven people, nine of whom were student participants and two of whom were course facilitators. The nature of this study precludes the drawing of generalisations. The age of participants varied from twenty to mid-thirties. Because of this, data that emerged could have been quite different than that which would have emerged from an experience with a similar number of participants in their early teens. It is difficult to make comparisons and projected outcomes, but, the reader should be aware of this research and make a personal interpretation of how this study can apply to one's own theoretical beliefs or practice on considering Indigenous learning.

Wilderness and the Human Perception

The meaning of 'wilderness' must be considered and clarified for the purpose of the study. In order to define wilderness, one must bear in mind that wilderness is a concept constructed by humans. It is a human perception and its meaning is derived only

from what people consider it to be. Wilderness is not 'wilderness' to anything or anyone else but humans, and more explicitly, to anyone but the people in the modern world. People in the modern world define wilderness in terms of what it is from a human perspective. For example, it is an area that is not developed or cultivated for human purposes.

Wilderness is therefore considered to be a Western conception (wilderdom.com) defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "an uncultivated, uninhabited, and inhospitable region" (oup.com). This definition would imply that human beings are civilised and in control of the land, and are considered separate from it in its natural state. The term also implies that wilderness is something to be feared; somewhere humans do not belong and have no role. This idea, and the creation of the Western conception of wilderness, is a contribution to the challenges society faces today with regard to disconnections and isolation from nature and land.

The term 'wilderness' in this study is used to help give meaning and terminology to the natural places that are mentioned. Wilderness is used in a way to mean specific places and/or pieces of land where the balance of nature is not governed by human impact. Wilderness, therefore, could include humanity's presence or habitation if nature were a prevalent and balanced part of the environment. In this study, the way we perceive wilderness will assist in shifting people's perceptions of being separate from nature and land. It will assist in progressing people's perceptions towards being part of 'wilderness' and wild places.

This study aims to document possibilities and insights into the way people relate to nature and place. It also contributes to written knowledge of one example of a traditional Indigenous Australian way of relating to nature and place. Indigenous cultures are slipping away and with their disappearance thousands of years of precious knowledge, as well as Indigenous descendants' identity, will vanish. Because of the oral traditions of the Aboriginal culture, there is little published regarding relationships and connections to nature and place. Written reports are one strategy that could contribute towards retaining this knowledge. Efforts should be made to salvage all that can be saved of these valuable cultures.

How this Indigenous connection can be understood, as well as how the Western world may learn from a different cultural perspective, is an area of research that has not been explored extensively. This study intends to add to these areas of research. It is my hope that the practical knowledge gained can be used in the wilderness adventure/experiential field, and that it will be able to further support people in experiencing deeper connections with nature and place, and to grow from this connection.

Chapter Two – Review of the Literature

Literature surrounding this study concerns many aspects of past academic research from several disciplines and other writings. Chapter 2 begins with a brief overview of the history and meaning of experiential learning itself. It then discusses nature and place from a Western perspective; it reviews how Western culture has lost touch with nature, what connection to place may mean to this culture, and how Western culture may re-establish our connection with nature and place. The chapter concludes with considering the connection to nature and place from an Indigenous perspective. The concept of systems as a whole is examined and evidence of different Indigenous perspectives is shown through a variety of writings and studies on place meaning from various cultures' points of view.

Experiential Learning and Knowledge as a Construction

The underlying theory behind wilderness experiential learning is from the theory of experiential learning itself. John Dewey's writings include the formula "experience plus reflection equals learning" (Dewey, 1938); this documented his belief in the role of experiential learning within education. More recently, Kolb's model called the 'Experiential Learning Cycle' (see Figure 1) has been the most influential work in the field of experiential learning. The model is four-staged and the learning process can be entered at any point in the cycle. Experiential learning is defined by Chickering as "...occurring when changes in judgements, feelings, knowledge, or skills result for a particular person from living through an event or events" (1976, 63). Christian Itin writes of experiential learning as "the learning is not a separate experience, but involves the entire person within the context of the learning environment where the learner is challenged to move beyond what is known" (1999, 94).

The context of the learning environment in this instance is the outdoors, which could also be termed wilderness, the environment, land, or place. Bringing an individual out of their everyday surroundings and into 'wilderness' to have an experience with other

people and in their less familiar surroundings holds much potential for learning experientially. This can be termed ‘wilderness experiential learning’, among other names, for similar types of experiences and programs that aim to educate through the outdoors.

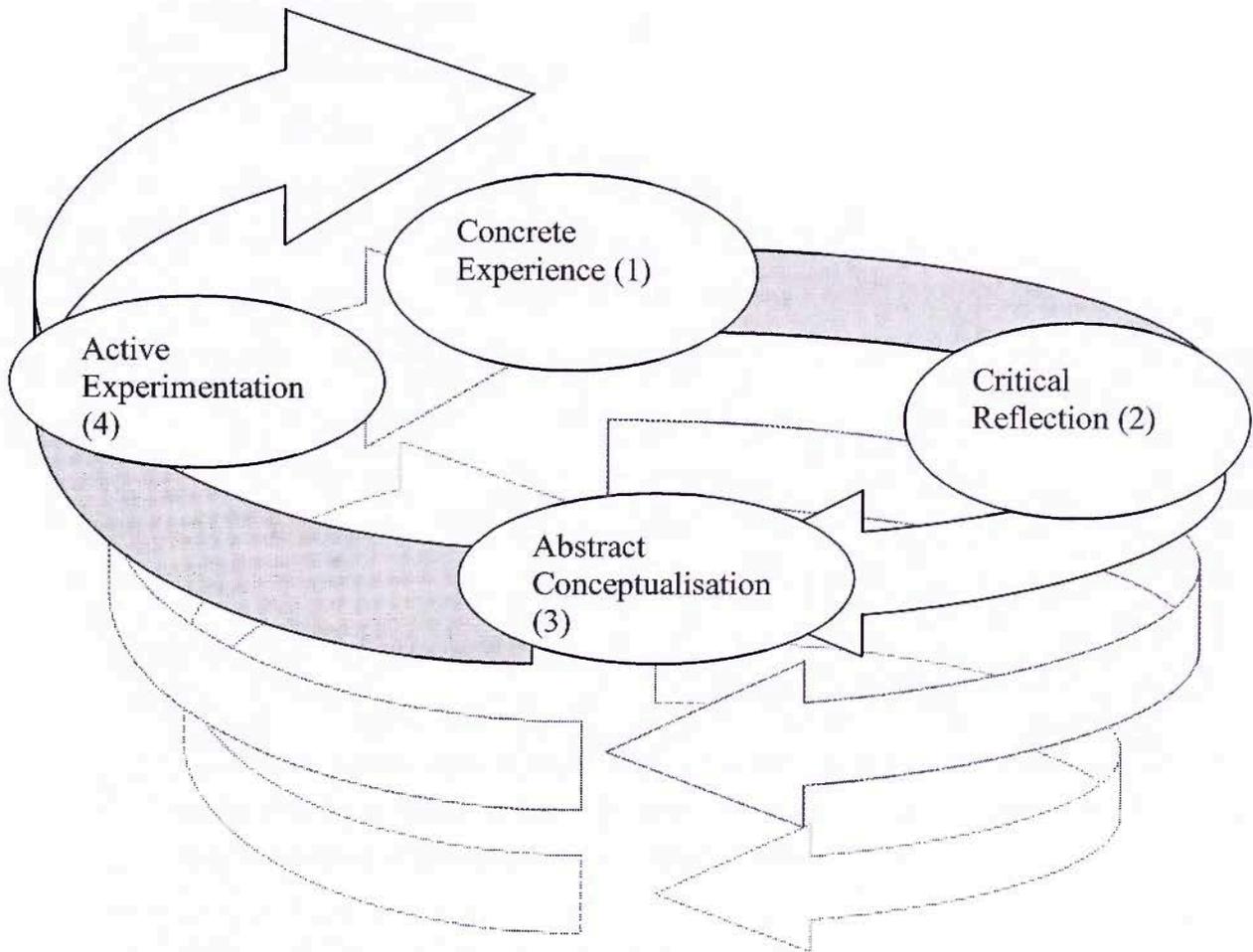


Figure 1. Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning (from Kolb, 1984)

Experiential learning is seen to be found within the constructivist learning theory (Haluzza-Delay, 2001). Randolph Haluzza-Delay writes about the foundation of the constructivist learning theory: “knowledge is a construction that an individual builds to fit

with his or her experience of the world” (2001, 43). An individual’s perspective of the world depends on prior experiences, social structures, and cultural assumptions, all of which comprise each individual’s formations of meaning. Experiential learning can make different experiences available (culturally, socially, and experientially) to help people gain a more general understanding of the world and to generate more meaning from experience.

According to the constructivist learning theory, how people learn to regard nature and place partially depends on the culture in which they grow up. Past experiences and cultural understandings have resulted in a construction of meaning with respect to the way we regard nature and place. Understanding and experiencing relationships with nature and place from a culturally different perspective could help people to form new constructs of knowledge from these new experiences, and help individuals to learn new ways to make connections with nature and place.

Western Perspectives of Nature and Place

Losing Touch with Nature

... nature has become alien, an enemy, and we live with a terrible delusion that somehow we are different, no longer subject to the same rules that govern all other life forms. We have lost all sense of belonging in nature... (Suzuki, 1996, 13)

Modern day industrialised societies are faced with many challenges as a result of moving towards independence from nature. Literature suggests that the problems individuals face, regarding feeling lonely and alienated, are as a result of losing touch with nature (Crain 1997, Ibbott 1999, Suzuki 1996, 1997, Vickers & Mathews 2002). Ibbott writes that “...it is our separation with nature that causes many of our problems” (1999, 6). She also points to “an increasing body of literature (e.g. Clark, 1990; McElroy, 1996; and Bartlett, 1997) which suggests that our urban way of living has begun to dull our sense of creativity and intuitive insight into what it means to be human

(Ibbott, 1999, 6). Suzuki discusses human population movements from country to city, increased consumption and consumerism, and the wedge that has been driven between realising our connection to the rest of the planet as a result of these things (Suzuki, 1997). Crain suggests “children need extensive contact with nature to grow well” (1997, 41). He discusses three major ways in which nature helps children develop (1) powers of observation, (2) creativity, and (3) a sense of peace. He believes young people grow up without the direct contact with nature they need. They are not made aware that they are part of something on a larger scale, and of their inherent relationship within nature. This plays a part in feelings of alienation and loneliness (Crain, 1997). People need nature and a healthy relationship with it in order to be mentally healthy and grow up endeavouring to achieve self-actualisation in modern society.

There is a substantial amount of literature which discusses modern society’s disconnection from the natural world (Henley 1996, Suzuki 1996, 1997, Crain 1997, Ibbot 1999, Wilson 1992, Orr 1994, Tacey, 1995). This disconnection is seen to have stemmed from the industrial revolution, where people became less reliant on nature for survival in a direct way. Dominating nature and land as a commodity is a commonplace Western view. People are seen as separate from nature and using it is a way to ‘make a living.’

Wilson describes the way people connect to the land in modern societies as by way of domination and greed (Wilson, 1992). This can be seen in acts such as prioritising non-renewable resource extraction on the land for a short-term financial return rather than aiming to seek better, more efficient ways to harness energy in our ways of living.

Martin talks about Western culture and how its views of nature are concerned solely from our own perspective. “We look at nature as existing only for the benefit of humans, whether for recreation, fossil fuel, food or as a source of minerals or timber” (Martin, 1996, 5). He makes the point that we view ourselves as superior to nature and separate from it.

From an environmental psychology point of view, Axelrod and Suefeld (1995) examine three accused sources of environmental degradation. These structural causes are

European civilisation and technology, capitalism, and Judaeo-Christian and Graeco-Roman rational (Axelrod & Suefeld, 1995). They examine the roles that each has taken historically to play a part in the present human disconnection from nature, and conclude that these sources cannot be identified as causal factors alone. While these factors cannot be identified as the causal factors to environmental degradation, they may be considered factors that took part in modern culture's emerged attitudes and values with respect to how humans relate to and integrate with the natural world.

Tacey discusses a 'dissociation' between society and nature. He critically examines the spiritual side of Australian society and ties nature into the fundamental equation for individuals' well-being. He refers to the 'conscious and the unconscious' as being disconnected from each other, causing people to experience a 'dis-equilibrium' in their lives. Nature, being the unconscious, has a need to be brought to awareness and linked to Western society's consciousness. Tacey attempts to define and explain the Australian psyche. He talks about a lack of spirituality within society and looks to nature and landscape for solutions.

The only way to develop a spiritually powerful culture in Australia is to enter more into the psychic field of nature; to 'shamanise' ourselves into the image of nature... We need to become less human and more like nature. (Tacey,1995,7)

David Orr describes the way young people are taught to reside in, rather than inhabit the places in which they live. This results in a feeling of disconnection. He says we "do not have a deep concept of place as a repository of meaning, history, livelihood, healing, recreation, and sacred memory as a source of materials, energy, food and collective action"(1994, 163). Vickers and Mathews also write about ways children in a school environment are taught to be disconnected from land and place through encouragement to be an independent person. Students feel discouraged to form attachments to community and place because this attachment would take away from their autonomy (Vickers and Mathews, 2002). This value in autonomy, and the lack of a deep concept of place described by Orr, actually takes away from people's ability to develop identity, build connections in their communities, and envisage connections in larger communities across species and within nature.

In today's modern society little connection with nature, land, and place are emphasised in people's driven and busy lives. Learning to better connect with our natural world to avoid these feelings of alienation is an obvious solution to this societal situation.

The views of deep ecology and ecopsychology mirror these thoughts. Deep ecology is a movement that acknowledges the problem of alienation from nature within society. Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, describes it as "a process of reflection leading to action" (solaroof.org). One of the key principles of deep ecology is Gestalt ontology, which looks at seeing things as a whole or as interrelated rather than having a subject-object relationship (solaroof.org). Deep ecology's fundamental beliefs are that the current environmental crisis is a cultural crisis (Henderson, 1999) and that change needs to occur where there is a greater appreciation in human life quality as well as all life quality of other living things (Henderson, 1999). It holds views that are 'eco-centric' or earth centred rather than 'anthropocentric' (Duenkel & Scott, 1994) which describes the dominant perspective from a human well-being and exploitative point of view. Deep ecology strives to develop an ecological consciousness or *ecosophy* (Duenkel & Scott, 1994).

Connections to deep ecology can also be made to the Gaia hypothesis. This philosophy also rejects the notion that humans and nature are separate and regards Earth as one single organism. Humans are one constituent of the larger system and are closely interconnected with everything within the organism (Axelrod & Suefeld, 1995).

Ecopsychology is the application of deep ecology. It aims at dealing with these feelings of alienation by helping people realise and experience their inherent connections to nature and the earth (Henderson, 1999). It is interesting to look at these fundamental beliefs in this recent field within Western society and observe the parallel to beliefs of traditional Indigenous societies. Maller et al (2002) write "ecopsychology is essentially modern interpretation of ancient views of humans and nature held by many indigenous peoples... believing that human beings are intricately linked to all life forms and life-like processes..." (Maller et al, 2002, 41). Henderson (1999) also notes "ecopsychology may draw on the traditional healing techniques of primary peoples, sensory awareness

activities, nature mysticism as expressed in religion and art, and the experience of wilderness”(1999, 442).

All of these suggested sources and techniques of healing one’s disconnection from nature, land, and place may be practiced on a wilderness experience. To include authentic traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge of nature and place on an experience may aid connections in a different manner and could provide other benefits to society as well, such as cross-cultural respect and models of community.

My place, My Identity

The swamp behind our place had become an important place for me. It was now part of me, part of what I was as a person (Morgan, 1987, 59).

The concept of ‘place’ and ‘sense of place’ within scholarly writing has existed for a substantial amount of time (see Tuan 1977). More recently, these ‘place’ concepts have been discussed with respect to leisure and recreation and outdoor education. Stokowski (2002) defines “sense of place” as being “typically used to refer to an individual’s ability to develop feelings of attachment to particular settings based on combinations of use, attentiveness and emotion” (Stokowski, 2002, 368). Sense of place has been considered as a socially constructed occurrence (Stokowski 2002, Williams 2002). Different cultures treat their place attachments in varying ways. Western culture, generally, lacks a sound sense of place due to people moving locations more frequently.

Place and sense of place are also considered to be important parts of people’s own identity in a great deal of writing (Williams 2002, Stokowski 2002, McAvoy 2002, Raffan 1993, Fredrickson & Anderson 1999). Place concepts, when considered in outdoor or wilderness settings, are closely tied to one’s relationship with the actual nature in the specific place. In outdoor and wilderness settings, nature always exists as a prevalent characteristic. Therefore to have a sense of place in this setting must include having a comprehensive relationship with nature in that location.

A three-pole model of the meanings of place attributed by individuals, was created by Gustafson (2001). The three components of the triangular, theoretical model

were “self”, “others”, and “environment.” This implies people’s different types of relationships are the key factors in establishing meaning. He also points out that a meaningful place “appears as a process” involving individuals and time. This too, is a key ingredient to forming a relationship with anything. It takes an attentive person and a given amount of time to establish any interpersonal relationship. The same applies to person-place relationships.

Raffan (1993) conducted a study on the experience of place across a variety of cultural perspectives in the Northwest Territories of Canada. He discusses the idea of “land-as-teacher”: how people acquire knowledge and ways of knowing from land. Raffan finds four main components that contribute to the concepts of ‘sense of place’, ‘place attachment’, and ‘knowledge from land.’ The first component was termed the “typonymic” component; it involved places and the names given to them by people. The “narrative” component included stories about and from the land. The “experiential” component made reference to personal experiences with the land. Lastly, the “numinous” component involved spiritual bonds between people and place. The study also supports the idea that having a sense of place is directly related to an individual’s own identity. Identity is formed through the land and places and a strong relationship with them. Raffan concludes by stating, “...it appears that sense of place, in varying degrees, constitutes an existential definition of self” (Raffan, 1993, 45). Whether this identity through place applies to people in Western urban cultures is still to be fully explored. It may also be worth considering whether a healthy identity can be formed with a more mobile lifestyle and multiple locations of living throughout the course of life, as people seem to be living today. Perhaps a wilderness environment could be used more extensively by modern urban cultures to offer some assistance in forming identity that offered a constant place to visit and relate to.

Stewart (2004) suggests that having a relationship with nature should be a more specific relationship with a ‘place’ in particular. He also writes that referring to a place as ‘wilderness’ limits our capacity to understand a place and acknowledge its history. This is a point well taken, and one that is considered further in this study with respect to the human role within any particular ecosystem, and what the implications are of using particular terminology to describe a place. From my perspective, when considering an

outdoor/wilderness location the concepts of 'nature' and 'place' are relatively inseparable, especially when considering a human/nature/place relationship. Nature can always be found in place, especially in wilderness locations.

Stewart also found in his study that a motif throughout the journal entries of participants in their experiences down the Murray River was feelings of being a part of something bigger, part of the "surrounding world," rather than set apart from it. This is associated with spiritual relationships with place and through nature, and a realisation that humans are inherently linked to all nature and are indeed a part of it themselves.

Attempting to Rekindle the Connection

All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality (Thoreau, 1854, 195).

This statement by Henry David Thoreau gives a point of view that clearly highlights his feeling of importance of being connected to nature. The perspective here is that, even in Thoreau's time (1817-1862), there was a need to remind people that human beings are certainly a part of nature. Our greatest gains and values are connected to appreciating and acknowledging our relationship with nature and earth.

Studies associated with relationships and connections with nature amongst the Western population have shown a variety of findings and have focussed on different areas. There is a significant body of research regarding spirituality and wilderness experiences and/or nature. Personal development and learning is inherently linked to spirituality in the broad sense of the word. This type of self-development (through "spirituality") has been sought out by many individuals through being in the wilderness and 'with' nature. It could be seen that individuals may seek to subconsciously replace a more traditional spiritualism with a more earth-centred wilderness experience.

Heintzman (2003) found "the wilderness setting, other group members, and solitude all contribute to the wilderness spiritual experience" (Heintzman, 2003, 36).

This suggests that an experience with nature is affected by the social setting of the group and the individual as well as the environment where that experience takes place. Many group dynamics come into play when on a wilderness experience with a group of participants as most experiences involve a strong sense of community living and reliance on one another. It is not a surprise that other group members and how the community functions has an effect on the spiritual experience of each group member.

Frederickson and Anderson (1999) found that important spiritual benefits are achieved through the biophysical characteristics of the wilderness and the direct contact with nature. They found that this contact led to a more contemplative and self-reflective experience. "Sense of place" and "place attachment" are among some of the concepts mentioned by Frederickson and Anderson which are related to spiritual benefits of wilderness. They believe having a sense of place and place attachment can result in a person's more "psychologically balanced, environmentally sound state of being" as well as having an increased sense of self (1999, 23).

Other factors came into play in a study by Stringer and McAvoy (1992). They found that although the wilderness environment was one contributing factor, the greater opportunities and enhancement of spiritual experiences in wilderness were usually connected with the lack of constraints and responsibilities in a wilderness situation. This shows the effect that a modern urban lifestyle including timelines may have on people, but does not attribute the enhanced experience directly to wilderness or increased contact with nature. The operative factor was being without the constraints and responsibilities of everyday life that are prominent in a Western culture. The concern was less so with wilderness/ natural environment compared to these time factor differences.

However, the *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel model*, developed by Fox (1999) proposes that the wilderness experience can bring about an unfolding of new behaviours and a considerable attitude change. The participants in her study made lifestyle changes because of positive feelings they experienced while in the wilderness. She mentions their experiences being linked to powerful emotions and feelings that are connected to nature, the person's inner being, and/or other people. This contributes to the idea that an improved connection with nature can result in changing an individual's life positively and aiding in their learning, personal growth, and well-being.

A study by Martin (2004) looked into human/nature relationships in outdoor education. He points out that a more developed relationship or growth with nature shows a greater inter-dependency between humanity and the earth, where “a person recognises that his or her well-being is fundamentally linked to the well-being of the Earth...” (Martin, 2004, 6). He found that there was a sequential change in every participant in the study, where each one experienced an increased feeling of integration with nature over the research period. He found that the human/nature relationship was affected by an understanding of the concepts of a relationship with nature, comfort levels within the place, extended time and activities in nature, the amount of dependence on nature, and the degree of emotional responses.

Martin’s ‘Pedagogical Framework for Outdoor Education Which Seeks Improved Relationships with Nature’ can be seen in Appendix 1. The model shows “Spiritual relationships with place” and “Alternate world views and links to everyday living” as the step before “Towards kinship with nature” on the hierarchy. This has much to say about the importance of a relationship with place as a fundamental part of a relationship with nature. It also implies that an improved relationship with nature can be transferred to everyday life and aid in larger scale world perspectives. These longer-term changes in participant perspectives could also be achieved through alternate means in a wilderness experience, such as learning about Indigenous ways of relating to attain similar results.

Another area of study associated with human relationships to nature and wilderness is environmental awareness and responsibility. Haluza-Delay (1999) studied relationships with nature on an adventure program with teenagers in Alberta, Canada. He explored how an improved relationship with nature might lead to more environmentally responsible behaviour. His findings showed that environmentally responsible behaviour did not increase in the teens but that a connection with nature facilitated “personal growth of the person (who) was pulled into relationship with this thing called nature” (1999,138). Haluza-Delay suggested: “perhaps outdoor leaders should help participants appreciate the natural world in general rather than in wilderness-specific ways”(1999, 138). This again hones in on the terminology and social construction of wilderness as a concept. Wilderness should be considered something people are a part of in a positive way. If

only places where humans are mere visitors are appreciated, we are contributing to the attitude that humans do not belong in nature, and only belong in urban locations. Participants on wilderness experiences need to experience nature where it is intensified, but then somehow carry this learned respect and appreciation to their own places.

Haluza-Delay (2001) followed up by studying how people's subjective outdoor experiences can be understood and used in everyday life to act in response to environmental concerns. His findings were that although his participants reported a feeling of connectedness to the natural world, the "programs that take participants away from their home environment to pristine natural settings may be counterproductive to environmental education" (2001, 47). He suggests programs that concentrate on feelings of connection that are applicable in the home environment.

One criticism of the suggestion to have programs conducted locally is that not every individual who lives in an urban environment has access to places such as a back yard or park near by, where 'nature' is a focal part of the environment. Unfortunately, some people have very little 'nature' around them in certain locations within cities. Participants could find it a challenge to seek out an environment in close proximity which could offer them some connection that would be comparable to a connection experienced in the wilderness, near home, making the wilderness experience less transferable. On the other hand, going to an environment where nature is abundant is a way of learning and relating with nature in one place and then relating it back to the place a person lives in, where some aspects of nature would be present, but not as prominent. In a wilderness setting participants could have a fresh view of nature because it is a space set apart from the rest of their lives. Nature does exist everywhere and it is up to the individual to seek it out and be in tune to its presence.

Although the wilderness environment was shown to play an important role in the personal growth and learning of the participants in both Haluza-Delay's studies, working within familiar locations is not a foreign or unexplored area. Benefits of contact with nature do not always need to be drawn from 'wilderness' environments alone. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) discuss benefits of contact with nature in settings more easily accessible to all populations, rather than extensive wilderness. They term this "nearby nature" and point to the fact that vegetation and other forms of nature are passed through

on a daily basis in most urban places. The concept of working near one's home environment to establish feelings of connection with nature goes hand in hand with "sense of place" and place concepts. A sense of place could be more easily attained within a person's local dwellings because of repeated interaction with the place. As discussed earlier, having a sense of place, whether in an urban or wilderness environment, does contribute to personal identity and well-being.

Benefits of contact with these types of 'nearby nature' have been studied by Frey (1981), who found that a greater level of life and neighbourhood satisfaction can be attributed to people who experience more contact and interaction with nature near their homes. This contact with nature contributes to the health and well being of people. Being aware of this beneficial contact could be the challenge for many urban residents experiencing alienation, stress, and loneliness. Perhaps individuals could be brought to more wilderness-like locations in order for them to discover a more concentrated contact with nature, and carry this awareness home to receive long-term benefits.

Traditional Indigenous Connections and Perspectives

Understanding Systems as a Whole

It became clear to me that we have many indigenous cultures with different expressions depending on geography, but one Truth of relationship and connection to land and Nature. In essence, we have *common ground* (Ellis-Smith, 2003).

Traditional Aboriginal societies in Australia lived and learned in naturally experiential ways. The way people learned was largely through observation and imitation (Hughes & More, 1997), learning through a constant cycle that parallels Kolb's experiential learning cycle of concrete experience, critical observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. The handing down of knowledge orally was a main part of learning. "Skills were learned by observation, imitation, real life practice and from the oral tradition linking song, site, skin (kinship), and ceremony... and

the use of storytelling” (Robinson & Nichol, 1998, 4). Education was “life-related and life-inspired” (Robinson & Nichol, 1998, 4) meaning that it included all aspects of the environment and ecosystem surrounding the society. People learned from watching and learning from plants and animals as well as others in the community. Education also extended for the duration of a person’s life (Robinson & Nichol, 1998); people kept learning throughout their life journey and learning was not considered to stop after completing a high school diploma or a University degree as it tends to be considered in Western culture.

Community is an important component of Aboriginal life and ways of being. People learn through participating in community life (Robinson & Nichol, 1998). Roles within the community help to form a person’s sense of self or identity. “Aboriginal society makes an individual’s sense of worth depend upon where he or she can fit in – cooperation rather than competition is valued and fostered” (Hughes & More, 1997, 8). How each person and each part of nature and environment relate to each other is a fundamental part of each being’s meaning. Forrest finds Australian Indigenous knowledge is described with words such as “non-abstract, contextualised, holistic, non-linear, non-reductionist and qualitative.” He goes on to say that an “important aspect of Indigenous knowledge is that it tries to understand systems as a whole and not isolate the interacting parts” (Forrest, 1999).

The concept of time within a traditional Indigenous society is vastly different than the modern Western experience of time. The concept of time can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, who had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos* (Logan, 1997). The Western world takes on the concept in a chronological manner where it is sequential and measured. It includes things such as ‘eight hour work days’, ‘half hour lunch breaks’, ‘dinner times’, ‘breakfast times’, and ‘leisure time’ where the clock is always ticking. Kairotic time can be described as organic, rhythmic, and intuitive (Logan, 1997). It is linked and interconnected to the inner cadence of the earth (Logan, 1997). This alternate, culturally different way of regarding time is how a traditional Indigenous society would regard time and function on a day-to-day basis. It is intimately related to nature and natural cycles on earth. “The Aboriginal world is not constrained by time or space – the land is still inhabited by the same beings which were involved in its creation...” (Hughes

& More, 1997, 8). Chronological time does not dominate in a traditional Aboriginal community.

This way of dealing with time can also be experienced when people are away from the Western world and immersed in nature and wilderness. A conscious effort by Western individuals needs to be exercised in order to let go of chronological time and be ruled by kairotic time or ‘natural time’ in this setting.

“Earth just like mother and father and brother of you”(Neidjie, 1989, 3)

Traditional native cultures regard land and nature in a drastically different way than does the Western world. Indigenous Australians and Native North American Indians can be seen to experience similar ways of living in intimate contact with their natural surroundings. In this way they share an association, both have lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years, treating the land with utmost respect. David Suzuki, in the foreword message for *Rediscovery* by Thom Henley, describes the way native people regard the land in which they live:

North America, to the native people living here, is more than simply a place, a piece of turf. Land embodies culture, history, and the remains of distant ancestors. Land is the source of all life and the basis of identity. Land is sacred. An overriding sense in aboriginal perceptions is that of gratitude for nature’s bounty and beauty. Gratitude - and respect (1996, 11).

Henley writes about native North American ways of regarding nature and how they contrast to modern society as well: “how different these philosophies and mythologies are from Western traditions” (1996, 23). Suzuki suggests in his book *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature* that the current scientific community is beginning to look beyond science and technology to meet the needs of humankind. He states “we need a new kind of science that approaches the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities; the search for it has already begun” (Suzuki, 1997, 26).

Allan Fox discusses the relationship Aboriginal people have with their environment and how this came about. He was editor for Bill Neidjie, an Aboriginal Australian writer and activist for preserving his culture, who wrote the book *Kakadu Man*. At the beginning of Neidjie's book, Fox explains this special relationship:

So, through 50,000 or more years, the environment which sustained life and culture became bound intimately with every aspect of human life... Aboriginal and environment were one and the same. Ownership of land in the European sense did not exist. Aboriginals were part of the living systems because through their mythology they understood that their ancestors created the landscape and the life on it including themselves, with each part playing a role in the maintenance of the whole dynamic world (Fox - Neidjie, 1985, 13).

He describes the relationship of Indigenous Australians to the landscape as having a "personalised" view. This viewpoint differs from the Western individualised view because it sees each being as interwoven and dependent upon each other as well as linked to past ancestral happenings on the land. This is one reason why the connection is so strong.

Tacey endeavours to describe the way Aboriginal people exist and relate to the land saying that they are "wedded emotionally and spiritually with the land" (Tacey, 1995, 70). He points to fundamental differences in the way Western society and Aboriginal societies relate.

The Aboriginal people can be seen as, and see themselves as, part of the symbolic continuum of the landscape, and so perhaps the usual Western distinction between people and land does not properly belong here (Tacey, 1995, 14).

Martin describes what he saw of the Koorie people as part of his rock climbing experiences over time in this particular area of Australia. He describes their animist beliefs as all things having a soul. As a result of these animist beliefs they "treated all of nature, animals, plants, rocks, water with the respect we reserve for human life" (Martin, 1996, 6).

Bill Neidjie gives good examples of how his Aboriginal people of the Kakadu region regard themselves the same and equal to any other living thing. He explains how we are all part of the larger system. He refers to the animals and plants in the same way as he refers to humans. We are all considered “anyone”:

People look for food,
animal look for food.
Lizard look,
bird look,
anyone look.
We all same (Neidjie, 1985, 40).

Listen carefully this, you can hear me.
I’m telling you because earth just like mother
and father and brother of you.
That tree same thing.
Your body, my body I suppose,
I’m same as you... anyone.
Tree working when you sleeping and dream (Neidjie, 1989, 2-3).

These Aboriginal viewpoints and ideas of balance in an ecosystem also play a big part in the distinct connection. Everything is considered to have a role to play and take part in the balance. Humans rely on the earth as much as the earth relies on human. In Western culture land belongs to us as our ‘property’ but the Indigenous people believe that it is the person who belongs to the land.

Million no good for us.
We need this earth to live because...
we’ll be dead,
we’ll become earth (Neidjie, 1985, 46).

McAvoy studied the place meanings of the Indigenous people of North America. He concluded that these Indigenous people have meaning of place through human/nature

relationships, spirituality, cultural identity, and interdependence or reciprocation (McAvoy, 2002). This study gives more evidence across different cultures that sense of place and personal identity are inherently linked together. It also shows that a person's relationship with nature is defined by a person's relationship with a specific place where this particular nature is.

Takako (2004) studied connection with the environment from different cultural perspectives in Scotland, Alaska, and Nunavut. She found that in order to foster a 'connection' with environment, experiences and education need to be relevant culturally, socially, and locally. The 'local' education implies a sense of place as being an important ingredient. She also found the experiences need to effect one's sense of identity and teach respect in order to foster the connection. Reports on the Igloodik people of Nunavut, Canada, showed philosophies comparable to Aboriginal groups within Australia. Their existence and well-being were described as "inseparable from the land" which can also be seen in the writing by Bill Neidjie. Takako also found that a core social and cultural value was 'respect,' which applied to all relationships. Both Takako and Suzuki use the word 'respect' as a fundamental description of Indigenous cultures' relationships.

With all of this knowledge the Indigenous people hold, it is a wonder why the modern Western world does not make an effort to appropriately utilise and learn from this way of connecting to nature and place. Learning about an alternate perception and way of relating to nature and place could aid in addressing the problems of alienation, loneliness, and disconnection from nature within Western society. This sharing of knowledge could also aid in the effort to retain aspects of Indigenous knowledge that are slowly disappearing. This study explores how Australian Indigenous traditional knowledge and approaches to learning may support us within wilderness experiential learning to learn about how to better connect with nature and place.

Chapter Three – Research Design and Methods

Chapter three outlines the research design and methods that were followed for this study. It begins by listing the aims and research questions specific to the study. It then discusses the nature and particulars of the qualitative case study. Analysis of the case study is then considered and the data process is mapped out. Chapter three concludes by stating the expectations of the study and how it will aid in understanding.

Aims and Research Questions

Aims:

- To understand how the experiential program enables people to learn about relationships with nature and place.
- To find out how a wilderness experience that includes an Australian Indigenous perspective can affect participant's ways of connecting with nature and place.

Research Questions:

1. How could we incorporate Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives in experiential outdoor programming?
2. What features of this program teach about relating to nature and place?
3. Do participants feel more connected with nature and place after the experience? Is there a benefit to them?
4. What meaning do we take from this experience?

A Qualitative Case Study

The method of research chosen for this study was qualitative research. I wished to understand and explore the program and participants in the program as well as describe their experiences with respect to the relationship they had with nature and place. “The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (Maxwell, 1996, 17). The qualitative research method allowed me to describe the specific phenomenon of learning about relationships with nature of the people involved. It also allowed me an insight into these relationships by using the data that unfolded in the study, without having prior expectations of the phenomena involved.

A case study methodology was used to frame the research. Yin states that case study methodology enables the researcher to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events...”(Yin, 2003, 2). The meaningful characteristics which were retained were involving people’s feelings about, and interactions with, nature and place. An experience with nature and feeling a sense of place certainly are ‘real life events’, and for this reason the case study method was justified. The case study has also been useful in research questions asking “how” or “why” (Yin, 2003). In this case the question investigated how people’s relationships with nature and place may have been altered through experiencing a wilderness program with a traditional Aboriginal theme, and why this may have been.

The study followed a single case design as suggested by Yin. The unit of analysis was the program as a whole, including the individual members participating in the program. When analysing the case the different data collecting techniques that were used were participant observation, individual semi-structured interviews and in-depth unstructured interviews. When quotes were drawn from data within the body of this study, references were abbreviated as follows: participant observation – ‘p.o.’, individual participant semi-structured interview – ‘p.i.’, in-depth unstructured interview – ‘i.d.i’. Because of these different data collecting techniques the data was triangulated. “Triangulation involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data”(Mertens, 1998,

183). This multi- method collection enabled the data to be richer and broader. Triangulation is seen as a measure of credibility in research, which adds to the quality of the study. Anderson writes about case studies and the use of triangulation saying:

... good case studies create a data base which incorporates multiple data sources and go beyond a single questionnaire or set of interviews. Triangulation is used to interpret findings, test alternative ideas, identify negative cases and point the analysis toward a clear conclusion based on the evidence collected. Findings based on conclusions suggested by different data sources are far stronger than those suggested by one alone (Anderson, 1998, 159).

This brings the discussion to the different methods of data collection undertaken. Participant observation was used to collect data during the four-day wilderness experience. Perceiving reality from “inside” the case study was an advantage as it allowed for accurate portrayal from the insider’s perspective (Spradley, 1980, 57). I took part in the wilderness experience that included being part of the group, taking part in conversations, sharing ideas, observing nature, creating artwork, floating down the river, and doing individual reflections. Field notes were taken throughout the experience in an open fashion. During the wilderness experience many unstructured and informal interviews also took place. In their chapter *Interviewing: the art of science*, Fontana and Frey refer to Lofland (1971) who states that in-depth interviewing and participant observation go hand in hand, and that much of the data which comes from participant observation is in fact from interviews which take place informally in the field (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

Individual interviews were held with each participant in the program at the completion of the four-day experience. These interviews made up the next part of the data within the case study. The interviews were semi-structured in order to maximise person-to-person relating and conversing. A list of the questions asked can be seen in Appendix 2. The interviews also took place in the outdoor environment at the completion of the program. This interview location contributed to the richness of the data. Participants were in the environment that was the subject of the interview and were

able to speak about their experience and relationships after spending time with nature, the group, and the place.

In- depth interviewing was also used for the analysis of the program. These in-depth interviews took place over a course of two days and were unstructured. The two individuals who organised and implemented the program through the University, Jack and Sally, were interviewed in an unstructured way and at length while taking part in casual conversation. A guide of sample questions for these interviews can be seen in Appendix 3. Fontana and Frey discuss the unstructured interview in saying that the “...very essence of unstructured interviewing (is) the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain...” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, 366). In the two-day period spent with the program’s directors it was my aim to have this ‘human-to-human’ contact and to understand the roots and perspectives of the program through them. The handing down of knowledge through oral means during in-depth interviewing also maintains traditional Aboriginal ways of teaching. Engaging in this type of conversation enabled the research, and my learning, to remain culturally appropriate and respectful.

A selection of photographs that were taken throughout the four-day experience were also included in the report. This was an accurate way of showing events that took place during this time and helps the reader to comprehend in a way that is beyond words. Loeffler (2004) writes about the use of photography in research and his study involving outdoor experiences saying: “this innovative and collaborative approach to the research contributed greatly to the depths of understanding gained...”(Loeffler, 2004, 57). I intended to involve the reader in this ‘collaborative’ approach of data display in this study allowing meaning to emerge from the data, details to be highlighted in a non-literary way, and a greater ‘depth of understanding’ to be obtained by all.

The painting the group created as a main part of the program was displayed in the report through photographic means as well. This art creation can be interpreted in many different ways by different individuals. In displaying the painting, the interpretation is left to the reader, and not interpreted through my own eyes. Aboriginal communities use

painting as one main means of communication, a means whereby everyone is included and everyone can see the information visually on a canvas.

Painting is also a culturally appropriate means of communicating knowledge, one in which Aboriginal people feel more comfortable and an alternative to using English language and particularly the more formal, rational and abstract language which public officials and scientists feel comfortable using (Changeworks Pty Ltd, 1995).

An Open and Flexible Analysis

At this point, I should not fail to mention the influence that my own past and background undeniably had on the study. While objectivity in collecting and coding data was clearly observed, it is almost impossible to completely separate myself from the research. And, as Miles and Huberman suggest “to know how researchers construe the shape of the social world and how they mean to give us a credible account of it is to know just who we have on the other side of the table” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 429). My philosophies are based on a constructivist paradigm; believing that knowledge comes from past experiences, constructs, and narratives which are imprinted on an individual’s mind throughout one’s life. This would mean it is inevitable that all people learn differently and make up different constructs of the reality of their world, depending on what their past experiences have been. These personal beliefs have led to the qualitative method of inquiry. Mertens reminds us of the important role the qualitative researcher has in a study: “The qualitative researcher decides which questions to ask and in what order, what to observe, what to write down. Therefore, considerable interest has been focused on who the researcher is and what values, assumptions, beliefs, or biases he or she brings to the study” (Mertens, 1998, 175).

With regard to the concepts being discussed - nature and place and relationships with them - it would be worth mentioning that I have had a significant amount of exposure to natural places, wilderness environments, and outdoor adventure in various locations around the world. Many of my personal values and benefits are drawn from nature and wilderness places. I am originally from the West coast of Canada, and have also reflected on the meaning of ‘place’ and ‘sense of place’ in the past few years of

living in Australia. With this in mind, I was careful to separate my own biases, past experience, and knowledge, from the emerging data in the study. This was done by constantly questioning and reminding myself throughout the data collection, coding and analysis process of the diverse places individuals in the study had come from, as well as the various experiences they may have had, which made up each person as an individual. In making this conscious personal reminder I was slightly separated and objectivity in the study was increased.

Inductive analysis was used to draw ideas and themes from the raw data. Inductive analysis was chosen because the study design calls for a relatively open and flexible analysis, allowing themes to emerge from the data. Huberman and Miles refer to a “loose inductively oriented design” which works best for “unfamiliar terrain, single cases, or exploratory or descriptive studies” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, 431).

Data analysis for the study began with transcription of all data collected from interviews and field notes. The interviews were audio taped, and were therefore transcribed from the tapes following the interview process. The data were then organised into thematic codes that aided me in reducing the volume of the raw data. Coding was the main exercise in developing prominent themes, opposing themes, and common beliefs or ideas. Sub- themes were then identified and coded as well. Analytic induction was used to discover the prominent constructs from the research and see regularities from within this part of our social world (Huberman and Miles, 1994). I then looked for critical themes and ideas that opposed the emerging evidence of the study being directed a certain way. Marshall and Rossman state the importance of looking for alternative explanations saying:

The researcher must search for other, plausible explanations for these data and the linkages among them. Alternative explanations always exist; the researcher must search for, identify, and describe them, and then demonstrate how the explanation offered is the most plausible of all (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, 117).

The analytic induction was displayed through a complete list of each discovered theme and key phrases that arose from the data. This showed the path I took to arrive at the emerging themes and sub- themes. Table 1, entitled ‘Theme and Data Source Table

including Key Phrases’, shows this analytic induction. Miles and Huberman write of the analytic induction cycle and how we move from one train of thought to the next: “When a theme, hypothesis, or pattern is identified inductively, the researcher then moves into a verification mode, trying to confirm or qualify the finding. This then keys off a new inductive cycle” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 431).

Table 1. – Theme and Data Source Table including Key Phrases

| THEME | DATA SOURCE | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| | Participant Interview | Journal Notes | In-depth Interviews |
| Realisation of Treating Time Differently | Take the time Slow down Being patient Time to just be there Spend the time Chill out... and observe Focussing on process Time difference Stopping and looking Allow space and time Very patient and very personal, no time to rush Kicking back and relaxed time* Take time to observe things Spending time, that calm feeling So much time to do it in Spending more time The concept of time Idea of time Appreciation of taking time When you take time Spending time with it They take time Have to spend time You need the time I don't need to rush it | Relaxed atmosphere Sat patiently Long walk Spent so much time with them Spent time getting to know the place Go out and spend some time (in their own way) All day to make a tiny loaf They spent time learning Concept of time Change of season tells you to move Sat under a tree for 3 weeks waiting Time factor and respect Spend time to build a relationship 12-14 years to learn about different communities Time is such a different concept for aboriginal people Spend all our time trying to erase our mistakes Spent about two hours painting Time passes by so quickly Takes time and patience People responded with: time... Trees could have been 400-600 years old Sit back and look for a while You need to allow time Change of pace Time there was to contemplate and consider Society's awareness of the clock Time to contemplate special things for me | Spent 16 years learning about each other You have to build the time to get to know them and have a relationship Sit down for a while and learn Show respect long enough... if I stay long enough then I can learn about this place You need to stay in it for a while and you need to learn about that place We don't plan our program |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Seeing an ecological balance take place</p> <p>- understanding inter-relationships and co-existence</p> | <p>Appreciating what's there Realising the environment you're in Think about the small things you'd see You find the answer in nature Noticing all of the things going on around you Knowledge with nature and living with it Connecting to some kind of spiritual side Really looking at nature More appreciation, more connection Part of nature Be in it to balance it Understanding of my place in nature Balance trying to take place Concepts of balance and harmony Look at nature from a more intense perspective The bush is about us Have a role in it Being there, looking after it, and enjoying it, and caring for it</p> | <p>Spirit goes back into the watering holes* Learn about the animal's environment Related to everything out there in it's environment Teach about interconnections with nature Emu's gut... used and eaten by the people Stories relate to the laws and animals together Everything being interrelated Eco system couldn't survive without one another In different areas for different parts of the year Southern Cross was related to the gum trees Concept of people with nature Equal with other creatures Relationship with the environment Where they can sustain themselves Function of the trees in the area Care take the land, and make the most of it Control the water, control the burning, and have balance Realised the delicate balance of the eco-system Provide an ecosystem for other things to grow Another use of the tree was the powder Ants clean up all of the mess All of these things build into the forest All use the lot, work as a balance Forest needs the balance All things playing a role See the different roles Contribute to something bigger Eco-system and plants and how they all work together</p> | <p>Everybody has the same consciousness It's like walking through your stories all the time, every time you go into the bush The role they played Everything in the forest has value The reeds give shelter to the birds Connect yourself to that balance things relied on other things for survival... take out one of those things... destroy everything else So the land right across is important because it all creates a balance Everything (animals, trees, Aboriginal people) would all be on the same line You look for something that relates to you Use it as a balance</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Seeing an ecological balance take place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - associating us with other species | <p>Appreciate what it would be like to be an ant Exercise with the ants and how to relate it back to yourself</p> | <p>Relate to us as humans Frogs were also very social and independent Likened to how humans act Noticed the tree's "struggle to survive" Different highways the ants took, like our own roads They were helping each other as well They would all congregate together How people are like ants Watching the ants... shows you a lot Looking at ants and feeling some sort of connection</p> | <p>What could individuals learn from an animal about their own life Everything that lives on the sand hill is related to me You look at a tree and see its like a big city with all these things growing on it One type of tree still carries the sound of people mourning You find the ants do something you do, then there is a relationship* Learning from animals and what they can teach you You learn about that little ecosystem that you are watching... relate it back to yourself and what messages it has for you in your life What to relate back to yourself is everyone is an individual and you have to show respect to that individual</p> |
| <p>Seeing an ecological balance take place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - noticing the balance being disrupted | <p>Tread lightly, be sensible, and environmentally friendly Challenge would be finding this balance with nature in other places</p> | <p>No watering holes...nowhere for the spirit to go* The smaller gum trees do not hold the banks Fish don't breed because they have nowhere An imbalance in the ecosystem here Not over-fishing Non-native species... diminished the other grasses Change that balance... stuffs it all up Few left as the other grass had choked it out Trees... used to travel outwards, now they travel up The human impact</p> | <p>Only take what you want, not store it up Not see it as a tree and that tree is timber, it's not timber If you take away one tree, then you are taking away one different language group from your community</p> |
| <p>Recognising Value in Community and Other's Perspectives</p> | <p>Broadening my understanding of Aboriginal culture Understanding of indigenous culture Articulation from another culture It was about sharing life Respect for difference Same place with different perspectives</p> | <p>Learned about his people Respect different people's beliefs and learn from them Conscious of one another's beliefs* Share his knowledge with anyone Communicated and learned from one another Learning different aspects of their culture</p> | <p>Relate all that learning back to myself Everything there was teaching things, so putting something into my conscience, showing me all this 26 different religions, 26 different beliefs, 26 different languages... we were all part of a</p> |

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|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Recognising Value in Community and Other's Perspectives (continued)</p> | <p>Accepting differences and learning from differences Part of a community Everyone starts to fill a role Different beliefs and systems and values Holistic approach Life being in balance Community approach Its not about 'us' or 'you', its about this Understanding what everyone else is doing as well How people can live together in harmony Everyone in a community has their place Community through learning about other cultures Let yourself go for the common good Looking at another culture Learning through other people Who you meet along the way Structure of learning through other people Someone else's comfort zone Indigenous links Learn from indigenous communities Group support Community and tolerance and how people can live together in harmony</p> | <p>Family and taking care of others Help people learn about his own culture Understanding religions and beliefs and learning from another culture Learn about different communities Supporting the local community Pictures were joined up together with dots Unified as one Listen to the interests of everyone Social aspect within the group How they were helping each other Congregate together Each individual approached the exercise differently Discussion about community... Draw on the different cultural knowledge of various group members Learn so much from other things about place, community, and people Understanding of Aboriginal people's relationship with the land Model of communities and sharing knowledge Community of the Aboriginal culture World in community, in living, having a role They learned from one another, and got to know one another Importance of community A part of the community Feel they have a task and a job Our role and the community Lived as a community, always been equal All equal and everyone has their place Every culture has got value</p> | <p>community Taking a role in our community... but we learnt from other people first We all play our different role in our community They all carry different messages for you... and they are a part of your community Let other things teach you Build a community that's there out of all different people Learn from every part of your community Go and sit with another community and learn from those communities Seeing the value in those differences You have to look at every individual, every part of our family... every one of them has a different way of looking at our special place Community is everybody in the community... all ages, all religions, and all races Tuckandee come in from another community Its about looking at everybody as a brother or sister Allow someone else to be a part of your experience and allow somebody else to come into your space Allow everybody to talk about all their different experiences everybody learns from each other... you should be learning as a group, you know like as a community... everybody is playing a different role</p> |
| <p>Taking Comfort from Past Experiences and Memories</p> | <p>When we were here as well When you know the history of a place it helps you understand Understanding the Murray's own history</p> | <p>Reminded us of "home" Provide him with shelter, food, or medicine... no longer be afraid Make it "home" by finding things to survive</p> | <p>They see in more detail... if people take notice, then that place will become more special to them If you sit there you learn about that place</p> |

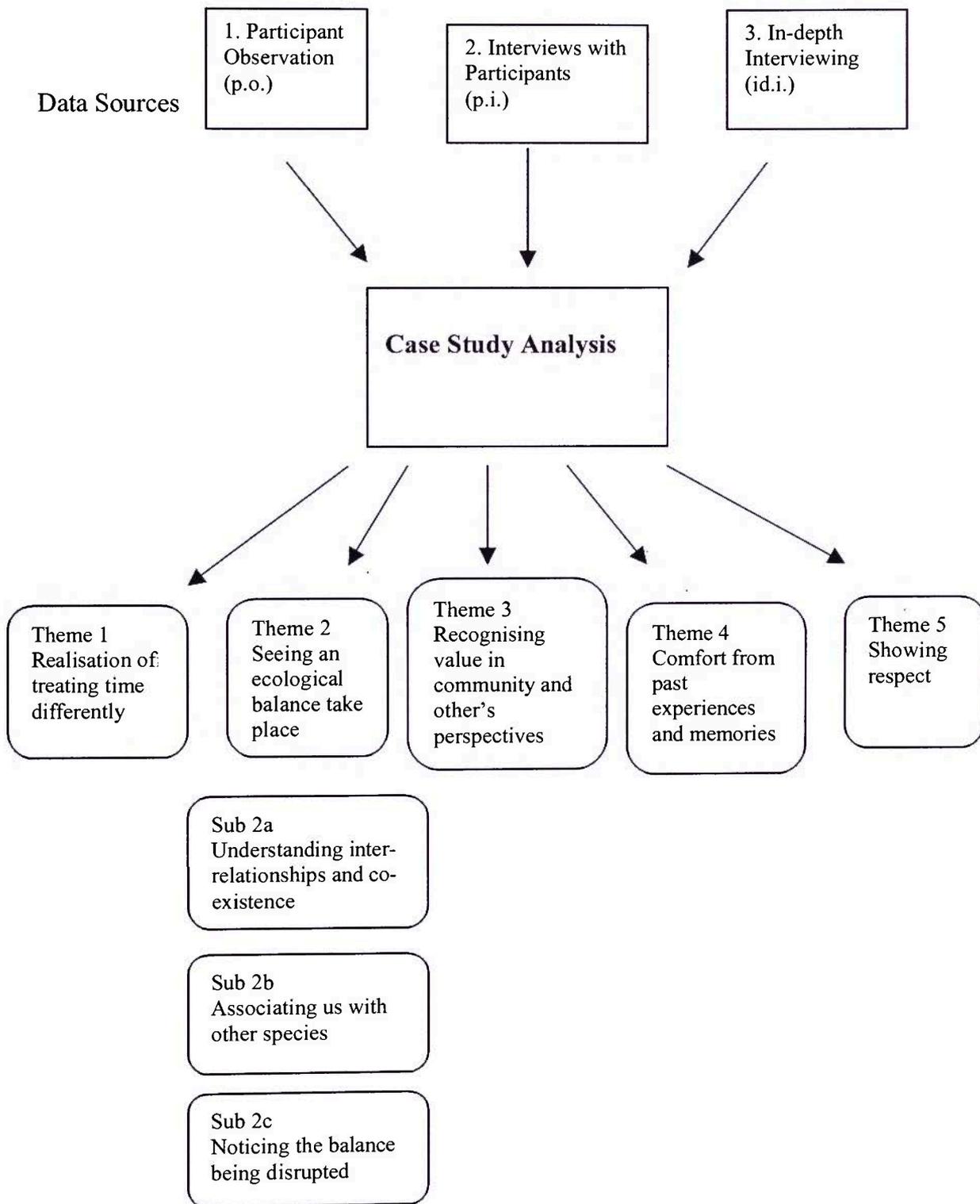
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| <p>Taking comfort from Past Experiences and Memories (continued)</p> | <p>More comfortable because we are used to the place* I know a certain piece of land very well Memories as a child, memories of 5 months ago Take people into the bush and make them feel more comfortable You find something that makes it feel like home for you Still a new place for me Part of our culture and history I used to live in Euchuca Familiarity Remember the differences Passion and knowledge of the place It felt comfortable Get to know a place Allowed to feel comfortable</p> | <p>Comfort in a place Details I know... because I had spent so much time As internal as a 'place within yourself' Were reminders of stories from their childhood Stories from where they were living now Back to our roots and where you came from A story from their past which connects them Start caring about a place Reminded them of home Around nothing familiar Needed to be near things they felt comfortable Painting tells a story Before you go into a place you try to learn about it A place that is very special to you Family has so much history there Through stories of her own in her childhood Stories and memories from certain places Places that people were thinking of Stories from people's pasts Find food and things and it is not uncomfortable anymore Still things grow the same See things in the city and get excited that it is growing Make people feel more comfortable in the wilderness</p> | <p>they have stories Recognise something that grows there from my country... carrying something around that links you to your place Have an experience of it... experience will make those art sites and cultural places more important to them</p> |
| <p>Showing Respect</p> | <p>More understanding of culture is so complex and profound We would ship people to Sydney, it shows such disrespect ... The impact it had. I feel so grateful of the lessons of the land Be sensible And respect, respect for difference Jack's way is so much wiser Teaching land respect in a positive wording Everyone has their place, and your place isn't their place</p> | <p>Paying respect to land Helps to respect it People respect different people's beliefs How respectful this way of living was Ethic of care and respect How you pay respect to a place They paid respect to the community there and the land Another example of time factor and respect Responsibility and respect How would you want them to respect it? The group has gained some respect for this place</p> | <p>Show respect to other people and other cultures Show respect to things that are different in a deeper sense Show respect to those different people Say what you believe and allow people to either respect or disrespect it* They are not separate in any way... its all about showing respect to all that What you believe in that make you strong and respect others For everybody to learn from and show respect for it, to show respect to</p> |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Showing Respect (continued)</p> | <p>That 'time', and respect Four places he took us which were about respect and land Freedom to do it our own way - respect, listening, and time It was respectful Talking about time and place and respect and honouring place We show a great disrespect by not listening Respecting, caring, and acknowledging</p> | <p>Pay respect when they visit Treating marine life with respect Trying to paint a concept of respect Relate to nature, respect it, and think of themselves as an equal You can not demand respect, but have to gain respect by respecting others Grateful and privileged to learn Teach a respect for knowledge Brings balance, respects people Taught one another out of respect Everyone was equal and showed respect</p> | <p>What make it sacred is respect that the men show Respect that makes it sacred You have a different respect for that place and show respect long enough Showing respect to these old people by teaching the young people Out of respect we could learn from each other Start showing respect to special places Show respect to it is because you already learned about it Shows respect to that ant by not taking over that part To show respect to that individual</p> |
|--|---|--|---|

* Examples of key phrase extraction and coding from raw data are given in Appendix 4.

The themes that resulted from the analytic induction cycle and shown through the Theme and Data Source Table including Key Phrases (Table 1) are illustrated in Figure 2 which maps out the data process within the case study.

Figure 2. Representation of the data process within the case study



There is an expectation that the data will assist in understanding more about:

- how parts of Aboriginal knowledge and tradition can be incorporated in teaching through experiential outdoor programs
- how participants feel about their connection to nature and place after the experience, and what meaning the experience has for them
- key elements which aid in people's connections with nature and place

Chapter Four – Data Presentation and Analysis: Discovering and Discussing the Meaning

Chapter 4 is a presentation of data collected for the study as well as the consequent analysis for this data. It begins by detailing the five elements of the experience and then discusses their meaning with reference to experiential learning and the experiential learning cycle. The chapter then delineates and illustrates the five themes that were discovered from the data. Theoretical models and explanation of these models then follow. Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of how the four stages of experiential learning are regarded with respect to this particular experience.

A. Experiential Learning and Holistic Knowledge: Learning to Relate to Nature and Place

There were five Indigenous learning experiences featured within the four-day experience that aided in the connection of person to nature and place. Each included elements of the five themes that emerged from the data, which are also discussed within this chapter. The exercises and tasks given assisted in focussing participant's attention to their relationships with nature and place.

First, participants were asked to find something in the bush that reminded them of home. There was no time limit for this. When people were ready to return with their article they would join the group. Discussion took place upon the return of all individuals. This task ties into the resulting theme of taking comfort from past experiences and memories. Finding something that reminded people of home resulted in a level of comfort in this new place because of the connection made and familiar feeling brought on by this article. When discussion took place, the group functioned as a community and respected other's points of view. The group shared their knowledge; each person listened and learned about others and their homes from each different story.

Second, participants were shown one of Jack's paintings. It revealed many things that were concerned with people connecting to nature and place. The painting had also

been utilised at a prior workshop that Jack had facilitated in an attempt to teach a community about their interconnections. (For the benefit of the reader all excerpts from data have been put in italics)

Jack then spread out a painting of his that he painted as a map of his area. He explained how he used it to teach about interconnections with nature. The painting tells a story and teaches. It represents country, religion, and rule. He taught the farmers of the area with the painting how to work with the land together. He taught them that all animals had their place in the land. (p.o.)

The group was shown a very unique and intricate representation of all of the interconnections within the nature of this place from the painting. It was an example of a culturally different way to teach and communicate through a non-verbal and non-literate way.

The third process was to spend time thinking about a place that was special to you and how you would want it to be respected. This brought things onto a more personal level for individuals. Again, there was no time limit for this exercise; individuals just went out and spent what time they thought they needed in order to think about this question. Upon returning to the group, no discussion took place. When everyone had returned and was ready we moved into the next exercise.

A large canvas was spread out on a tarpaulin and paints and brushes were provided. The group was asked to paint the special place they had been thinking of and how each person would have it respected. This process was an all-encompassing exercise; it included all of the theoretical elements and themes that were discovered within the experience. The group used painting as a mode of communicating instead of talking about their special places. In this way it was a new and unified way to learn together.



Image 1 – The group working together as a community while painting

Time was used in an open manner with no restrictions placed on the participants. Each person played their role in the exercise and was able to convey the importance of their point of view. The group was balanced because each individual had an important role to play. Features of the painting were specific places from people's pasts along with stories from these places; nature was also a prominent element. When everyone had finished painting their special place some members of the group joined the work together by using dot patterns. The group worked as a community while painting, unifying the painting jointly at the end. Each person gained respect for one another's special places painted on the canvas as well as learning more about each person.



Image 2 – The finished canvas: special places and how we respect them

The final process was an exercise where the group split into smaller groups. Each group was assigned a specific species to observe. Participants were asked to find out about this species, its surrounding environment and how it interacted, and how this species related back to ourselves. The three groups observed a large red gum, an ant colony, and tree frogs by a watering hole. Balance and the roles each species played in the environment were dominant elements of this exercise. Individuals were to spend time really observing what kinds of interconnections things had. It was very apparent after some time that each living thing relied on others for its survival and well-being. The whole party then moved on to the places where the smaller groups had been observing and discussed what each group had discovered.

The focus of each process during the experience overlaps the other parts of the experience, making the learning applicable and holistic. For example, focussing on watching one single species in nature and what they do overlaps with learning about the whole ecosystem and what role each species plays. This, in turn, aids in learning about a

place, that place where the particular species is, and developing a relationship with that place in particular.

This type of learning about a relationship with nature supports suggestions by Stewart (2004) who states that having this relationship with nature should be a more specific relationship with place. In getting to know the various species and how they interact in the area, one is indeed establishing a relationship with nature, but with the nature in that geographical location. The ecosystem that exists on the parts of the Murray River where the experience took place does not necessarily exist in other parts of Victoria or Australia. Therefore, the relationship with nature and the relationship with place can be considered one in the same for this particular area.

Stewart makes other points about referring to places as ‘wilderness.’ He suggests it limits people’s ability to understand a place and acknowledge history there. With respect to this program, these points can be applied where Jack made many suggestions to the group about how he begins to get to know a place and break down this mental barrier of considering a place ‘wilderness.’ He spoke much about finding things to help him survive there, such as plant life which was edible and places for shelter, and that this played a part in his comfort in a place. He then no longer considered a place wilderness. In this way the meaning associated with the terminology is broken down. Wilderness is no longer wilderness, although the only change that has happened is within the constructs in the mind.

The learning from this experience is aimed at moving beyond what participants gain in the wilderness. It involves exploring one’s life philosophies, beliefs and history. In this way it could be considered holistic learning, characteristic of traditional Indigenous ways of teaching and knowing. The learning is aimed to be what Robinson and Nichol (1988) term “life-related and life-inspired.” The outdoors is the context for the learning to take place. However the subjects that are addressed apply to all aspects of life. Part of the learning from the wilderness is drawn from the experience of relationship with nature and place. Watching its different species interact with one another and their environment and witnessing the co-existence helped individuals realise the delicate balance present. Carefully observing one species and its habits and mannerisms and

applying this to oneself allowed learning to come directly from an ecosystem and the nature we are a part of.

Sally explains how the Aboriginal ways of learning are used and why learning from this perspective is effective and individual:

...seeing the ecosystem at work and that's an experience of again learning the way Aboriginal people used to learn about the environment... learning from a little ecosystem that you are watching for a couple of hours allows that learning to be so individual, because the messages are completely different for every single person that's actually sitting there watching it. (id.i.)

This focus on individualised learning matches experiential learning philosophies. Each person is considered to learn different things from the same experience of observing parts of nature because each individual has come from a different past, had different experiences, and has therefore different constructions of knowledge.

The exercise of finding something that reminded us of home, the first exercise during the program, has been displayed through Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Figure 3, p 44). This is an example of one of the processes and how participants learn experientially about relating to nature and place. In the concrete experience the participants were given the task of finding something that reminded us of home, or special places to us. During the experience, in the critical reflection stage, individuals reflected on the past experiences and memories they had which were connected to the article they picked up. For example, I picked up a certain type of grass that reminded me of spending much time with horses and knowing which types of grass they liked. In the abstract conceptualisation phase, individuals drew parallels between our special places where our stories were from and this place on the Murray River. This moved individuals into the next phase, where they usually experience an increased comfort and sense of place in the environment as a result of having ties to past experiences and knowing the place better.

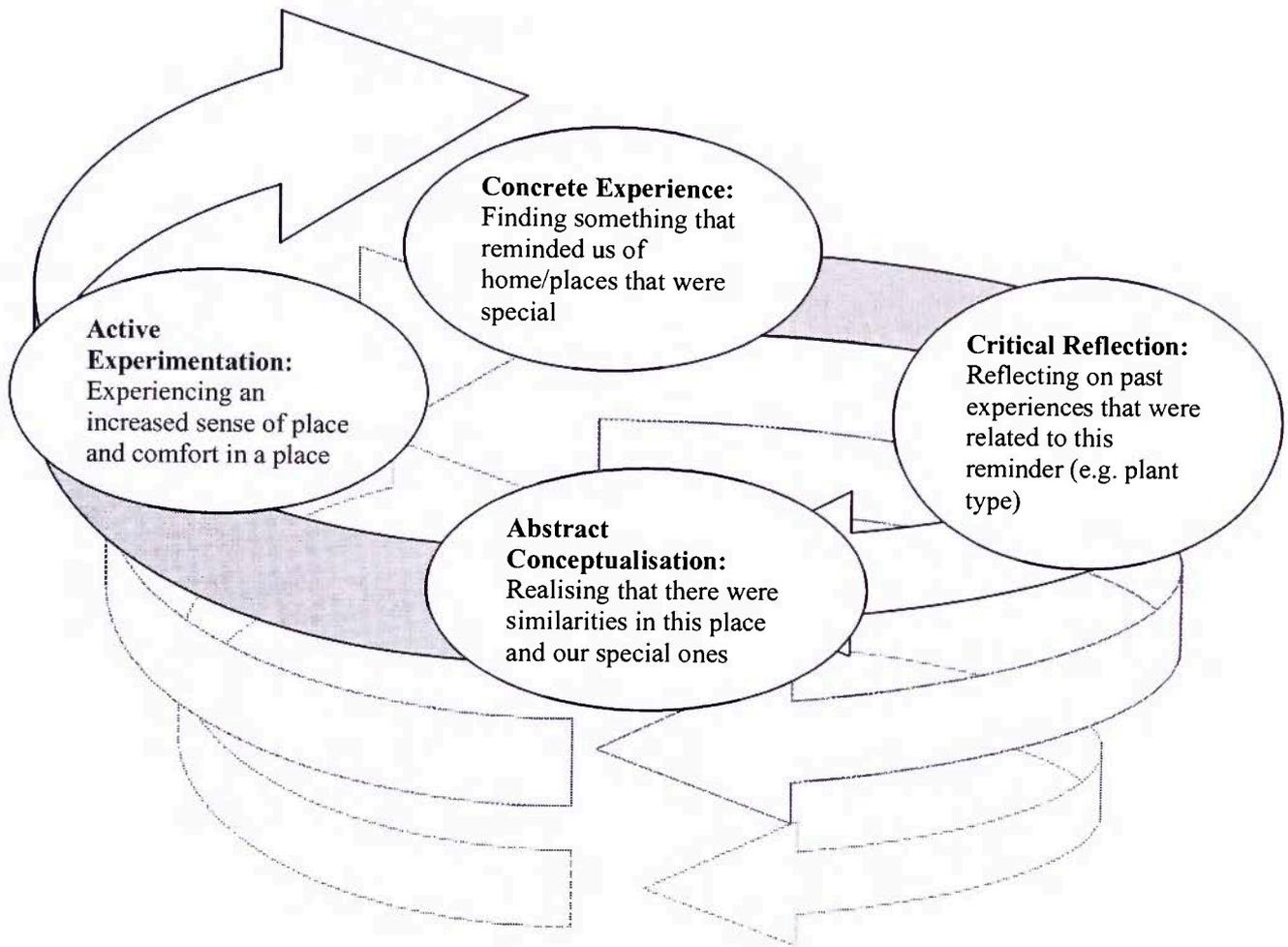


Figure 3. Learning to Relate to Nature and Place through Experiential Learning, Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning applied

B. Recurring Impressions

Five themes were recognised from the coding of the three types of data. The themes were entitled '*realisation of treating time differently*', '*seeing an ecological balance take place*', '*recognising value in community*', '*taking comfort from past experiences and memories*', and '*showing respect*'. These themes helped identify the main theoretical concepts behind the program (see Figure 5, p 70) as well as aided in the formation of the theoretical process model 'towards a connection/relationship with nature and place' (see Figure 6, p 72) for participants through this experience.

Analysis from the three types of data showed similar themes. This triad of data sources allowed the themes to be identified and then reinforced from secondary and tertiary methods. Figure 2, in Chapter 3, shows the process the data went through and the resulting themes.

1. 'Realisation of treating time differently'

'Realisation of treating time differently' was identified as a theme throughout. This concept applied to the use of time on the program. The experience was unstructured, the workshops began each day when each member was ready; there was never any rush to complete tasks, exercises were done for extended periods and were only complete when each individual felt they had experienced what they needed to. The participants made many comments on this difference in use of time. In Western culture we are dependant on, and conditioned to be aware of, the time on the clock. In traditional Aboriginal cultures time is seen as a completely different concept, almost non-existent, or existing only through natural happenings (i.e. sunset, sunrise, seasons). This contrast illustrates the comparison between treating time in a chronological way and treating time in a kairotic way. The difference in the way the day was not structured helped participants learn in a way they were not used to, and begin to see beyond their own everyday reality. For example, Yvonne made these comments about part of the experience. She was still aware of time in the Western sense here as she mentions hours and minutes, but realised the difference spending more time in a tranquil way made:

When we sat and listened to the frogs. Usually I sit for ten minutes and then go, but sitting there for an hour and a half, it starts switching into different levels of why you were there and what really did relate. Listening to how the frogs did their thing, I never listened long enough and concentrated long enough to realise there was something about what they were doing. (p.i.)

Personal research journal entries showed similar comments. On the first day of the experience this comment was recorded:

He (Jack) said this is why when we go into a place we need to learn about it, sit back and look for a while and see the different roles... In order to understand what relationship you have to a place when you come into it you need to allow time. (p.o)

Whether the participants would have ended up with an increased connection and relationship with nature and place if they were in this location without the program's processes and elements in place has been considered here. The emphasis placed on spending more time (as much time as one needs) aided in the deeper level of connection experienced. Individuals may have spent some time watching and learning about different species in the area if they were put in this place on their own. But concentrating on really finding out the links one species has to another by carefully and constantly watching, and then applying how to relate this to oneself is a unique and very different way of looking at nature and place in the Western world. Observing for this longer amount of time and finding out these inter-connections helped the participants' relationship with place as well. Knowing the details of the place, becoming comfortable there, and feeling the connection one has to these other species helps to establish relationship to place in a deeper way.

The experience provided a platform for change in outlook that will essentially benefit individuals' well-being and perspective of being part of something on a larger scale; there is a sense of calm from being more connected to nature and place. In most cases, participants commented on the different way of treating time on the program. This

style of time usage was very culturally different to what people are used to on a day-to-day basis and had a distinctly Aboriginal flavour to it. Participants were put into a world that had similarities to the way traditional societies treated time. This helped people learn from a different perspective than the ones they were used to on most outdoor experiences. Participant's comments indicated a realisation that time is not something which has to be treated in a measured and structured way, especially while in the outdoors. Being reminded to consciously take the time also showed that this helped participants relate to nature and place better.

Rhonda explained how taking time had made a difference and what she had learned from the experience:

Yesterday, I was realising when I go into the bush I don't take the time to get into the little things. Paying attention to the small things is how it's changed. And Jack giving information about how they use the small things like the plants. Taking the time to appreciate the little things, and using all of the senses. You sit and start noticing all of the things going on around you, which will help you connect more naturally to the landscape. (p.i.)

Yvonne and Robert also clearly felt strongly about the different use of time on the program. They express the impressions that were made on them:

And the idea of time, realising the value that spending time has, that is the thing that stands out most about what I learned over the four days. Not worrying about the quantity of what you do through the day, but the quality. -Yvonne (p.i.)

The observation, the spending time, for me, to look at a tree. This is not something I had the patience for before, and I realise there is an arrogance I bring into the wilderness. It's made me realise that I need to chill out a bit more and observe... His pace of teaching was so different... Jack focuses on spending more time and focuses on process, trying to commune with nature. You are coming into better balance with nature

because of his overall style and the time difference. It comes back to the concept of time.” – Robert (p.i.)

These comments about taking the time to build a relationship with nature in this place were attributed to spending the time in an unstructured, culturally different way. Stringer and McAvoy (1992) discovered that the lack of responsibilities and constraints in the wilderness was a major factor in people’s enhancement of spiritual experiences, more so than the wilderness environment. This is something worth considering with respect to this study, as the time use was brought up continually in comments and interviews.

Participants in this case study did attribute the different use of time to the quality of their experience; they did certainly have less responsibilities and constraints than they would in everyday life. There was difference in this study in that the focus on using the time was for quality processes concentrating on nature and place during the experience, for example, spending half a day observing specific species such as the ants, the frogs, and the red gum, in this place in order to see our connection and the co-existence present. These realisations could be considered ‘spiritual experiences’ because they contributed to people’s perspectives, world-views, and self-development. Yet, only once was the word ‘spiritual’ used by a participant to describe the experience and effects it had. This reluctance to use the term ‘spiritual’ could be a result of the belief in Western culture of this term belonging only to formal religions. The wilderness environment was essential to the functioning of this program, along with lack of constraints and responsibilities in order to have the ability to use the time as it was used.

2. ‘Seeing an ecological balance take place’

The second theme uncovered was termed ‘seeing an ecological balance take place.’ Sub-themes were identified for this concept; they were termed ‘*understanding inter-relationships and co-existence*’, ‘*associating us with other species*’ and ‘*noticing the balance being disrupted*’.

‘Seeing an ecological balance take place’ is another theme found in the data that can be applied broadly and in a holistic way. The concept ties into an individual’s perspective of where they fit into the world and what role they play. This learning and potential attitude change could aid in the psychological well being of a person because it helps to give perspective. The holistic nature of this balance and the roles each living thing has allows for transferability to a person’s everyday life.

a.) Understanding inter-relationships and co-existence

Realising the great inter-relationships and dependence all species have on each other within an ecosystem was a major part of this experience. ‘***Understanding inter-relationships and co-existence***’ was used to describe this sub-theme. Annette described her realisation of this balance like this:

We are part of a circle. We are part of nature, like every other animal in the ecosystem. We can contribute in a positive way to the ecosystem. We are part of the environment and we need to be in it to balance it. (p.i.)

These ideas are repeated in personal study journal observations:

Jack wrapped up the exercise by saying that we all looked at different things, but all of these things build into the forest. From the frogs to the ants to the trees, they all use the lot, and work as a balance. The forest needs the balance, and it needs people as well. We need to balance it, not try to control it... He talked about how we looked at all things playing a role. He said this is why when we go into a place we need to learn about it... (p.o.)

Jack talks about what he hopes participants experience in relation to the connection and inter-relationships we have to the environment. He also expresses his desire to help people be stronger and benefit from learning about their connections:

And I would like people to have that experience, the same experience I have. Because it makes you a lot stronger, and see the land differently, if you don't experience the land then you have no idea what the land is

about... If you look at a tree and see its like a big city with all these things growing on it. And all those things play a balance, if you don't connect yourself to that balance then you're not experiencing the land. And that's what I would like people to experience, is their connection. Not see it as a tree, and that tree is timber. It's not timber. (id.i.)

Martin's (2004) study on human/nature relationships in outdoor education shows similar findings. He discusses inter-dependency between human and earth and a recognition that human well-being is linked to the earth's well being. Comparisons can be drawn to the aims and messages taught through the program based on the Aboriginal ideas. It too focuses on allowing people to come to the realisation that everything in nature is connected, including humans, and there is a role for everything to play. What Martin terms an 'alternate world view,' is a viewpoint that contradicts the mainstream modern societal view described by Wilson (1992) as connecting by way of domination and greed.

Jack explains this from the Noongaburra Aboriginal perspective and how this inter-dependency concept is used in his programs. He aims for people to see that they have a role and a place in nature:

...it's lookin' at the Aboriginal terms, traditional term is that... what's important is that your playin' a role and you no different than the trees, the plants, the animals. You only there to play that role, and you there to keep balance, and your job is to make that balance work (id.i)

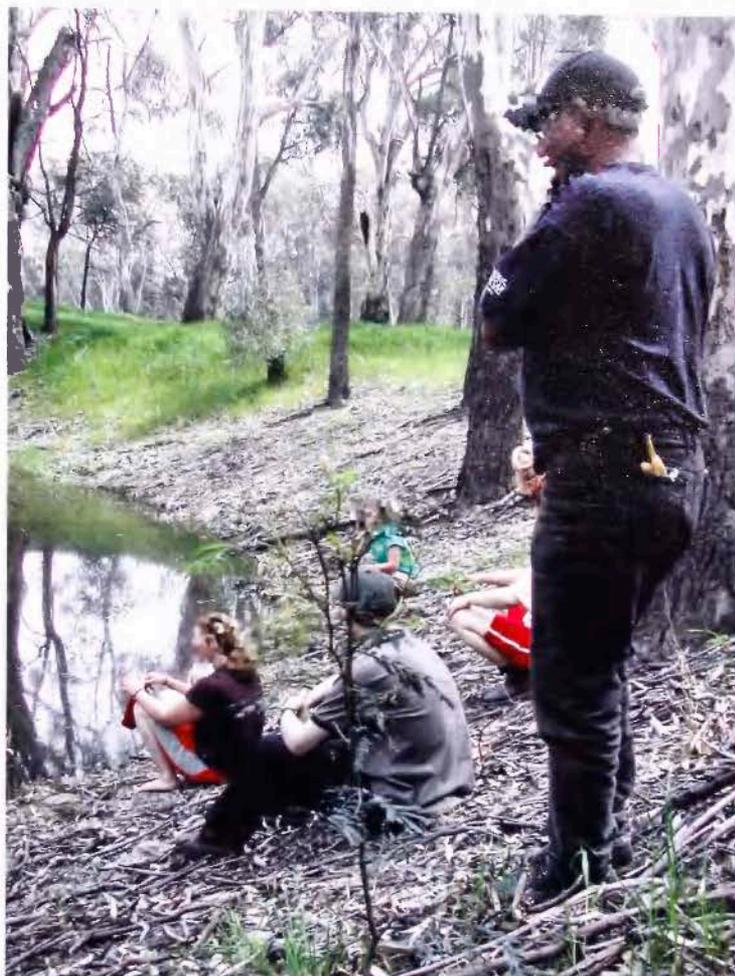


Image 3 – Observing the balance that exists in the ecosystem at a watering hole

The views expressed here also relate to the views of deep ecology and ecopsychology. Ecopsychology, aiming to aid people in realising their connections to nature and earth, parallels the points of view expressed through the program. Both are attempting to help people become aware of the connection and inter-dependency. Improved relationships with nature and place can contribute to this shift in ‘world view’, and essentially aid in one’s well being, which are the aims of eco-psychology, outdoor education, and this outdoor experience alike.

The experience attended to the goals of ecopsychology and could be considered within the category of an ecopsychological program. Maller et al (2002) and Henderson (1999) point to the views of primary and Indigenous peoples and the fact that ecopsychology is a “modern interpretation of (these) ancient views of humans and nature” (Maller et al, 2002). A relationship exists between ecopsychology and this

specific case, but the intentions of the facilitators were not to follow an ecopsychologically modelled program, but to follow a traditional Aboriginal perspective and to help people learn about their relationships with nature and place (and subsequently ‘alternate world views’) through these “ancient views.” Perhaps ecopsychologists should consider this type of program an avenue to follow in order to achieve their goals of changing and shifting ‘world views’ as well.

b.) Associating us with other species

The “*associating us with other species*” sub-theme involved a connection between a particular species and the person. Observing a species and then taking away a lesson on how to live your life, relating these observations back to oneself is one distinct traditional Aboriginal way of learning about themselves, their environment and the balance each thing plays. This type of learning was identified and commented on by participants, for example:

The stories we heard, and how to relate them back to yourself, the cultural stories. And the exercise with the ants and how to relate it back to yourself. I wouldn't have seen watching ants as a lesson for how you should live, that was a connection for me. – Lynn (p.i.)

Excerpts from the participant observation journal revealed that drawing similarities led some participants’ conversations to deeper thoughts about society as a whole:

Natalie compared these ants to our own society. How people are like ants: really really busy, like little servants always doing something. Natalie said that towards the end of their observations the group had got into a discussion about community, corporations, societies, religion, and tolerance. (p.o.)

Utilising the Aboriginal ways of learning, while observing an aspect or particular species in nature and relating this back to oneself, affected participant’s attitudes and views. It brought about realisations in relation to humanity’s place in the world and thoughts of where this place might be through learning about the relationships from this

perspective. Martin's 'Pedagogical Framework for Outdoor Education Which Seeks Improved Relationships with Nature' can be seen in Appendix 1. It could be applied to this experience and the participant's responses. "Alternate world views and links to everyday living" can be seen in the way the participants talked about being part of nature and part of the balance.

Tim talked about his experience and how it gave him perspective on the 'bigger picture':

It made me appreciate what it would be like to be an ant, the way it fit into the world around us, realising the environment you're in... and I was reminded to observe... It's made me think about the small things you'd see, to slow down when you go through nature. To understand the small things means the bigger picture is more clear. (p.i.)

Mark expressed his awareness and feelings about having a role within the wilderness and the outdoors from what Jack had done throughout the experience:

He brings the Indigenous links and makes sense. Talking about time and place and respect and honouring place. He showed us that the bush is about us, as much as it's about the birds and the trees. We are allowed to have a role in it and we should have a role in it. (p.i.)

This view of seeing the balance and roles each species plays in nature carries from a small frog population and their roles within their own community, on to humanity's role amongst all other populations and species on earth. In this way it could be considered as what Martin terms "alternate world views and links to everyday living." According to the framework, this step is the one before developing a "kinship with nature." In this case, participants did show these views, and their relationship with nature and place was improved because of the realisation.

The process aided individuals in having different perspectives and to take a step back from the perspective they live amongst. Jack's traditional Aboriginal style emphasised this in a unique way and brought about this change in connection and

attitude, highlighting the essential ecological balance that exists. Participants benefit personally and psychologically as a result of having these realisations.

c.) Noticing the balance being disrupted

'Noticing the balance being disrupted' was the third sub-theme that was apparent from the data within the 'seeing an ecological balance take place' theme. The consequences of taking something from this balanced ecological system were that the system no longer functioned properly. Everything relied on everything else in the system to work in harmony.

Sally spoke during her in-depth interview about the way everything relies on everything else, and how participants learn in a way Aboriginal people used to learn:

One of them is seeing the ecosystem at work and that's an experience of again learning the way Aboriginal people used to learn about the environment... it was out there watching the ecosystem work so that you knew what things relied on what other things for survival and so on. And you knew that to take out one of those things, it would completely destroy everything else. (id.i.)

Imbalances in the ecosystem on the Murray River could be seen readily from the information Jack gave and the observations participants made of human impact. These imbalances in the system were easy to spot once pointed out. These observations came out of the participant observation journal:

Stories of the gum trees and soil erosion in the area came up as well. Jack explained that the smaller gum trees do not hold the banks together and the erosion is bad. The grass, which I picked up from the walk, was also a major part of keeping the banks together. When the cows came here to graze, they loved it (the native grass) and ate the grass up. This meant the banks could no longer be held together, there was an imbalance in the ecosystem here. (p.o.)

Jack helped people learn through the program that each living thing in the ecosystem has a role. He showed the group a variety of ways in which humans have a role on the Murray River as well. This all stemmed from what he knew about the plant and animal life, what their uses were to people, and how humans played their part in the balance of this place. He pointed out the challenges to the ecosystem on the Murray River since colonisation. Although these challenges have been common knowledge to many people within Australia through media and various writings on the deterioration of the Murray, the lessons learned through the program highlighted a different perspective. Participants learned about seeing a balance trying to take place here. This makes the learning positive and directly applicable to the home environment as well, where nature is always trying to balance itself out. Without this perspective, individuals with the knowledge about the deterioration of the Murray may have only looked at the challenges from a point of view which says ‘isn’t it a shame what we have done to this place.’ One of the participants, Robert, has a positive outlook on the situation from what he had learned, and plans on incorporating it in his everyday living:

The challenge would be finding this balance with nature in other places.

It was a necessity to come here to see the balance trying to take place. I will try to take the learnings from here and move them into an urban setting. (p.i.)

Both of Haluza-Delay’s studies (1999, 2001) resulted in suggestions for programs that concentrate on feelings of connection that are applicable in the home environment. They suggest aiming for appreciation for the natural world in general, not just wilderness specific ways. Feelings of connection, in this case, were documented in the wilderness environment and are easily transferable to the home environment. Feelings which came from the program with an Aboriginal type of teaching and learning in it, gave participants a way to fit themselves into the bigger environment, relate to the nature in this environment, and will consequently help them to relate to nature and place in all environments. The concentration on the positive ‘humans have a role in nature’ view and the ‘wilderness is no longer wilderness when one is comfortable in it’ view from Jack, breaks down the social construction of ‘wilderness’ as a concept where humans are

separate from nature, and begins to have participants think in a more unified and all-encompassing fashion.

Robert's comment (above) shows he is prepared to try to make this connection in places other than wilderness. Frey (1981) found a greater level of life and neighbourhood satisfaction in people who experience more contact with nature near their homes. Robert has been made aware of his inter-connections with nature from a wilderness setting and wants to now carry this awareness back to an urban setting. Making the connection to everyday situations means benefits and feelings of well being, from the conscious contact with nature, will be received.

The wilderness (Barmah State Forest) setting in this case was very appropriate for this type of learning because of some of the noted human impacts and changes the environment had undergone since colonisation. As Robert notes in his interview, it was useful to 'see the balance trying to take place.' In this way, participants were able to see the impact and were shown a struggle for natural balance taking place, but were also in an intensified and more concentrated natural surrounding than their home environment.

Trips to wilderness locations should not be replaced by more local programs, as suggested by Haluza-Delay, because of the need to appreciate nature in less wilderness-specific ways. Programs could utilise the types of values and philosophies reflected in this case study in a wilderness location to help people see nature in an intensified way (where everyday responsibilities and constraints also do not exist), and then carry these new realisations and views over into the home setting.

But, one must be reminded that there are distinct differences between Haluza-Delay's study and resulting suggestions and this case study. When considering the type of wilderness environment each study took place in, we must realise that the location Haluza-Delay's study took place in was a region of Alberta, Canada, where the human impact on nature could be considered less so than within the Barmah State Forest. Because greater differences existed between the participants' home environment and the wilderness environment, it is difficult to compare the way each group viewed each respective environment and their relationship with the nature there. The other distinct difference exists between the participants of the two studies. In Haluza-Delay's study participants were youths, where in this study the participants were at a more mature age,

where they were taking part in graduate studies. There is no doubt that the values and priorities of these two groups could have varied greatly. Therefore, findings regarding participant's impressions of the programs were difficult to compare.

This study relates in a separate way to the study by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999). They talk about sense of place and place attachment playing a large part in one's sense of self and well-being. Fredrickson and Anderson also attribute spiritual benefits to direct contact with nature and nature's 'biophysical characteristics.' These things were highlighted on the program in a culturally different way, yet achieved similar results. Participants paid close direct attention to the physical characteristics of all aspects of nature on the Murray River, and as a result created a sense of place within themselves for this place. Mark shows his acknowledgment of the cultural difference and talks about relating to place and respecting it through spending time with it:

Stopping, looking, focussing, listening was really good because I don't think it's something we do enough of... That 'time', and respect. You learn about a place through spending time with it. (p.i.)

The study by McAvoy (2002) found that two of the contributing factors the Indigenous people of North America attribute to place meanings were through human/nature relationships and interdependence or reciprocation. These are two factors which are also highlighted on this Indigenously-based outdoor program. Therefore, individuals were taught in a traditional Indigenous way to see the human/nature relationships and interdependence and acquired a meaning of this place on the Murray River because of these factors.

3. 'Recognising value in community'

The term community can be referred to in a variety of ways and needs clarification with respect to this study. Community can be defined "as a group of people living in the same locality" (dictionary.reference.com). In this case the group of people were the people present on the workshop on the Murray River who were all temporarily

living, or camping, in the same locality. Community is also defined as “sharing, participation, and fellowship” (dictionary.reference.com). Participants recognised a value in community and this value is linked to the recognition of these things. Sharing, participation, and fellowship were an integral part of the experience, and so this meaning is considered.

It is also important to highlight that the meaning of community also includes other living things. An additional ecological definition of community is “a group of plants and animals living and interacting with one another in a specific region under relatively similar environmental conditions” (dictionary.reference.com). Therefore, the community being referred to in this theme is the ecological community, which includes the humans present in this locality as well as the other groups of plants and animals, and the sharing, participation, and fellowship which was realised as a result of the interaction of these groups.

‘Recognising value in community’, the third theme to arise, applied to observing the importance of being part of a community. The theme also applied to realising the importance of learning from other’s perspectives (sharing) within one’s own community, and learning from other communities’ perspectives (fellowship). Learning from other perspectives contributes to a healthy community (ecologically and amongst one’s own species). This concept involving community impacted upon participants greatly. When asked what was the most significant part of the experience Lara replied:

The community approach, doing everything together, and doing it on the land. It is adventure, it is active, it’s experiential. The holistic approach and community - having a good group to experience the community with.
(p.i.)

Roles people have within a community were highlighted on a number of different occasions and in different scenarios. The importance of roles within the larger ecosystem across species tied this together with the importance of roles within your own community. Annette voiced her thoughts and realisations about roles in a community and learning from another community in her interview:

Community is really important, everyone in a community has their place. We each have our own responsibilities and making sure it is maintained. The whole idea of “self” is counterproductive to human nature. The concept of owning your own idea... And people perceive that their idea is their own and it needs to be out there. And with the idea of community, you need to let yourself go for the common good. You have to let go of your ego. We hold onto identity and ownership too much. (p.i.)

This comment supports the thoughts by Vickers and Mathews (2002), who discuss the way young people are taught to be autonomous and do not want to be connected to community or place as it may take away from their perceived autonomy. Annette’s comment shows her realisation of the importance of community.



Image 4 – Sharing and living together – the ‘value in community’

‘Recognising the value in community’ is a concept which can be applied to all of nature (all the trees and birds and animals) in one global ecological community. All things in each community have a role to play in order to have a healthy balance. All living things in Jack’s traditional Aboriginal culture are also seen as equal, with equal

consciousness, and equal importance. This equal consideration can also be seen in the writings of Bill Neidjie, who wrote about his culture's way of regarding everything as an equal (see p 22).

This is an equality concept Jack tries to teach people on the program to help them relate to nature and place from a different perspective. For example, in his in-depth interview Jack talks about one of the roles of the She-oak tree to his Aboriginal people; it is to carry a message:

... we all play our different role in our community. One type of tree still carries the sound of people mourning... She-oaks. You know if you see a lot of She-oaks when the wind blows through them it makes this mourning sound, it's a groaning sound. And that's how Aboriginal women used to mourn, and they left their voice in the trees. That voice in the tree, tells them that they mourn, and the young people sit there and listen to it. They all carry different messages for you, they carry that different message because they have a conscience and they are a part of your community. And if you take away one tree, then you are taking away one different language group from your community. Everything has a place. If you drew a line and showed the importance, everything - animals, trees, Aboriginal people, would be all on the same line. (id.i.)

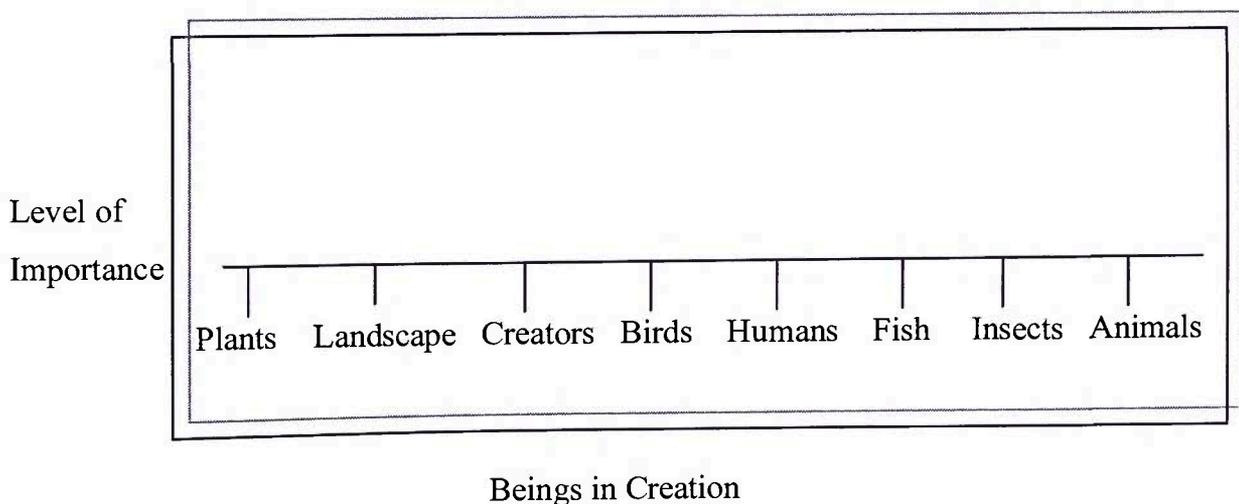


Figure 4. The Noongaburra perspective of Equality in Community

The 'value in community' theme and the idea of each individual having a role in this community was challenged by some participants' remarks regarding the amount of people using the Murray River while the group was there. During the four-day period, many other people were seen and used the area for recreation. This did not, for most cases, add to each person's experience but took away from it. For example, Rhonda mentioned she wished there were less people around:

It's such a beautiful area, and a diverse river. There is only one drawback and that's the other people around. (p.i.)

Lynn also mentioned the human impact, referring to the amount of people, recreational usage, and ecological deterioration in the area:

Maybe it's a good environment for the adventure part, logistically it works. It would have been nice if it was less impacted upon. (p.i.)

Yvonne made a point about hearing motorised vehicles on the trip. It is interesting to observe this participant's thought that motorised vehicles are not used by Indigenous communities in remote locations, whereas, in reality cars are used readily in what is referred to here as 'Jack's environment. There is a very pure and unaltered picture of what this environment would be like.

Yvonne talks about how hearing the vehicles does not fulfil her experience of relating to nature in a wilderness setting:

It had its good parts. How there was different types of animals and areas around. I think that having the interruption of the cars and motorbikes interrupted the connection we might have had with nature and being in the wilderness. Jack's environment was what he was trying to get us to relate to. On the last night when we were away and more secluded, that was way better. (p.i.)

Part of what we were learning as a group on this trip was related to everyone having a role and a place in nature. Feelings of not wanting these other people around implies that individuals were thinking there was no place for them on the river, and that

they only cared for our own group to be there. This indicates a level of opposition to saying that these individuals really had learned to think that everyone has a role and is part of the larger community. If learning, regarding humans having a role within nature and wild places, were applied more widely by participants perhaps less comments about the other people being present would have been mentioned.

On the other hand, there were indications that the other groups of people using the park did show a slight lack of respect to the land themselves. Past camping sites were not cleaned properly and noise levels on the river could sometimes be described as intrusive. This does not imply that some other groups were indeed contributing to the environment and being part of the balance, but were helping to deteriorate the area with rubbish and noise pollution. Perhaps the comments were directed more at disapproval of this type of behaviour and lack of respect for environment than to a disagreement with these people having their place and role on the river as well.

Without the program's processes and elements in place, the relationships among the participants and the functions of a community would probably have taken place to varying degrees. Camping with a small group of people will inevitably result in close meaningful conversations and friendships over four days. These relationships, and the experience, would perhaps have been remembered for its community feel and the relationships people had with other individuals and their environment. However, the depth of the community theme during the program was explored more thoroughly.

Heintzman's (2003) study found that three factors of 'wilderness setting,' 'other group members,' and 'solitude' contributed to the wilderness spiritual experience. 'Solitude,' in particular, for this case was part of the experience that raised some concern for myself during the program. It was not something that was enforced as an action which participants must practice; if people wanted to do the exercises and processes in a group it was their own decision. I wrote the following in my participant observation journal after realising that not all group members were spending any amount of time alone.

There is also a large social aspect within the group which influences their experiences. Some group members do most activities together as a group,

which leaves them out of being alone to think with and about nature and this place. Is what the group gets out of the experience from this socialising? Is the social aspect more important than nature? (p.o.)

Heintzman's factors of wilderness setting, other group members, and solitude may or may not have been present in an experience without the facilitation of Jack and the processes he brought to the program. But during the wilderness experience these factors were not concentrated on purposefully so that people could end up having a spiritual experience. What was more important was relating to the nature in that place and seeing things through other's perspectives. Perhaps, then, consequently they would end up having some kind of spiritual experience that occurred naturally and subconsciously.

However, the character of the program resulted in a deeper level of connection to other participants and the environment. Community was emphasised as an important factor along the way, much more so than 'solitude' or time alone to think. Robert compares this experience with the previous four-day wilderness experience he had earlier in the year:

The people and the relationships are contributing factors to distinguish one trip from the other. It's who you meet along the way, rather than the particular environment you are going through. The strong memories are the relationships you had - you compared to the environment, or you compared to others on that trip. (p.i.)

The links to the other communities within nature in this place also may not have been realised if participants were not involved with the program. Jack emphasised community in a wide range of scenarios. He pointed out the similarities of other species' communities to our own through, for example, the process of watching the ant colony. Seeing the ants work towards a goal and help one another showed these community elements. He also compared the life that a giant gum tree supports to the life that a big city supports. Jack's traditional Aboriginal way of learning by seeing something another species does and relating it back to oneself, would not have taken place without the presence of the facilitator and his knowledge.

4. *'Taking comfort from past experiences and memories'*

'Taking comfort from past experiences and memories' was another theme that came out of the data. This theme included people's stories from past experiences, and the feelings of comfort and familiarity that came out of these memories. The term comfort has been used for this theme to describe the feelings due to the present, unfamiliar, outdoor experience being connected to past familiar experiences for individuals. This theme is closely related to the 'value in community' theme because a community cannot exist without a certain amount of familiarity (and comfort from past experiences) about what this community is; an identity which one exists within. In this way the two are closely related to one another.

In one instance, a conversation took place during the program with a participant about her own connections with nature and place. She said it was because of her positive memories and stories that made her feel comfort and connection. The following was recorded in my participant observation journal:

She stated that from what she knew, most of her connections with land and place were through stories of her own in her childhood... She thought it was because of stories and memories from certain places (for example, stories from spending time in the rain forest). (p.o.)

Another participant, Tim, talked about feeling comfortable in a place and it being connected to his memories as well:

Coming back again gives the ability to go deeper, because you're not afraid to. The environment allows it to be more comfortable because we are used to the place. I spent time as a kid here, and it brings back an affinity, memories as a child, and then coming back again brings back memories of 5 months ago, in May. (p.i.)

Raffan's (1993) study on 'land as teacher' points to importance in past experiences as well. He reveals the 'narrative' and 'experiential' components referring to people's stories about, and from, the land and personal experiences with the land respectively. These components were seen to play a part in the development of a sense of place, place attachment and knowledge from land.

Participants in this study also attributed past experiences and stories to their meaning of places. Memories triggered feelings of comfort and a sense of place. The program asked individuals to discuss why a place had meaning and was special to them. In these discussions, past experiences and memories repeatedly came up. This shows a definite value in having past experiences in a place and having a sense of place and comfort there. The concept of time is closely interwoven here. In order to have experiences and form memories time is needed. This program allowed the participant's memories and past experiences to re-surface in their minds. In this way, they were reconnecting to their own sense of place from past experiences, because of the present experience on the program.

Rhonda talked about her experience of the exercise on the workshop when we were to go away and spend some time in the bush and come back with something that reminded us of home. Finding something that reminded her of home brought back feelings of comfort and helped her connect to this place:

I think it was good timing. We had just arrived in a new place, and it was thinking along the lines of connecting to this new place. When you go somewhere and you find something that makes it feel like home for you, you think about when you were there. (p.i.)

From the program facilitator's point of view, Aboriginal people would find something in the bush that would help them survive. This would then make them feel comfortable in a new place knowing there were things there that were familiar and would help them to stay alive.

He talked about how people are afraid of wilderness or the bush. He said that if he can find something that can provide him with shelter, food, or medicine in the bush he will no longer be afraid there. (p.o.)

The desire to learn more about past Indigenous stories also connected to the realisation that there is value in every culture. Some participants expressed their desire to increase their knowledge about their own background and heritage as well from the experience:

I want to learn more about Aboriginal culture. I want to understand about my culture, my own culture is important too. How they used the land, and how we used the land. It's the thing of understanding what everyone else is doing as well. – Lara (p.i.)

Attitudes with respect to Aboriginal cultures showed an increased desire to learn more about the culture and cultural practices. Participants showed a huge respect and wonder at the Aboriginal ways of being.

Rhonda talked about this new learning for her and how it may influence her in the future:

The Indigenous perspective on the landscape for me was totally new learning. I don't know much about their beliefs and traditions. It was fascinating for me to learn about how they learn to balance the landscape, and also the dream-time stories, the different beliefs and systems and values.

Probably it's made me want to learn more about Indigenous culture, their beliefs and things. I am more aware and paying attention a bit more. Being out in the wilderness, you have to be patient and try to understand what's going on in your environment. That can be applied to any kind of learning - to take time to observe things. (p.i.)

The desire to know one's own historical background and culture as well as learn more about Australia's Indigenous culture shows desire to increase one's own identity

through past experiences of people. Ellis-Smith used the term ‘common ground’ in the excerpt in Chapter 2 (p 18) to describe the internal commonality amongst all cultures. He suggests that all people have an innate connection to nature and land and although we are from various locations, each person has an Indigenous history. Perhaps participants were shown this innate ‘common ground’ through the Indigenous stories told by Jack on the Murray and through remembering their own history. As individuals’ sense of self was increased from experiencing the relationship with nature and place, further discovery to understand their own lives, their own ancestor’s lives, and this country’s ancestry was inspired through the past stories.

5. ‘Showing respect’

‘Showing respect’, the last theme, is another concept that was repeatedly presented in the data. The term ‘respect’, as it is used for this theme, can be defined in two ways, both of which relate to this program and experience. It can be defined as (1) to feel or show deferential regard for; esteem, (2) to avoid violation of or interference with (dictionary.reference.com). This was a concept that was identified at the heart of the program and in its aims. In this way, all the previous themes are tied to respect because it is woven through all the other realisations participants reported from the experience. It was also at the core of the way traditional Aboriginal people lived and what Jack and Sally, the facilitators, wanted to impress upon people. Sally had this to say about teaching people about respect:

And so, I guess what I hope people go away with is a really different way of thinking about things and really examining their own norms to see if they really do show respect to other people and other cultures... other things, animals, plants, whatever it is. That whole concept of... you know, people tend to show respect but only in their own way. They will show respect only to things or people who are similar to them. And I guess what

I hope people go away with is a real sense of examining how to show respect to things that are different in a deeper sense. (id.i)

Jack talked about his desire to teach people experientially to show respect to land:

So it's about you having that experience, and show respect long enough so that you can say 'if I stay long enough then I can learn about this place and see it can be just as beautiful as the place over there where I was', and that's the stuff that I would like people to look at. (id.i)

Jack also talked about showing participants in his programs how people should respect individuality through watching nature:

...you look for something that relates to you. It's like looking for a clue to teach you something about what you do in your life so you have a relationship with it. ... like a different ant that comes in that has a different way of doing things and how it shows respect to that ant by not taking over that part. You're looking for the things like... you are looking for difference, you are looking for individuals... So you're looking what to relate back to yourself is everyone is an individual and you have to show respect to that individual. (id.i)

Participants were influenced by this respect and also verbalised their respect for Jack as a teacher, facilitator and person. Mark said this about the respect that was present in the way Jack gave time for each person to speak their thoughts:

He didn't have an outcome for us to get, there was freedom to do it our own way - respect, listening, and time. He was a very special man because he listened to us. Being there, it was a comfortable place, just being there and speaking with people by the river. It was respectful. (p.i)

Lynn showed how she identified respect as one central concept on the program. She talked about one of her favourite parts of the experience:

Hearing Jack's stories about his community and how they used to live. And respect, respect for difference, like all the different Aboriginal creation stories, and community. (p.i.)

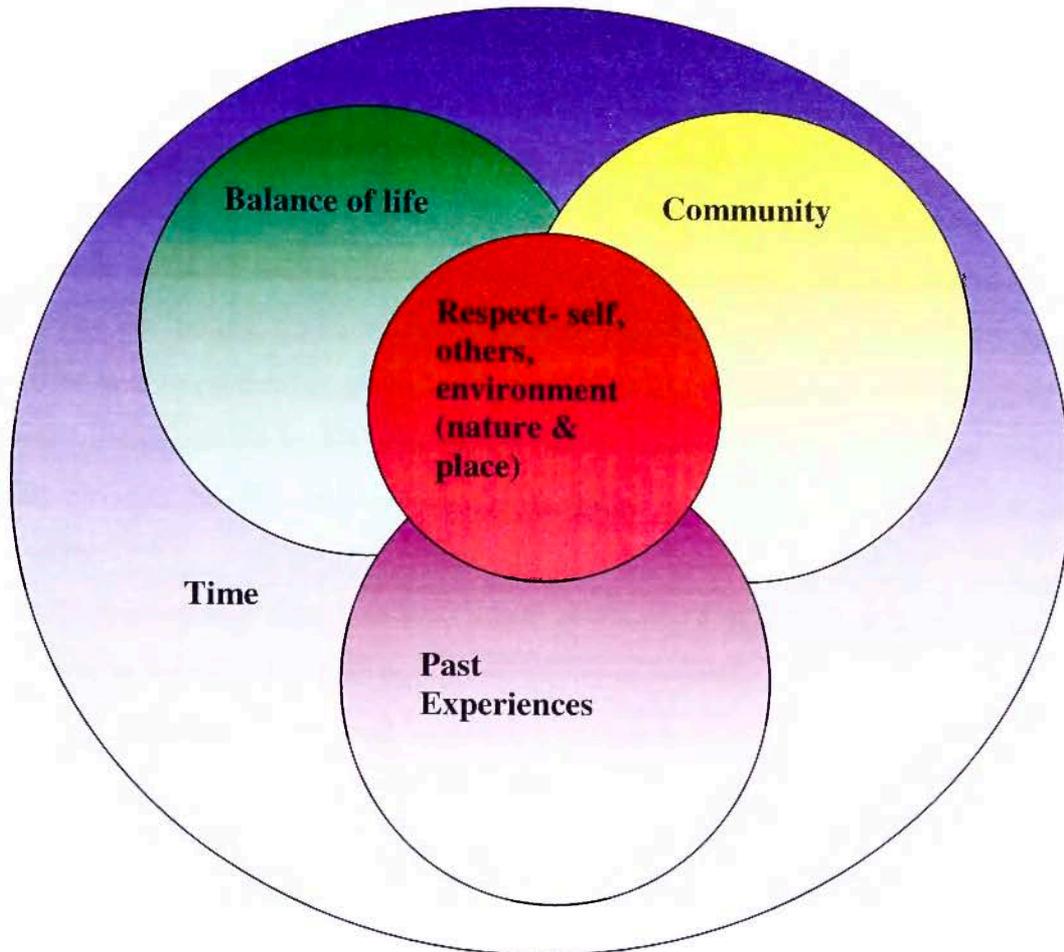
Each element of the program included respect in the lesson. During one exercise, teaching people about respect for land and other people's special places was looked at. This was mentioned in the participant observation journal, where I reflected:

I think it was useful to the group to go out and spend some time (in their own way) and come back with a story from their past which connects them with this place. It brings in an ethic of care and respect that Jack talked about establishing for the land. He mentioned that if you start caring about a place, then it becomes more special and if you understand that it is someone's special place you are more likely to not hurt this place. (p.o.)

Takako's (2004) study highlights respect as a core value socially and culturally for some of the Indigenous people of Canada. The respect described across all relationships is a similar respect that is being taught on the program. Respect for people, place and environment - holding these things in high esteem and avoiding violation with them - results in a healthy relationship with these things. This is why respect was identified as the central concept for this program.

C. Theoretical Models

Figure 5. Theoretical Elements and Themes of the Program Model



This model represents all five themes identified in the program. It is a representation of how the themes fit together to form the program, and how these elements are viewed in relation to one another.

'Realisation of treating time differently' connects to the other themes identified in an eternal way. In this model it is referred to as just 'time', as in the program it is not seen as a different treatment of it, but another perspective of time, similar to kairós time. Each of the remaining themes relies on a certain amount of time in order to accomplish their effect on an individual. In order to see an ecological balance taking place in a wilderness environment, there needs to be a substantial amount of time to observe what

exactly goes on in the environment. People need the un-pressured time to notice that all of the species are relying on each other in very specific ways for their survival.

The next theme, 'recognising the value in a community' requires a certain amount of time treated in a different way as well. From the group's perspective during the experience, time was needed without other distractions or responsibilities in order for the group to establish feelings of community and to function as a community. To extend this community concept to the realisation that people should learn from other community's perspectives, took a special kind of time as well. This treating of time differently allowed participants to take a step back from their everyday lives and have more time to reflect on the values of having different communities and different perspectives to learn from. Jack's stories, in particular, played a big part in this realisation as he talked about how the different communities in his area traditionally learned from one another. They moved around through 26 different smaller communities that existed in the area learning from each other.

It is inevitable that time is required in order for experiences to take place and for something to become familiar and comfortable to a person. This is how the 'realisation of treating time differently' and 'noticing comfort from past experiences and memories' themes connect to one another. Time without the regular pressures of everyday life during the experience helped the participants become familiar with surroundings and the Murray River environment, which led to comfort. Individuals also acknowledged that the places they were most comfortable in were the places they had spent considerable amounts of time in (e.g. places where people had stories of growing up). In order to become at ease, one needs time to get used to and get to know a place.

The 'realisation of treating time differently' is inter-connected with the theme of 'showing respect' because time is an essential variable to have in order to establish respect. Once one has had the time to get to know something or someone, they begin to respect, and can then show this respect.

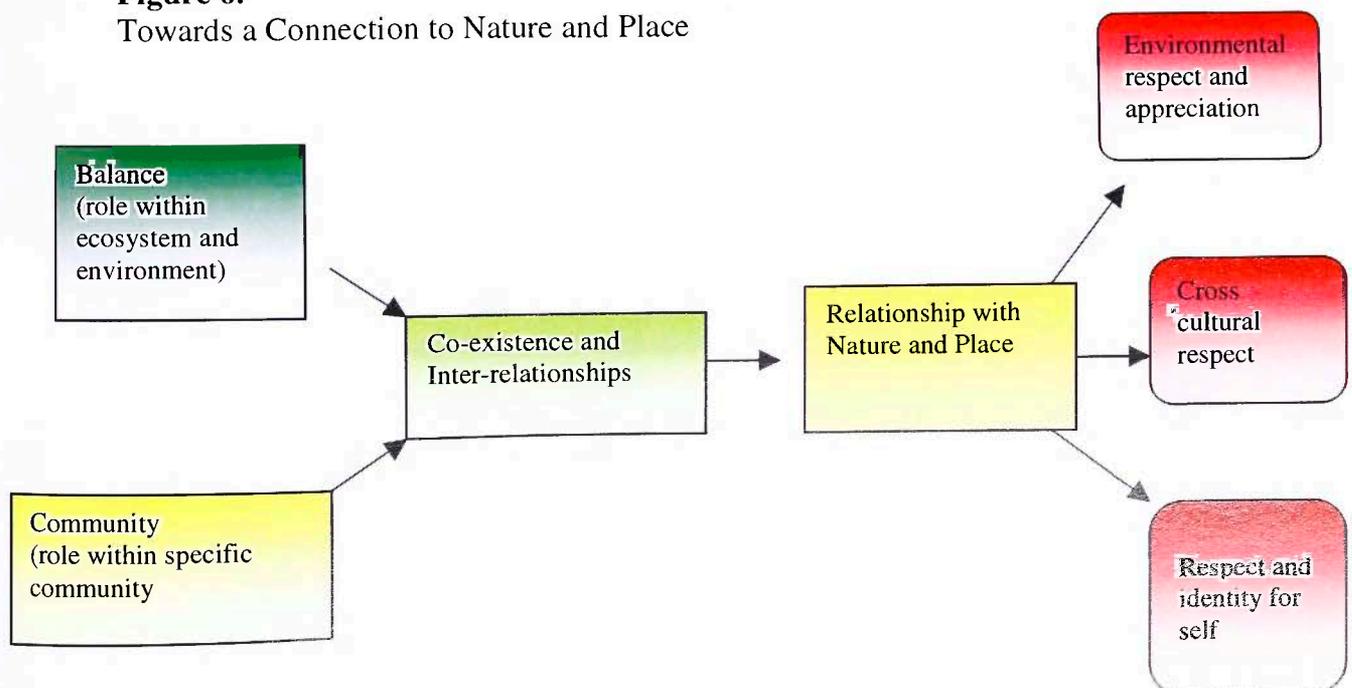
'Seeing an ecological balance take place' is connected to the 'value in community' theme. In order to be made aware of this balance individuals realised on the experience, realisation of strong communities must exist. Many smaller communities make up an ecologically balanced environment. These communities can range from

species as petite as ants to species as large as a population of red gums. These thoughts correspond with the philosophy of Gaia, which considers the Earth one single living organism, where each smaller community is considered one interconnected element.

Respect is at the centre of the model because it is at the heart of the program and its philosophies. All other themes revolve around respect. To gain respect for self, others, and environment (nature and place) is the final result of this experience. It is impossible to have a complete understanding of each element without the respect that it is shown to need. This relationship is reciprocal in that each of the elements (balance of life, community, and past experiences) need to be understood in order to develop respect.

Figure 6 represents the theoretical path an individual moves along during the program in order to end up with an enhanced relationship with nature and place because of the experience. The ‘balance in the ecosystem’ and the ‘value in community’ themes are first identified and explored by the participant. They then move into a realisation of the co-existence and inter-relationships which are present between ourselves and environment and ourselves and other communities. Consequently, an enhanced relationship with nature and place is experienced. As an end product of this enhanced relationship and realisations of inter-dependence, environmental respect and appreciation, cross-cultural respect, and respect for self are established.

Figure 6.
Towards a Connection to Nature and Place



D. Experiential Learning, Quintessential Learning

This wilderness experiential learning program that focuses on Indigenous ways of learning to relate to nature and place is considered a true example of experiential learning. The experience was applicable to many areas of learning for individuals and allowed participants to learn in a way that was individual to each person. The wilderness environment and learning to relate to nature and place was the vehicle for attaining these learnings, which carry across into many aspects of life.

Concrete Experience:

The stages of the experiential learning cycle are considered with respect to this experience. The Experiential Learning Cycle has been applied to the four-day wilderness experience in Figure 7 (p 74). The concrete experience was the four-day wilderness experience, where individuals participated in five different Indigenous ways of learning to relate to nature and place discussed at the beginning of Chapter Four.

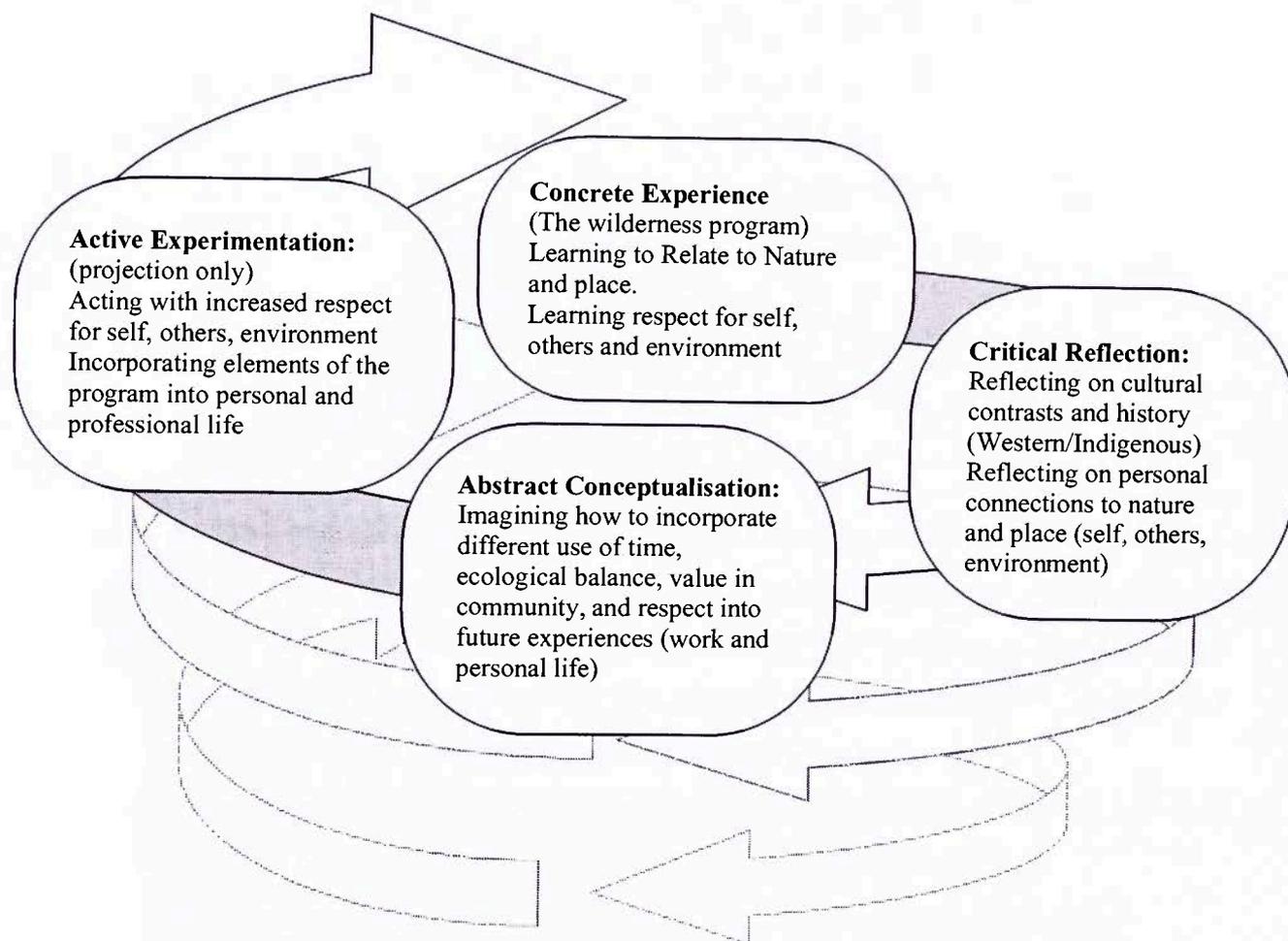
Critical Reflection:

In the critical reflection stage, participants made sense of their present experience by considering the past. Critical reflections were expressed by participants during individual interviews. Some participants showed a certain level of disappointment in Western culture in the way we live our lives. In this way, they were critical about the past:

I also am feeling culturally shamed about how white people are so stupid as a culture. The feeling of more understanding of culture is so complex and profound, I mean the stories he has told and the way he has done it. I also feel despairing that the statistics are that the numbers of Aboriginal people who know their culture are dropping. Like stories that still, even

12 years ago, we would ship people to Sydney, it shows such disrespect. Some people have learned, but so many don't. – Natalie (p.i.)

Figure 7. The Experiential Learning Cycle Applied to the Wilderness Experience



The contrast in cultures and the way the Aboriginal people lived, compared to the way modern Western society lives, was reflected on by many participants. Individuals talked about the vast difference in the two cultures. For example, Rhonda mentioned that the Western world does not understand the land properly. She expressed this in a way that seemed daunted by what the Western world does not know:

It makes you realise how ignorant we are in terms of knowledge with nature and living with it (in terms of Western culture). We know so little about the landscape and don't understand it properly. (p.i.)

This stage in the experiential learning process, critical reflection, is essential in order to move towards the following stage in the process. Motivation for change is achieved through learning that an enhanced relationship with nature, land, and place is possible and has been experienced before in many Indigenous cultures. The result of seeing the contrast in the two cultures is a critical reflection on what has happened historically, and how differently each culture has perceived the world.

Abstract Conceptualisation:

Abstract conceptualisation was also undertaken during the wilderness experience. Personal views and impressions were shifted while on the experience, and participants discussed their intentions to make changes in their places of employment in the future. As participants were all students in the education field and worked with people in the outdoors, they planned to carry their learning into their practice.

Lynn talked about how she planned to alter her use of time within her own programs to help participants feel more comfortable and learn about a place:

In my practice, small ways to take people into the bush and make them feel more comfortable, influence their environmental ethic, and maybe make them think... It showed that there is a place for giving yourself time to just be there, and the exercises to do in one area cover less ground and incorporate more just being there. I would structure a day where there's just one day that you stay in one spot... I think it's made me more confident about what I naturally wanted to do in practice. (p.i.)

Yvonne conceptualised about changing her use of time within her work as well, emphasising quality over quantity:

I was thinking about it and I would like to incorporate taking more time into my practice. On other programs I've been on there's always been pressure to get the people through, and do a whole bunch of little things. It's amazing how much you learn when you take time. Doing one thing to its full capacity is quite powerful really. (p.i.)

The program revealed to individuals a unique way to utilise these styles of relating to nature and place in their practice. Participants spoke of their hopes and new ideas about how to focus on teaching people to connect with nature and place:

And I would like to incorporate nature in my program more. I would like more about nature and land and learning in the way I teach, more appreciation, more connection. I was given ideas on how I can do that and why it's important to do that in an experiential way. – Lara (p.i.)

I have learned some ideas about how to make people feel more comfortable in the wilderness. Like looking at ants and feeling some sort of connection. – Lynn (p.i.)

Participants conceptualised about the community impression that was emphasised during the experience as well. A desire to utilise this view, which originated from traditional Aboriginal life-view, in teaching was expressed by individuals. Lynn spoke highly of the community 'model' and how it pertained to larger societal and world challenges:

And respect, respect for difference, like all the different Aboriginal creation stories, and community... A model of communities accepting differences and learning from differences. You look at some of the most massive world problems, and it seems hard, but then you look at this small model and it seems easier. (p.i.)

The abstract conceptualisation stage functioned in relation to each of the themes identified from the experience. In this stage, participants imagined how they could

incorporate using time in a different way into their jobs, how they could help people to relate to nature and place by helping them realise the ecological balance that exists, how they could incorporate the idea of community into their life and work, and the importance of respect in all of this. On a larger scale this could lead to societal benefits resulting from this shift in ways of thinking and different perspective, ultimately spreading from these individuals to the people they have contact with.

Active Experimentation:

The following stage in the experiential learning cycle is the active experimentation stage. As the study was not longitudinal, evidence of participants actively experimenting with their new learning was not possible. Exploring this final stage would be possible through a more long-term study or a follow-up study.

Although follow-up on the participant intentions was beyond the scope of this study, theoretical consideration could be given to the “Spiritual Experience Process Funnel Model” developed by Fox (1999). In Fox’s study, lifestyle changes were made by participants because of the positive feelings they experienced while in the wilderness. Similar intentions were voiced by participants of this study, especially with respect to their work in the outdoors. “Shift in life perspectives” is shown on the model as a by-product of these spiritual experiences. In this case, this shift in perspectives could be seen with regard to career perspective and the content of participants’ own programs at work.

This experience enabled individuals to develop new constructs of knowledge as a result of the events that happened over the four days. They were allowed to reflect on existing personal and societal knowledge formed from past experiences, and then allowed to utilise newly acquired learning from the experience to apply to the future. Itin (1999) describes the person being challenged to move beyond what is known. Participants were challenged to do just this, and did move beyond what was known to them within the context of a life-related environment: the wilderness environment. In this way this experience is considered quintessential experiential learning.

Chapter Five - Conclusion

This study investigated perspectives of nature and place on an outdoor experience. The study participants experienced a four-day program in which the facilitator, an Indigenous Australian, led processes that were clearly designed from his learning from the Noongaburra people of Northern NSW. Focus for the program was on exploring people's relationships with nature and place and acknowledging and respecting other cultural perspectives. There was an increase in connection with nature and place as a result of this experience. Individuals benefited from the experience as they were shown alternate ways to pursue enhanced connections for themselves and the people they work with.

The participants drew meaning from the experience in five ways:

1. Participants discovered a different way of using time during an outdoor program. The effectiveness of this time usage, where processes were given as much time as people needed and there was no hurry to accomplish tasks under a clock, was recognised by participants. This was a cultural difference which people appreciated and planned to implement in the future in their own programs and experiences.
2. People recognised a delicate ecological balance took place within nature. They valued this balance and were shown that there was a place and a role for each living thing to play in order to keep the balance. They also realised there was a human role in maintaining and being part of this balance. They saw that there were similarities between humans and other kinds of nature and this increased their feeling of being connected and part of nature.
3. The value of community was revealed in the way the program was conducted. Participants treasured the relationships they had made during the experience and recognised that they could learn much from one another's different perspectives. Identity was also drawn from the community and the relationships (with people and place) in this way. They also valued functioning as a community and not as

individuals. Community was seen as a concept that belonged to other things in nature as well as humans.

4. Participants realised that being comfortable in a place came from having past experiences and memories in that location. They saw that these previous experiences played a large part in their relationship with a place, as well as how they felt they belonged and existed within a place. Having past experiences in a place resulted in feeling more comfortable there from this familiarity. Individuals were made aware of this and consequently developed efficient approaches to enable this comfort in a place to happen.
5. The participants also acknowledged that respect was an important factor in the experience for them. It ran through the program as a central motif in the way people treated each other and their environment. Respect was shown through learning about other people's places, and spending time getting to know places through learning about the details of nature there.

Limitations

The case study was limited to a specific space of time (four days) as it was one experience in a certain place. There were no follow-up studies or interviews on this experience. In this way the study is not longitudinal, and can not measure what the participants' reactions to the program may have been long-term. It is a description and exploration; a snapshot in time. Further study, that includes follow-up elements over longer periods of time, would be useful.

Other challenges are present as there are limited cases similar to this one that have been studied and documented within academic research. The organization is one that practices rare processes in using traditional Indigenous knowledge within Australia, so making comparisons across cases is almost impossible. Other similar case studies on Indigenous groups and outdoor programs within academic research are limited, and each specific Indigenous group, whose processes could be utilised, is also unique. Because of

this, this case study is considered to be descriptive. It gives the reader information about one distinctive case, and distinguishing processes used in the case.

Drawing generalisations from a small and specific group of people in this case study is not possible and was never the intention of the research. The study set out to understand perceptions of people's relationships with nature and place. As the age of participants varied from twenty-one to mid-thirties, data that emerged could have varied with a similar program and participants of different ages. Further studies with participants of different age groups and backgrounds would also inform well.

Recommendations

Processes such as using time in a different way than people are accustomed to, observing all types of nature in detail and seeing their co-existence, recognising communities through the outdoors, and making links to humans and society are methods of learning about the self and our environment which have been used for thousands of years by Indigenous Australians, and may also be utilised by outdoor facilitators. These methods of practice may be applied in various types of outdoor programming with the aim of increasing participants' feeling of connection with nature and improving relationships with nature and place.

A question that needs to be raised is whether these specific outdoor programs need an Aboriginal Australian of a specific mob to facilitate each program. Would the experience have the effect it had on the participants of this case study if a facilitator were employing the same processes, but was not of Aboriginal descent? This is an area of research that would also benefit heavily from further study.

The program could be further enhanced by being held in a more remote location. Disturbances were a voiced concern for participants, and moving to a more isolated place would eliminate these concerns. It could also foster the increased connection with nature and experience away from intrusions of the modern Western world, while focussing on both cultures' realities.

One more recommendation could be made in relation to being away from daily life. Increasing the amount of days of the event would aid in a more beneficial experience. Participants in this case seemed as though they had settled into the mindset of the experience after about a day and a half, and then had few full days left to draw as much out of the program as they could. Increasing the program length to six days could result in a more intensive and longer lasting educational experience.

Other possibilities for utilising this knowledge could involve including it into an outdoor education program. Following the processes outlined in the case as part of an outdoor education program could lead to enhanced connections with nature and place, increased cross-cultural respect, and more perspective on the holistic and relevant nature of learning through the outdoors. These Indigenous processes are very useful for education across all ages.

The field of ecopsychology may consider this information and documented ways of relating to nature as methods in its practice as well. Individuals in dire need of creating a sense of connection to the earth as a result of feeling alienated in modern society could benefit from these ancient methods. Drawing a link between cultures and recognising a common need to feel a connection with nature and place is appropriate for everyone. The holistic type knowledge explored in this program can be used in all other components of life; it is a way of looking at the world and humanity's place in it.

Implications also exist which pertain to cross-cultural respect and knowledge. In utilising this type of program, individuals are exposed to new perspectives and helped to see the value in other cultures. Individuals are drawn to learn more about this culture and also to find out more about their own culture and background. Each culture is valuable; individuals should do what is possible to learn about as many as possible.

This study is also a written document on some of the ways of the Noongaburra people; it is one way of trying to conserve a valuable culture and knowledge that may otherwise be lost. This program model could be used with these aims in mind. In a society that is so multicultural, igniting the desire to learn about other groups of people, our own groups, and how to live together could have an overwhelming effect.

Concluding Comments

A different perspective was experienced in this program. The experience was led from an Aboriginal Australian perspective; this made it unique and insightful. The program offered new meanings for participants in the way they experienced wilderness and outdoor programs and how they relate to nature and place. The influence the experience had on the participants is shown in the way participants planned to utilise these ideas and ways of facilitating in their own practice. The meaning of the program to them in their lives was appropriate and revealed new insights for them.

Western individuals can learn much from other perspectives and different cultures in the outdoors. They can learn that there are ways of relating to nature and place in alternate ways that provide a deeper, more connected relationship to a place, and nature in a place. Becoming more connected to place can lead to a person's increased definition of self (Raffan, 1993), improved identity, new perspectives on larger 'world views' as a result of connection with nature (Martin, 2004), and consequently one's well-being in society.

Through gaining a better understanding of the meanings of this Aboriginal Australian-based outdoor experience to the participants, and documenting and comprehending the aims of the facilitators, leaders of outdoor programs are given an option to consider when wanting to concentrate on participant connections with nature and place. By seeing the effectiveness of the types of processes, unique to the program and employed originally by the facilitator's traditional people in their daily lives, we are given insight into an immense collection of possibilities for outdoor education, outdoor experiences, and wilderness adventures. The result would be the improved well-being of individuals who were recipients of this type of program from an increased sense of identity from relating to their own place, from a greater respect for other's perspectives and cross cultural respect, and through learning to connect to nature and place in an alternate and deeply effective way.



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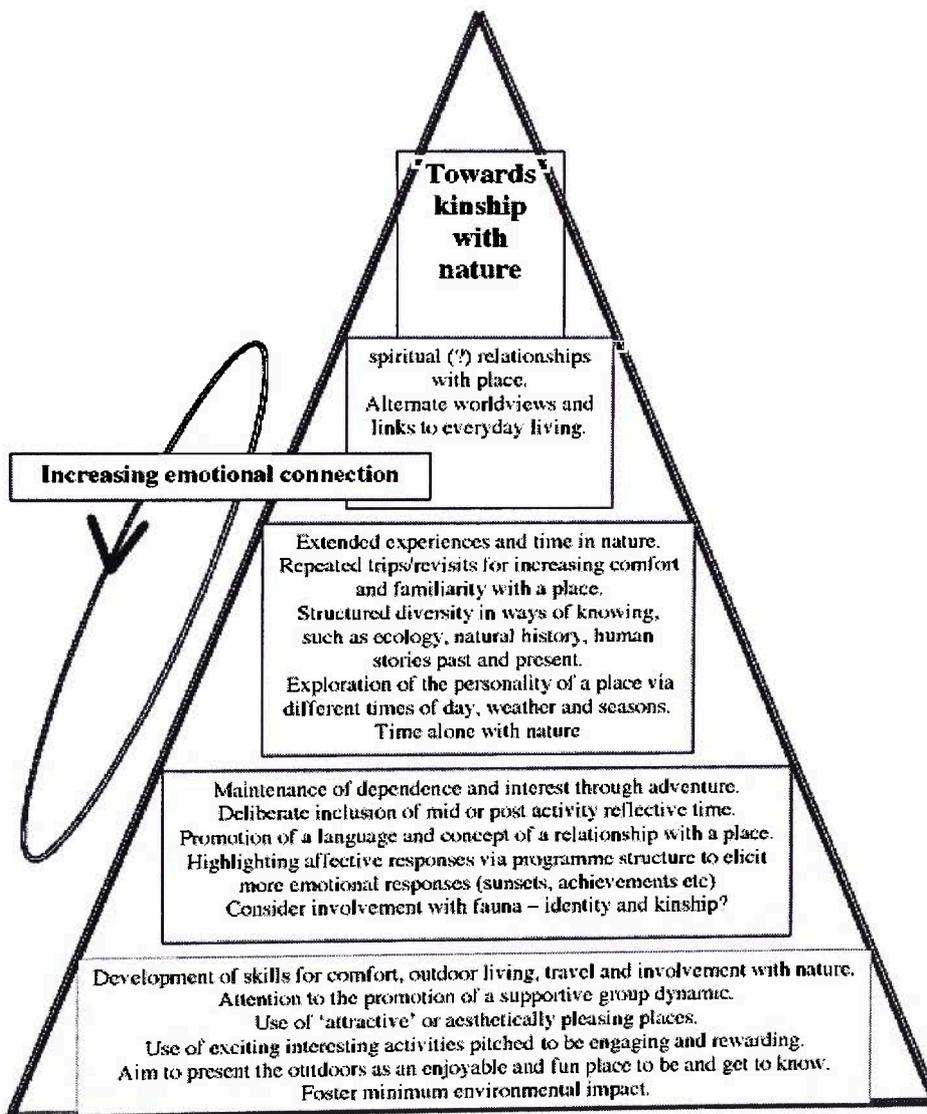
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Appendix 1. Martin's Pedagogical Framework for Outdoor Education

(Source: Conference proceedings – International Outdoor Education Research Conference, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia, July 2004.)



Appendix 2. Interview Questions for Participants

1. What was your favourite process/ exercise from the workshops on the camp? Why?
2. What was the most significant part of the experience for you?
3. Are there any changes in your own relationship with nature, land, and place since the program?
4. Has this specific area of the Murray River been a good environment for this program to take place? Why or why not?
5. How did having Jack as the facilitator of the program influence this experience for you?
6. What do you believe you have gained from this experience? Can you tie this into your own practice and everyday life?

Appendix 3. In-depth Unstructured Sample Interview Questions for Program Facilitators

1. What inspired you to start doing programs such as these?
2. How do you frame the program so that people are able to move through the experience and learn from it in the end?
3. What do you hope people will gain from your programs? What change do you hope to evoke in people?
4. How do you use your indigenous knowledge to help others learn and connect with nature and place?
5. Are there some aspects of this knowledge that you chose not to share with your participants? (You may simply answer 'no comment' to this question)
6. How do the different types of participants in the programs influence the experience for you?
7. Do you feel each new program changes you at the end of the experience? Does each program influence the way you facilitate the programs the next time?
8. How do you think the way the western world relates to/ regards nature and place compares to the way indigenous people in Australia traditionally relate to nature?
9. How do you think your stories and pieces of knowledge about nature and place will help people improve their own relationship with nature?
10. Do you think we can separate the concept of nature and place? How are the two related?
11. If communication between different groups is to improve, how can it be done from traditional Aboriginal culture to Western society?
12. How do you think society could promote the idea of learning from one another, becoming more knowledgeable, and not afraid of other cultures?
13. What is the aim of getting people to use the Aboriginal way of symbolising and communicating things by painting with dots? Do you feel this is a good way for people to bridge between cultures? What do/would other Aboriginal people think of the use of the dots?
14. What is 'consciousness' to Aboriginal people? What is seen to be our duty if we are the only 'conscious' beings within the ecosystem? Are any other animals 'conscious' like we are, according to Aboriginal concepts?

Appendix 4. – Examples of Key Phrase Extraction and Coding from Raw Data

Participant interview

“I got much more out of it this time, with the kicking back and relaxed time” – kicking back and relaxed time → thematically coded into ‘realisation of treating time differently’

Journal notes

“Jack explained that the people of the Murray River/Barmah area believe that when they die, their spirit goes back into the watering holes of the Murray and into the river. If there are no watering holes, there is nowhere for the spirit to go.” - spirit goes back into the watering holes & no watering holes... no where for the spirit to go → thematically coded into ‘Seeing an ecological balance take place’, sub-themes: ‘understanding inter-relationships and co-existence’ & ‘noticing the balance being disrupted’ respectively

In-depth interview

“...you look for something that relates to you. Its like looking for a clue to teach you something about what you do in your life so you have a relationship with it. When you find the ants do something that you do, then there is a relationship there, then you watching much harder” - you find the ants do something you do then there is a relationship → thematically coded into ‘Seeing an ecological balance take place’, sub-theme: ‘associating us with other species’

Journal notes

“One participant made a comment about how respectful this way of living was, to be conscious of one another’s beliefs, learn from them and still have your own” – conscious of one another’s beliefs → thematically coded into ‘recognising value in community’

Participant interview

“Coming back again gives the ability to go deeper, because you’re not afraid to. The environment allows it to be more comfortable because we are used to the place.” - more comfortable because we are used to the place → thematically coded into ‘comfort from past experiences & memories’

In-depth interview

“ Instead of saying ‘no that’s not the right way, this is the right way’, you learn from all things that happen, so if you’re game enough to put yourself out there and say what you believe and allow people to either respect or disrespect it, you can learn from that.” - say what you believe and allow people to either respect or disrespect it → thematically coded into ‘showing respect’