Experiential Learning Programs in Australian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Experiential programs in special environments are common in Australian education, notably in independent secondary schools. Without overt reference to research, they claim the special features of their program lead to personal development. The study sought to discover the underlying theoretical elements common to experiential learning programs, and by extension, sought to identify the elements of the experiential learning that might be incorporated into mainstream learning.

Adopting a constructivist interpretive framework drawn from the work of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bruner, the study examined six Australian independent school experiential learning programs offered to Year 9 students at dedicated, discrete settings ranging from wilderness to the inner city.

The methodology employed in the research design was qualitative, drawing on Argyris and Schön’s notion of theory of action as an overarching framework in the documentation of six case-study programs. A preliminary probe into a single experiential program and an Australia-wide survey of school-based experiential learning provided a base of reference for the main study, which focused on 41 teaching practitioners as the primary informants on the programs. Data sources consisted of public documentation on programs, ethnographic interviews, questionnaire responses and researcher observations. Charmazian grounded theory method and Argyris and Schon’s ladder of interference were used as the primary tools for data analysis.

The study found challenging setting, constructed social interaction, tolerance of risk, and reflection to be the essential design components that enable personal learning, and these thus form the model of experiential learning that emerges from analysis of the data. Together with the learner and cognitive dissonance, the spatiotemporal setting of the experience is identified as the defining characteristic and third component of experiential learning transactions. Specific properties of each learning setting interact with learners
in ways that afford specific learning opportunities. Individual student status and collective social structures in remote experiential settings that rupture contact with the home community are profoundly altered through the experience. Risk emerges as an indispensable property of novel learning experiences. Reflection, both facilitated and unfacilitated, is the mechanism by which experiential learning is stored in episodic memory and informs the process of knowledge creation.

The theoretical model of experiential learning derived from the programs studied describes the essential differences between experiential and mainstream learning. This model offers a basic design template for the development of experiential learning programs in other settings to meet the particular learning needs of Year 9 students in mainstream schools. Finally, these programs provided evidence of close parallels with traditional initiation rites, suggesting that they serve an important socialisation function for adolescents.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface;

ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and

iii. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.
Acknowledgements

The Confucian educational maxim 三人行必有吾師焉 (Where three are gathered, isn’t one my teacher?) is a particularly apt description of my journey as a learner over the years during which this thesis was researched and written. The three have swelled to a host of colleagues who have given of their time with a generosity of spirit that is both enlightening and humbling.

Firstly, the contribution of my supervisor, Dr. Jane Orton, towers above all others, shaping of my thoughts, guiding my creative hand, and sharpening my editorial eye. As a mentor, collaborator, critic, and ultimately, a friend, Dr. Orton has been both a guiding and motivating force at every stage. I owe her a debt of heartfelt gratitude.

I am also deeply indebted to the 41 brave colleagues who bared their souls and professional practice to my scrutiny in the course of the study. They demonstrated courage and commitment in so doing and have thereby contributed enormously to this thesis.

The principals of the participating schools also took a risk in inviting a colleague in to examine their flagship programs; their trust exemplifies what should be treasured in their respective schools: confidence to invite scrutiny and willingness to grow through the advice and suggestions of critical friends.

Finally, while a PhD is a lonely journey, I have not travelled alone. My wife, Holly, and our children, have endured patiently, with good grace and humour, as I have perplexed them with half-formed ideas, frustrated them with my intellectual obsessions, and denied them time and attention when my research made its inevitable demands on me. My mother, Marjorie, also lent her unwavering faith and care. Their support and encouragement infuse each and every page of this thesis.

Malcolm Pritchard
September, 2010
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1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale for Study

Secondary school experiential learning programs have become an increasingly widespread phenomena in Australian schools over the past 50 years, with a growing number of schools establishing dedicated facilities or discrete campuses across Australia and even overseas to offer off-campus, residential learning based on themes of adventure, self-discovery, and life skill development. These programs are directed at single-sex male or female groups as well as co-educational groups in the middle years of secondary schooling, typically, Year 9, when students are 14 to 15 years old, with durations ranging from one week to one year.

The schools offering these discrete, off-campus programs promote the benefits derived from student participation in them through printed brochures and school websites, typically emphasising intended learning outcomes and the unique nature of the learning environment. Many emphasise a contrasting setting and skills that, it is claimed, will have applicability well beyond the years of formal schooling. The following extracts from school websites offer a selection of program descriptions. For example, a South Australian school claims:

The annual outdoor activities program provides a unique and unforgettable learning and living experience. Students face challenges beyond those possible in a suburban day school, including taking responsibility for themselves, the community and the environment, while learning life skills and values including leadership, teamwork and tolerance.

Another school in Queensland states that its experiential program:

…provides exciting learning experiences for students: ones that leave vivid memories long after leaving…continues (the school’s) commitment to providing innovative outdoor experiences.

The curriculum at the remote campus of an independent girls’ school in Melbourne provides its Year 9 students with:
challenge and a chance to succeed in a unique environment, a place to explore and experience life, form friendships and receive positive encouragement in the development of self worth...(Students are) most likely to be found in the fresh air considering educational issues in a meaningful setting.

The type of setting and the physical learning and living environments are emphasised by some schools; a Victorian school states:

In the stunning mountain setting students live in and learn from the natural environment. This unparalleled experience sets the year apart from any other educational opportunity.

A Victorian girls’ school highlights the activities undertaken within the setting:

...in the beautiful National Park, students live in households of eight, gain...independence and responsibility, practice the life skills...study the environment, power and water use, and go canoeing and bushwalking...it stays with them for life.

Another school, also in Victoria, citing the linguistic and cultural focus of its Year 9 ‘Internationalism Program’, claims that it offers:

...intensive study of another language and culture. (The) program promotes personal independence...in a different setting...(where) participants learn a great deal about themselves.

The information available from schools about these programs reveals several strongly congruent elements among them all: the choice of target level – Year 9; the focus on unusual, distinctive, or ‘unique’ settings, allied with claims of vivid, lifelong memories of the experience itself; and the promotion of a common set of skill outcomes, such as independence, self-reliance, tolerance, teamwork, and decision-making. However, there is also a significant absence of information provided by the schools on the theoretical base underpinning their programs that might justify their claims and support the specific means by which the outcomes are expected to be achieved.

A number of educational questions arise about these programs that disrupt regular schooling and are offered in locations away from established school campuses, including, for example: Why do students of (typically) Year 9 need such a special learning environment away from the main school campus? Why would experiential learning in these settings produce the outcomes intended? Is this learning different to mainstream education, and, if so, how is
it different? Do all successful programs follow a similar design in their core processes? Given the significance attributed to the setting in the promotional literature, what role does it play in the learning and do these programs successfully utilise setting to achieve learning outcomes? And finally, if these experiential programs in special settings achieve significant learning outcomes for participants, should this model of learning be applied more widely to secondary schooling in other settings – do they in fact offer a guide to the reform of mainstream education?

It is hard to find answers to the questions above. Despite their popularity, the programs have remained largely unexamined in educational research. Yet their continuation and development suggest that staff, students and parents believe the programs are valuable, and this researcher’s involvement in one such program provided evidence of some very particular benefits possible from these programs, if they are designed and conducted according to certain principles. However, these principles have remained largely tacit to date, even to the researcher.

This research project addresses the questions raised above. The aim is to answer the following fundamental questions underlying this kind of experiential program:

a. What is the theoretical model of learning which underpins these programs?

b. What elements of the model are essential and what might be optional?

c. What elements of the model might be incorporated into mainstream schooling?

The congruence of approach, grade level, common use of remote setting, and similar claims in the school literature are the given elements that inform these three research questions. They give the appearance that there might be something that unifies the programs at a theoretical level and it is the search for this unifying ‘model’ that forms the central focus of this study.
The scope of the study is limited to experiential learning programs offered at Australian schools. The location of school programs examined in this study has been left imprecise to better protect confidentiality. This intentional imprecision does not compromise the information needed to understand and analyse the nature of the learning program. The study confines itself to an examination of the model of learning underpinning these programs and their constituent essential elements. Analysis of program effectiveness is therefore not a focus of this study.

1.2. Australian Experiential Learning Programs

The first Australian experiential learning programs were established at the end of World War II and were based at least in part on the 'survival' programs of education that were developed during and after the war, such as Outward Bound, founded by Kurt Hahn (Montgomery & Darling, 1967, p. 8). The first recorded 'remote' campus for experiential learning was set up in 1947 by an independent school in the State of Victoria, some 50 kilometers from Melbourne (Caulfield Grammar School, 2011). It offered a program of short-term experiential learning for boys largely based on farming activities.

Another experiential learning program, still in operation and also in Victoria, was founded a few years later. Considered innovative for its time, it took its all-male cohort of Year 10 students into the Victorian high country for a year-long program of hiking, skiing, and mainstream studies:

*The principle behind this is a simple one and perhaps has its origins in the thinking of Kurt Hahn...Hahn believed that the skills and confidence to deal with unfamiliar territory can be developed. They are things that are learned.*

In the final decades of the twentieth century, a number of other schools around Australia, mostly independent schools, followed suit, establishing remote campuses offering experiential learning programs based on an increasingly diverse range of skills and approaches. The highest concentration of these is found in Victoria and now includes urban, rural and
remote wilderness programs in settings that range from coastal to alpine. Program duration ranges from several weeks through to a full academic year. The learning programs are typically based on a philosophy of learning by experience, but the diversity of location and approach lends a unique character to each campus and program.

A noticeable feature of these programs in the publicly available information is the setting: all programs offer a series of structured learning experiences conducted in a physical and/or cultural environment that offer a strong contrast to the conventional classroom setting in which the mainstream curriculum is implemented.

A further common characteristic of these programs is the intended age group, with Year 9 (age range from 13 to 15 years old) being the most frequently targeted year level. There are programs that cater to the needs of older and even younger students, with many schools also offering one- or two-day programs to primary aged students, but by far the majority of experiential learning programs take place in secondary school, typically between Years 9 to 11.

The programs often feature prominently in school promotional literature, and are clearly intended by independent schools as potential draw cards for enrolments in a highly competitive marketplace. The strong demand for enrolment at schools offering these programs suggests broad acceptance among parents seeking an independent school education for their children for this type of learning. It is therefore somewhat puzzling that the literature contains only sketchy references to the underlying theories of learning on which these programs are based, program design, and learning outcomes. For example, what qualifies a setting as being meaningful is not stated, and other settings are similarly proclaimed to be unique, different, or challenging, also without explanation.

One school offers a tentative theoretical connection, suggesting that its program is perhaps based on the educational philosophies of Kurt Hahn. The
evidence offered to support this, however, is only a further claim: that *skills and confidence* can be developed when students are *confronted* in an environment that is *secure* and *new*.

It is curious that these numerous, expensive and high claiming programs have not attracted more attention from researchers to date. The schools themselves do carry out program evaluations that appear to be largely practical and operational, but there remains a dearth of sound investigation and discussion of the basis and claims of the prospectus documents and brochures.

Furthermore, while the publicly available documentation describing the experiential learning programs offered at these remote campuses suggests a degree of similarity in underlying educational philosophies, where articulated, and the learning outcomes, there are also subtle differences in emphasis that invite further investigation.

1.3. *Preliminary Probe*

The first step in designing the study was to consider the most suitable sources of information about program theories. Three sources of information were considered: materials published by the schools about the programs; school managers, teachers, and staff responsible for implementing the programs; and students who had participated in the programs. A further consideration was to examine both the espoused theories and the practices of programs, comparing the schools’ espoused intentions and the actual implementation achieved.

The theoretical foundations were sought firstly in the espoused knowledge and understandings of those who run and manage the programs, and in how they see these being realised in program structure and content. Secondly, the learning theories were sought in the beliefs and experiences of those who staff the programs. A third source of information – students – was also considered in the study design phase.
In the researcher's experience over a decade founding and managing a program similar to those participating in this study, in their final published reflection on leaving the school at the end of Year 12, it was common for students who had participated in such a program three years earlier to cite their participation in it as one of their key learning experiences in their time at the school. This phenomenon reflected in a subjective sense the importance of the experience to those students. However, their statements were usually at a removed level of descriptive abstraction, with terms such wonderful, memorable, or life-changing, offering little insight into the nature of the learning.

As an initial probe to commence examining the programs, the researcher obtained university human research ethics approval to design and conduct a limited survey of student perceptions of the experiential learning program at one Australian independent school by means of a simple questionnaire. The aim was to see in what way, and to what degree, Year 9 students could offer a reliable source of usable data about their own learning and the nature of the experiential learning. In particular, the probe sought to discover if students were aware of when learning took place and to what extent they were aware of the process by which it had occurred. The probe questionnaire did not seek to identify student perceptions of program effectiveness.

After obtaining both parent and student agreement to take part in the probe, the students provided responses to questions about what was memorable about the program, what they had found difficult and what seemed most important about the experience. Questions consisted of both forced choice and narrative formats. For reasons of institutional confidentiality, the questionnaire, which identifies activities and locations specific to this program, has not been provided as an attachment.

The essential finding of this probe showed that students emphasised the importance of the social dimension of the experience. The majority of students acknowledged some difficulty in coming to terms with individual personality
differences and working together in a confined residential setting. A sample of typical responses provided by informants about their learning experience and the most important outcomes is provided below:

*New home, routine, people, etc., and having to put up with it...learning to clean up, take care, and manage myself (Student 1).*

*How to make friends...Living with strangers and being away from my family (Student 2).*

*Learning to live with those who bug me, learning to accept everyone for who they are, (and) valuing my own opinions (Student 3).*

*My most difficult challenge was being a leader (Student 4).*

*The most difficult thing was being away from my friends and family for such a long time. I think I got through it because of the busy schedule (Student 5).*

*I know I can be independent and that I don’t need my parents to do everything for me (Student 6).*

In analysing these responses, it was felt that information provided by students was likely to prove unsatisfactory for the purposes of the intended study. As with the school leavers, the younger students were not particularly insightful about their experience of learning itself. Little of value was offered about the nature of experiential learning and the actual process of learning from a student perspective.

Given that the main objective was to examine the theories underpinning the programs, the survey results confirmed the practitioners as the most suitable source of data. Consequently, this study has confined itself to the aspirations, designs, planning and practices of the educators involved.

### 1.4. Outline of the Study

The project begins by tracing the origin and development of the programs and examining the learning theories that support their educational goals and purposes. Thus Chapter Two examines the evolution of experiential learning from a socio-constructivist perspective in the writings of Dewey, Vygotsky,
and Bruner. The strongly autonoetic dimension of experiential learning that emerges from the key concepts leads to an examination of Tulving’s notion of *episodic memory*. From this review of learning theory, eight essential elements of experiential learning are identified. The chapter concludes with a restatement and brief discussion of the three research questions in the light of the theories of learning examined.

Chapter Three sets out the qualitative methodological approach to the study and discusses ethnographic data gathering techniques, and instruments and methods of data analysis using grounded theory method. The chapter includes a brief discussion on criteria for selection of the participating schools and the program parameters identified as necessary for selection. The ethical issues involved in data collection and data protection are also discussed. The chapter concludes with a description of the data types to be collected.

Chapter Four presents analyses of the data. Each of the experiential learning programs offered at the six schools selected is examined discretely. This is followed by an in-depth thematic analysis of selected text excerpts. From these analyses, the underlying base on which each program is founded is revealed. The final section of Chapter Four identifies the four essential themes that emerge from analysis of the set of programs.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the four essential themes as the core of experiential learning. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical implications of these findings, using the theories of learning explored in Chapter Two as a frame of reference. In conclusion, the three research questions are addressed in light of the results of the study.

Chapter Six presents a discussion of the broader implications of the findings for education, some reflection on the methods used, the limitations of the project, and suggested directions for further research in the field of experiential learning.
1.5. *Summary of Chapter*

The prevalence of remote, residential experiential learning programs in Australian schools reflects the value parents and schools place in these programs. In the absence of sustained academic scrutiny of this type of education, however, there are questions concerning the claims of specific learning outcomes achieved by such programs, and the theoretical basis on which these claims are founded. A further question concerns the extent to which this type of education requires a remote, specialised setting and whether the practices in these programs are transferrable to the mainstream classroom. This study has been undertaken to examine the theoretical underpinnings of these experiential programs through a close examination of a sample of experiential learning programs in Australian independent schools employing program teachers and leaders as the principal informants for the study.
2. CHAPTER TWO: CRITICAL REVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS

2.1. Overview of Chapter

This chapter examines the key concepts of experiential learning through an examination of experiential learning theory pioneered by John Dewey. The review of key concepts initially traces the emergence of constructivism as a dominant contemporary educational paradigm in the Western educational literature through an overview of Piagetian cognitive constructivism, Vygotskian socio-constructivism and the nature of knowledge construction. This leads into a detailed examination of the development of Deweyan pragmatic constructivism, centering on experiential learning. The importance of human memory in learning through experience is then explored briefly through Tulving’s work on episodic memory. The final section of the chapter summarises the essential elements of experiential learning theory derived from the key concepts and concludes with a restatement of the research questions that emerge from this review.

(Note: for cited writings originally published in a foreign language, or for older republished works in English, the referencing convention adopted in this study places the English language publication date of the cited source first, followed in square brackets by the original publication date; for example, (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934], pp. xx); for translated works, the name of the translator is cited in the first in-text reference only).

2.2. Key Concepts of Learning

This section explores key concepts in the general theories of learning tracing the development of constructivism from its Greek philosophical roots, through to Piagetian cognitive constructivism, Vygotskian socio-constructivism and Deweyan pragmatic constructivism. The section concludes with a detailed examination of the role of setting in the learning process, with particular focus on Gibson’s notion of affordances.
2.2.1. Introduction to Contemporary Theories of Learning

Research into the ways in which humans learn and develop, and more particularly into the organisation and management of learning practices and activities, programs and their associated educational institutions, has undergone many paradigm shifts in the past 100 years or so. During the Twentieth Century, in the search for the ideal model of learning, the field of education has embraced a number of emerging disciplines, such as genetics, psychology, and cultural psychology aiming each time to illuminate the psychological and sociological processes associated with learning that are generally not directly observable.

Experiments involving animal learning, such as Köhler’s chimpanzees (Köhler, 1930, pp. 155-156) have, in a collateral sense, revealed some interesting features of human cognition, but there remains a great deal that is unknown about the precise processes that regulate and control consciousness, and facilitate the acquisition of new skills and knowledge; in fact there is a great deal more to learn about what constitutes knowledge and intelligence (Cole & Hatano, 2007, pp. 113-115). However, current evidence still supports the contention that, in contrast to the imitative learning that has been observed in other animal species, only humans seek to understand the world as they experience it, and based on this experience of the world, only humans teach in a systematic and sustained way to create knowledge and make meaning about the world (Bruner, 1997, pp. 63-71; Richardson, 2000, pp. 1-4, 122-123; Cole & Hatano, 2007, pp. 113-115; Jonassen, 2009, pp. 13-25).

As humans, we seek to gain a greater understanding of the world through learning, and part of that process requires an understanding of the process of learning itself. While there are many different, competing paradigms of learning theories, Dewey simplifies the discussion, narrowing the field down to just two essential choices: the history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 17). Dewey identifies
learning in the former as an essentially internal process, in which humans encounter novel situations and develop or construct knowledge and understanding of these phenomena from the inside out; constructivism is the major theoretical paradigm belonging to the first category. The second category identifies learning as a process that commences from the outside, with novel experiences and knowledge being acquired from without by learners. There are many different external models of learning, but traditional views, such as the transmission model, or the empty vessel model, in which new knowledge is transmitted from an expert teacher to a novice student, fall into this category (Mayer, 2005, p. 12).

Avoiding both these unilateral perspectives, constructivism is the dominant paradigm in Western contemporary educational philosophy (Mayer, 2004, p. 14) and as such provides a logical starting point to this review of learning theory. The genesis of modern constructivism can be traced back to the writings of Giambattista Vico (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 6), although some contend that it can be traced back further, to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (Pegues, 2007, pp. 316-317). Constructivism and its associated ideas inform much of the contemporary discussion on theories of learning from a philosophical, psychological and pedagogical perspective (Perkinson, 1984, pp. 47-53; von Glasersfeld, 1993, pp. 23-29; Floden & Prawat, 1994, p. 37; Steffe & Gale, 1995; von Glasersfeld, 1995, pp. 3-11; Gredler & Green, 2002, pp. 53-54; Pegues, 2007, pp. 316-317).

The epistemological foundation of constructivism lies in the attempt to avoid the philosophical dualism associated with an external, objective reality and a subjective self through the notion that knowing is an experiential state (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 7). In learning theory, constructivism centres on the notion that the individual learner is an active participant in learning, constructing his/her own viable version of the external ‘real’ world experientially, as perceived through successful interaction with the immediate environment, society and knowledge artefacts (Tobin & Tippins, 1993, p. 3; von Glasersfeld, 1995, pp. 7-8).
This view has emerged as a result of our increasing understanding of the processes of human cognition and stands in opposition to the more traditional view of learning as a process in which the student is a more or less passive vessel to be filled with knowledge through the mechanism of education (Confrey, 1995, p. 203). In the constructivist perspective, the locus of control in the learning process moves from the teacher to the learner as the centre of any learning activity. The basic building blocks of knowledge construction are not pieces of information transmitted to the student, but are previously constructed, experientially-based understandings that are used in the course of a novel encounter to create new understandings that transcends existing cognitive structures (Ernest, 1995, p. 470).

Constructivism is not a single epistemological theory or model of education: there are many forms of constructivism and little agreement as to which represents the core of constructivism (Ernest, 1995, pp. 459-470). This study focuses on two of the most highly influential constructivist theoretical perspectives dealing with the way in which humans develop and learn: the more individually focused cognitive-conflict model of constructivism posited by Piaget, and the socio-culturally mediated model of constructivism posited by Vygotsky. The writings of these two theorists form principal elements of the framework in which some important contemporary debates about learning theories are conducted (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 6; Daniels, 2001, p. 36). The following sections examine these two constructivist perspectives in detail.

2.2.2. Piagetian Constructivism

One of the pioneers of constructivism – and, in fact, hailed as one of the greatest constructivist of the 20th Century – Jean Piaget pioneered our understanding of learning as a process of development (von Glasersfeld, 1995, pp. 4-5; 1996, p. 13). Much of the contemporary literature dealing with the topic of childhood development and education owes a debt to Piaget’s thinking. Piaget’s model of cognitive development is based on the notion of logical stages through which each individual passes on the way to adulthood (Piaget, 1952; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, pp. 1-2; Bruner, 1992). According to
the model, human interaction with the world is largely governed by an integrated network of logical operations that perform a mediating function between the *mind of self* and the outside world (Piaget, 1952; Bornstein & Bruner; Bruner, 1997). Through these operations the mind constantly tests and compares the accepted model of the world with what can be perceived in through the senses, making adjustments and changes to the inner model as necessary; the individual does not discover new knowledge, but makes his/her own version of it (Bruner, 1997, p. 66). In Piagetian constructivism, knowing is an *adaptive* state (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 7).

The driving force of human cognitive development according to Piaget is *disequilibration*, a state of conflict between the external world and the inner constructed world of the individual arising from an encounter with a situation that is novel, or a mismatch with previous experience (Piaget, 1952, pp. 4-5; Bornstein & Bruner; Piaget & Garcia, 1991; Bruner, 1997). When this occurs, existing cognitive structures become disequilibrated, prompting a response from the individual to redress the cognitive imbalance (Bornstein & Bruner, 1989; Piaget & Garcia, 1991; Bruner, 1997). The novel or mismatched phenomena are either incorporated into existing cognitive structures by a process called *assimilation*, or used to initiate the construction of new cognitive structures through a process called *accommodation* (Piaget, 1952, p. 6); both assimilation and accommodation are seen as key elements in cognitive development.

*Assimilation* is seen as the more frequently encountered process in the systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills, as it illustrates a typical model of learning, in which there is an incremental change, reflecting an *internal motivation* towards growth (Furth, 1987, pp. 67-69). However, *accommodation* is the process in which a *novel* object or event is experienced and cannot be assimilated according to existing or prior knowledge (Harlow, Cummings, & Abersturi, 2006, p. 45). New knowledge is thus only created when a novel object or experience is encountered, stimulating the construction of a new cognitive structure. *Assimilation* is a process determined by the *subject* and
accommodation is a process determined by the object (Harlow, et al., 2006).

For Piaget, knowledge is:

(A) reconstitution of reality by the concepts of the subject who, progressively and with all kinds of experimental probes, approaches the object without ever attaining it in itself (quoted in Bringuier, 1980, p. 64).

Piagetian constructivism provides a plausible explanation of human learning processes based on new or conflicting experiences in the external world. One way of mapping the psychological development of the child is through charting the establishment or growth of new or modified cognitive structures from within the egocentric self resulting from contact with the outside world (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). These emerging structures, according to Piaget, gradually facilitate the formation of a network of cognitive contacts and relationships that act to mediate an individual’s perception of the outside world (Flavell, 1963). In line with the fundamental idea of Piagetian constructivism as a subjective process conducted within the individual, the individual does not acquire knowledge and experiences in the external world; they are perceived and cognitively reconstructed through what Bruner describes as a logical calculus (Bruner, 1997, p. 66). Because each person’s specific set of experiences and encounters are unique, each person’s logical calculus will also be unique.

In addition to disequilibration as a mechanism for cognitive change in specific instances, Piaget also seeks to describe the longer term processes associated with cognitive development as occurring through the notion of stages, with each stage of development reflecting the physical and psychological predisposition of the growing individual towards certain types of physical and cognitive functioning (Piaget, 1952; Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). Piaget states that all humans pass through each of the four stages – Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational – in the same order and, roughly, in the same time frame (Piaget, 1952, p. 4; Flavell, 1963).
2.2.3. Criticisms of Piagetian Constructivism

Criticisms of Piagetian constructivism often focus on two main areas: its shortcomings as a theory of development due to its rigid stage structure and underemphasis of learner intersubjectivity, defined as the human capacity to understand the mind of another or share an understanding with another (Bruner, 1996, p. 20; Dennen, 2004, p. 816); and its impracticality as a guide to inform practice in educational settings. The model imposes a set of invariant stages to describe child development, without regard to the surrounding social or cultural setting, with the individual child acting as a largely autonomous agent in its own development (Bruner, 1992, p. 230; Moore, 2000, pp. 11-13). It is also a theory of development derived from data collected under highly controlled conditions, not a theory informed by classroom observations, and therefore has little to say about the pedagogical implications of its model (Moore, 2000, p. 13).

The model’s perceived failure to deal with intersubjectivity, and its perceived overemphasis on the individual as the focal point and source of all forces driving cognitive development, is the theoretical feature that is most often cited as a shortcoming (Freeman, 1987, pp. 25-27; Cole & Wertsch, 1996). A much earlier criticism of Piaget’s work (Isaacs, 1930, p. 79), on the other hand, cites overemphasis on the social factor as a significant theoretical concern.

Piagetian theory acknowledges the role and function of society as one aspect of the prevailing environmental conditions to which each individual must adjust (Piaget, 1962), but social interaction is not emphasised (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). Peer learning is given prominence in earlier explications of the model, but is increasingly underemphasised in later publications (De Lisi & Golbeck, 1999, p. 3). The perceived sociological shortcomings in Piagetian constructivism, however, are seen by some as a matter of inaccurate translation, rather than a theoretical problem (Kitchener, 1996, pp. 28-29). The notion of logic ruling in disputes between cognitively conflicted young learners is somewhat unrealistic, particularly with formation of social peer
groups in older learners, where sociological factors rather than logic are far more likely to determine the outcome of disputes (De Lisi & Golbeck, 1999, pp. 35-37); this is a position that Piaget adjusted somewhat in later years, acknowledging the influence of social factors on individual cognitive development (Piaget, 1962).

The Piagetian emphasis on cognitive development occurring as a largely individual and autonomous process has also been contested. For example, Vygotsky asserts that the evidence used by Piaget to justify egocentrism arose from specifics of the observational setting (Amin & Valsiner, 2004, p. 90); Flavell (1963, p. 261) asserts that learners adopt new or modified cognitive structures as a result of interpsychological interaction. Social mediation is seen to be underemphasised in the Piagetian model, and particularly in its disregard for adult intervention, which is seen by some contemporary educationalists as a significant theoretical oversight (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995, p. 67).

A further observation on the theory underlying Piagetian constructivism is that in an epistemological sense, Piaget’s theory of development, based on the logic of his own theory, is perhaps flawed. Thus, in observing the development of what he describes as logical structures in his subjects, Piaget is, by virtue of his own theory, potentially just observing his own cognitive reconstruction developed in response to a novel situation. Put another way, Piaget’s theory may in fact owe more to his own constructive response to phenomena observed, which in fact may not have existed in the minds of his subjects during the period of observation (Bruner, 1997).

2.2.4. Vygotskian Social Constructivism

One of the major criticisms levelled at Piagetian constructivism in the literature is that it fails to address intersubjectivity and, as such, underemphasises the social dimension of learning (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934]; Tudge & Rogoff, 1989; Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Bruner, 1997). While this claim is specifically refuted by Piaget (1962) and questioned as oversimplification by others (von
Briner (1997) asserts that Piagetian constructivism does emphasise the cognitive development as an internal process of the individual over development through interaction as a part of a social group. While important aspects of Piagetian theory have remained central to later learning theories – for example, radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1996), discovery learning (Bruner, 2006), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – modifications to the original Piagetian notion of constructivism are numerous, with perhaps the most notable being the development of a social theory of constructivist learning based on the writings of Vygotsky.

Social constructivism is one of a number of alternative paradigms retaining the essential notion of learners constructing their own understanding of the world, but mediated through interaction with others, such as parents, teachers and peers (Hickey, 1997, p. 175). Developed largely in reaction to a perceived oversight concerning intersubjectivity in Piaget’s work, social constructivism offers an alternative model of human development in which the interconnectedness of all human elements of society is given a higher priority in explicating the genesis of development in its most fundamental dimensions (Vygotsky, 1978, Trans. M. Cole; 1986 [1934], p. 34, Trans. A. Kozulin; Ernest, 1995, p. 480).

In social constructivism, also known as socio-constructivism, or socially-mediated learning, new knowledge/cognitive structures manifest themselves externally to the learner through the social dimension prior to internalisation or assimilation. Indeed, the concept of interaction between people forming the basis for learning is the focus of the social constructivist model. In social constructivism, there is no elemental metaphor for the learner as a discrete individual, as all individuals are part of an on-going network of social interactions, or conversations (1995, p. 480).

Pioneered by the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, the social constructivist model of learning embraces the idea that individuals do not learn without some form of interaction with other members of society, either directly through...
social interaction, or indirectly through semiotic mediation (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 19). In a frequently quoted passage from *The Mind in Society*, Vygotsky asserts that learning will always take place on two levels or planes, first on the social plane and only then on the individual plane (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57; Amin & Valsiner, p. 87). For Vygotsky and his followers, the social nature of human activity is adopted as a fundamental point of departure for explaining the process of acquiring and developing novel cognitive structures from earliest childhood through to adulthood. Thus, Vygotsky states *through others, we become ourselves* (1987, p. 105).

According to Vygotskian theory, at its most basic level, learning is an instinctive and adaptive process, a ubiquitous survival strategy adopted by humans and other species (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993 [1930]). Through learning, individuals naturally develop the means of recognising and dealing with the threats posed by the outside world (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993 [1930]). At a higher level, learning takes place through the medium of language, which results in *deep transformations* as the child is connected to the social and cultural environment into which it was born (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993 [1930], p. 171). Individuals are connected together to form social groups that rely on semiotic mediation to form bonds through time and space, which ultimately form communities (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934], p. 7). From a Vygotskian perspective, the understanding of the world sought by humans in the form of learning can only be achieved through the experience of social interaction.

In his alternative model of child cognitive development, Vygotsky sets aside the classical Piagetian notion that development at an ontogenetic level occurs through the gradual maturation of pre-existing higher mental functions, and instead asserts the notion of higher functions emerging through the inter-mental functioning of more primitive cognitive functions (Wells, 1999, p. 101). Much of this inter-mental functioning, and specifically language, that results in the development of higher mental functions, occurs in social settings that are not designed to be specifically educational in structure or purpose (Wells, 1999, p. 101). Vygotsky’s ideas have enormous potential in the field of education to provide organising principles in a broad sense, but in his actual
writings he provides little if any guidance to educators on the specifics of optimisation of child development processes (Wells, 1999, p. 102).

In asserting the importance of the social plane for the development of the child, Vygotsky focuses particular attention on the role of language as the most important mediating semiotic tools available to influence interpersonal activity. The role of language at an intrapersonal level is central to socio-constructivism, as language acts as the medium of social interaction and provides the very building blocks, the means by which inner speech is structured (Daniels, 1996, p. 10). In every sense, language shapes the way we think and interact with others (Wells, 1999, p. 101).

The ability of an individual to acquire and master the use of semiotic tools such as language is a, if not the, critical step in the development of an individual as a social being. Vygotsky notes the importance of interaction between individuals in developing language, with sign and gesture emerging in infancy as the precursors of verbal language (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 56). Through gesture, pre-verbal infants learn to communicate basic needs. In having their needs met by an adult carer, the infant learns the power of gesture (Freeman, 1987).

One further observation in support of the importance of postnatal social interaction for human development is the suggestion of a duocentricity between mother and infant, where the helplessness of the infant provides an instinctual pre-condition to promote communication between the two (Freeman, 1987). The lack of infant independence actively promotes adult interaction with the child. Infant and parent interactions are shaped by their environment in other significant ways. Bruner notes that in the very early stages of vocal development in the infant, the experimental sounds being generated have already taken on the phonemic shape of the parental language, demonstrating the impact of the environment and social setting on the unconscious development of the individual (Bruner, 2004).
The importance of the other in the development of self is important in social constructivism, as individuals cannot develop into themselves without the mediating influence of contact with other members of a community. It is through the influence and interaction with the other that culture is transmitted to children, primarily through parents and other adult members of a given community (Vygotsky, 1978). This emphasis on the role of adult influence in the development of the child offers a clear point of distinction between social constructivism and other constructivist theories (Gredler & Green, 2002). Through participation in activities that involve interaction with other experienced members of a community, cultural transmission to neophytes takes place (Wells, 1999, p. 20). Engagement and participation in doing and making, through the medium of semiotic tools, provides the link that binds the individual to the outside community; tools mediate activity to link individuals to the world of objects, but also to the world of people (Wells, 1999, p. 47).

Vygotsky (1986 [1934], pp. 37-40) deals specifically with what he perceives as the issues that divide his approach to cognitive development and that proposed by Piaget. In summarising what he perceives as major theoretical and methodological shortcomings in Piaget’s early work, Vygotsky asserts that children are active participants in their own development and that their egocentric needs are able to adjust and accommodate reality when required (1986 [1934], p. 37). Rejecting Piaget’s notion of egocentricity in development, Vygotsky makes a vigorous case for the primacy of adaptation to reality in development, with the satisfaction of individual need being subordinated to or accommodated within external reality (1986 [1934], p. 37). This reversal of the hierarchy of external versus internal factors driving development further underlines Vygotsky’s case for the dominance of the social dimension over the internal dimension in determining the course of individual development.

The extent to which the mind of a child is shaped by its own internal forces and motivations is also specifically challenged by Vygotsky, contradicting Piaget’s claim that things do not shape a child’s mind (1986 [1934], p. 39). In fact, according to Vygotsky, in realistic situations when the egocentric speech
of a child is connected to *practical* activity, the development of the mind is quite strongly shaped by external forces (1986 [1934], p. 39). In making this connection between inner development and outward reality, Vygotsky underlines the primacy of experience, the means by which individuals encounter and assimilate reality, as a critical step in learning; experience of the physical and semiotic tools through which the individual encounters and interprets reality serves to shape the inner structure of the developing mind. Just as importantly from the perspective of theories about learning, Vygotsky defines this contact with reality as neither passively reflected in the perceptions of individuals, nor as an abstract contemplation in isolation; in every sense, Vygotsky believes the individual’s experience of reality results from active engagement with it (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40).

2.2.5. Zone of Proximal Development

Described as arguably Vygotsky’s greatest contribution to our understanding of the process of learning (Wells, 1999, p. 25), the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) is hailed by Bruner as a theory of development, a theory of cultural transmission and a theory of education, all at the same time (Bruner, 1987, pp. 1-2). The ZPD concept describes the distance or gap between the learner (subject), with an existing demonstrated level of competence in a particular skill, and the notional level of competence that might be displayed in relation to that skill with the provision of competent assistance or facilitation (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84-86). Put simply, the ZPD is the gap between what the child or student can do unaided and what he or she could potentially accomplish with help of some sort (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Help, or mediation, is most typically sourced through a more experienced member of the community, most likely a mother or teacher, but also possibly a more experienced peer, or a member of the community encountered in the course of a learning activity; mediation may also be provided through an artefact or agency not immediately present.

The ZPD concept and its significance for theories of learning have been explored extensively in the literature (Wertsch, 1985; Tharp & Gallimore,
1988; Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Bruner, 1997; Wells, 1999; Daniels, 2001). A number of characteristics of the ZPD, as conceived by Vygotsky, have had a significant impact on the design of learning programs in many western countries since its popularisation in the 1960s (Kuhn, 1997, pp. 246-247). Subsequent publication of more of Vygotsky’s works has resulted in a deeper understanding of the underlying ideas and an even greater impact on educational thinking.

Vygotsky does not see the ZPD as an attribute belonging to any single individual; instead he sees the ZPD as a general principle applicable to all students and, in fact, to all adults, through all stages of life (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1999, pp. 24-25). In a given activity, while engaged in a complex set of tasks, it is possible that an individual might be working at a number of different levels with respect to the ZPD. Where individuals are exercising a skill already mastered, they may be acting as a supporting or mediating agent for another member of a group, while at the same time, receiving the assistance of another more experienced team member themselves in dealing with another facet of the task at hand. The bi-directional nature of mediation in a learning setting might mean that a group of learners participating in a task under the supervision of a teacher may, in fact, be assisting the teacher in the development of competence in a teaching or supervising task in his or her own ZPD (Wells, 1999, pp. 40-41). Individual differences impact on the extent to which aid can boost demonstrated competency. Vygotsky cites the example of two students of similar chronological age, but with differing mental ages as demonstrated through aided competency in a task (1978, pp. 85-86). This particular feature of the ZPD concept demonstrates that the gap between actual and aided competency differs from person to person (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky argues that all higher mental functions ultimately develop from interaction between individuals: this is his general law of development that orientates learning and development in direct opposition to the notion proposed by Piaget (1978, p. 90). Learning, according to Vygotsky, is generated between the learner and another agency, not purely from within. In
contrast to the Piagetian view of learning as an internal process, and one that lags behind cognitive development in the individual, according to Vygotsky (1978, p. 89), *good learning* occurs ahead of demonstrated or actual competence in a task, rather than following the achievement of competence. Using the analogy of *budding flowers*, Vygotsky states that the idea of ZPD applies to competencies that are in the process of maturation, but have not yet developed to the *fruit* of independent competence (1978, p. 86).

The operationalisation of the ZPD in practice is rather more problematic than the theoretical model. Chaiklin suggests that the ZPD concept is one of the most commonly cited and most misunderstood concepts in contemporary education, and that these misconceptions translate into difficulties operationalising the ZPD in pedagogic practice (2003, pp. 40-41). The implementation of the ZPD concept as a pedagogical tool requires that the level of difficulty associated with any learning task falls neatly into the two boundaries of the ZPD, that is somewhere between a student’s demonstrated competence on the one hand and the furthermost limit of assisted competence on the other.

Furthermore, what constitutes assistance in the sense intended by Vygotsky is open to debate (Chaiklin, 2003). For some, the notion of the ZPD does not require the physical presence of a mediator, hence text, for example, can also act as a mediating influence within the ZPD concept (Daniels, 2001, p. 64). Others believe that human agency may assist learning, even when not present: Gredler & Shields (2004, p. 21) cite the example of the child undertaking a homework task away from the classroom, yet still under the tutelage of the teacher.

Scaffolding of learning through tutorial support is closely associated with the operationalisation of the ZPD (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). While the scaffold supports, it also sets limits and constraints on the learning undertaken (Bruner, 1966, pp. 158-159). Recent criticism of scaffolding as a pedagogical concept notes its centrality within constructivist thinking, but also asserts that the work to develop a set of testable principles to guide the
implementation of scaffolding remains an unfinished task (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; Tobias & Duffy, 2009, p. 5).

There are a number of pedagogical difficulties associated with the notion of ZPD. The learner age, current stage of development, and current abilities are identified as a potential limit to the latitude for assisted completion of a task by an individual (Wells, 1999). The effective implementation of the ZPD concept in the classroom is heavily dependent on an interaction between the individual learner’s level of development and the form of instructional practice adopted in the classroom (1985, pp. 70-71). It is possible that by varying the nature of instructional practice, access to the developmental phenomena associated with the ZPD concept may be affected. This also suggests that affective domain factors such as learner motivation may impact on the extent to which adult mediation is successful in the completion of a task carried out within the ZPD. A final observation is that the notion of ZPD lacks a mechanism to guide the collection of empirical data demonstrating the consequences of adopting different forms of ZPD intervention at both an individual and class level (Daniels, 2001, p. 64).

2.2.6. Social Constructivism and Knowledge Construction

The core process in the many theoretical variations of constructivism is knowledge construction. In social constructivism, knowledge is constructed socially, through individuals interacting interpsychologically or with knowledge artefacts that represent acts of knowledge creation by others. This view of social knowledge construction is a key point of difference with Piagetian constructivism, in which knowledge is seen to be constructed through autonomous acts of individual cognition.

For social constructivists, knowledge has both an individual and a social dimension. Knowing is an intentional activity undertaken by the individual, but within a social context; the individual constructs knowledge, but does not know alone (Leontiev, 1981). Even without the immediate presence of another individual, knowledge construction has a social dimension as it relies on
experiences and understandings constructed through previous social interaction (Wells, 1999, p. 79). Knowledge itself cannot be separated from the actions of representing and making (Wells, 1999, pp. 73-79). Knowledge is passed across generations and geographical distance through acts of reinvention and rediscovery. Previous paths of reasoning and imagination are explored anew by successive generations and other communities through acts of knowledge creation (Popper & Eccles, 1997; Wells, 1999, pp. 76-79).

In constructivist theories of learning, in addition to any behavioural or attitudinal changes arising from an act of knowledge creation, knowledge may also have a physical manifestation in the form of a semiotic tool or knowledge artefact. Knowledge is apprehended or recreated and made available for use through understanding the representation embodied in the artefact (Wells, 1999, p. 89). However, a clear distinction exists between knowledge and the artefact that merely represents the knowledge. As the creation of knowledge from an artefact is subject to subjective interpretation and misinterpretation, knowledge artefacts and semiotic tools should not be confused with knowledge itself; artefacts are representations, they do not contain knowledge (Wells, 1999, pp. 73-77). Furthermore, learners exert their own influence, however subtle, over the symbols and tools manipulated in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 74-75).

It is the act of knowledge making, rather than the physical artefacts created, that defines constructivist knowledge (Wells, 1999, p. 86). Knowledge artefacts may act as representations or carriers of previous reasoning (Pea, 1993, p. 53), but individuals must still re-learn previous knowledge through their own active participation in meaning making in a contemporary setting (Wells, 1999, pp. 78-79). This notion of active and current knowledge creation raises a further question: when an artefact no longer carries any semiotic significance for a community, is the knowledge that created the artefact lost (Wells, 1999, p. 86)? If there are no living individuals capable of making knowledge from an artifact, does the original knowledge that led to the creation of the artefact still exist? As knowledge cannot be transmitted or
acquired without understanding and intentional participation, without intentional acts of meaning making, knowledge is inert (Wells, 1999, p. 86).

2.2.7. Contrasting Piaget and Vygotsky: Cultural Mediation

As set out above, it can be seen that the universal stages of cognitive development proposed by Piaget would be viewed by Vygotsky in a very different way. Thus, Vygotsky argues that individual thought and inner speech develop through a gradual mastery of social interaction with other members of a community, either through direct verbal mediation, or mediation delivered through other means, such as written texts (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986 [1934]). Indeed, Vygotsky and his modern followers believe that the development of the individual cannot be understood without reference to his/her network of interaction with other members of a given community (Wells, 1999, p. 37); thus all higher mental functions are, at heart, internalised social relationships.

In much of the literature, the distinctions between the apparently opposing views of Vygotsky and Piaget are often reduced to oversimplified statements pitting the individual constructivism of Piaget against the social constructivism of Vygotsky (Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Amin & Valsiner, 2004). Cole and Wertsch argue that the individual-societal dichotomy that is commonly assumed to demarcate the boundary between the theories of development attributed to Piaget and Vygotsky is perhaps more complex than is generally understood (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, p. 250). They assert that with respect to the individual and society, a great deal of complementarity exists between the two positions, a view that is supported by Amin and Valsiner (Amin & Valsiner, 2004, pp. 87-88). Piaget acknowledges the existence of a social dimension to the individual’s construction of knowledge, although he imposes an individualistic framework on much of his work (Piaget, 1962; Bruner, 1997, p. 67). Similarly, Cole and Wertsch point out the strong focus Vygotsky places on the active individual in the development of cognitive processes (1996, p. 251).
While Amin and Valsiner focus attention on mistranslations and subtle shifts in emphases (2004, p. 93), for Cole and Wertsch the essential difference that emerges from the writings of Piaget and Vygotsky lies in a third dimension, that of cultural mediation (1996, p. 251). In departing from the commonly adopted individual-societal dichotomy, Cole and Wertsch assert that Vygotsky's emphasis on the mediation of tools and artefacts on the processes of development is a cultural phenomenon that has no counterpart in the views of Piaget, and it is therefore in this dimension that a stark contrast between Piaget and Vygotsky can be identified (1996, p. 255).

Adopting the term co-constructionism to establish a bridge between the notions of individual and societal, and environmental dimensions of development, Cole and Wertsch (1996, p. 251) shift attention to the accumulated impact of the experiences and artefacts of previous generations on a given individual or community acting as an essential element in development. They take as a point of departure the understanding that specific groups of individuals occupy unique locations to form societies in which practices develop that are to some extent informed and moulded by the practices and activities of preceding generations sharing a common genetic and geographical heritage (p. 251). Drawing on the ideas of Dewey, Cole and Wertsch assert the importance of setting in learning, noting that the experiences of individuals arise in a chronological, as well as a cultural, social and geographical context, not as isolated events independent of context; their practices have a genesis that is strongly tied to that which has been transmitted from previous generations (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, pp. 251-256; Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 39).

The role of semiotic tools in mediating the actions of past, current, and future generations is for Vygotsky the central fact in human psychology (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, p. 251). Higher mental functions, according to Cole and Wertsch, require the appropriation and mediation of semiotic and physical tools that have been produced by means of previous and current experience in order to facilitate an immediate interface with the physical world; these
higher functions develop and operate only indirectly with the world (1996, p. 251).

Tools and artefacts do not just support mental functions, but in fact play an essential role in the shaping and transformation of these mental functions (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). By means of this process, the accumulated experiences of previous generations continue to reach out to facilitate, and also to inform, the cognitive development of future generations. The individual’s experience of the world is therefore shaped at a fundamental level by the semiotic tools that are largely the product or legacy of a different generation. A further implication of this concept is that as culture and experience shape the tools of mediation, the development of psychological functions remains dependent on the overall cultural, historical, and social context or setting in which development occurs (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, p. 252).

The concept of mind therefore extends beyond the proximal limitations of the physical senses to be shaped by the mediating tools and the cultural and physical setting in which the tools are created (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, p. 252). The growing interconnectedness of individuals facilitated through technical media, such as the Internet, for example, provides an illustration of this concept. Indeed, through on-line activity, the creation of virtual electronic personas and their attendant artefacts leads to a blurring of the point at which the individual might be said to end.

This points to a distinction between the views of Piaget and Vygotsky: in the case of the former, there is an equilibrium between the individual and society and the individual develops in relationship with society; in the case of the latter, it is only through the mediation of cultural artefacts that the individual develops at all (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, pp. 250-256). In shaping the individual, the artefacts are themselves transformed in different ways by the interaction with the individual and it is the accrual of these transformations, both great and small, that marks the growth and development in a cultural sense with the passing of generations (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, pp. 250-256).
Through the mechanism of stage-based development, Piaget believes that the transition between the inner psychological/biological phase of the individual and the more externally focused and engaged social phase is explained (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1986 [1934]). However, Vygotsky (1986 [1934], pp. 12-57), in reviewing Piaget’s findings in 1934, goes to some trouble to refute the approach adopted by Piaget in explicating what he sees as the primary role of social factors in driving the process of child development. Vygotsky notes in particular the use of the term *coercion*, in describing the almost violent process that draws the individual from their isolated, reflective inner world to the interactive, social world beyond (1986 [1934], p. 44).

Sensing a hint of dualism in the sharp distinction between the inner and outer worlds of the child as observed by Piaget, Vygotsky’s analysis demonstrates the need for the outer social state to conquer or overpower the inner in order to allow the child to mature into a socially functioning adult, a view that he feels is not reflected in the evidence collected in either Piaget’s own experiments or his own (1986 [1934], pp. 48-51). Vygotsky also acknowledges that experience as a form of learning plays an important role in the work of Piaget, noting that experience and thought are mutually supportive, with the experience of the child shaping the development of the thought process, which in turn serves to form a framework through which experience is then reviewed and interpreted (1986 [1934], p. 51).

The role of peers in learning is unclear in Vygotsky’s writings. Hogan and Tudge assert that, unlike Piaget, Vygotsky does not emphasise the role of peer learning in his theories, assuming that learning activities are centred on an adult-child relationship (1999, p. 40). Wells, on the other hand, finds support for peer collaboration in Vygotsky’s writings, pointing out that the process of knowledge construction is supported and, to an extent, facilitated through verbal interaction within a peer group (1999, p. 304). While peer-to-peer teaching practices are perhaps not emphasised by Vygotsky, Hogan and Tudge suggest that Vygotsky’s ideas have great potential for developing
collaborative learning (1999, p. 40). They note that while the research on
 collaborative problem-solving based on Vygotsky’s ideas is not strong, there
is substantial evidence of the benefits of peer-centred social interaction in the
process of learning under some circumstances (1999, p. 45). The age at
which peer collaboration confers maximum benefit to the student remains the
subject of debate (Hogan & Tudge, 1999, p. 48).

2.2.8. Vygotsky and Internalisation

At a philosophical level, learning presents the question: how do learners
acquire and assimilate novel concepts, how do they create new cognitive
structures? Addressing this question, Cole (1996) argues that there are some
aspects of current theories of learning that retain unresolved questions, such
as the paradox of development or learning paradox. According to this
paradox, in order to acquire a novel external cognitive structure, it must be
received and accommodated within an existing internal cognitive structure.
This is a problem at least as old as Plato and has been more recently
articulated in the debate over Piagetian constructivism (Fodor, 1980, p. 149).
Daniels, citing Vygotsky, illustrates this idea in terms of learning to swim: one
must have had some experience of water and swimming in order to succeed
(Daniels, 2001, p. 35).

For cognitive structures that fall within the realm of experience for a given
communal social grouping, Vygotsky’s idea of socially mediated transference
of learning resolves the paradox for individual neophyte community members.
Experienced adults, already possessing mastery of the target cognitive
structure, through direct or indirect means, are able to assist or facilitate
acquisition of the new cognitive structure by the neophyte. This subject to
subject assistance or facilitation may take the form of direct intervention or be
achieved by indirect means, such as provision of aids, prompts, or other
stimuli in a structured or ordered manner.

This solution still does not address the question concerning the origin of the
mastery possessed by the adult or the mechanism by which subject-object
novelty is explained. There remains the problem of how this idea allows for
the development of truly novel ideas to be conceived and developed within an
existing structure: what the mechanism is for innovation and change.

For novel cognitive structures in the broader, societal sense, the learning
paradox creates difficulties, as the act of encountering a novel object or event
must by definition transcend all previous experience. These phenomena are
perhaps sufficiently infrequent as to warrant consideration under a
psychological form of Kuhnian paradigm shift, in which an intuitive leap of
perception acts as the mechanism by which a new cognitive structure is
accommodated (Kuhn, 1996). Others explain novelty emergence in terms of
sudden and inherently unpredictable changes to dynamic systems that permit
accommodation (Boom, 2004, p. 84); predictive adaptation through a
generative form of cognitive self-organisation, termed connectionism is also
cited as a plausible explanation (Bereiter, 2000). Everyday experience may
also provide metaphorical inspiration in support of emergent intuition that
leads to the development of axioms that eventually gather empirical support
(Smith, diSessa, & Roschelle, 1993). In summary, to apply an evolutionary
metaphor in the field of metacognition, these intuitive leaps are frequently
attempted, but rarely successful or fruitful in leading to viable and sustainable
cognitive structures in their own right. It is important to draw a distinction in
this discussion between the incremental advance of knowledge in an
extensional sense, and the creation, or initial perception, of knowledge that is
objectively novel.

2.2.9. Criticisms of Social Constructivism

Vygotsky’s work has been enthusiastically received by senior western
scholars such as Bruner (1997), Cole and Wertsch (1996), and Hickey (1997).
The emergence of social constructivism marks a bifurcation in the
epistemological orientation of constructivism, between the social and
individual construction of knowledge (Liu & Matthews, 2005, pp. 386-387), a
development that has given rise to criticisms with sharply divergent positions
regarding this social-individual dichotomy.
For those who categorise Vygotsky as a constructivist, there is some debate about the exact form of constructivism described in his writings (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 391). Many forms of constructivism adopt elements of Vygotsky’s thinking, while developing and modifying his ideas in relation to the concept of culture, social interaction and pedagogy (Ernest, 1995). Hickey and others identify Vygotsky’s theory of development as socio-constructivist, with individuals acting within a social group (Hickey, 1997, p. 175; Reed & Schallert, 2003, p. 103). Gredler and Green (2002, pp. 55-57) and Lave and Wenger, on the other hand, shift focus away from the individual, advocating a strongly collectivist distributed constructivism or co-construction of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1996).

Others critics advocating a stronger focus on individual construction of knowledge, such as Karpov (2003, p. 66), hold that Vygotsky’s ideas diverge from the mainstream of Piagetian constructivism. They claim that the role of autonomous agency in learning and the observed phenomena described in the stage structure of Piagetian constructivism has not been fully accounted for in Vygotsky’s writings (Piaget, 1962). Individual construction of knowledge is also emphasised in Brunerian learning through acts of discovery that are exclusively the property of the individual learner (Bruner, 2006, pp. 57-58).

Due to the temporal, social, and geographical limitations of the context and age in which Vygotsky worked, the impact of class, ethnicity, setting and gender on the course and nature of individual development is an important dimension of Vygotsky’s work that is incomplete (Wells, 1999, p. 39). In particular, in a multi-cultural or multi-class society, the impact of language, environment, family structure and social status, may have an enormous impact on the ability of an individual child to master the semiotically mediated discourse in the classroom and ultimately may determine the extent to which the child is able to apprehend and assimilate new cognitive structures of the classroom (Wells, 1999, p. 40). Differentiation between different kinds of social mediation is also seen as a weakness in Vygotskian constructivism, as all sources of social interaction are seen as equal, regardless of institutional
setting, cultural context, socio-economic factors, or history (Wertsch, Toma, & Hiatt, 1995, p. 164). The role of setting in learning is examined in more detail in a later section in this chapter.

The structure of the Vygotskian model of development contains an element of implied intergenerational conformity that appears to emphasise cultural replication, without allowing for the creativity or dissent of the individual learner (Wells, 1999, p. 41). Strict replication is an inherently unidirectional process that does not accord with the phenomenon of social or cultural change and Wells sees an implicit bi-directionality of development in Vygotsky’s account (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 105-106; Wells, 1999, p. 41). The interaction between the subject and the mediated object does allow for the possibility of change in both the subject and the object. Indeed, Wells (1999, pp. 40-41) sees this type of mutually interactive evolutionary change as an unavoidable consequence of mediation.

The nature and progression of human development, a feature of Piagetian constructivism, is not fully explained in Vygotsky’s writings (Wertsch, 1985). For one critic, this creates the impression that Vygotsky believes learning and development to be the same thing, leading to the erroneous conclusion that development is limited only by opportunity to learn (Wertsch, 1985, p. 73). Echoing Piagetian developmental stages, Wertsch (1985) asserts that development actually proceeds according to its own internal dynamic, independent of external factors.

The form of social constructivism based on Vygotsky’s ideas is a powerful tool for understanding the place of the individual in the social formation of knowledge. However, in the development of his ideas, Vygotsky had little opportunity to take his research into the realms of practical application (Daniels, 2001). There is little information about how to set up and manage a program of study, as Vygotsky’s focus was on the types of knowledge to teach rather than how to teach them (Wells, 1994; Karpov, 2003, p. 69). This poses something of a challenge for any educator wanting to establish a program of learning based on Vygotsky’s ideas, as they tend to refer to what
happens in a psychological sense in learners, not what should happen in an educational sense. He thus has little to say about the application of the analytical tools he developed, particularly the notion of the zone of proximal development.

In reviewing the potential for further research on Vygotsky's work, there are several suggestions. Hogan and Tudge (1999, p. 63) raise the need for empirical verification of the existence and functioning of the zone of proximal development, noting also that the findings will not be generalisable beyond the socio-economic class on which the research is conducted. There is also a need for further research into parent-child scaffolding within the context of other cultures, as the currently existing research base is strongly US-biased (Kermani & Brenner, 2000, pp. 31-33). Another area in need of examination centres on the influence of ‘socio-emotive’ or affective factors on developmental processes, particularly in the context of pre-existing or developing relationships between peers participating in collaborative learning (1999, p. 64). The potential for positive impact of a friendship between collaborating peers is noted, along with a concern that such factors may exert an influence on the veracity of research findings that have not factored this social/affective dimension into data collection.

There are different kinds of social constructivism, and the differences, although minor, appear to be irreconcilable, the result of which is that there is very little agreement on anything, with the possible exception of the general acceptance of knowledge as a social product (Floden & Prawat, 1994, p. 37; Ernest, 1995, p. 459; Gallego, 2001, p. 318). For some, despite the large volume of related writings, social constructivism is not sufficiently well grounded in theory in either the educational or the psychological field and one of the main reasons for this is its positioning at the intersection of cognition and sociology which renders it cross-disciplinary in nature (Wertsch, et al., 1995, p. 159). This has led to the establishment of somewhat ill-defined theoretical boundaries for social constructivism, and has therefore contributed to its development into a very broad collection of theoretical models, with many sub-categories and definitions. Social constructivism has thus become
associated with a wide range of pedagogical approaches, such as the cognitive apprenticeship, reciprocal teaching, intentional teaching, and communities of learners (Hickey, 1997, p. 176).

2.2.10. Criticisms of Constructivism in Practice

As the dominant theoretical paradigm in western educational writings, constructivist ideas are commonplace in discussions of educational theory, but from a pedagogical perspective, the implications of constructivism for didactic practice are problematic. As stated above, there are many constructivisms (Ernest, 1995, pp. 459-470), leading to what one critic describes as rampant sectarianism among constructivists (Phillips, 1995, p. 5), which in turn results in many misconceptions about constructivism (Harlow, et al., 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008). The most influential criticisms of constructivism focus on the perceived shortcomings of student-centred implementation and pedagogical practice that minimises teacher intervention in learning (Kirschner, et al., 2006). Part of the problem is that the term constructivism itself has lost some of its specificity, as it now reflects many different things: a philosophy, a methodology, a pedagogy, an epistemology (Harlow, et al., 2006, p. 41), or even powerful folktales (Phillips, 1995, p. 5).

The single most persistent criticism of constructivism is that it presents practical difficulties when implemented in an educational setting (Baines & Stanley, 2001; Kirschner, et al., 2006). Constructivists have been accused of advocating an approach to learning that is not adequately grounded in theory, impractical and largely unproven as an effective mode of learning (Land & Hannafin, 2000, p. 1; Baines & Stanley, 2001, p. 695). For some, constructivism is philosophically strong, but pedagogically weak, reflecting a gap between theory and practice (Tobias & Duffy, 2009, p. 4). Von Glasersfeld asserts that while constructivism is dominant in theoretical terms, much of what is done in the field of education reflects the oversimplified thinking of behaviourism, which is largely concerned with cause and effect and, particularly, observable results (1995, pp. 4-5). Others suggest that in the
practice of education at an institutional level, while constructivism is espoused in theory, the *transmission* mode of education continues to dominate pedagogical practice (Perkinson, 1984, p. 165; Mok, 2003, p. 2; Parkinson, 2003, pp. 230, 236). Administrative policies in schools tend to emphasise the more *visible achievements* of individuals, focusing on competencies and functions that are easily measured and often disconnected from the learner’s own experience of reality and the processes of personally relevant knowledge construction (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994, p. 268).

While constructivism is a key element of theory in many teacher training programs (Hausfather, 2001), Hackmann suggests that in the United States and elsewhere, constructivism has not been widely incorporated into pedagogical practice and one of the reasons for this is that the organisation of learning activities, particularly timetabling, is seen by some to work against the adoption of constructivist theories of learning in the mainstream secondary setting (Hackmann, 2004, p. 697). Another school-based criticism is the apparent devaluing of teacher expertise that some observers assert lies at the heart of student-centred constructivist pedagogy (Baines & Stanley, 2001, p. 695; Chrenka, 2002; Kirschner, et al., 2006).

As a learner-centric epistemological theory, constructivism logically places the teacher in a role that is different to that found in more traditionally didactic settings; the role of the constructivist teacher remains a topic of protracted historical and contemporary debate (Dewey, 1997 [1938]; Chrenka, 2002; Kirschner, et al., 2006). In the constructivist classroom, the teacher is a visible presence who scaffolds learner inquiry (Chrenka, 2002), acting as a co-learner and equal member of a learning community who shapes the course of study (Dewey, 1997 [1938], pp. 57-58). The teacher, in Dewey’s view, provides a supportive and well managed environment in which students explore their *individuality of experience* (1997 [1938], p. 58). Dewey adds:

> When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities (pp. 57-58).
This notion of the teacher relinquishing a measure of external control of the learning process is a key criticism of constructivism in practice (Kirschner, et al., 2006), as it is equated with leaving learners to their own devices. This is balanced against the constructivist criticism of traditional pedagogy:

*To fulfill the cultural desire for certainty, the conventional practices of schooling often discourage playful curiosity and experimentation and insist on the existence of the one right answer* (Chrenka, 2002).

Some of these criticisms reflect particular forms of constructivist practice (Baines & Stanley, 2001; Kirschner, et al., 2006), where constructivism has been adopted in name to suit institutional or governmental agendas. However, without sufficient understanding of the profound pedagogical and epistemological implications for classroom practice, constructivism is reduced to little more than a set of hollow slogans and policies that are educationally ineffective (Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008, pp. 72-73). One explanation of the perceived failure of constructivism as a pedagogical practice is the lack of a supporting body of practice-based knowledge (Baines & Stanley, 2001).

Constructivism is therefore not a single epistemological theory, but a collection of theoretical positions dichotomised in the writings along several different axes: for example, the individual-social divide, the novice-expert divide, and the adult-peer divide. The divergent theoretical positions between the social and individual approaches to knowledge construction are the most numerous, thus creating a new dualism, precisely what the pioneers of constructivism set out to avoid in eradicating the subjective mind-objective reality dualism (Liu & Matthews, 2005, pp. 386-387). This in turn creates further theoretical difficulties in resolving the learning paradox, discussed previously.

From this review, it can be seen that constructivism is theoretically diverse, terminologically imprecise, and difficult to implement in practice. What constructivists do agree on is the centrality of knowledge construction based on personal experience in the process of learning. The *construction* or *building* metaphor is the unifying feature of constructivism (Ernest, 1995, p. 461). Building on the model of individual cognition in Piagetian constructivism,
the theories of the social constructivists, pioneered by Vygotsky, provide a robust advocacy for socially mediated cognition in knowledge creation.

In the next section, the role of setting, which emerges from the foregoing discussion as an area of potential theoretical interest, is discussed in more detail. In the writings relevant to the two main forms of constructivism considered in this chapter, there is largely implicit evidence of the influence of setting on the process of learning (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934], p. 56; Wells, 1999, p. 38; Piaget, 2002 [1923], p. 269). However, the role of setting is not a prominent feature of constructivist learning theory and is therefore discussed as a discrete topic below.

2.2.11. Learning Environments and Setting

The final section in this general overview of learning theories considers the context, environment or setting in which learning occurs. This section contains a brief discussion of the role of setting, context or surrounding conditions and the impact these might have on the process of learning. This includes a brief summary of the different ways in which the role of setting in the learning process is interpreted.

For the purposes of this study, setting is intended to mean the immediate physical location in which learning takes place, including the tools, artefacts and objects present; each setting has an embedded emotional, social and cultural dimension (Marsh, 2004, p. 125). The term learning environment is used by many writers interchangeably with setting; it can, however, act as a broader term, including the location of learning, but also embracing emotions, spirituality, institutional policy settings (e.g., behavioural), local and systemic pedagogical practices, institutional and community demography, and the prevailing political milieu. For consistency, the term setting is adopted in this study to denote the location and context of learning.

While setting is seen by some as theoretically unproblematic (Van Note Chism & Bickford, 2002), acting as a container of human behaviour
(Engeström, 1993, p. 66), others, such as Vygotsky, see it as changeable and dynamic – and not a static entity to be taken for granted (Vygotsky, 1994 [1934], p. 346; Marsh, 2004, p. 125). Others see complexity in setting arising from the frame of reference through which it is viewed, for example, historical, cultural, institutional, or psychological; each perspective yields different interpretations of the impact of setting on human activity (Wertsch, 1991, p. 121). The overall impact of setting on learning theory, however, has been modest, attracting little attention from researchers and is therefore perhaps not well understood. There are no unifying or general theories to guide the design or exploitation of setting in student-centred programs of learning (Land & Hannafin, 2000, p. 2; Loyens & Gijbels, 2008). For some researchers, it is assumed that psychological processes are essentially independent of setting and that learner cognitive processes are spatially neutral or ambiguous (Poag, Goodnight, & Cohen, 1985, p. 71; Marsh, 2004, p. 129). This neutrality or ambiguity with respect to setting and cognition arises in part because its impact on the learner is seen as being largely indirect (Poag, et al., 1985, p. 104).

Even as an implicit element in many educational theories, setting does not feature as a core consideration in childhood development. An example of this is found in Vygotsky’s critique of Piaget’s evidence, in which the reader is alerted to the unacknowledged influence of surrounding conditions on the nature of speech in young learners (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934], p. 55; Piaget, 2002 [1923], pp. 269-271). In contrasting the social interaction between children in culturally different kindergartens in two countries, Vygotsky asserts that Piaget’s error lies in assuming that the findings in one setting would be applicable to others (1986 [1934], p. 56). Indeed, Piaget notes the differences in the data, but is focused on the developmental trend within the data stream, rather than the respective impact of the two settings, Geneva and Hamburg, on the ego-centric speech of his subjects (Piaget, 2002 [1923], p. 269). Vygotsky suggests that the higher level of group activity and the consequent reduction in the ego-centric speech co-efficient in German kindergartens points to the potential for a different set of conclusions on the matter of egocentric speech (1986 [1934], p. 56). Implicit in this criticism is the fact that
the generalised theory on egocentric speech is based on observations taken in two different cultural and social settings.

Vygotsky’s own perspective on the impact of the setting on learning reflects his awareness of the complex *interactive* relationship between the learner and the setting (1994 [1934], pp. 338-339). The setting acts as far more than an undifferentiated ‘container’ of activity for the learners occupying the space. The same learner and space will generate a changing dynamic as the learner develops and different learners within the same space will have an individualised, even unique interaction with the setting (Vygotsky, 1994 [1934], p. 339). Learners also utilise and adapt semiotic tools found within a specific setting to reflect their own experience of the setting. This may result in some discrepancies in communication acts as individuals at different stages of development use common words, but with differently nuanced meaning to describe their experience of the setting (Vygotsky, 1994 [1934], p. 345).

Each learning setting is unique, when socio-cultural, ontogenetic (experience across the lifetime of the individual learner) and microgenetic (moment of specific actions) factors are taken into consideration (Brown, 1988, pp. 3-4). Through the interaction between subject and setting, a unique, semiotically mediated relationship is established that will leave a unique imprint on the subject. The learning experience impacts on the learner, but the learner in turn exerts influence on the learning setting and associated artefacts (Wells, 1999, p. 38). Any mediated interaction between the subject and object may result in a net change in the learning environment beyond the learner, as agency is bi-directional and the learner will be both acted upon and in turn act upon the mediating agent (Wells, 1999, p. 38). Learners leave a mark on both the environments in which they learn and on the adults through whom their learning is mediated (Wells, 1999, p. 38).

Taking this notion of the relationship between learner and setting a step further, proponents of activity theory see setting as an activity *system* that is constructed by participants, possessing a physical, psychological, social, and cultural dimension (Engeström, 1993, pp. 66-67; Engeström & Miettinen,
In setting as a system, subject, object, tools and artefacts, and community are integrated into an interactive whole (Engeström, 1993, pp. 66-67), each component of which is constantly undergoing construction and revision and reconstruction.

More recently, some cognitive theorists have begun to acknowledge the role played by the learning setting through its interaction with the learner (Hickey, 1997, p. 175). Authenticity is an essential attribute of the ideal learning environment from a constructivist perspective: in authentic settings, learning problems can be complex and ill-structured to pose a challenge to learners (Loyens & Gijbels, 2008). Some have sought to focus on perhaps overlooked aspects of traditional learning spaces that might be modified to suit constructivist pedagogical approaches (Readdick & Bartlett, 1995). These voices, however, seem to represent a diffuse minority rather than an aligned mainstream view of setting.

There are practical difficulties in creating theoretically ideal environments that offer a degree of authenticity and present learners with realistic, complex problems. Conventional classrooms are settings constructed within an institutional context and as such are not necessarily aligned with the theory-driven demands of student-centred learning (Land & Hannafin, 2000, pp. 2-16). The inertia of existing setting design and institutional practice results in compromise as new approaches are heavily modified to fit into the existing infrastructure, resulting in domesticated implementation models that bear little resemblance to the original theoretical models that spawned them (Land & Hannafin, 2000, p. 16). This suggests that there may be a fundamental conflict between the type of setting that is needed for effective learning that is focused on the needs of the learner, and the conventional notion of an appropriate learning environment within an institutional context.

Virtual learning environments in classroom settings heavily modified by technology offer a way forward, albeit within the existing institutional educational paradigm. One such approach that seeks to resolve this dilemma is the creation of ‘Open-Ended Learning Environments’ (Oliver & Hannafin,
in which learners frame and tackle realistic problems using specialised on-line or computer network tools in modified classroom settings. However, the extent to which this approach confers a discernible learning advantage over a more traditional pedagogical approach is questionable, due in part to the tensions between institutional content-related constraints and the less structured objectives of open-ended learning (Oliver & Hannafin, 2001, pp. 28-29).

The *Reggio Emilia* Approach originating in Italy is a model of classroom design that is based on a specific learning theory. Aimed at early childhood education programs, the Reggio Emilia approach construes setting as the *third teacher* (Gandini, 1998; Cook, 2006). Based on the work of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bruner, Reggio Emilia is strongly constructivist, bringing the setting and learner into a direct, interactive relationship in which specific properties of the setting stimulate learner exploration through all of the senses (Swann, 2008). The Reggio Emilia learning space is a *container* for social interaction, but also acts as learning content in its own right (Gandini, 1998, p. 164). The employment of the Reggio Emilia approach is typically limited to early childhood educational programs.

Theories of learning exploring the nature of the relationship between the learner and the setting, and particularly the role of setting itself in learning, are not commonplace, but one such theory, the notion of *affordances* (Gibson, 1986), seeks to establish a theoretical framework to explore the boundaries and relationship between the learner (subject) and object. According to Gibson, an affordance is an invariant property of the object itself, not of the subject; the affordance or *invitation* is perceived visually by the subject (Gibson, 1986, p. 139). Hence a chair *affords* the possibility of sitting, regardless of the perceptions of the observer, and may therefore be used for that purpose if the observer is capable of decoding or perceiving that which is afforded by the object. The object or setting offers something and the observer must have the skills or knowledge to take advantage of what is afforded (Zhang & Patel, 2006, p. 335). The property of a setting or object, itself, may therefore play a role in the deployment of human intelligence,
drawing out latent capabilities and making possible certain types of developmental activity that might remain dormant in a different setting with a different set of affordances (Pea, 1993, pp. 51-53).

The cultural dimension of setting, when considered in the light of the theoretical proposition offered by Gibson’s affordances, has not been properly explored (Pea, 1993, pp. 51-52). Gibson, in ascribing an affordance to an object based on subjective visual perception, does not explore the implicit cultural component of the invitation offered by the object to the human agent. On the other hand, Pea (1993) and Zhang and Patel (2006, p. 335) all acknowledge that the construction of an affordance as a shared property between the object and the subject may in fact have a strong cultural bias. The affordance of eating implements such as chopsticks, for example, might be culturally constructed (Gibson & Pick, 2003, p. 16). The notion that a setting or object might possess properties that are independent of the cognitive meaning imputed by the observer also presents a theoretical difficulty for some constructivists (Greeno, 1994), who believe that this contradicts a fundamental tenet of constructivism regarding the universal subjectivity of meaning.

A further development of this concept is the notion that an artefact may possess qualities that become linked to the way in which an individual perceives and experiences the world. The employment of tools or other artefacts to extend perception does present a difficulty in identifying the boundary between subject and object and what is actually afforded to the subject. The boundary between the perceiver and the setting in the case of the blind using a sticks to aid in extending their range of perception is a case in point (Gibson, 1986, p. 41). Vygotsky and Luria refer to the psychology of the prosthesis to describe the artificial extension of perceptual boundaries by means of a prosthetic object (1993 [1930], p. 218). In this case, the prosthetic object possesses a property that affords the subject the opportunity to perceive and interpret aspects of the physical world to change behaviour. As a part of the physical setting in which an activity takes place, this type of prosthetic affordance points to the need for a better understanding of the way
in which a humans interact with settings, particularly in the course of learning through discovery.

In summary, subject-object interactions are unique and certain objects, such as settings, may possess qualities that influence the construction of knowledge in the subject in a particular way. This may be seen as a construction of the subject or an affordance offered by the object. In either case, what is constructed is dependent on that interaction. Settings, therefore, as one class of objects, have an influence over the learning process that is not fully explored in the theories reviewed here.

2.2.12. Summary of Key Concepts of Learning

Through our growing understanding of cognition and social mediation as the core elements of the interactive relationship between learners and knowledge artefacts, how the learning process is understood has undergone a profound paradigmatic shift. Taking a social constructivist perspective, learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon that seeks to resolve cognitive dissonance arising from the interaction between the learner and the learning problem. Learners actively construct their own version of knowledge by active exploration of the world through the network of mediating contacts that surrounds each member of a community. Learners are not passive recipients of facts in an intellectually inert transmission process. Knowledge arising from the experience of previous generations is not transmitted; it must be recreated by each successive generation, albeit with subtle modifications, reflecting the added experience of learners in the relevant chronological, physical and cultural setting.

The Vygotskian notion of the ZPD further enhances our understanding of the learning process, providing a powerful theory of development that transcends mere observation of learning and its underlying mechanisms. Through the ZPD, we find a theoretical tool that offers the capacity to design more effective programs of learning based on cognitively and socially optimised learning
conditions. By placing the focus of learning ahead of competency, but within a supporting scaffold of competence, the ZPD provides a major structural element for operationalising a model of learning based on Vygotsky’s ideas (Wood, et al., 1976; Wells, 1999; Daniels, 2001).

Many questions concerning the design and implementation of learning programs based on the constructivist model remain unanswered at this point. The ZPD lacks specificity in terms of implementation at a pedagogical level (Chaiklin, 2003). Critics refer to the constructivist model of learning as unproven or impractical, with an unbalanced emphasis on the learning journey, rather than the building of new knowledge (Wells, 1999; Land & Hannafin, 2000). The cross-disciplinary nature of socio-constructivism, in particular, has left it open to theoretical and terminological imprecision (Wertsch, et al., 1995). Constructivism in general has been characterised as philosophically strong, but pedagogically weak (Tobias & Duffy, 2009, p. 4).

The role of setting in which learning takes place, particularly in student-centred learning, is an area of theoretical interest arising from this general review of learning. Seen as theoretically unproblematic by many in mainstream conventional education, learning settings, when viewed from a student-centred approach to learning, require further attention with respect to the underlying theoretical assumptions used for their design and pedagogical utilisation (Land & Hannafin, 2000). Theoretical approaches, such as affordances, provide a different conceptual framework within which to analyse the interaction between the learner and setting, but still leave important questions unanswered (Gibson, 1986; Zhang & Patel, 2006), particularly in relation to the specific properties or ownership of object affordances (Greeno, 1994) and the influence of culture on settings and objects.
2.3. *Theoretical Foundations of Experiential Learning*

This section examines theories of experiential learning.

2.3.1. Introduction to Experiential Learning

Often oversimplified as *learning by doing*, experiential learning is the most historically pervasive form of learning in human society (Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, & Angelillo, 2003). Experiential learning allows learners, from novices to experts, children to adults, to acquire and apply skills and knowledge through active participation, solve problems, take calculated risks to learn from trial and error, and reflect on their learning (Kolb, 1984; Spera, 1996; Dewey, 1997 [1938]; Neill, 2006). Experiential learning also aims to develop self-confidence, analytical skills, risk recognition and management, teamwork and leadership (Neill, 2006). Experiential learning may make intentional use of settings that are distinctive, sometimes unusual, and often challenging, to present problems to learners that support of learning outcomes (Neill, 2006). Experiential learning remains a popular and influential form of institutional learning (Moon, 2004, p. 114).

Despite its historical prevalence, there are many conflicting views over the purpose, duration, setting, activity focus, and structure of experiential learning programs (Neill, 2004). While claims of the efficacy of experiential learning in achieving extraordinary outcomes for students of many different ages and backgrounds abound, the body of theoretical research underpinning its putative strengths is limited (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Itin, 1999; Neill, 2004; Rickinson, et al., 2004). Until relatively recently, experiential learning had not attracted the attention of researchers; Kolb’s model of Experiential Learning Theory model is the most recent contribution in the field (Kolb, 1984; Boud, 1989). Some claim that experiential learning holds little theoretical interest in comparison to more mainstream forms of learning (Boud, 1989). Where it has been examined, the organised research focus has often concentrated on experiential learning for adults and how it might be applied beyond school, often in the corporate world, and with a commercial orientation (Weil & McGill, 1989, p. xix).
In the following discussion, a review of the key concepts of experiential learning in the literature reveals that this mode of learning does have a rich and enduring historical provenance and a solid theoretical base to inform the design and implementation of experiential learning programs.

2.3.2. An Educational Definition of Experience

As a first step to examining theories of experiential learning, it is necessary to establish a working definition of experience for the study. Philosophically, experience is often defined phenomenologically (Cooper, 1993, pp. 3-5) in terms of consciousness of the world (Husserl, 1983 [1913]-b, p. xix); the notion of experience has both immediate sensory and post-sensory reflective connotations. The phenomenological world is the sum-total of objects of possible experience and experiential cognition (Husserl, 1983 [1913]-a, p. 6). Beyond the field of philosophy, however, the inherently subjective and interpretive nature of experience makes it methodologically complex to define (Fox, 2008).

In this study, a cognitive definition is adopted, whereby experience is the sum total of impressions and other input from our sensory network that connects the brain, and particularly the memory, to the perceived world beyond the individual (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffin, 2003). While what is experienced is often not understood if there is no pre-existing referent, through exposure and processing of the stimuli brought about through experience, the mind constructs analogues to accommodate or assimilate the perceived world (Piaget, 1952; Bruner, 1997). These analogues are one of the products of the learning process and, depending on relevance, applicability, and durability, are called on to compare current stimuli with previous experiences stored in memory to make meaning (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, p. xvi). There is a complex relationship between experiential stimuli, memory, and learning that is explored in this section on experiential learning and the following section on the function of memory in experiential learning.
Finally, this study is primarily concerned with educational experience, as not all experiences lead to learning, although all human activity yields experience (Dewey, 1998 [1897], pp. 231-233; Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 2). Much of human experience is routine and unremarkable, where individuals make as if assumptions on the basis of the perceived immutability of daily reality: Presumption is the typical response to everyday experience (Jarvis, et al., 2003, p. 61). Such experience does not connect directly to learning. Other responses to experience include non-consideration or rejection, where an individual makes an active choice not to learn from an experience (Jarvis, et al., 2003, pp. 61-62). In this study, references to experience are intended to reflect those experiences that explicitly or implicitly lead to learning.

2.3.3. An Historical Overview of Experience in Learning

Historically, there are many views on learning and its relationship to experience. While the view of learning as a process of transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, or a form of societal initiation, dates back to ancient Greece (Perkinson, 1984, p.164), learning based on direct experience and action has an equally distinguished historical provenance, including Aristotle and Confucius (Mayer, 1960, p.99; Henson, 2003, p.6). In The Republic, Plato articulates a theory of education that places experience as the primary instrument of education, where the trials of experience in the real world (the cave) complete a student’s education in preparation for service to the community (Plato, 1952, Book VII, 540, Trans. B. Jowett; Barker, 1959).

John Locke, writing at the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, details his views on education in An Essay on Human Understanding, asserting that all reason and knowledge have but one source: experience (Locke, 1952 [1689], p.122, emphasis in original). In Locke’s view, experience is the means by which individuals develop more abstract forms of cognition, specifically reasoning. Immanuel Kant, in exploring the boundaries of knowledge and reason, and the difficulties associated with a priori reasoning, agrees that our cognition, knowledge and experience are inseparably linked (Kant, 1996, pp. 44-52, 752-753, Trans. W. Pluhar; Kitcher, 1996, p. xxviii).
The idea of education as a process of individual growth emerging from experience first appears in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau (Perkinson, 1984, p.164). He asserts that:

*The gift of education...comes to us from nature, from men, or from things. The inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature, the use we learn to make of this growth is the education of men, what we gain by our experience of our surroundings is the education of things* (Rousseau, 1957 [1762], p. 6).

Significantly, Rousseau focuses his attention not on education as a process of initiation for neophytes or transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, but as a process in which the student is at the centre, growing through participation in the experience. He also recognises the importance of interaction with the learning setting – the *surroundings* – in education (Rousseau, 1957 [1762], p. 6; Duffy & Cunningham, 2001).

In the 20th century, many schools of philosophical thought sought to discover the theories underpinning our experience of the world and its relationship to learning. William James developed the notion of radical empiricism (1912), responding to what he perceived as a failure to ground rationalism in daily human experience. James suggests that the totality of our experience is quasi-chaos (1912, p. 65), with the individual as the nucleus of those experiences. There are two forms of knowledge emerging from our experience: perceptual and conceptual; our experiences provide percepts which form the foundation on which abstract concepts about the world are constructed (James, 1912, pp. 65-67; Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002).

Based on the experimental work of Pavlov, and pioneered by Thorndike, Watson, and Skinner, Behaviourism was the dominant theoretical paradigm in education throughout much of the 20th century that focused attention on the observable human response to experience (Skinner, 1950; Amsel, 1989, pp. 3, 15-19; von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 4). Educationally, behaviourists see learning as experiential reinforcement or patterning based on stimulus and response, or *training for performance* (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 4). While
seen by some as essentially *mechanistic*, behaviourist thinking remains a highly influential force in education (Gibboney, 2006).

The emergence of a student-centred focus in education, based on individual experience, was first mooted by Rogers (1969, 1983), arising from his client-centred practice as a therapist. Objecting to teacher-centric pedagogy with its focus on transmission as excessively authoritarian, Rogers places the student at the centre of the curriculum (Rogers, 1969, pp. 4-5; 1983, pp. 188-189; Perkinson, 1984, p. 151). This shift in focus is an important step in the evolution of contemporary experiential learning programs, where the teacher’s relationship with each student is one of facilitation of individual learning, assisting self-discovery (Perkinson, 1984, p. 151).

The emergence of 20th century experiential learning is often traced to the work of Kurt Hahn (Hahn, 1960; Hattie, et al., 1997, p. 44), who pioneered an approach to learning that focused on outdoor adventure and survival. Arising from Hahn’s belief that many fatalities in World War Two were the result of a flawed educational system that failed to provide learners with the resources to cope when faced with challenges, *Outward Bound* offers a challenging program of experiential learning in which the inner resources of students are tapped to endure physical and emotional testing in an outdoors setting (Outward Bound International, 2004). Hahn’s ideas of learning through experience have also been put into practice through other programs of learning through community service, such as Round Square and The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (Round Square, 2010; The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2011).

Finally, the development of contemporary experiential learning also has a political dimension, with Paolo Freire developing the notion of the *banking metaphor* to critique contemporary education. Freire sees education as a conservative system in which students act as passive accounts into which indoctrinating information aimed at achieving political ends, is deposited; classrooms remain orderly, students passive and highly receptive, reinforced by teacher mastery of their subject matter, and all are aimed at maintaining a
political and social stasis (Freire & Giroux, 1992; Browne, Hiers, & Quinn, 1995, p.207). This idea echoes the traditional transmission model of learning. Freire advocates education that emphasises a robust experiential course of problem-solving, involving real-world issues that challenge orthodoxies, particularly social and political issues, as a more effective means of learning for students with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Freire & Giroux, 1992; Roberts, 2000).

2.3.4. Deweyan Experiential Learning

The most important contemporary pioneer of a theoretical base for experiential learning is John Dewey, whose ideas form a unique combination of pragmatic constructivism and learning through experience (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 15; Henson, 2003; Pegues, 2007). Dewey’s views on education, and its connection with personal experience, retain a highly influential place in theories of learning and his ideas continue to resonate with relevance in contemporary debates on issues such as the role of the individual and society in cognitive development (Garrison, 2003; Gibboney, 2006). Indeed, some suggest that much of the current debate on education has not moved much beyond the progressive reforms proposed by Dewey (Dewey, 1909; Garrison, 2003).

Much of Dewey’s writing on education focuses on reform and how best to structure and implement a system of education that meets the needs of contemporary society (Dewey, 1909, p. 11). A noted pragmatist philosophically, Dewey proposes the idea that experience is the most effective way of teaching to achieve the greatest degree of social utility (Hoberman & Mailick, 1994, p. 19; Khalil, 2004, pp. 7-8). Dewey strongly advocates the need for an identity of purpose between society and education; he asserts that what is experienced by students in institutions of learning should reflect the values and practices of the wider community: Apart from participation in social life, the school has no moral end nor aim (Dewey, 1909, p. 11).

Deweyan pragmatism is captured most succinctly in his statement: Things are what they are experienced to be (Dewey, 1998 [1905], p. 116). The state of
reactive experience, however, is distinguished from knowing by a deliberate process of cognition that separates pure reaction to experiential stimuli from experiential knowing (Dewey, 1998 [1905], p. 117; Khalil, 2004, pp. 99-100). This knowing experience, for Dewey, is the organising force of all learning (Garrison, 2003).

As noted earlier, the dominant type of daily experience does not necessarily lead to learning, as it rests on the immutability of the experienced world and as such informs the formation of habits based on assumptions and routine (Miettinen, 2006, p. 252). When this routine is disrupted by an experience that causes these habits to fail, the resulting uncertainty gives rise to reflective thought and learning. Dewey’s definition of experiential education is:

*That reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience* (Dewey, 1921, pp. 89-90).

Thus, in Dewey’s conception of education, experience is not passive or static, and the educational merit of any given experience is measured by its continuity with future experience, the way in which it connects with subsequent experience and its capacity to shape or generate future behaviour (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, p. xvi; Dewey, 1997 [1938]). A novel experience is broken down, analysed and reconstituted through the process of learning that is both reflective and adaptive so as to influence future experiences. This is the Deweyan experiential equivalent of Piaget’s cognitive disequilibration, followed by assimilation or accommodation.

Experience as learning is characterised by two dimensions, one active, the other passive; in the active dimension, experience is concerned with trying something novel in an experimental way using previous experience as a framework; in the passive dimension, Dewey sees experience as something that is undergone, or absorbed by the individual (1921, p. 163):

> To "learn from experience" is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence (Dewey, 1921, p. 164).

In this sense, the individual acts within the experience and is in turn acted upon by the experience.
Experience that leads to learning requires more than an instinctual reaction to a set of novel stimuli. According to Dewey, thinking about an experience – reflection – is an essential step in learning:

Thought or reflection...is the discernment of the relation between what we try to do and what happens in consequence. No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought (Dewey, 1921, p. 169).

For Dewey, reflection is:

(T)he explicit rendering of the intelligent element in our experience. It makes it possible to act with an end in view (Dewey, 1921, p. 171). Action is a necessary consequence of experience for Dewey, as it distinguishes between presumptive and habitual acceptance of the routine and a genuine learning experience, the latter of which implies uncertainty (cognitive dissonance) and a responsibility to respond in a rational way:

Reflection is the acceptance of responsibility for future actions arising out of an experience (Dewey, 1921, p. 171).

Reflection is therefore the considered, purposeful conjecture that follows the experience of uncertainty, incompletion, and doubt. Dewey distinguishes clearly between different forms of reflection, from immediate trial and error, to more intentional and considered reflection (Dewey, 1921, pp. 173-176). Ultimately, reflection based on experience leads to tentative conclusions that are tested in the real world. Learners can never truly escape from trial and error arising from experience. For Dewey, reflection connects an earlier experience to that which will follow (Dewey, 1929, p. 109). While reflection is seen by some as an interruption to an experience (Quay, 2003), for Dewey, reflection is also an experience in thinking, complete with its own processes and outcomes (Dewey, 1921, p. 176; Quay, 2003).

Experience in education is a powerful tool and must be judged by its ultimate objective; when properly managed, experience, arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative and builds purpose (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 38), exerting a powerful motivating force well beyond its initial impact. Warning against the adoption of an uncritical acceptance of all experience as appropriate for educational purposes, Dewey states:
The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other (1997 [1938], p. 25).

Not all experience is educational and not all experience is desirable, in Dewey’s view, with so-called *mis-educative* experiences distorting growth and leading the individual to disintegration and dissipation (1997 [1938], pp. 25-6; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). This of course raises the issue of universally applicable criteria to assess the educational utility of any given experience, criteria which would in effect become the underlying philosophical and organisational structure of an educational program. In addressing the difficulty of determining an appropriate organising principle in a pedagogical sense to the task of formulating an experience-based curriculum, Dewey seeks to articulate an approach based on the utilisation of social factors that govern experience to distinguish between desirable and mis-educative experience (1997 [1938], p. 21). Perhaps responding to William James’ notion of experience as *quasi-chaos*, Dewey states that experiences, no matter how intrinsically interesting, if lacking a coherent, underlying structure binding them to an educational outcome, give rise to a disintegrated and unconnected curriculum (James, 1912, p. 65; 1997 [1938], p. 26).

A further concern for Dewey lies in learning experiences that he refers to as *collateral learning*, which equates to the notion of the hidden curriculum (1997 [1938], p. 48), namely that what a student takes in through participation in a learning program may be significantly different to what is intended by the designers or supervising teacher. The key determinant in distinguishing between appropriate experience and mis-educative experience is for Dewey the continuity of learning experiences that promote growth in a way that benefits society (1997 [1938], p. 56).

Motivation provides a clear demarcation between what Dewey refers to as the *traditional* style of education and the experience-based model of learning articulated in his writing (1997 [1938], p. 26). This is not to deny that students participating in more conventional academic activities have experiences, but it
is his contention that the experiences of students engaged in this type of learning lead to a gradual diminution of motivation (Dewey, 1997 [1938], pp. 26-27). Dewey’s focus is the design of learning programs that motivate students to raise questions that lead to learning to the benefit of the community. The educative quality of a learning experience, its capacity to shape future experience, and its relevance and capacity to benefit to the wider community, remain for Dewey defining characteristics of effective education.

As a contemporary of both Vygotsky and Piaget, the context of Dewey’s educational theories lies within the tensions between the theories of learning that pit the notion of individual cognitive construction against a socially-mediated formation of knowledge (1938, p. 56). In critiquing the individual developmental model proposed by Piaget, Dewey argues strongly for the primacy of the social dimension in learning, decrying the absurdity of spontaneous development from within; for Dewey, learning can only be understood as a socially situated process (Dewey, 1998 [1916], p. 263). Language development in children flows on from adult responses to the instinctive babblings of infants (Dewey, 1998 [1897], p. 229), a view in which Dewey concurs strongly with that ascribed to Vygotsky by Kozulin (1986). The critical feature of this theory of language acquisition in children is that it is achieved through experience and interaction with the external world. In rejecting the notion of development as an inwardly-oriented process, Dewey states:

What is called inner is simply that which does not connect with others – which is not capable of free and full communication (Dewey, 1998 [1916], p. 263).

In echoing the Vygotskian notion of socially mediated learning, Dewey asserts that learning occurs through interaction with external agents (1998 [1916], p. 56), comprising a type of dialogic inquiry in which semiotic mediation provided through the actions of other individuals allows the learner to acquire and transform the cultural resources needed to solve problems (Wells, 1999). The educative quality of a learning experience, its capacity to shape future experience, and its relevance and capacity to benefit to the wider community, remain for Dewey defining characteristics of effective education (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 26; O’Brien, 2002, p. 22).
Adult or mature mediation is seen by Dewey as the primary determinant in planning, facilitating, and filtering the experiences of students. The superior experience and judgement of the more experienced, mature person acts as the guiding force in selecting and rejecting experiences on the basis of their utility and propensity to provide continuity (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 39).

Management of an idealised physical environment in order to provide the most effective setting for learning is a further responsibility to be undertaken by the supervising adult (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 40). Floden and Prawat (1994, p. 37) assert that social constructivism has strong links to Deweyan notions of experiential learning and student-centred learning, and this is particularly apparent in Dewey’s description of the teacher as a the leader of a group of learners, a co-partner in learning (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 59).

The role of the teacher in experiential learning is typically based on expertise in a set of skills relevant to the program. Teachers are expected to facilitate learning, providing a scaffold based on competence and experience to support and guide the learning process. In contrast to the conventional transmission model of learning, in which the teacher provides students with a grounding in the relevant abstract principles of a topic prior to application in the real world, the order is generally reversed in experiential learning, with learning often occurring through reflection after participation in an experience-based activity (Laubscher, 1994, p.6).

The lack of an experiential dimension to traditional schooling and its isolation from reality is for Dewey one of the reasons for the failure of education to address the needs of society (1997 [1938], p. 48). Citing the education of things from Rousseau, Dewey (1998 [1916]) acknowledges the importance of connecting learning to the real world and, in particular, the surrounding setting. Learning, to be effective, must have relevance and application in the learning setting (Dewey, 1997 [1938], pp. 48-49). Learning is for the present, but connects with the future: only in learning to meet the needs of the present do learners acquire the skills to meet the demands and challenges of the future (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 49). Dewey's educational legacy is highly
pragmatic; he advocates authentic learning experiences to promote independent thinking; learning to solve problems has a social aim: to build a better, more democratic society (Freeman, Nelson, & Taniguchi, 2003, p. 25).

2.3.5. Dewey and Vygotsky: Common Ground and Contrasts

The common ground between Dewey and Vygotsky lies in their shared focus on the importance of the social dimension of learning; the contrast lies in how they viewed formal education and how they expected their ideas to be implemented in an institutional setting. Dewey’s (1909, 1997 [1938]) advocacy of the social outcomes of learning is morally prescriptive and pragmatic; this contrasts with Vygotsky (1978), who focuses on analysis and description of development and learning as a cognitive and socially mediated process. Dewey believes that societies form as a result of the acceptance of collective control, with individuals remaining under group control, even when there may be no apparent immediate individual need being met through the actions of the group (Dewey, 1997 [1938], pp. 52-55).

While there are differences between Dewey and Vygotsky (Glassman, 2001, p. 3), there is also considerable common ground between their theories and a somewhat puzzling lack of discussion comparing the two directly. Glassman (2001, p. 4) highlights the strong parallel between Dewey’s direct identification of experience with education and the role played by culture in Vygotsky’s thinking (1978), citing the connection between experience and culture in Dewey’s writing (2001, p. 4), a connection also noted by others (e.g., Neubert, 2009). Similarly, Glassman identifies inquiry-based problem solving motivated by individual or social utility as a core part of learning for both Dewey and Vygotsky (2001, p. 10). This perspective is disputed by Gredler and Shields on the grounds that Vygotsky and Dewey are influenced by different schools of philosophical thought (2004, pp. 21-22). Contemporary interpretations of the ideas of both Vygotsky and Dewey, however, have continued to evolve with the passage of time and as Glassman and Wang (2004, p. 20) remind us, recent reinterpretations should not be used to impose differences that were not apparent at the time of original writing.
The concept of experience and its role in education is a central feature in much of Dewey’s writing, but is not emphasised in Vygotsky’s work. What Dewey describes as *actual experience*, including the experiences of both students and mature persons responsible for guiding the learning of the young, has, he believes, an *intimate and necessary* bond with education (1997 [1938], p. 20). Going further, Dewey cites the *organic* relationship between personal experience and education as the one permanent frame of reference on which to base any theorising about education (1997 [1938], p. 25).

Vygotsky, by contrast, establishes a distinction between formal school-based instruction – what he refers to as *scientific* learning (equated with semantic learning) – and informal, experiential learning – referred to by Vygotsky as *spontaneous* learning. Vygotsky considers scientific learning to be systematic and conceptually rich, reflecting knowledge constructed through direct adult intervention (1986 [1934], p. 158). Spontaneous, everyday learning, on the other hand, stems from knowledge constructed from subjective, personal experience (1986 [1934], p. 158). Vygotsky, thus establishes a discrete theoretical basis for experiential learning that he acknowledges is connected to scientific learning, but offers different strengths, particularly learning motivation in the affective domain (1986 [1934], p. 158). Vygotsky cites clinical evidence of scientific learning capacity developing ahead of spontaneous learning in younger children, *as long as the curriculum supplies the necessary material* (1986 [1934], p. 147). He believes this is due to the *systematicity of instruction* and cooperation between the child and teacher, noting that children find it difficult to draw abstract knowledge from their personal experience (1986 [1934], pp. 148-149).

Vygotsky asserts that learning of an experiential nature is a qualitatively different aspect of cognitive development (1978, pp. 84-85). Vygotsky’s ideas regarding scientific learning are not fully compatible with the notion of student-centred *discovery* learning, which is more closely aligned with his definition of spontaneous learning (Panofsky, John-Steiner, & Blackwell, 1990, pp. 251-
This is because the most significant feature of Vygotskian formal learning is the primacy of the interaction between student and teacher, or child and adult in the learning process (Karpov, 2003, p. 66).

Dewey essentially rejects the notion of education in which the teacher is the arbiter of worthy content and only carefully selected experiences from the recent and distant past are valued. Dewey asserts the need to distinguish between past experience as the sole end of education and past experience as a means to achieve a more broadly focused set of learning outcomes (1997 [1938], p. 23). The power of experience in the learning context is for Dewey, undeniable: *Every experience is a moving force…all human experience is ultimately social* (1997 [1938], p. 38). Thus, Dewey aligns his thinking about the social dimension of experiential learning with Vygotsky’s.

Traditional education of the type Vygotsky might have identified as *scientific*, organised in a much more systematic manner without any realistic prospect of immediate application, is strongly criticised by Dewey as having insufficient social utility in both the short and longer-term (1997 [1938], p. 19). In his criticism of the traditional model of education, Dewey questions the imposition of a passive, *transmission* model of education in which teachers use *devices of art to cover up the imposition so as to relieve it of obviously brutal features* (1997 [1938], p. 19). The gap between adult-like competence and student performance noted by Dewey is seen as being so great, and the structure of learning experiences so rigid, that students are effectively *forbidden* from active participation in their own learning (1997 [1938], p. 19). Dewey notes that one of the underlying assumptions in this approach to education, apparently imposed by those in previous generations, is that future generations will be little different from previous ones and that knowledge is to be transmitted unchanged and unchallenged from previous times (1997 [1938], p. 19). This view of learning as a conservative force in society is not supported by Dewey (1997 [1938], p. 19).

Implementation of experience-based education and its associated difficulties is a concern for Dewey, and in contrast to Vygotsky, who as noted earlier is
chiefly concerned with the explication of observable phenomena (Wells, 1994; 1997 [1938], p. 21). At both a classroom and institutional level, Dewey recognises the necessity of conducting a thorough redesign of the conduct and management of learning programs once the underlying theory of learning is changed, citing the failure of earlier reforms as clear evidence supporting this contention (1997 [1938], p. 21). Vygotsky, by contrast, has little to say about the way in which learning and associated institutions and practices should be organised (Wells, 1994). Dewey is particularly strong on the purpose of education, the preferred nature of learning experiences and the way in which schools and teachers should function (Dewey, 1997 [1938], 1998 [1916]).

A final point of congruence of Dewey’s position with the ideas of Vygotsky concerns the bi-directionality of interaction between the subject and the mediating tool (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 106; Wells, 1999). Dewey asserts that experience similarly cannot be treated as a unilateral, isolated phenomenon arising from within the individual, as it exerts its own mediating force:

*Experience does not go on simply inside a person…every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had* (1997 [1938], p. 39).

Individuals are not passive recipients of an experience; they have the capacity to change the circumstances of the experience and future experiences. In a manner similar to the treatment of culture and cultural artefacts in Vygotsky’s work, experience has a cumulative property for Dewey, in which each experience is held to live on in some way in future experiences (1997 [1938], p. 27).

2.3.6. Semantic and Experiential Learning

The problem of connecting experiential and semantic learning at a theoretical level is touched on by Daniels (2001, p. 98), who sees experience as a motivating, moving force in learning, but one that is disconnected from semantic learning in schools. Daniels emphasises the importance of the relationship between these two different modes of learning, asserting that
failure to connect everyday empirical learning and spontaneous concepts with semantic (or Vygotskian scientific) learning will leave the latter inert and developmentally ineffective (2001, p. 98); this is echoed by Collins, et al.:

Consequential and problem-solving knowledge acquired in school remains largely unintegrated or inert for many students (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989, p. 455).

In acknowledging the debate on the mechanism by which semantic learning is internalised by the learner and made available for future use, Steffe identifies the problem of abstractions that are not experientially linked for the learner (1995, pp. 507-509). This is particularly the case where that semantic knowledge is abstract or not directly connected in some way with the learner’s experience of the world acquired by way of the physical senses (1995, pp. 507-509). Abstract knowledge presents a more difficult issue in terms of learning theory, due to the problem of internalisation (Cole, 1996). In the case of knowledge that has a direct connection to personal experience, perceived or experienced directly by the senses, this more readily become a part of the learner’s memories, available for recall and reflection without considerable effort in most cases (Duit, 1995, p. 275).

Within learning institutions, there remains a tension between experiential and semantic learning. Daniels advocates the need to establish curriculum-based links between the two modes of learning to allow semantic learning to be operationalised in the experienced world of the individual (2001, p. 98). In Vygotsky’s writing, we find a significant difference between the two modes of learning, providing some indication of the difficulties that may lie ahead for an intermeshing (Vygotsky, 1978). Experiential, everyday learning, much of which is learned unsystematically and at a very early age, but with direct relevance and applicability to everyday tasks and settings, contrasts strongly with scientific learning, which is often taught in a highly systematic way, with deliberate application, and very little direct relevance to the daily experiences of learners (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 74-75; Wells, 1999, p. 29). This suggests the need to review the theoretical relationship between semantic and experiential learning in the context of mainstream education to consider how a connection between the two might be established. Debate continues in the literature.
addressing the question of what should and should not be taught in educational institutions and how it is taught (Wells, 1999, p. 51). The connection between the classroom and the world beyond is under intense scrutiny:

> Perhaps as a by-product of the relegation of learning to schools, skills and knowledge have become abstracted from their uses in the world (Collins, et al., 1989).

The role of the teacher in semantic learning, as either a conduit for the transmission of knowledge or a facilitator through the provision of scaffolding, constructivist, experiential or otherwise, similarly remains a contentious issue (Tobias & Duffy, 2009, p. 5). Critical of the notion that schools should act as conduits for the transmission of knowledge, Wells asserts that while schools do have a role to play in the creation of a *socialising dynamic*, they also have a much wider role in creating and recreating society. The emergence of the *cognitive apprenticeship* model of learning, with teachers as masters making explicit connections between semantic learning and experiential, realistic tasks, is one suggested solution to this problem:

> Although schools have been relatively successful in organizing and conveying large bodies of conceptual and factual knowledge, standard pedagogical practices render key aspects of expertise invisible to students. Too little attention is paid to…carrying out complex or realistic tasks (Collins, et al., 1989).

This *invisibility* of expertise is particularly problematic when the learner seeks to leave the formal educational environment and assume a productive role in the community. This focus on *conveying large bodies of conceptual and factual knowledge* is interpreted by some, such as Collins, et al., as passive transmission, but without practical application; transmitted content is largely disconnected and isolated from the direct experiential base of the learner. Implicit in the transmission model is the notion that schools act in a unidirectional and unilateral fashion; learners act as passive receptacles into which knowledge is poured (Wells, 1999, pp. 52-53).

Schools that have not found a way of connecting semantic learning with authentic experience are in danger of become precincts of an *exotic kind of practice contextually bound to the educational setting* (Lave, 1997, p. 33).
Lave suggests the need for schools to adopt a practice that permits a gradually maturing approximation of adult practice through practical application of learning – a form of cognitive apprenticeship (Lave, 1997, p. 33). Learning that does not have an experiential dimension is therefore seen as being limited to an institutional context and having limited personal application.

2.3.7. Experiential Learning and Constructivism

While experiential learning theory shares much with constructivist ideas, beyond Dewey, there is little direct commentary in the constructivist literature dealing with the notion of experience as a form of learning. While some, such as Moon (2004, p. 2), assert that all learning is experiential, Miller and Boud see experience as only one of the means through which learners actively construct their own knowledge of the world (1996, pp. 9-10). Bruner, citing historical examples, notes that praxis always precedes nomos: the experience comes first, leading to skill, and before the process of constructing meaning out of the experience itself (Bruner, 1996, p. 152).

The way in which we construct understanding of our experiences is shaped by the thoughts and words we use to describe them (Halliday, 1993). Halliday draws our attention to the fact that it is through language that the connection is made between our experiences and the corresponding knowledge that is constructed:

*Language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge* (1993, p. 94).

Language provides the means by which we construct a more durable account of an experience for later re-use, reinterpretation, and recall. This view aligns strongly with the Vygotskian notion of language as the key mediating tool in the social interactions, through which knowledge is built (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934], p. 7).

Experiences occur in a social and cultural context that shapes the way in which learners construct knowledge from novel encounters, and according to
Miller and Boud, the experiential context cannot be excised from the experience itself (1996). They add that experiential learning has what they describe as a socio-emotional context, or a micro context, perhaps another way of describing learner affective factors, which serves to shape the way in which an experience is constructed in the minds of the participants (Miller & Boud, 1996). An important part of the social dimension of experiential learning is the extent to which individuals and groups are aware of themselves as members of a collective entity when engaged in an experiential learning task (Cates & Ohl, 2006). The setting in which the learning occurs and the nature of the problem encountered by the group will also have an impact on the relative cohesion of the group, influencing social dynamics significantly (Cates & Ohl, 2006, pp. 72-73).

The distinction between semantic or scientific learning and experiential or spontaneous learning is only briefly touched upon by Vygotsky (1986 [1934], pp. 153-157). However, drawing on Vygotsky’s assertion of the importance of the context of learning and its socially mediated nature, it could be suggested that experiential learning is similarly construed as an activity that occurs on a social plane external to the student prior to its internalisation. Daniels, in looking at different models of internalisation, refers to this learning model as the participation model, which explicates the means by which a social experience becomes absorbed into the cognitive structures of the individual learner (Daniels, 2001, p. 39). This model of external experience leading to internal understanding is also closely aligned with Vygotsky’s description of the process of learning (1978, pp. 84-86).

Rogoff also views the development of an individual occurring through participation in an activity and being transformed through that participation, rather than the acquisition of knowledge and skills (2003, p. 254). Through experience of participation in one activity, the individual develops the ability to apply that experience to new situations, or to construct a better working model of the applications of the experience; new problems are handled in ways that correspond directly to the prior experience (Rogoff, 2003, p. 254).
A final comment on the constructivist perspective on experiential learning comes from Piaget, who, in an observation about the nature of learning written in the latter years of his life, notes the tension between more conventional semantic learning and what he describes as *spontaneous* learning (1962), a term that he uses to describe less formal learning based on experience. While this relationship is seen by some educators as adversarial, Piaget (1962) insists that there is much that formal education could learn from other more spontaneous forms of learning. In fact, Piaget argues that learning conducted in a more active mode is perhaps more *productive*, tapping into the experiences and interests of the child (1962).

2.3.8. Experiential Learning and Problem Solving

Following Dewey, a number of writers, such as Wells, assert that learning ideally should be connected with the learner's experience of reality: experiential learning ideally takes place in the context of solving a problem that is encountered or experienced by a learner who is motivated in some way, either through need or interest, to seek a solution to the problem (Dewey, 1997 [1938]; Wells, 1999). As previously established in the discussion on the ZPD, the ideal problem lies beyond the immediate ability of the individual to solve on the basis of current knowledge or skills. Through the problem, the learner becomes aware of a gap in knowledge or skill needed to resolve the problem and assistance, often in the form of physical or semiotic tools provided by a more competent individual, is required to solve the problem (Bassok, 1997, p. 1). Learner generated mistakes arise inevitably as a result of this experiential process.

The genesis of learning as a cognitive process arises from the learner's attempts to resolve the cognitive conflict. Through this process, the learner becomes aware of mistakes, which in turn give rise to questions that play a central role in initiating and guiding learning through cognitive conflict (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1992). The learner, in ignorance, or through committing an error, potentially encounters *disequilibration* (Piaget & Garcia, 1991). Learning is said to have occurred when the disequilibration has been
resolved, although according to Daniels, the exact mechanism by which this is effected is still subject to debate (Daniels, 2001, pp. 32-35).

Challenging experiential learning problems are multidimensional, including affective domain factors such as planned disorientation, either physical or emotional, for learners, which are seen as being a necessary part of enduring learning (Owen-Smith, 2004). One way of engaging the affective domain in learning is to design learning experiences that offer a sharp discontinuity with the previous life experiences of the learner, a practice that generates *discontinuous experiences* (Williams, 2005). This discontinuity may not involve risk or particularly confronting problems, but may take place in a *place-based* setting as a core program element within a specific social setting (Theobald & Tolbert, 2006, pp. 271-274). Similarly, experiential problems should be open-ended, encouraging learner curiosity and openness, seeking to avoid the imposition on learners of pre-conceived notions (Freire & Giroux, 1992; Roberts, 2000, p. 2).

When facing a problem, learner motivation, one of the most fundamental psychological drivers, plays an important role in the process of learning (Tappan, 1998; Covington, 2000). Awareness of a cognitive gap, or conflict in the form of an error or knowledge gap, is one of the primary preconditions for learning, acting as a trigger providing causal motivation for the commencement of the learning process. In a metacognitive sense, a learner’s awareness of a semantic knowledge gap, characterised by Dewey as *genuine ignorance* (1997 [1910], p. 177) or error, creates the conditions and motivation to allow the learning process to commence. Errors encountered during the process of learning to solve a specific problem actually motivate further learning and in fact where the number of errors is reduced, the latitude for learning is also reduced (Seiffert & Hutchins, 1992, p. 183).

The importance of learner awareness of knowledge gaps and errors has contributed to the growing trend in pedagogy towards a greater application of metacognitive concepts for both for practitioners and learners to enhance the
effectiveness of learning (Bruner, 1996, p. 64). Through detailed examination of student errors and knowledge gaps, and how they are encountered, recognised, and managed, the potential exists to develop a greater understanding of the process of learning and what motivates learning at an intrapsychological level. In developing a better understanding of error as a trigger factor in motivating learning, both pedagogically and metacognitively, the potential exists to design learning experiences that enhance the development of autonomous learning.

Taking a different view of mistakes in the learning process, Perkinson adopts a Darwinian approach to the emergence and improvement of learning paradigms, suggesting that learning occurs through encountering and recovering from mistakes – trial, error, and survival – seeking a Piagetian equilibrium through the creation of new knowledge (1984, p. 169). Taking Perkinson’s idea a step further, through the experience of less effective paradigms of learning, it could be contended that more powerful paradigms will emerge as a result of this trial and error, offering even greater explanatory power to advance our understanding of the process of learning.

2.3.9. Experiential Learning and Setting

As noted in the definition of experiential learning, experiential learning commonly takes students away from their normal, everyday environment (Hattie, et al., 1997, pp. 44-48). The role of these settings in experiential learning is being discussed in a more explicit way in the recent relevant literature on experiential learning, but it is still typically viewed in an unproblematic or narrow way and remains relatively unexplored (Beard & Wilson, 2006, pp. 79-85). In some descriptions of experiential learning, the term outdoors is used to make explicit the contrast with the indoors associated with mainstream, classroom-based education (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 93; 2006, p. 87). The settings employed in the experiential mode of learning are described by some as distinctive and challenging, although these qualities are not typically explored in detail (Neill, 2006). An early and highly influential model of the experiential learning process characterises the
physical setting as neutral and impartial (Walsh & Golins, 1976, pp. 4-6; Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006, p. 64), but with a social dimension that influenced the learning dynamic in the physical setting. Some researchers have now moved away from setting as a passive or neutral given, asserting the affective influence of setting on the learner’s experience through generating feelings of unfamiliarity, isolation, dissonance, and anxiety (McKenzie, 2000, pp. 20-21; 2003, p. 14).

There is acknowledgement in the literature, however, that much of experiential learning research has been focused on activities rather than settings and that more work is needed on the theorisation of setting in experiential learning (Beard & Wilson, 2002, pp. 90-92). For example, in one extensive survey of the parameters of experiential learning, the only explicit reference to setting is environmental awareness (Hattie, et al., 1997, p. 48). In Itin’s diamond model of experiential learning the social, economic, political dimensions of setting are acknowledged, and existence of interaction between learner and setting is illustrated diagrammatically, but without describing the nature of this interaction and without ascribing any particular role to setting in this interaction (Itin, 1999, pp. 93-95).

Overall, the role played by setting remains unexplored or uncertain among those researchers examining experiential learning. The debate among experiential educators on the role of setting is currently focused on whether the mountains can speak for themselves, and if so, what they would say (Beard & Wilson, 2006).

2.3.10. Post-Dewey: Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory Model

After Dewey, there are very few fully articulated theories of experiential learning, but one such model is David A. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Kolb’s model is one of the most frequently cited theoretical references associated with experiential learning (Greenaway, 2005). ELT espouses a strongly Deweyan/Vygotskian foundation and incorporates a four-stage model of learning moving from concrete experience through observation and
reflection to abstract conceptualisation back to active experimentation (Kolb, 1984; Grabowski & Jonassen, 1993, p.253). While the ELT model is frequently cited in writings about experiential learning, it is a model that is essentially aimed at adult learners (Oxendine, Robinson, & Willson, 2004). ELT has been widely adopted in many different forms as a model for the design of vocational or professional training programs (Oxendine, et al., 2004).

Criticism of Kolb’s model focuses on several key areas. A fundamental concern is that, while based on Dewey’s ideas, Kolb’s model makes no clear distinction between non-reflective experiential learning, which arises directly from disequilibrium, where a real-world contradiction is encountered and resolved directly, and reflective experiential learning, in which the experience is followed at some later point by deliberate, purposeful reflection (Oxendine, et al., 2004). Some critics observe the Kolb’s experiential learning model is largely indistinguishable from more generic models of learning and as such fails to identify the unique elements of experiential learning (Henry, 1989, p. 26). Kolb also overturns Dewey’s notion of knowledge being created out of the learner’s contact with, and subjective interpretation of, reality through observation, asserting instead that knowledge is created through the experience itself (Oxendine, et al., 2004).

A further criticism of Kolb’s model is that it imposes a fixed cycle of processes in the learning cycle on individual learners; both the learners and the stages in the cycle do not appear to interrelate in the ELT model (Oxendine, et al., 2004). Greenaway asserts that this approach is not supported by our knowledge of cognitive processes associated with learning, in which there is rarely a set pattern of steps; instead there is wide variation according to context, need, and individual affective factors, all of which are not well accommodated by Kolb’s model (Greenaway, 2005). In particular, Webb (1980) finds Kolb’s model to be fundamentally flawed in asserting an invariant four-stage model that is not borne out in practice; learning, according to Webb, can occur at any point in the experiential process (1980, p. 2).
Kolb’s model has been extremely influential in shaping corporate, adult-oriented experiential learning. However, significantly for schools, experiential learning for younger learners is not specifically addressed in Kolb’s model, leaving an open question as to the applicability of this model to the secondary setting, particularly in view of the metacognitive demands placed on learners working within the ELT model of learning.

2.3.11. Criticisms of Experiential Learning

There are a number of significant problems associated with the implementation of different forms and expressions of experiential learning theory. These problems range from our understanding of the setting of experiential learning, through appropriate teaching methodologies, to the identification and measurement of learning outcomes associated with experiential learning (Kirschner, et al., 2006). It is seen as too impractical, too risky, or lacking academic rigour, and as such fails to produce new knowledge of any value (Hirsch, 2001; Karpov, 2003). This stands in contrast to the view of semantic learning as content driven, disconnected and producing inert knowledge (Wells, 1999).

One of the more significant problems is the issue of setting and the extent to which experiential learning settings should be controlled in some way, or allowed to reflect the real world. Classrooms and other mainstream learning settings are typically synthetic, with many of the variables controlled or restricted in some way and in which participants are insulated from consequences; natural or realistic settings, on the other hand, introduce a greater degree of reality and uncertainty to the learning activities (Hoberman & Mailick, 1994). Synthetic experiences are supplied by moot courts or other simulated environments in which the learning can be subject to much greater control. For the purposes of experiential learning, such realistic settings are by definition essentially uncontrolled, and as such pose genuine risks to learners; these risks require careful management (Fenwick, 2000).
Schön adopts something of a middle road between controlled synthetic settings and realistic settings, arguing for the need to establish a form of learning by doing that he calls a *practicum*; overseen by more skilled and experienced individuals undertaking a mentoring role, the practicum approximates the real world in its presentation of actual problems in all their complexity, while removing many of the risks, pressures and consequences that attach to real world tasks (Schön, 1987, p. 37). In this form of learning by doing, Schön argues that interactions with peers and teachers are equally important, and that exposure and immersion lead to what he terms *background learning* (Schön, 1987, p. 38).

*Guided discovery learning* is a compromise between a tightly controlled pedagogy on the one hand and an unfettered *discovery* learning approach on the other; by virtue of its empirical nature it can be considered to be a form of experiential learning (Karpov, 2003, pp. 74-76). In guided discovery learning, students discover underlying principles in a learning activity through sensory interaction under the guidance of an experienced mentor. According to Karpov, this type of learning has regained popularity in the last decade, but is flawed in its underlying theory in a number of ways. Most importantly, Karpov objects to the trial and error nature of any form of discovery, dismissing it as *reinvention* (2003, p. 75). He also criticises the acceptance of mistakes in learning, particularly scientific learning, as inhibiting the potential contribution to knowledge implied in a less than rigorous approach to accuracy and truth (2003, p. 75).

These criticisms may underestimate the importance of developing autonomy in learning, as well as the positive impact a culture of risk-taking can have on learning outcomes. Karpov’s conclusion that independent learning should be an outcome, not an instructional premise, does not address the manner in which independence is acquired as a formal part of the learning process (2003, p. 79).

A criticism levelled at learning that is activity-based and student-centred is that too much attention is focused on the process of learning, the *learning*
journey, with insufficient emphasis placed on mastery of the discipline-based knowledge (Wells, 1999, p. 90). Karpov also highlights the problems of misconceptions developing through the application of discovery learning in a situation where guiding principles are lacking in the development of program design (2003, p. 70). Wells believes that mastery of knowledge in its true sense equates to knowledge building and that this type of activity has several defining purposes: it must be based on steady theoretical foundations, purposeful, and constructive or transformative (Wells, 1999, p. 90). He adds further that this knowledge is not transferred from textbook to brain, but should entail research that creates new knowledge through answering the students’ own questions. The steady accumulation of prescribed knowledge for retrieval and display is already an outmoded model of educational; participatory knowledge building through joint action is the only way to give students a sense of proprietary ownership in both the process and the product, as both the questions and their relevant answers will belong to each student in a very real and personal way (Wells, 1999, p. 92).

With a firm grounding in personal experience of phenomena in the learning process, one infrequent criticism of experiential learning is its alleged preoccupation with empiricism, which in this context may be defined as the requirement to limit acceptance of the world to that for which experientially verifiable evidence exists (Feibleman, 1962, p. 43). A direct response to this concern is not readily apparent in the literature.

Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002), along with Wells (1999), all contend that experiential learning is only effective if it has a reflective and analytical phase that guides future experience and action. Yet the practice of reflection, which is accepted widely as an essential part of experiential learning, is often at odds with the student-centred philosophy on which many experiential learning programs are based (Estes, 2004). The common practice of post-experience reflection is teacher-centric, where the power to shape the way in which an experience is processed and structured rests with the teacher, rather than the student (Estes, 2004). Estes notes the incongruence of
student-centred learning in which the teacher speaks on behalf of the experience (Estes, 2004).

2.3.12. Experiential Learning In Practice

The current state of knowledge of experiential learning in practice as viewed through the literature reveals a number of areas of uncertainty (Miettinen, 2006, p. 244), some of which relate to the somewhat underdeveloped theoretical model of experiential learning, while others relate to the pedagogic approach adopted in a specific implementation of this model. Evaluation of experiential programs in terms of specific benefits and broader relevance of findings emerges as another area in need of attention and further study.

Criticisms of experiential programs, and the absence of sustained research into the nature and benefits of these programs, highlight the need for research to advance our knowledge of this type of experiential learning in a number of ways (Neill, 2004). Neill notes the absence of consistent evaluation methods and written research, highlighting the danger of outdoor educators adopting some of the more affective, informal approaches of experiential education in tackling the exacting demands of more rigorous research in this field of education (2004). Client focused corporate experiential learning, typically aimed at middle level management and largely based on Kolb’s ELT model or a variant of the Kolb model, has, according to Neill, driven the establishment of a healthy industry for adults with an associated body of research to support these programs (2004). However, the same is not apparent for school-based programs (Neill, 2004). In what is potentially a significant gap in our knowledge, Neill notes the absence of studies examining the ways in which outdoor education might be used to enhance academic learning in secondary sector schools. The duration and structure of outdoor education programs is similarly not based on a theoretical model aimed at maximising the benefits to participants, but on the availability of program venues and content (Neill, 2004).
Following more than four decades of studies affirming the value of experiential learning programs in the United States, it is the lack of development of more effective forms of program evaluation that generates scepticism outside the experiential learning field about the effectiveness of this form of learning (Hendricks, 1994). Hendricks suggests that in order to adapt and transfer those elements of experiential learning that have applicability in other forms of learning, the main research task is to discover the more broadly applicable reasons for success underlying those experiential programs that are found to be effective (Hendricks, 1994). Prior research in this field has also been focused on the merits of individual programs in isolation, rather than the broader educational benefits conferred by utilisation of the experiential mode of learning within a mainstream educational setting (Hendricks, 1994). For example, Smith (2003) reports that in one limited experiential program in the United Kingdom specifically aimed at linking experiential learning and literacy, significant results were achieved in building a connection between the experience and the academic skill, in this case, writing. Participants reported enhanced self-esteem, but it was also noted that they achieved observable improvements in their writing skills (Smith, 2003). Smith notes that the impact of the program relied to a large extent on embedding the experiential component within a mainstream literary curriculum (2003, p.3).

Finally, where conducted within traditional mainstream institutions, experiential learning programs may in practice merely reflect a different form of teacher-centred learning, in which the student is still compelled to follow a teacher directed course of study (Itin, 1999). Itin notes that there are many implementations of experiential learning in which the student is bound to a tightly structured curriculum, and in which the main difference to mainstream didactic learning is essentially a shift in pedagogy and perhaps, setting, with the teacher-centred structure left largely intact (Itin, 1999). Rickinson et al., in summarising a review of outdoor learning, note the use of fieldwork settings to enhance mainstream learning in the United Kingdom and in other countries is severely limited, particularly in the sciences (2004). They also note that the setting of outdoor education may have a positive effect on long-term memory, but without further discussion or analysis (Rickinson, et al., 2004).
Furthermore, echoing Hendricks, Rickenson et al., also assert that our understanding of the relationship between experiential and mainstream learning is not well understood (2004). As such, the practice of experiential learning in schools is challenging and as yet not fully developed.

2.3.13. Summary of Experiential Learning

Historically, experiential learning has been the dominant mode of learning until relatively recently. Learners construct their understanding of the physical world through personal, direct experience. Epistemologically, experiential learning is pragmatic: we deal with the world as we experience it, drawing on previously constructed experiential knowledge to make meaning of novel experiences so as to shape and connect with future experience (Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Experiential learning is fundamentally social in nature and relies on authentic settings and realistic problem-solving exercises (Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Experiential learning involves both a reactive and a reflective response: reaction to the stimulation of the sensory dimension, followed by reflection that leads to knowledge construction and further development and growth in the individual (Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Experiential learning is distinguished from semantic learning by the strong presence of learner self-awareness. Essential elements of experiential learning include: social interaction, individual and group problem solving, student-centred activities, authentic problems and settings, risk, and learning from mistakes.

Criticisms of experiential learning focus on its lack of a strong theoretical base, its focus on the process or experience, its underemphasis of the production of knowledge, and its inefficient trial and error nature (Karpov, 1995; Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Experiential learning lacks a concise, comprehensive definition due to its accommodation of a wide diversity of approaches and characteristics (Itin, 1999). Authentic settings and problems bring about risks that may be unacceptable to schools, thus leading to a tension between safe synthetic mainstream classroom settings and risky realistic environments. Learning experiences must be selected carefully as not all experiences are educational: routine experience may not necessarily
result in new knowledge or modified behavior in the future. Finally, experiential learning is less effective when conducted within rigid, teacher-centred structures in mainstream learning institutions (Itin, 1999).

Building on the notion of learning through experience, the next section examines briefly the functioning memory and the ways in which our experiences are stored and recalled in the process of learning.

2.4. Role of Episodic and Semantic Memory in Learning and Experience

The final section of the critical review of literature provides an overview of the relationship between experience, memory, and learning. This discussion considers developments in the field of the long-term memory systems, and specifically episodic memory and episodic learning. The central idea explored in this section is Tulving’s work on the functioning of episodic memory and its potential applications in education (Tulving, 2002). The discussion also includes some of the criticisms and uncertainties associated with educational applications of neurological and cognitive sciences.

2.4.1. Introduction to Experience and Memory

Contemporary psychology tells us that the relationship between learning, knowledge, and memory through history is complex: Socrates is said to have claimed that all learning (knowledge) is recollection (Plato, 2002, p. 111, Trans. G. Grube). The creation of knowledge relies entirely on learning and memory: the two are tightly interconnected, mutually reinforcing, but have separate identities (Howard, 1995, p. 3). New knowledge is in fact evidence of learning and the memory function associated with the creation, and particularly, the recall, of knowledge plays an important role in learning (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The role of memory is a significant part of experiential learning because it is only those elements of an experience that are stored in memory that will be
available at a later time for retrieval, reflection, and perhaps cognitive construction and personal growth (Howard, 1995; Willingham & Preuss, 1995). This is particularly important in the case of memory encoding and recall, as varying depths of memory encoding, and the presence or absence of external stimuli to trigger recall, may have a significant impact on the outcomes of any given learning experience (Willingham & Preuss, 1995).

There are different memory encoding, storage and retrieval functions applicable to knowing as opposed to remembering; with the former associated with semantic memory and learning and the latter more closely related to experiential learning (Tulving, 2004). Long-term memory relating to personal experience is highly context-dependent and relies heavily on the subjective sensory perceptions of the learner captured at the time of the experience (Styles, 2005, p.257).

2.4.2. Tulving’s Notion of Episodic Memory

In 1972, the Canadian neuroscientist, Endel Tulving, produced an influential paper, Episodic and Semantic Memory, hypothesising the existence of a type of memory that stored information relating to personally experienced actual past events, which he described as episodic memory (Tulving, 1972, 2002). Episodic memory is one of the two forms of long-term memory with close connections to semantic memory; it is the stronger of the two types and is related to setting and circumstance, with a rich set of sensory cues and stored contextual impressions to aid recall (Sutton, 2004). Tulving asserts that episodic memory is in fact an extension of semantic memory, and that it is unique to humans (Tulving, 2004, p.13). Episodic memory allows the subject to re-live a personally experienced past event (Tulving, 2002, p.xvi) or even to project forward in time to anticipate an event, based on previous experiences (Tulving, 2004, p.10-12). Episodic memory has a special relationship to time and place that semantic memory does not: an individual might know of an event that occurred at a particular time and place through semantic memory, but they can only remember it as a part of their own lived experience through episodic memory (Tulving, 2004, p.18).
Tulving argues that the creation of subjective time is a unique human phenomenon that is made possible through the interaction of episodic memory and physical time, which in turn creates the capacity for subjective time to be re-lived *autonoetically* in the future (Tulving, 2004, p.17). Citing the example of a tree falling in the forest creating vibrations that only become sound if there is an ear present to capture the phenomenon, Tulving notes that the slice of past subjective time – a sense of pastness – that is carried forward into the future is only recalled through the interaction between the physical time of the event and the episodic memory systems of the rememberer (Tulving, 2004, p.17).

Semantic memory relates most strongly to the storage and retrieval of factual and abstract information that largely lacks the strong contextual cues associated with episodic memory. Semantic memory allows the subject to recall knowledge about a particular subject, but in a *noetic* sense, that is without self-awareness of the memory as an actual experience, and without any temporal and spatial context (Tulving, 2002). Episodic memory, however, functions through semantic memory; encoding into episodic memory is dependent upon semantic memory processing (Tulving, 2004, p.13).

The close association of these memory functions with particular types of recall events is emphasized in Tulving’s writings, but this does not amount to an absolute identity of function for the two; e.g., in re-experiencing a past event through *autonoesis*, an awareness of self participating in the remembered event, the subject may also employ semantic memory to a lesser extent (Tulving, 2002). All memory functions are interdependent to a degree and they do not function as discrete cognitive processes (2002). Episodic memory creates autonoetic awareness – self-awareness – of subjective time and is strongly associated through recollection with a specific time and place (Tulving, 2002, 2004). According to Tulving, strongly recalled learning experiences are most frequently associated with episodic memory (Tulving, 2002).
In replicating Tulving’s experiments attempting to establish a clear distinction between semantic memory (knowing that) and episodic memory (remembering that), Snodgrass suggests that the context of encoding appears to have a significant positive correlation with the extent to which retrieval can be associated with semantic or episodic memory (1989, pp.170-1). This suggests potential significance for the place of setting in experiential education.

2.4.3. Episodic Memory and Learning

Due to the particular encoding, storage and recall functions associated with episodic memory, learning experiences that are described by Herbert (1999) as episodic, activate a distinct process of capturing and storing memories in the form of a complete episode, containing an interconnected set of sensory data, which are more likely to leave a deep impact on the student. For Herbert, episodic learning is in every sense, experiential learning. Herbert’s research into the use of episodically rich materials in an Australian tertiary educational setting revealed consistent improvement in semantic learning as a result of using episodic-rich materials to support or scaffold the learning (Herbert, 1999). The experiential framework or scaffolding of a learning activity is believed to provide learners with additional data to assist in the process of schematisation, where experientially derived stimulation forms a cognitive scaffold by which semantic memory is operationalised to organise and categorise retained knowledge (Herbert & Burt, 2004).

Semantic memory, lacking the contextual scaffolding of episodic memory, has been the subject of much educational research focusing on the enhancement of learning efficiency and efficacy. Foos and Sarno (1998, pp. 310-311) note that all memory encoding can be adversely affected by familiarity, with distinctive encoding and strong recall associated with unfamiliar subject matter and settings. The relationship between the affective domain and experiential learning is a further consideration, as some assert that memory best retains what is emotionally and subjectively significant (De Sousa, 2004, p. 67).
There is little mention of the employment of episodic memory as a discrete component of learning in the current literature associated with theories of learning or indeed experiential learning. Knapp reports there is virtually no literature discussing the question of episodic memory and experientially-based science field trips (2000, p. 65). Martin (1993, pp. 169-170) notes that while educational psychology places great emphasis on understanding the functioning of semantic memory in learning, the role of episodic memory has been largely neglected. Martin adds that this neglect may stem from a belief that episodic memory is less significant educationally, a belief that he claims stems from inadequate clinical experimentation on learning activities that activate episodic memories (Martin, 1993, p. 171).

Some limited investigations into the role of episodic memory in learning have been conducted. For example, Casareno, in examining the work of teachers managing teenage students experiencing learning disabilities, reports that learning with an intentional episodic memory connection, properly established and reinforced, has a positive impact on the learning and recall functions (2002). On the basis of limited observations involving a comparison of memory performance in verbal and action events, Knopf finds that memory performance based on experiential action events is more effective than verbal events that have a more specifically semantic knowledge focus (1995, p.131). While some recognise the importance of the relationship between episodic memory and learning, this has not been examined in any depth, resulting in the absence of ideas for the active utilisation of episodic memory in a pedagogic sense (Ulijens, 1997, p. 231).

The taxonomy of memory is still the subject of vigorous debate and the status of some forms of memory in the literature is at best unclear (Willingham & Preuss, 1995). While there is support from some quarters for further research into the ways in which memory functions in the learning process (Caine & Caine, 1994), this support is not universal. Some question the extent to which research in the field of neuroscience, such as Tulving’s work, can be directly applied to education (Backtalk, 1999; Bruer, 1999). Bruer criticises the
application of what he terms *brain-based research* to mainstream education, questioning its theoretical validity and the absence of research verifying some of the claims made in this field of research. Tulving himself notes that even with considerable clinical evidence to support the notion of multiple systems of memory, particularly through research performed on subjects with physiologically induced impairment of memory function, there is as yet little understanding of its practical applications, particularly among educators (Tulving, 2002).

In summary, episodic memory, as a function of long-term memory is highly durable and strongly autonoetic. The educational applications of this memory system are not well understood. There is, however, evidence of a connection between personal experience and episodic memory, and thus by extension, between experiential learning and episodic memory, that suggests the potential for the enrichment of learning through the intentional incorporation of experiential *scaffolding* utilising episodic memory. As yet, there is little evidence in the literature that this has been attempted, nor is there any substantial analysis of the pedagogical implications of this approach.

### 2.5. A Theoretical Base for Experiential Learning

This section defines key terms associated with experiential learning.

#### 2.5.1. Defining Experiential Learning

Much of the terminology associated with experiential learning implies some underlying commonalities, with some context specific elements: for example, the terms outdoor education, outdoor learning, adventure learning, experiential education, wilderness education, and environment education, tend to be used interchangeably. There is an implication that these terms are based on a similar or common philosophical approach and pedagogy, an assumption that is in some cases not wholly accurate (Itin, 1999; Adkins & Simmons, 2003). Fenwick observes that the definition of experiential learning has become problematic as it embraces a diverse range of activities from classroom discussions to wilderness team-building (2000). Henry suggests
that there is general agreement that experiential learning is about ensuring that people can ‘do’ rather than merely ‘know’ (1989, p. 28). This is also unsatisfactory, however, as it suggests that experiential learning may not have occurred if knowledge is constructed, but not applied in some form of practice. This terminological diversity in itself reflects the growing complexity and depth of experiential programs of learning, but also suggests that there is a pressing need to derive an umbrella definition of experiential learning from general principles to provide a guide for the further development of a theoretical model of experiential learning.

Current definitions of experiential learning in the relevant literature give rise for concern (Boud, et al., 1993, p.6). The term experiential learning is often defined in a self-referential manner, for example:

Experiential education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experiences (Association for Experiential Education, 2005).

In the web-based literature, a frequently cited definition states:

Experiential education is the process of actively engaging students in an experience that will have real consequences. Students make discoveries and experiment with knowledge themselves instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others. Students also reflect on their experiences, thus developing new skills, new attitudes, and new theories or ways of thinking (Kraft & Sakofs, 1989).

Such definitions seek to define experiential learning in terms of experience and as such are inadequate in that they fail to illuminate the underlying nature of experience in the context of this specific mode of learning. A further unsatisfactory aspect of many working definitions of experiential learning is the omission of setting or context as a potentially significant component of any learning activity. While what is experienced and how it is experienced are deemed to be significant, where the experience occurs is apparently theoretically unimportant; the foregoing review of key concepts, from Rousseau to Vygotsky and Dewey, suggests that setting does indeed play a role in shaping our experiences and hence our learning. These definitions also appear to fail to acknowledge the distinctive cognitive processes associated with experiential learning.
For the purposes of this research project the term *experiential learning* has been adopted as a general all-embracing term with which to identify models of learning based on experience. There is little evidence in the literature to indicate any discernible difference between what is intended by the terms *experiential learning* and *experiential education* in the specific senses used, save for the obvious semantic intention differentiating *education* from *learning*; education refers in a formal sense to matters of educational policy, institutions, courses of study and associated qualifications, all with a strong organisational dimension, whereas learning is seen as an activity within an educational context focusing on the actions and outcomes for the individual learner (Itin, 1999). With the exception of direct quotations, the former term – *experiential learning* – is adopted throughout this thesis as the preferred term, having its focus on the learner.

### 2.5.2. The Essential Elements of Experiential Learning

In locating experiential learning within the broader theoretical framework of mainstream learning, there are a number of unique defining characteristics and features that distinguish experiential learning from other modes of learning. Miller and Boud define *experience* as:

> The totality of the ways in which humans sense the world and make sense of what they perceive (Miller & Boud, 1996, p.8).

In the context of an experience, *learning* is described as:

> The process which takes this experience and transforms it in ways which lead to new possibilities, which may involve changes in actions, ways of viewing the world or relationships (Miller & Boud, 1996, p.8).

This definition of experience largely aligns with the notion of *percepts* articulated by William James (1912). The process of learning from an experiential perspective, on the other hand, embodies a number of essential parameters, ranging from socially-mediated knowledge building, to memorability and authentic settings.
Finally, a constructivist definition sees experiential learning as a process of cognitive construction that occurs when the brain is stimulated through contact with the experienced world and that results in new knowledge and changed behaviour or attitudes (Mowrer & Klein, 2001, pp. 1-2). This definition is adopted for this study.

It is implicit in some of the terms used in experiential education – outdoor, environmental, and wilderness – that setting is an important characteristic of experiential learning, whereas it is at best neutral, for conventional, semantic learning (Land & Hannafin, 2000, p.2). Setting, particularly beyond the classroom, plays an important part in differentiating some forms of experiential learning from semantic learning. Of course, not all experiential learning occurs outdoors (Barnes, 2005, p. 3). In considering the full extent of experience as a model of learning, any definition should therefore include the notion of setting as part of experience in the fullest sense, embracing a comprehensive range of potential settings that may serve an educational purpose, from cultural settings, to local urban or even home settings – perhaps even within the conventional classroom when used in an experiential way, such as the approach to learning described by Herbert (1999). From this it can be seen that terms such as outdoor education, while describing programs that may conform to the experiential learning model, in fact apply to what is a sub-category of experiential learning.

The memorability of experiential learning activities, in which learners have a strong autonoetic sense of their own physical participation in an activity at a specific time and place, emerges as another key element to differentiate semantic and experiential knowing (Martin, 1993; Herbert, 1999; Knapp, 2000).

From the foregoing review of literature relevant to theories of learning and in particular, experiential learning, a comprehensive and theoretically consistent model emerges, which should include the following elements:

1. experiential learning is a social enterprise with the student placed at the centre of learning activities; learning occurs through socially and
culturally mediated interaction with others (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978, trans.; Henson, 2003);
2. experiential learning is strongly autonoetic; memories are encoded and stored in episodic memory (Tulving, 2002);
3. experiential learning relies on intentional interaction with a learning environment or activity setting (Miller & Boud, 1996), including its:
   a. physical environment
   b. socio-political milieu
   c. economic context
   d. chronological frame (Cole & Wertsch, 1996) and
e. cultural setting (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002)
4. experiential learning requires active participation in scaffolded, realistic problem-solving activities (Bruner, 1996, p.65; Gordin, Hoadley, Means, Pea, & Roschelle, 2000);
5. risk-taking is an integral part of learning process, with learners expected to make and learn from mistakes to develop self-reliance (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1997 [1938]);
6. reflection on experience is incorporated as an integral element of learning (Dewey, 1921, 1997 [1938]; Fenwick, 2000);
7. experiential learning is a transformative experience leading to personal growth (Miller & Boud, 1996; Dewey, 1997 [1938]); and
8. new knowledge is constructed by participants as an outcome of participation in experiential learning (Wells, 1999).

These eight elements will be used to provide a framework for examining existing experiential learning programs, and will act as a guide in discussion on the wider applicability of experiential learning ideas and approaches in mainstream educational programs.

2.6. **Review of Research Questions**

This section restates the research questions in light of the review of key concepts.
2.6.1. A Refinement of the Research Questions

The research questions arising from this review of key concepts point to a significant gap in our knowledge about the nature of experiential learning, particularly in the context of secondary schooling; they also point to the need to consider the extent to which the findings of this investigation into experiential learning may also contribute to the reform of mainstream education.

As stated in Chapter One, the research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

a. What is the theoretical model of learning which underpins these programs?

b. What elements of the model are essential and what might be optional?

c. What elements of the model might be incorporated into mainstream schooling?

2.6.2. Implications of Review for Research Questions

This review of key concepts shows that the basis of a theoretical foundation for experiential learning exists in the literature, but no clear agreement has been achieved on a single theoretical model. As well, the writings concerning experiential learning cited show that its philosophies and espoused practices are broadly consistent with the key contemporary theories of learning. The review has also identified eight elements of experiential learning that should form part of a comprehensive theoretical model of experiential learning.

The review shows clear differences, however, between experiential and semantic learning that remain as yet largely unexplored, particularly in theoretical terms. The most influential theoretical models of experiential learning are also limited in their portrayal of the social dimension of learning, the precise role of setting in experiential learning, and potential variations in experiential learning for different age groups, particularly school-aged children.
The educational implications of Tulving’s notion episodic memory, particularly in experiential learning, remain uncertain and largely unexplored. The review shows that there are very few programs of learning of any type that intentionally employ episodic memory through autonoetic awareness to support learning outcomes. In fact, there is very little in the theoretical writings on experiential learning that specifically address taxonomies and functions of memory from a pedagogical perspective. However, there does appear to be a connection between personal experiences and the way in which these are encoded and recorded in long-term memory that warrants further consideration in this study.

The impact of the setting in which learning takes place, and the extent to which a learner might interact directly with an artefact or the setting itself, emerges as another area of interest from the review. Experiential learning settings need to be authentic and provide problems for learners to solve, but the review does not provide a clear picture of the theoretical role of setting in learning. Lastly, the potential application of the notion of affordances as a core theoretical concept in experiential learning is an area of interest for further investigation.

2.7. Summary of Chapter

Constructivism is the dominant theoretical paradigm in education in which learning is not a process of knowledge transfer from teacher to learner, but a process in which learners actively construct their viable version of knowledge, making meaning from their own experience of the world (von Glasersfeld, 1995; Wells, 1999). Constructivists hold divergent views on the role of social mediation in learning: some believe that knowledge is individually constructed (Piaget, 1952), whereas others assert that it is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986 [1934]).
In constructivism, cognitive equilibrium reflects a dynamic balance between the experienced world and the constructed inner model (Piaget, 1952). Disequilibration occurs when a novel experience disrupts this stable cognitive state and triggers learning (Piaget, 1952; Seiffert & Hutchins, 1992; Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Constructivist learning recognises two cognitive processes, assimilation and accommodation, that re-establish cognitive equilibrium through incorporation of the novel experience into existing cognitive structures (Piaget, 1952). The Zone of Proximal Development is a Vygotskian notion that seeks to optimise socially mediated learning through an intelligent management of disequilibration. It describes the state or zone in which learners undertake learning tasks beyond their level of experience or competence, but within a scaffold of support provided by a supportive competent individual or artefact (Wood, et al., 1976; Vygotsky, 1978).

Experience is the totality of ways in which humans sense the world and experiential learning is how they make sense of what they perceive (Miller & Boud, 1996). Experience of the world is a pre-condition of human learning, because in order to learn and understand, we must first experience (Wells, 1999; Daniels, 2001). Novel problems are thus handled in ways that reflect the sum total of our prior experience (Rogoff, 2003). While we experience as individuals, all human experience is a dynamic force that is ultimately social (Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Language is a social artefact that is an essential condition of knowing; our experience becomes knowledge through language (Halliday, 1993; Wells, 1999).

Experiential learning is a process of reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases our ability to direct subsequent experience, or leads to new possibilities (Dewey, 1921; Miller & Boud, 1996). Experiential learning emphasises both doing and knowing, where knowledge is transformative and applicable in the real world (Dewey, 1997 [1938]; Wells, 1999). Authentic settings are important in experiential learning as each transaction has a unique social and cultural micro-context which shapes the way in which we make meaning from an experience (Miller & Boud, 1996; Rickinson, et al., 2004). Understanding is
achieved through reflection which is the process of knowledge creation
directing subsequent experience (Dewey, 1921).

Our recollections of personal experiences are encoded and stored in episodic
memory, a durable form of first-person, long-term memory that is highly
autonoetic (Tulving, 2002). Episodic memory is highly context dependent,
fixing an experience in a setting according to subjective circumstance
(Tulving, 2002; Styles, 2005). Episodic memories allow the individual to return
to an experience in its setting at any point in the future, in contrast to semantic
memory, which is linked to knowledge of facts without direct reference to the
context in which the facts were first learned (Tulving, 2004).

In summary, the review of key concepts shows that experiential learning is
socially-mediated and student-centred (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978;
Henson, 2003); it is strongly autonoetic (Tulving, 2002); it relies on distinctive
settings (Miller & Boud, 1996); it requires realistic problem-solving activities
(Bruner, 1996, p. 65; Gordin, et al., 2000); it involves risk and allows learners
to make mistakes (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1997 [1938]); it involves reflection
(Dewey, 1921, 1997 [1938]; Fenwick, 2000); it is transformative, leading to
personal growth, and the construction of new knowledge (Miller & Boud, 1996;

This summary of the properties of experiential learning provides an
interpretive theoretical framework from which to proceed to the investigation
phase of the study in which the theory of learning underpinning experiential
learning programs in practice will be examined.
3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The aim of the study has been to document and examine the theoretical underpinnings of the learning activities undertaken in a series of Australian experiential programs. In this chapter the choice of approach to research and the methods and techniques employed for data gathering and analysis are presented and explained. The chapter is divided into five sections: the first provides an overview of the methodological base and approach; the second presents and explains the methodological choices made for the study; the third sets out the methods and instruments used in data collection; the fourth section details the analytic methods used; and the fifth section summarises these four steps.

The study adopts Argyris and Schön’s notion of *theories of action* as an overarching theory in the documentation of representative programs (Argyris & Schön, 1974). This notion asserts that intentional actions can be seen as designs to realise values, themselves choices made on the basis of beliefs about the world (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 9-11; Argyris, 1999, p. 126). Within this framework, actions are undertaken by individuals based on theories operating at two levels: at one level, the person’s *espoused theory of action* reflects their publicly professed beliefs and intentions; at another level, the theoretical construct reflects what the authors term *theory in use* (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 6-7): the beliefs and values that actually inform and guide the actions taken by the individual. Individuals are usually unaware of their *theory in use* and it can only be accessed through analysis of actual action, when it will be found to be more or less congruent with the same individual’s espoused theory of action. This is because all value sets contain potential contradictions – internal clashes in values – and in such cases, it is theory-in-use which generates action, whether it is congruent with espoused theory or not.
In light of this theory, the design of programs that are the focus of the study are understood to reveal the theory-in-use of the program, while practitioner statements express espoused theory. As noted, these two sets may be found to be more or less congruent.

3.2. Choice of Research Methodology

3.2.1. Introduction

This section examines the rationale for choosing a particular research methodology as the over-arching paradigm for the study and argues that a qualitative approach is consonant with the topic and aims.

There is a rich and rapidly growing body of literature on qualitative methodology that reveals an increasing diversity and complexity of approaches and methods, the end result of which is that there is no single methodological model or prescribed set of rules for qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, pp.191-2). In fact, it can be asserted that in the interests of its key values – research authenticity, fairness and trustworthiness – a range of methods selected as the best tools for the task at hand, creates the potential for findings that are more authentic. The methods chosen should be those that are best suited to providing answers to the research question(s) (Benz & Newman, 1998, p.15).

3.2.2. Qualitative Methodology: A Definition of Terms

There is considerable terminological imprecision surrounding the term qualitative research in the literature (Potter, 1996, p.14; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp.xv-xvi). It is described as being essentially interpretive in nature, a process in which the researcher is acknowledged as having an active role in making choices about emphases and constructing knowledge based on these choices; it is also defined negatively in terms of the absence of statistics or references to any form of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp.10-11;
Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.xvi). The qualitative research paradigm is a world view that embraces many different approaches and definitions, while defying attempts to establish a single, over-arching definition of its properties and delimitation of its extent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.15; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.xv). Many methods and approaches are embraced within the qualitative paradigm, including ethnography, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory, hermeneutic, and ‘naturalistic’ inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Potter, 1996, pp.5-6). In fact, the relationship between many of these terms and qualitative methodology is asymmetrical, in that they are not interchangeable; each embodies one or more aspects of the qualitative paradigm, while none conveys its full sense as an umbrella term (Potter, 1996, p.14).

For the purposes of this study, the term qualitative is adopted in its generally accepted interpretive, paradigmatic sense (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.xvi).

Qualitative methodology is selected for the study as the approach best suited to fulfilling the aims of the study: it is consonant with the topic and nature of the data being sought (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A qualitative methodology permits access to information on the nature and qualities of programs and the largely private, even hidden, intentions and aspirations of the people who design and run them. This methodology is also well suited to examining topics about which little is known and in which the research is seeking to understand processes and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11).

3.2.3. Constructivist Epistemology: Reality and Viability

Research, by virtue of its fundamental purpose to create new understandings and fill gaps in our existing knowledge, must seek to break new ground. Research methodology therefore forms an essential component of the interface between the known and the unknown: it shapes the way in which we discover what is unknown; it also serves to link our discoveries in some fashion to existing knowledge. There are those who assert that what is real in the knowable world can be described and explained: a positivist position.
From an alternative perspective, however, knowledge is created through human acts of meaning making, and thus the new knowledge arising from research emerges from an act of intentional interpretation and construction conducted on an individual basis. Although it may include an ontological position that accepts the existence of ‘something beyond the self’, the epistemology implicit in constructivism necessitates rejection of the notion of a knowable, positivist reality awaiting discovery by the researcher, asserting instead that there are multiple, individually constructed versions of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). From a constructivist perspective, the process of knowing is necessarily one of adaptation to the experiential world and, according to von Glasersfeld, it is an approach in which reality is replaced with viability: concepts, ideas, and experiences are pieced together to create cognitive structures reflecting the world as experienced by the individual (1995, pp. 6-8).

Some aspects of reality are indeterminate or unknowable with any certainty and the pursuit of reality that characterises some qualitative research may harm or limit the research (Talburt, 2004). Where undue emphasis is placed on the verification of research hypotheses through linkage with an assumed observable reality, the scope of research may be prevented from examining more theoretically challenging domains of abstract knowledge that defy such positivist verification (Talburt, 2004). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 104), pioneers of the grounded theory method, one of the perceived epistemological strengths of the qualitative paradigm (and an implied shortcoming of the positivist paradigm) is the liberation of the researcher from the constraints of overemphasis on verification of existing knowledge. Qualitative methods are therefore particularly suited to the development of new theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Lincoln and Guba also highlight the strength of the qualitative paradigm, particularly in the area of theory generation; qualitative research methodology is particularly well suited to conduct emic research (1985, pp. 24-28), where it is the insider’s knowledge within a bounded site or group that is being sought.
3.2.4. Ecumenical Methods within Qualitative Methodology

In choosing a qualitative research methodology for this study, the researcher is seeking the approach best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of experiential learning at a theoretical level. However, this decision does not preclude the incorporation of methods and approaches from other methodologies. Research methodology has undergone a transformation in the past decade that has seen a substantial blurring of what were once stark philosophical and methodological distinctions between competing quantitative and qualitative research paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 191). Indeed, there is also a view that the perception of a dichotomy between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms is false, that all belong to a unified interactive continuum (Benz & Newman, 1998, pp. 11-12).

The advocacy for a form of epistemological ecumenism, in which both qualitative and quantitative methods are adopted to form a hybrid approach, is aimed at producing more robust and rigorous research (Onwuegbuzie, 2002; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By creating an interplay between qualitative and quantitative methods, the research process is enriched to produce more comprehensive and strongly integrated findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 31-33).

This ecumenical approach was adopted in the current study in a small way. Thus as a preliminary step to the main data collection phase of the study, an initial survey of secondary schools offering experiential learning programs was conducted which yielded some basic quantitative data about the prevalence of these programs, their distribution across Australia, the year-levels targeted, and duration of programs. These data were then used to shape the study design in terms of school sector, the number of schools offering experiential programs, program duration and focus, program locations, and schooling system. These data yielded information about the essential variables in school and program type that was then employed to determine the size of the sample needed to include a representative of each different category. In the data collection and analysis phase of the study, frequency counts were employed.
to establish the relative importance of concepts emerging from the data and these in turn acted as one of the parameters used interpretively by the researcher to construct theoretical structures through analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11).

3.2.5. Validity and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

The extent to which the qualitative paradigm is valid, authentic and trustworthy is the topic of considerable discussion in the literature. Even the term validity itself is problematic when describing qualitative research, due to its association with the positivist paradigm and the implied assertion of a single objective validity, a notion explicitly rejected by the constructivist perspective (Reason, 2005, p. 10).

In general, the literature on educational research methodology strongly endorses the adoption of a qualitative approach to explore new theoretical perspectives, but there are, nonetheless, some concerns about the status of this approach in academic research (Ellis, 2005, p. 7; Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005, p. 3; Lincoln, 2005, p. 171). The concerns focus on the apparent trend in educational research, particularly in the United States, in which a positivist methodological research paradigm, emphasising experimentation, is being viewed as superior to other research paradigms (Lincoln, 2005, p. 171). This trend seeks to elevate replication and generalisability in scientifically-based or evidence-based research as the sole criteria by which valid research may be judged (Harry, et al., 2005, p. 3). The suitability of a positivist methodological approach for research questions in the field of the social sciences that require a deeper level of understanding is particularly questionable (Harry, et al., 2005, p. 3); indeed the open-ended inductive logic on which proofs of generalisability are based may be inappropriate, or even flawed, in social science research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 133-134).

Rather than seeking to establish the legitimacy of research through the validity of findings in the empiricist sense, qualitative research is instead
validated through the legitimacy and importance of the research questions, established in the light of prevailing needs of society, professional practice, and prevailing moral and ethical values (Reason, 2005, p. 12). As Schön so aptly describes it, the significant research questions, that is those worthy of effort because of their complexity and indeterminate nature and importance to human concern, lie in ‘the swamp’ of uncertainty (1987, p. 3). Indeed, the clear-cut problems that invite analytical attack by methods of academic rigor and technical rationality are often relatively unimportant to those involved in social practices (Schön, 1987, p. 3).

The choice of research methodology is a matter of considerable complexity. A key criterion is that to have the potential to produce answers to the research questions, a suitable methodology must be consonant with the nature of the problem and the knowledge being sought. These considerations are also directly related to a more basic question at issue, which is that of trustworthiness: can the findings produced by such an approach be of sufficient trustworthiness that they may be acted upon (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205)? This question not only encompasses the rigor of the methods used in the process of the study, but also the trustworthiness of the interpretations on which the findings are ultimately based (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). The orientation of this question also focuses on the consumer of the findings – the readership – as the party for whom trustworthiness is of ultimate concern (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 328).

Trustworthiness is based on a number of criteria, including credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability, and authenticity; triangulation and negative case confirmation are among key means advocated to enhance the trustworthiness of research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 328-331). The operationalisation of these criteria is a matter of judgement on the part of the researcher, and the ultimate evaluation is in the hands of the readers. Trustworthiness is not an objective binary state, but an open-ended scale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 329). Sufficiency of detail and depth in description of the context under research allows the reader to make reasonable
judgements about the applicability (and ultimately) the trustworthiness of findings.

In considering the most appropriate research design for this study – examination of the theoretical underpinnings of experiential learning programs – the unique interaction between learner and specific settings would tend to preclude generalisability in the sense required to meet the demands of ecological validity (Gliner & Morgan, 2000, p. 160). Transferability has therefore been adopted as a more accurate and methodologically sound concept to describe the extent to which the findings of this study are applicable in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124).

Achieving an acceptable degree of transferability depends largely on the similarity of the two contexts; the judgement about transferability is made by the individual seeking to make the comparison and this judgement depends on a detailed knowledge of both contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 124-125). Comparison is facilitated through highly detailed data, famously called thick description by its creator, Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 3-10). Thick descriptions offer the reader the information necessary to form a judgement on the extent to which one situation is sufficiently like the other that interpretations reached in the one context may be transferable to the other; this is a measure of the degree of fit between two contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125).

Other measures of trustworthiness require research findings to be credible, confirmable, and fair. Credibility is based, in part, on prolonged engagement through extended contact with informants and sustained observation of the research context; and triangulation (to the extent possible) through comparisons within the one context between different sources, and comparison between contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 329). In this kind of research, confirmation of findings is in part achieved through an auditing process that allows an independent, disinterested researcher to check the findings and the data on which the findings are based (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323). Fairness is achieved through the presentation of a balanced view,
and one that is sufficiently robust to resist vigorous attempts to disprove the findings of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207). The contribution of fairness to the trustworthiness of findings is realised by the extent to which all views and perspectives have been given a voice in the research, and that procedural bias has not resulted through omission (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207).

The approach adopted in this study seeks to create reader agreement about the trustworthiness of the findings, due to the credibility, transferability, confirmation, and fairness of the methods employed to collect, analyse, and present findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 290-292).

3.2.6. Researcher Participation: Objectivity and Subjectivity

The role of the researcher in the qualitative paradigm is one of active, conscious and intelligent participation in the research process, from formulation of study design through to promulgation of findings. In fact, the interpretive influence of the researcher in most research paradigms, such as post-positivism, is now largely accepted; there is a widely accepted inevitability of interaction and mutual shaping between the knower and the known, the observer and the observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 30-37).

The interaction between the researcher and the object of study are important considerations in research design. Olsen (1995) identifies researcher subjectivity as an asset, allowing the researcher to establish a closer relationship with the informant to create a more effective rapport. The subjective researcher in Olson’s view is able to acknowledge any biases and use their own experiences to gain a closer insight into the informants’ own experiences. As the research is not independent of the observer and the process of analysis, the findings will also be informed by the espoused and tacit values and theories of the researcher. Where accessible to them, these must be revealed.
While it is taken as a fundamental principle that researchers shape and interpret their perception of any objective reality through the filter of experience in order to construct any form of knowledge, an important distinction must be drawn between description and interpretation, as these are often problematically conflated in research (Talburt, 2004). Even when only description is intended, an element of researcher interpretation is unavoidable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Talburt, 2004; Charmaz, 2006). Meanings and descriptions are therefore not discovered through observation, but are, in fact, constructed and interpreted. Even when seeking to describe an observable reality, researchers make choices about emphases and priorities. These choices are based on the beliefs, values, and purposes of individual researchers, reflecting their own operationalised epistemologies. The end result of this process is the creation of knowledge structures that inevitably reflect the interpretive imprint of the researcher.

It is the constructivist perspective above that has been adopted in this research project, and it is accepted that in conducting research, the act of observation itself tends to modify the phenomenon under observation in an unpredictable and unknowable way. Thus the researcher is not independent of the object under investigation (Cupchik, 2001). The act of choosing a research topic and acting in some way to observe it or collect data, itself, separates that segment of reality from its context and binds the researcher to it. In observing the social world, phenomena are not limited to sense-data, but are in fact tied to judgements by individuals and social collectives interacting at some level with the phenomenon (Cupchik, 2001).

In accepting the interpretive-subjective framework in which qualitative research is conducted, there is still a need for a balance between objectivity and sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 42-43). The researcher and the data interact in a constant process of shaping and refinement, in which too great a distance between the two, while enhancing apparent objectivity, in fact reduces the sensitivity of the researcher to the nuances that emerge as a part of the data collection process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43). There is a further, higher level of interaction between the researcher and the subject
under examination, in which the researcher engages in a process of metacognition, exercising critical reflexivity to learn more about self in a highly subjective sense, as both the individual directing the research and also as a learner within the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210; Watt, 2007, pp. 82-83).

Another way of considering the relationship between the researcher and the topic is to see it as a dialogic structure, not linear; it is one in which the interaction that unfolds is essentially exploratory and emergent in nature (Kleining & Witt, 2000). The dialogic character of qualitative research allows interaction with the phenomenon under examination to modify the epistemic structure of the researcher (Kleining & Witt, 2000). Gliner and Morgan assert that in light of its emergent and dialogic nature, all forms of qualitative research are essentially constructivist (2000, p. 18). Put simply, through interaction with the object of study, researchers are able to modify their own thinking and learn – an inherently constructivist model. These considerations have led to the finer choices within the qualitative methodology framework that need to be made for the conduct of this study.

In summary, the nature of the study, with its focus on discovery of espoused and in-use theories of experiential learning in these programs, is best suited to being accessed through a qualitative approach. This decision allowed for an examination of experiential learning in its natural, social setting, which, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2) and Denzin (2004) assert, is a fundamental, if not defining, characteristic of the qualitative research paradigm. Given the significance of setting that emerged in the theoretical model of experiential learning derived from the review of key concepts, the adoption of a research methodology that retains natural setting was particularly important.

3.2.7. Choice of Grounded Theory Method for Data Analysis

Grounded theory method enjoys a position of considerable influence in the field of qualitative research, where it is widely used in studies that deal with theoretical questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.vii). For some critics,
however, grounded theory method has been used as an *umbrella* term to
disguise methodological imprecision or confusion (Bryant, 2002, p. 32).

According to its creators, Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory method was
conceived as a methodological tool in sociological research to aid in the
development of theories *grounded* in the research data (Glaser & Strauss,
1967, p. 1). It emerged as a reaction to the heavy emphasis on positivist
quantification in research in the 1960s (Charmaz, 2006). The terms *grounded
theory* and *grounded theory method* are often conflated. The distinction is that
*grounded theory* refers to the product of a research process (Charmaz, 2006),
whereas *grounded theory method* refers to a research method, which does
not necessarily result in theory generation (Bryant, 2002). This discussion
refers to grounded theory *method*.

Grounded theory method provides a structured process that allows theory to
emerge from interplay between the researcher and the data as it is collected
and analysed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 12-13; Bryant, 2002). In grounded
theory method, the close connection between the data and any theory
grounded in the data thus narrows and focuses the scope of the theory and
thereby enhances its specificity (Hutchinson, 2001, p. 124). According to one
of grounded theory method’s greatest proponents:

*Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines
for collection and analysing qualitative data to construct theories
grounded in the data themselves* (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2).

While its originators, Glaser and Strauss, intended grounded theory method to
develop new theories, some contend that grounded theory method can also
be used to enhance or generate new perspectives on existing theories
(Hutchinson, 2001, p. 125). Others, however, question the extent to which
grounded theory method in its original form allowed for the extension or
modification of pre-existing theoretical models (Bryman & Burgess, 1994, p. 7;
Bryant, 2002).

Bryant’s concerns over the inadmissibility of pre-existing theoretical positions
in grounded theory (Bryant, 2002, p. 33) run counter to the original Glaser and
Strauss (1967) position, which allowed for the predictive generation of theoretical ideas and models, which are then subject to comparison with theory generated through research; the authors’ position is summed up with the assertion that generating a theory involves a process of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6). By contrast, the source of certain ideas, or even models, can come from sources other than the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6). Such sources include a priori hypotheses and, particularly, insights. They add that grounded theory does, however, require that any element of a theory derived from a non-data source be verified by the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6).

While grounded theory method has a strongly constructivist foundation, Charmaz, among others, is critical of what she sees as a move by Strauss and Corbin, and others, away from interpretation towards a positivist focus on verification as an explicit goal of grounded theory method (2005, p. 509). Bryant (2002, 2003) is also critical of the positivism he believes is implicit in the origins of grounded theory method, asserting that this is philosophically incompatible with the interpretive and dialogical nature of grounded theory method. Instead, Bryant (2003) suggests that a constructivist approach is a more accurate reflection of contemporary notions of multiple interpretations of a socially grounded reality – a suggestion that was previously rejected by Glaser (2002).

For their part, Glaser and Strauss early on made clear they considered their work to be making a clear departure from the objectivist-positivist position on Popperian falsification:

> From his own readings, a sociologist can almost always find, if he wants to, some piece of data that disproves the fact on which his colleague has based a theoretical notion... (H)e has merely posed another comparative datum for generating another theoretical property or category. That is all he has done. Nothing is disproved or debunked, despite what those who are overly concerned with evidence constantly believe (1967, p. 22).

Glaser and Strauss emphasise that grounded theory method results in theory as process, not a complete, perfected theory, but as a proposition in progress,
any statement of which reflects a momentary snapshot at a specific point in 

A critical component of grounded theory method is its reliance on constant 
comparisons, questioning, interpretation, and subsequent sampling of data 
based on emerging theoretical constructs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 46). 
Comparisons are framed within and aided by the personal experience of the 
researcher, not to filter or force an interpretation, but to provide a meaningful 
frame of reference from which to view and measure the data as provided by 
informants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 48). As a process of construction, 
therefore, the analysis of data and subsequent construction of a theory 
grounded in the data depends on the active participation of the researcher, 
particularly in the process of interpretation, which effectively marks the 
genesis of theory production (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130).

Grounded theory method is a widely accepted methodological tool that allows 
the researcher to interpret and analyse qualitative data and construct theories 
directly (Thomas & James, 2005, p. 2; Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, the 
constructivist approach to grounded theory method advocated by Charmaz is 
closely aligned with the philosophical frame of reference adopted for this 
study. Hence the grounded theory method of analysing data was adopted.

3.3. **Methods and Instruments of Data Collection**

This section describes the identification of program type and targeted schools, 
the types of data sought, and the methods of data collection and instruments 
employed to do that.

3.3.1. Program Identification: Preliminary Survey

An initial problem to be resolved was the identification of the cohort of 
programs available for study that would provide information to answer the 
research questions.
A preliminary survey of all experiential learning programs offered in Australian schools was designed, which used elementary quantification methods for identifying programs to be targeted. The primary source for these data was school websites, where available, or the websites hosted by the government education authorities in all states and territories in Australia. While the main focus of data collection in the study was not directed towards numeric data, key numeric data elements were important for creating an understanding of the framework within which experiential learning programs operate. Numeric data to be collected during the preliminary survey included:

a. school sector (government/non-government);
b. school sub-sector (catholic/independent);
c. number of schools offering experiential programs;
d. number of different types of programs;
e. duration of programs;
f. year level of students undertaking programs;
g. number of dedicated, discrete experiential learning campuses; and
h. proportion of in-house versus out-sourced providers.

These survey data were to be used to identify the types of schools from which a choice of programs would be made. The process of selection for participating schools is detailed in Chapter Four.

3.3.2. Methods of Data Collection

Researchers using qualitative methodologies adopt three principal co-operative methods to achieve access to the information they seek, and employ at least two, preferably three, methods in the one study so as to augment both fairness and trustworthiness. The methods used are: in-depth interview, observation, and analysis of documentary evidence. Documentary evidence consists of both elicited responses from informants in the form of questionnaires and written accounts responding to specific study-related questions, and non-elicited public documents and accounts, such as reflections, diaries, institutional records, published accounts, promotional material and media reports (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 12).
Qualitative data are often diffuse, and being stored ‘in the head’ of those involved in the activity being examined, are impossible to access without cooperation. In the present study, the information being sought was the form and role expected in each program examined of the eight essential elements of experiential learning. It was understood that this information would be variously held by different people, and that the views of the range of people involved in the design and actual conduct of the one program would vary according to personal characteristics and role in the program. The first task was, therefore, to identify the group in a chosen school who, collectively, would have the information sought and, secondly, to gain access to each of them.

Relevant data also reside within school records, program documents, press releases, website documents, school handbooks, prospectus documents, advertisements, conference papers and journals. These provide descriptions of the program, campus, setting, activities, outcomes, and student experiences, all of which needed to be collected and examined.

Entry to selected schools was to be achieved through a written invitation to participate sent to the school principal.

Data would then be collected in four forms in the following order (or iteratively)
- a. Public document perusal;
- b. Staff questionnaire/survey administered to all interviewees prior to interview;
- c. Interviews with staff identified as holding key knowledge of the program; and
- d. Observation of program setting, student and staff interaction, and a sample of learning activities.
3.3.2.1. Public Documentation on Programs

As a first step, data relating to the structure, proclaimed design principles, and outcomes of programs were to be gathered from information published electronically on school websites or in hardcopy form in school prospectus documentation. Public documentation would include information about program structure, content, outcomes, and campus staff.

3.3.2.2. Choice of Informants

The study sought to identify the key elements of each experiential program as seen by those responsible for its design and delivery, and the role these elements play in achieving the program outcomes, in both planning and implementation.

Knowledge of design, planning and delivery of programs resides within the experience of school staff responsible for program design and delivery. The researcher therefore targeted school and campus administrators, program managers or supervisors, teachers, and other teaching assistants, all of whom had regular involvement in the management, planning, delivery and assessment of experiential learning activities in the program. From preliminary survey data and public documentation of programs available on school websites, four categories of informant role were identified: school managers, campus managers, program managers, and teachers. The definitions adopted from the survey data for these categories are described below.

*School managers* are all based at the parent school, and act as the managerial interface between the remote campus and the school, with no direct responsibility for the implementation of the program and no direct contact with students.

*Campus managers* are based at the remote campus and are responsible for overall operational management of the campus and its programs; campus managers consist of staff providing the highest level of leadership at the remote campus.
Program managers are responsible for the management of specific elements of the experiential learning program. Program managers design and plan the experiential program, setting overall activity objectives, learning model priorities and constraints, program design considerations, specific activity design constraints, resource allocation, and activity scheduling.

Teachers are responsible for the delivery of program activities through direct interaction with students. This category includes program teachers, activity specialists and assistants, and teacher aides. These individuals have a detailed knowledge of the specifics of pedagogy, activity planning, implementation, resource and other constraints, learning outcomes, student management, and practical aspects of activity management.

For the purposes of confirmation and potential triangulation, multiple sources of data at these different levels of management and program delivery from within each program were sought. At each of the remote campuses, the head of the campus, the program or teaching team supervisor, and at least two teachers experienced in the delivery of the program were invited to participate in the investigation.

3.3.2.3. Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments of data collection were used to access information held by school managers, campus managers, program managers and teachers directly involved in delivery of the experiential programs: questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Data to be collected utilising these three instruments primarily focused on qualitative data, and comprised the following:

a. overall descriptions of programs;

b. descriptions of role of setting in program;

c. changes in setting (implicit or explicit) reflected in informant accounts and observations;
d. relative importance attached in references to setting in informant accounts;
e. observations of setting, including preparation, utilisation, risks, and problems;
f. setting as a participant in program,
g. extant and elicited descriptions of program structures;
h. extant and elicited descriptions of policies, including rationale, scope, and tacit/espoused contribution towards program outcomes;
i. learning outcomes,
j. rules of conduct and behaviour for program participants;
k. program schedules;
l. methods of instruction;
m. stated program aims;
n. accounts of practitioners (actual aims, conduct of activities, use of resources, use of setting);
o. references to problematic dimensions of setting in learning;
p. explicit and implicit references to contrasts, comparisons or commonalities between experiential and conventional learning;
q. evidence of theory (tacit or espoused) guiding planning and delivery of activities/lessons; and
r. disconfirming or negative data.

The first source of data was to be the *questionnaire*, which, as an elicited written source of data, offers a number of contrasts or points of difference in comparison with data collected from the same informant during interviews. The purpose of the pre-interview questionnaire, which was to be administered to all staff who agreed to be interviewed, was to identify respondents' views on the type of experiential learning in their program, focusing on what they believed to be the most important elements of its design, delivery and key outcomes. The informants’ responses would then be used as a frame of reference for the interviews that followed.

The questionnaire was designed based on De Vaus (1996, p. 95) and was intended to provide data reflecting the following aspects of the informant:
a. Behaviour: what the informant actually does in a given situation;
b. Beliefs: what the informant believes is right in a given situation;
c. Attitudes: what the informant thinks is desirable;
d. Knowledge: what the informant knows and the accuracy of both their knowledge and beliefs; and
e. Attributes: specific facets of the informant’s personality.

The second data collection instrument was to be an in-depth interview with the school managers, campus managers, program managers, and teachers who had agreed to be interviewed. In planning, structure, and conduct, the type of interviews were ethnographic (Spradley, 1979, pp. 55-68) and followed the conversational and informal style, but were designed to allow the informant to inform the researcher through a wide range of structured and follow-up questions. In conducting interviews, Spradley emphasises the need to observe what he terms the verbatim principle (1979, p. 73): native terms and observer terms are recorded and coded accordingly in order to distinguish one from the other. In particular, Spradley advises strongly against what he terms translation competence (1979, p. 73), as this may lead to distortions and inaccuracies in transcription, interpretation, and analysis. Instead, all native terms are taken as having potential significance for the proposed study that require follow up through further data collection (Spradley, 1979, p. 73). Johnson (1997) also refers to the negative impact on research validity caused by interference or translation of informant responses. A further consideration is that the researcher must understand the informant’s response in the context of his or her interpretation of the question asked. This is a process that involves examining the assumed competencies and knowledge bases that underlie the specific response being provided by an informant (Spradley, 1979, p. 84).

Strauss and Corbin emphasise the need to design in-depth interviews that are sufficiently unstructured to allow for the exploration of emergent data that cannot be anticipated in the preparatory phase (1998, p. 205). The emergent nature of the ethnographic interview requires a high degree of flexibility in the interactions between the researcher and the informant, which to an extent
precludes a fixed, predetermined structure in the design and implementation of the interview itself (Spradley, 1979, pp. 58-59; Meloy, 2002, p. 10). This does not, however, preclude the interviewer having an interest in specific matters of interest that is explored through the interview.

It was recognised that the specific questions posed in each interview would vary, depending on the role of the informant in the planning, management, or delivery of the program. Questions needed to be reliable in the sense that they would elicit the same response from an informant regardless of when or how the question was asked (De Vaus, 1996, p. 96). The researcher would need to be sensitive to the validity of questions, checking to ensure that they in fact collected the intended data. Consideration would need to be given to the different ways in which each question might be interpreted by an informant and follow-up or confirmatory questions added when judged as necessary in the interview to enhance the validity of interview answers. The language used must be clear, unambiguous, and inoffensive (De Vaus, 1996, pp. 96-97). In particular, care needed to be taken to avoid leading questions or double-barrelled questions that presuppose a particular response.

By means of getting the interviewee talking and setting out his/her experience and opinions, interviews were planned to reveal the beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and actions of interviewees with respect to the experiential learning activities undertaken in the programs studied, with a particular focus on the following areas:

1. Nature of experiential learning
   a. Nature of experience: parameters and characteristics of experience;
   b. Nature of learning: definition, how is experiential learning planned, structured, implemented, managed, and assessed;
   c. Student-centred experiential learning as a social enterprise;
   d. Status and role of the student in experiential learning;
2. Context and setting for experiential learning;
   a. Location of program and how it is used;
   b. Intentional interaction with a distinctive learning environment or activity (physical environment, socio-political milieu, economic context, chronological frame, and cultural setting);
   c. Descriptions of settings, such as:
      i. Type of settings;
      ii. Number of different settings used,
      iii. Unique features of setting,
      iv. Limitations, and
      v. Special considerations in specific settings;
   d. Impact of setting on learning;
   e. Mutability of setting;
   f. Transferability of specific experiential learning activities to other settings;
   g. Time spent in each setting;
   h. Tacit or intentional use of setting in experiential learning, including processes that involve unique elements of setting to achieve learning outcomes;
   i. Nature of interaction between learners and elements of setting;
   j. Memorability of setting;
3. Experiential learning activities;
   a. Active participation in teacher-scaffolded, realistic problem-solving activities;
   b. Learner participation: how participation is defined and managed;
   c. Differentiated participation;
   d. Planning, developing, and implementing activities;
   e. Intended learning outcomes of activities;
   f. Problem-solving in activities: definitions of problems, timeframe, differentiation of difficulty;
g. Social interactions:
   i. Types,
   ii. Structure of groups,
   iii. Formal and informal interaction
   iv. Teacher-student interaction;
4. Memory and experiential learning;
   a. Autonoesis as an intentional or tacit component of experiential learning;
   b. Explicit and tacit incorporation of memory functions in experiential learning;
   c. Tacit or intentional incorporation of student autonoesis in experiential learning programs;
   d. Memorability of activities and experiences;
5. Teacher role in experiential learning
   a. Status and role of teachers and others;
   b. Types of teacher-provided scaffolding;
   c. Tacit and intentional use of teacher scaffolding;
6. Mistakes, errors, and managing risks in experiential learning;
   a. Errors: how are these defined, discovered, handled, and reviewed;
   b. Nature of learning from mistakes;
   c. The place of taking risks in learning;
   d. Limits of risks in experiential learning;
7. Reflection on experience;
   a. Nature, content and function of reflection within experiential learning;
   b. Tacit and intentional purpose of reflection;
   c. Frequency and duration of reflection;
   d. Role of learners and staff in reflection;
e. Links between reflection and other experiential learning program elements;
f. Links between reflection and memory functions for participants;

8. Learning outcomes;
a. Personal Development/Growth
b. Transformative experience with personal growth;
c. Experience, participation and change;
d. Personal growth: definition, status, measurement;
e. Links to tacit and intentional learning outcomes;
f. New knowledge:
   i. Nature of new knowledge,
   ii. Process of Construction,
   iii. Realisation,
   iv. Assessment,
   v. Reporting,
   vi. Connection and continuity with other learning programs; and
g. Ways in which new knowledge is constructed:
   i. Socially,
   ii. Independently,
   iii. Didactically,
   iv. Auto-didactically;
h. Function of new knowledge in program;
i. Links to other learning experiences and applications of new knowledge; and
j. Assessment and reporting of new knowledge construction.

The third data collection instrument was to be observations undertaken by the researcher at each campus. Observations were primarily intended to provide a form of triangulation with the documentary and informant data, enabling the researcher to capture detailed descriptions of the program, particularly the physical location of the campus, interactions between staff and students,
program activities, and the settings used for program activities. Descriptions of setting were to include the characteristics of the immediate setting, the way in which this is incorporated into activities, and constraints on program activities imposed by the setting, such as climate and terrain.

The observations were not intended to provide direct evidence of the learning described by the interviewees, but to provide confirmatory and contextual data to enable the researcher to understand the physical context of the informant data.

In order to protect the confidentiality of data sources, the physical descriptions of program settings and activities derived from researcher observations, and which form the basis of the observational reports provided in Chapter Four, were also intentionally limited in scope and detail.

3.3.2.4. Data Protection Procedures

Data collected in either electronic or hardcopy form were to be handled in accordance with university ethical regulations: all documents stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office, and identifying features of both individuals and institutions removed or disguised to protect their identity. Informants were to be advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, or to have any or all interview or questionnaire responses deleted.

These measures, the nature and extent of their participation, and the purpose of the project, were to be explained to participations, in writing, and their written consent to take part obtained, prior to the commencement of data collection.

3.4. Analysis of Data

This section describes the tools and processes employed to analyse the collected data.
3.4.1. Processes

The two key analytical processes selected to analyse collected data were (i) applying the ladder of inference, and (ii) grounded theory method.

3.4.2. Ladder of Inference

Individuals use a process of reasoning to interpret social interactions and to formulate actions, basing generalised, abstracted or culturally mediated responses on the extrapolation of information from concrete or interpreted data. The ladder of inference (Argyris, Putnam, & Mc lain Smith, 1985, pp. 57-58) provides an analytical framework that can be employed to establish the degree of abstraction in specific data, an important step in reconstructing informants’ in-use theories. By permitting the calibration of abstraction from action to description, generalisation, and judgement of action, the ladder of inference is an important tool in both the collection and the analysis of data (Argyris, et al., 1985). In the course of conducting an interview, awareness of an informant’s movement up or down the ladder of abstraction is crucial in being able to shape or re-shape subsequent questions, so as to keep opinions linked to directly observable grounded data.

In analysis, the ladder can be used as an analytical tool in that it provides a means to locate and link any data collected from an informant with respect to the relative degree of removal or abstraction from concrete, observable data (Argyris, et al., 1985, p. 246).

Data at the first level comprise concrete action, available to any observer; at the second level of inferential abstraction, data consist of the descriptions of the action, and at the third level they comprise cultural interpretations of the described action and behaviour, that is, views commonly accepted within a specific cultural or social grouping; the fourth level of inferential abstraction provides the causal theories developed by individuals to explain what is experienced directly at the first level (Argyris, et al., 1985, p. 247). Through its ability to connect an abstracted in-use theory back through cultural
interpretations and descriptions to concrete data, the ladder of inference is a powerful tool with which to identify and map discrete levels of inference in collected data.

The ladder of inference can also be applied to the researcher’s own analytical processes in a metacognitive sense, as it provides a self-regulatory tool by which the researcher can develop a greater awareness of analytical jumps of an inferential nature when handling data.

3.4.3. Grounded Theory Method

_Grounded theory method_ of data analysis comprises coding of basic elements, identification and coding of conceptual categories, defining and refining of categories, developing relational links between categories, developing hypothetical relationships between categories, and constructing theory from the conceptual categories developed from the data.

Analysis of interview data begins with a word by word, line by line analysis of transcripts (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 51-53). The immediate processing of data shapes the latter stages of data collection and analysis, a ‘bottom-up’ design feature that is essentially a form of emergent design. Other data types, such as questionnaires and public documentation, both _elicited_ and _non-elicited_, are also subject to the same word-by-word scrutiny. Charmaz notes that the purpose to which non-elicited text is put in the process of analysis may be starkly different to the original intended purpose of the author (2006, p. 35). Charmaz emphasises the need to use _non-elicited_ or extant texts as a legitimate object of analysis, rather than only acting as a form of _corroboration_ (2006, p. 39).

The basic unit of analysis in grounded theory method is the discrete _concept_, which is most typically linked to an action or a process and contains _characteristics, parameters and associated properties_ (Charmaz, 2006). The basic concepts are developed through what Strauss and Corbin describe as a form of conceptual _labeling phenomena_ (1998, p. 103). Interactions, events,
and actions are named to create concepts that act as the first level of analytical unit above the data and permit grouping and comparison of similar and dissimilar concepts and other low-level analytical manipulations.

Through this first line of analysis, concepts become conceptual categories that are identified and developed through the examination of data, and from which conceptual categories are then derived and defined on the basis of properties revealed in the data. There is a level of abstraction separating concepts and their properties from the data; they are derived from the data, but are not actual data themselves (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 36).

Relationships between categories and sub-categories are used to determine links between concepts and this process facilitates the emergence of new theoretical structures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 23-31). Strauss and Corbin draw a clear distinction between description, which may contain both objective statements of facts and interpretations, and theory, which while relying on description, seeks to explain the underlying reasons for the phenomena described (1998, pp. 18-19).

Data analysis is conducted from the beginning of the research, as the data are collected. Initial analysis of the data shape the collection and analysis of subsequent data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 23). A characteristic of grounded theory method is what is referred to as constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 36; Charmaz, 2006, p. 54). As coding takes place, the emerging codes, conceptual categories, and hypothesized relationships are constantly compared at multiple levels so as to verify accuracy and fit (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 36; Charmaz, 2006, p. 40).

3.4.4. Coding Methods

In qualitative analysis, coding is the most fundamental and arguably important element of analysis as the codes create the form and shape of the analysis that is to follow (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 45-46). Coding, at its most basic level, represents the process of categorising and sorting data (Bryman & Burgess,
This process commences through what Strauss and Corbin refer to as *microanalysis* or *microscopic* analysis, in which the data are viewed, weighed, and evaluated at the most fundamental levels, word by word, phrase by phrase (1998, pp. 65-70). The process allows the systematic identification of dimensions and categories or classifications within the data (1998, p. 70).

An important aspect of this is that in grounded theory method, the codes are not predetermined, but are constructed by the researcher through interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Coding categories tend to reflect actions and processes in grounded theory, rather than describe static objects or actors (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48).

The literature contains a number of approaches to coding using grounded theory methods, each of which asserts the need to analyse each word and line of collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz recommends line-by-line coding as a means of creating a more productive framework through which to view the data and also for its power to suggest avenues for further investigation (Charmaz, 2006, p. 51).

Both Glaser and Strauss, and Charmaz, identify *forcing* of data into preconceived categories as the main danger in the initial coding process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 37; Charmaz, 2006, p. 67). This difficulty is avoided through allowing conceptual categories and relationships to emerge from the data, rather than imposing these structures from pre-existing theories.

In summary, the task of coding itself is one of observation, comparison, and review, going back over the data and looking for processes rather than static concepts. In grounded theory, coding is ultimately looking for ways of coding for actions and interactions in the context of the conceptual categories discovered in the open and axial coding process. The resultant data structures therefore represent an on-going flow of action.
3.4.4.1. Open or Initial Coding

Open coding is conducted on data in a deliberately unfocused manner, with the refinements emerging later following first analysis by line (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 207-209). Through opening data up to microanalysis, objects or processes are located and identifying properties and measurable parameters are assigned, which in turn allows comparisons between concepts to be made, identifying similarities and contrasts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 103-116). Observed phenomena are grouped in categories according to properties observed in the data that suggest shared parameters or qualities, and it is through the description and elaboration of categories that analysis in the open coding phase begins to create more abstract and powerful structures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 114-115). Categories are progressively refined through the process of definition and identification of parameters, along with the allowable variations in these parameters within the limits set by the researcher in defining each category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 116).

Charmaz adds an intermediate phase of coding after open coding, termed focused coding (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). This second phase is a process of review, in which the codes created during the initial line-by-line coding are reviewed and compared with the data to assess which of these codes appears to be the more significant or frequent. This set of initial, emergent relationships allows data to be re-examined in the light of an emerging set of categories and codes; focused coding occurs through the comparison of data directly with data (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 57-60).

3.4.4.2. Axial Coding

Axial coding occurs after the base-level codes have been created and reviewed. Axial coding is the process by which relationships between conceptual categories and sub-categories created in the initial coding processes are identified and defined (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). Strauss and Corbin define a category as a phenomenon, such as an event, or issue that is of importance to the research informants (1998, p. 124); sub-categories are defined similarly, but are clearly subordinate to an existing
category and act to provide further explanatory information relating to the relevant category (1998, p. 125).

Charmaz describes the process of axial coding as one of reintegrating data into a new structure following the fracturing that occurs in open coding (2006, p. 60). She also recommends a further step in the coding process, one that performs a similar function (of reintegration) that she refers to as theoretical coding (2006, p. 63). In theoretical coding, the emphasis is placed on linking hypothetical constructs in a way that reflects the emergent theory based on the data.

Through the process of axial coding, the discrete conceptual categories identified in the open and focused coding process form structures in which the relationships between categories and sub-categories emerge. While some question the value of relying on inductive logic to derive conceptual categories and theoretical structures from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136), the process of axial coding is also an inherently creative process in which the emerging data are also drawn upon to hypothesise new relationships deductively.

Data collection that targets the axial coding process probes the emerging relationships between categories and sub-categories, particularly in the mapping of boundaries and parameters and properties of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 209-210).

3.4.4.3. Writing Memos in Grounded Theory Method

Memo-writing forms an important component of the coding and analytical process. The memo is written as an unstructured narrative recording the analytical insights arising from the process of open and axial coding. Both Strauss and Corbin, and Charmaz, emphasise the importance of writing analytical memos that act as a record and later as an analytical tool in which speculation, uncertainties and insights about the data are stored (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 110-113; Charmaz, 2006, pp. 76-80). Memos are a form of
inquiry that provides an important record of reflexivity in the analytical process (Watt, 2007, p. 83).

Questions raised in the process of memo writing serve to shape and inform subsequent data collection and analysis efforts. In their early work on grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss emphasised the need to write memos as each item of interest or discrepancy was encountered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.107). Open coding memos, according to Strauss and Corbin, focus specifically on the data and form an indispensable link in the process of developing conceptual categories (1998, p. 113).

Memo writing throughout the process of axial coding is also important, but at this stage the purpose is quite distinct from that underlying the memos written during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 230). The memo is written to record the analysis at the level of the conceptual category or sub-category and is, in effect, at a level of abstraction from the data, in that it deals with the insights of the researcher.

Lying between coding and reporting findings, memo-writing forms an important intermediate step in the process of analysis. Charmaz ascribes a linking function to memos, stating that memos generated progressively through the process of data analysis provide the medium through which the emerging connections between data, concepts, and categories (2006, pp. 72-73). Charmaz sees the memo as the step that allows a focused code to ascend to theory status (2006, p. 91).

3.4.4.4. Selective Coding

The final phase of analysis is selective coding in which theory emerges from the assembled essential categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). Selective coding, according to Strauss and Corbin, is an intensely interpretive process by which theory emerges from relationships between conceptual categories that have been identified through the process of data analysis (1998, p. 144). At this point in the analytical process, categories are already at a high level of abstraction in that they no longer represent data directly, but
must have an explanatory power to illuminate relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 145). Theory generation begins with the selection of a central category; the quality of centrality is determined by the degree to which a category is interconnected with all other conceptual categories discovered during analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 146-147).

3.4.5. Developing Theory

The intended purpose of the grounded theory method is the production of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1) and Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 70) also emphasise the need for the development of theories, based on research, that are not constrained by doctrinaire approaches to verification. However, Charmaz notes that in the field of social science, there is considerable debate over the precise definition of theory. In seeking a definition, Charmaz cites both positivist and qualitative paradigms, stating that theories can explain and predict in a positivist sense, or they can aid in understanding in a more interpretive sense (2006, p. 126).

For Strauss and Corbin, the defining characteristics of a theory are well defined categories that are interrelated in a systematic fashion to form a coherent structure informed by clearly stated and linked principles related to the theory itself (1998, p. 22). Description is not theory: to become theory, it must ascend to a higher plane to allow explanation – why the situation observed and described is the way it is – and prediction – what is likely to happen under the same or similar circumstances in the future.

The process of developing theory is two-fold: the first step involves conceiving or intuiting a theoretical notion – an essentially creative process – which is then followed by a process in which these ideas are tied together in a structure that is informed by the system underpinning the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 21). These ideas, contained within an emergent system, are continuously checked against further incoming data to confirm validity, raise new questions or suggestions, or overturn earlier unproven intuitions not borne out by the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22).
One danger of the open-ended and more exploratory nature of the qualitative research paradigm is that it creates conditions under which researchers can often find what they set out to find; reflexivity, or self-critical reflection, on the predispositions and biases of the researcher is seen by Johnson (1997), and others, as an important tactic to adopt in overcoming overt bias. The notion of reflexivity asserts that within the research process itself there is an element of self-creation in which the researcher, through interaction with the subject of the research, engages in a process of creating self (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210).

3.4.6. Application of Analytical Tools to the Data

The analytical processes described above were applied to the two sets of data collected in the study: publicly available documentation, and elicited data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

The first data set examined was the publicly available documentation on the programs. These documents were examined for level of abstraction and significant linguistic features that identified properties and parameters of the programs, such as educational purpose, design considerations, practices, expected outcomes, content of activities, setting specific information, and other salient information about the programs and underlying espoused theory of education. As this information was found to be at a high level of abstraction from the programs and yielded little of theoretical significance, it was most effective as a referential framework for espoused theory to which the more grounded data from the elicited sources was linked at a later stage of analysis.

The second data set examined was the elicited data from questionnaires and interviews, along with researcher’s on-site observations. Questionnaire and interview data were treated as two separate data sub-sets and analysed separately. Additional interpretive impressions derived from observations
were applied during the final phases of analysis as a form of confirmatory triangulation.

The grounded theory method of data analysis was supported by the employment of QSR NVivo 7, which was used at each step of the data analysis. Initially, each data node derived from word-by-word and line-by-line examination of data in the open coding phase of analysis was stored in the NVivo 7 project created for the study.

In the first step, transcripts were analysed individually, in program groups, with the line-by-line process progressively fracturing the data into basic data nodes. Once the first step was complete, all data nodes, as a discrete data set, were examined for preliminary patterns and features, such as similar actions or themes captured in the node title. As the NVivo 7 tool marks data nodes within the transcript text, each transcript was then processed a second time, line-by-line, taking into account the patterns and features of the first set of data nodes, and identifying potential data nodes missed in the first step. This process was then repeated until all potential data nodes had been identified and captured using NVivo 7. At each pass through the data, insights gained in previous processing steps were used to extract further data nodes.

The NVivo tool was then used to conduct analysis of linguistic constructions used in descriptions and particularly actions that were then noted as points of interest for later coding. Frequency counts of significant or recurring lexical items, such as verbs and adjectives, were conducted on transcripts. This also allowed the isolation and examination of certain lexical items associated with program setting, such as geographical features, descriptive terms for settings, and names for locations.

In subsequent phases of analysis, axial and selective codings were undertaken using NVivo 7. These two analytical processes grouped data nodes together thematically initially. The thematic categories were then compared and grouped into categories at a higher level of abstraction. This thematic re-categorisation acted to reverse the fracturing that occurred in the
open coding phase, as grounded data from different informants were then combined under headings emerging from data analysis. Observational data were also applied in this analytical phase for confirmation or refutation of developing lines of theory. An interpretive framework was applied in the selection of data nodes for these analytical categories and not all data nodes were allocated to the thematic categories.

Memo writing was undertaken at the axial coding phase and in the selective coding phase when developing theory in the more advanced phase of analysis, and again NVivo 7 was employed to connect the memos to the relevant data nodes. As noted previously, memos written in the theory production phase of data analysis captured interpretations and emerging trend observations and, as such, helped to shape later theorisation grounded in the data.

The final phase of data analysis and coding in this study produced three meta-categories, 14 categories, and 53 sub-categories of data that are discussed in Chapter Four.

3.5. **Summary of Chapter**

A qualitative research methodology was selected as the most suitable approach for the type of study being undertaken, where the researcher’s experience informs interpretation of data in the construction of knowledge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). The study adopted Argyris and Schön’s *theories of action* as an overarching theory in the documentation of representative programs, in which actions reflect espoused and in-use theories (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Data types consisted of non-elicited public documentation and data elicited through collection instruments consisting of in-depth ethnographic interviews, documentary reviews, and participant observations.
The ladder of inference (Argyris, et al., 1985) was chosen to guide the ethnographic interviews and later in the analysis to locate informant responses with respect to the degree of abstraction from data grounded in action. Grounded theory method was adopted to analyse the data through the coding, thematic categorization, and selection of significant information from which theories were developed in response to the research questions (Charmaz, 2006).
4. CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1. Introduction

As set out in Chapter Three, data were collected in two main stages: firstly, a selection of participant schools was made; and, secondly, information on the programs in the six schools selected was collected in three modes: (i) a survey of program parameters, design and principles; (ii) interviews with key staff involved in the program; (iii) on-site observation of setting and activities. Results of analyses of these data are set out in this order below. School program data analyses are presented firstly by campus and then these analyses are further examined in depth thematically.

Participating schools and teachers required their identity to be protected as a condition of their participation and that data presented in this chapter would be intentionally limited to avoid compromising the identity of the participating school. Pseudonyms are used for all participating school campuses.

4.2. Participant School Selection

A list of schools that offered an experiential program was compiled through an Internet survey of experiential learning programs in Australian schools. Results showed that the majority of experiential programs were offered by independent secondary schools. Only one documented government-sector experiential learning program was discovered (Victorian Government Department of Education & Training, 2005). After making contact with the program manager, it was determined that the government sector program was not able to take part in the study for reasons of institutional policy. It was therefore decided to concentrate the survey on independent schools.

The highest concentration of programs was found in independent schools linked to the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA). The member schools of AHISA include day and boarding schools,
and religious schools of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish faiths as well as non-denominational schools (AHISA, 2006). AHISA schools thus represent a broad demographic cross-section of independent Australian schools and these schools formed the initial pool of candidate schools to take part in the main data collection phase of the study.

At the time of undertaking the survey – May, 2006 – there were 313 AHISA member schools, of which 165 (53%) offered an experiential learning program. Table 1 shows the distribution of these programs by basic type across Australian states and territories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Experiential Programs</th>
<th>Specialist Provider</th>
<th>Dedicated Campus</th>
<th>Long-term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aust. Capital Territory</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>313</strong></td>
<td><strong>165</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Long-term: defined as in excess of one-month duration*

**Table 1:** Summary of Experiential Learning Programs by State

Three significant factors emerged from this survey of sites: the first was the large number of experiential learning programs and particularly those offered at dedicated experiential campuses; a second was the number of long-term programs; and the third was the concentration of programs in Victoria. Other noteworthy findings from the survey were how programs were identified on school websites and the use of third-party providers of outdoor education to manage these programs.
The 56 schools in Victoria offering an experiential learning program make up 34% of the total number of such programs in Australia (165), by far the highest concentration. Although having the largest number of AHISA members (88 schools), only 43% (35 schools) in NSW offer programs, 21% of the national total. Remote campuses dedicated to the provision of programs have been established at 22% of AHISA program schools nationally (37 of 165); 40% of which are located in Victoria.

The survey showed a clear separation of programs into short-term programs, of up to ten days, structured around a school ‘week’, and long-term programs, lasting between one month and one year. The majority of programs (86%) were of 10 days or less in duration, with the shortest program, aimed at primary aged children, requiring just one day. Each long-term program was offered at a dedicated campus, typically located at some distance from the parent school. Travel time to the remote campus varied from school to school, but typically required less than one day.

Schools offering a program identified it either as part of the co-curriculum or extra-curricular activity (99%), or as core curriculum (1%). Nearly all schools with a program identified outdoor activity, such as camping, hiking, and outdoor survival skills as the essential student activities. However, two schools focused on inter-cultural experiences; another four schools specialised in spiritual experiences; and one other school emphasised the academic focus of its program. In most cases, independent schools conducted their own experiential learning programs, but third-party contractors, such as Outward Bound or Outdoor Education Group, were engaged as specialist providers for 24 programs nationally, 15% of the total. All of these third-party programs were short-term.

The preliminary survey identified Year 9 across all states in Australia as the year-level targeted by the large majority of long-term, residential experiential learning programs offered at dedicated campuses (Victorian Government Department of Education & Training, 2005; AHISA, 2006). Because they require a higher level of commitment of curriculum time and resources from
both the school and the parents, amounting to the effective suspension of the normal routine of schooling for the duration of the program, these *long-term* programs were selected for further scrutiny as potential candidate programs for this study.

In reviewing the survey data, these long-term programs require dedicated residential and program facilities, extended program duration, specialist staff, and special settings. This provides an indication of the value schools, parents, and students believe they bring. Given the considerable investment of time and effort put into this type of program, at least one of which has been in operation for more than 50 years, and the absence of academic scrutiny, long-term programs, of which there are 23 in Australia, thus became the focus of this study.

In selecting the final candidate schools for to participate in the data collection phase of the study, two major considerations were used. Firstly, programs tested over a number of years were considered most likely to be able to provide rich, reliable data in comparison to those still dealing with teething problems. Therefore, a minimum period of five years in operation was taken as a primary criterion for selection into the group to be invited to participate. Otherwise eligible programs that were undergoing a major review or restructuring were also eliminated at this point. Secondly, the aim was to select a set of schools that together would provide contrasting data on single-sex and co-educational programs, as well as variation in setting, which from the survey could be urban and rural programs.

The variation across the 23 schools offering long-term programs was finite and a sample of between six and eight was judged to be sufficient to capture all of the essential permutations of gender, setting, length of program, and content. By limiting the sample size to between six and eight schools the volume of information collected during the study could also be kept to manageable proportions.
Based on the criteria described above, only 12 of the 23 programs were eligible for selection, with 11 being recently established (within five years) or undergoing major restructuring or review. Of these 12 programs, one inner city non-residential and seven residential programs were selected for an initial approach to participate based on the setting and demographic criteria described above. The eight schools all claimed to offer innovative, experiential learning programs conducted at purpose-built, discrete, dedicated campuses. Program duration for these final candidate programs ranged from five weeks to one year.

Following clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne, contact was made with the Principals of the selected schools. Only one school declined to take part in the study, citing school policy that restricted participation in external research. Letters of introduction, including invitations to participate and Plain Language Statements, were subsequently sent to the remaining seven. At this point, one of the seven schools withdrew, citing changes in the leadership structure at the school and a consequent unpreparedness to participate.

The remaining six schools still offered experiential programs at dedicated, remote campuses that represented the full set of possible variation across type of school within the independent school sector identified in the Internet survey: enrolment gender: single-sex and co-educational; residential status: residential and non-residential; duration: from one month to one year; type of curriculum: mainstream academic programs, modified academic programs, and experiential programs; religious affiliation: secular and denominational; and type of setting: wilderness, rural, and urban.

A summary of the six participating schools and the program parameters is provided in Table 2 (Note: pseudonyms are used for all campuses). In this table, residential status identifies where the students lived while participating in the program; type of curriculum describes whether schools offered mainstream, timetabled, lessons; experiential activities; or modified forms of both; affiliation identifies schools with a religious governance affiliation;
program setting divided schools into: wilderness, defined as bush settings isolated from all outside human contact; rural, defined as settings located within sparsely-populated, rural communities; and urban, defined as settings located within densely-populated, large, built-up areas within major cities. Two schools offered a subject-based, timetabled mainstream academic program taught in classrooms, alongside an outdoor experiential program. Three schools offered a program that included subject-based timetabled lessons taught in classrooms, with content and outcomes heavily modified to suit the setting of the program, along with experiential activities that were scheduled outside of the classroom. One school offered a purely experiential program of learning that did not include any timetabled subject-based lessons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Acacia</th>
<th>Boronia</th>
<th>Callistemon</th>
<th>Darwinia</th>
<th>Eucalypt</th>
<th>Ferntree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment status</td>
<td>Co-ed</td>
<td>Single sex</td>
<td>Co-ed</td>
<td>Co-ed</td>
<td>Single sex</td>
<td>Co-ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential status</td>
<td>School dormitory</td>
<td>School dormitory</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>School dormitory</td>
<td>School dormitory</td>
<td>School dormitory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Duration</td>
<td>40 weeks</td>
<td>8-9 weeks</td>
<td>40 weeks</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>40 weeks</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of curriculum</td>
<td>Academic and experiential</td>
<td>Modified academic &amp; experiential</td>
<td>Modified academic &amp; experiential</td>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>Academic &amp; experiential</td>
<td>Modified academic &amp; experiential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Setting</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of Participating Schools

In offering this range of variation in the participating schools, it was judged that the final sample of six, while small, was representative of the variable parameters identified in the Internet survey. The six schools represented 50% of the programs that met all selection criteria and 26% of all long-term secondary school programs.

The principals of the six schools gave a written undertaking to allow their school to be part of the study. Each school imposed a condition on their
participation whereby the identity of each school would be protected in the final report through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of unique identifying features of respective programs. This condition had the effect of limiting the amount of specific program and campus detail that could be included in the case studies reported in this chapter. In the case of some details reported for each school, such as the degree of remoteness, the duration of the student journey is given, but without reference to the specific mode of transport used, as in some cases this is unique to one program only. The limitation does not, however, compromise the examination and discussion of the essential elements of each program.

A further consequence of this confidentiality undertaking was that program-specific documentation available in the public domain could not be cited in this chapter, as it potentially compromised the identity of participating schools. This documentation was reviewed in the preliminary survey detailed at the beginning of this chapter and as it did not yield any useful information about the model of education underlying respective school programs, its absence does not compromise the aims of this study.

Arrangements for field visits and interviews were then made through a senior member of staff designated as the school ‘Contact Officer’ for the project. In five out of six cases, the Contact Officer was the Head of Campus where the experiential learning program took place. In the sixth case, the campus Head of Curriculum was delegated the task of coordinating the field visit. Copies of the Letter of Introduction and Plain Language Statement were passed to campus staff at selected schools through the Contact Officer and a total of 43 consented to participate in the study. Participating staff were then asked to complete a written questionnaire after which individual interviews were arranged. Eventually, two of these 43 initial participants were not able to take further part in the study due to illness.

With selection and permission procedures for these six schools and the 41 participating teachers thus completed, a schedule of visits to each of the campuses was arranged through the Contact Officers, who also distributed
questionnaires to participants. These were to be completed and returned to the researcher to serve as a primer for the interviews.

4.3. Overview of Teacher Questionnaire Data

The teacher questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was divided into three parts, the first of which asked for personal data: years of teaching experience, role, gender, qualifications, and specialisations (if any). The second part asked the teacher to select essential program elements from a list of 18 provided, and rank them in order of relative degree of importance. The third part asked for short discursive responses on what the teacher believes were the unique elements of the program, external influences, contrast with mainstream learning, use of setting, and student and staff outcomes.

Only 20 out of 41 participants made responses to the questionnaire (12 female and 8 male). The remaining 21 interviewees returned blank questionnaire forms, or forms without any usable data. When asked at interview why they had not completed the form, most cited time pressure. None suggested reluctance to provide information and in the interviews all replied to similar questions with alacrity and in full.

The data derived from the 50% who responded to the questionnaire show some strong commonalities across programs with respect to teachers’ perceptions of the essential elements of each program. Student personal growth was nominated as the most important element, with teamwork, active participation, independence, residential setting, and reflection, the next most important elements in rank order.

Through closer analysis of the narrative responses, two common themes emerged: (i) the importance of the setting of dedicated campuses, and (ii) student social interaction. Teachers emphasise the importance of setting to achieve program outcomes, either the isolation in a remote, challenging environment, or in an urban environment sharply contrasting with the setting
of the main school. Setting was seen as achieving two important functions: isolating students from the support and influence of their home environment, and providing its own challenges and learning opportunities. Teachers’ perceptions of student outcomes focused almost entirely on student intra-personal and interpersonal development. Student intra-personal development was demonstrated through greater self-reliance, independence, resilience, self-confidence, and knowledge of self. Interpersonal development in students was expressed through enhanced written and verbal communication skills, conflict resolution and teamwork skills, and tolerance of others.

One other finding from the questionnaire was the view from those in teacher roles that the process of reintegrating students back into their respective mainstream learning programs at the conclusion of the experiential learning program is poorly managed. One respondent criticised the transition back to mainstream as too brief, another claimed the reintegration of students is ineffective; a further observation is that program campus staff have little idea of the reintegration process. Only one respondent from Darwinia Campus claimed students are able to share their experiences on return to the parent school.

4.4. Participating Staff

The average age of participating staff was 35.4 years, ten years younger than the Australian national average for secondary school teachers (McKenzie, Kos, Walker, & Hong, 2008). They had an average of 7.3 years experience in experiential programs. Seventeen of those interviewed had significant experience working at two or more schools offering long-term experiential learning programs.

In order to protect participant anonymity and allow roles to be directly equated across programs, the four generic informant roles described in Chapter Three (p.108-9), school manager, campus manager, program manager, and teacher, were applied to participant according to the highest level of responsibility regularly performed within the program or school as a whole.
A summary of staff participants interviewed is presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants: All Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of participating staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant age: &lt;30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant age: 30-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant age: &gt;40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of experience in experiential programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of experiential programs worked on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Summary of Participant Group: Roles and Experience

4.5. Interviews and Observations

The primary aim of the interviews was to explore the design and practice of experiential learning programs through the eyes of teachers. The interviews examined how experiential learning is implemented in the programs and explored the underlying intentions of teachers. The interviews therefore focused on ideas or educational theories underlying programs, how teachers went about designing a program or activity in light of any underlying theory, how this design became realised through the running of activities in their particular program, what difficulties arose in the process, and what outcomes they believed were achieved as a result.
In addition to data collected through interview, observations of staff-student interactions during formal activities and informal free time were undertaken at all campus sites. These observations consisted of descriptions of activities, the physical layout of the campus buildings and their apparent function, the setting of the campus and how this was used in activities, and general impressions concerning the interactions between students and staff. Some student activities were observed during the visits, but these observations were not intended to provide a comprehensive set of program activity data. These observations were a tightly constrained but important piece of data gathering that allowed me to obtain confirmatory triangulation and contextual points of reference with respect to the interview data. Impressions formed during these observations were recorded in the form of notes. These notes were consulted during the process of contextualising and analysing the interview data to assist in the interpretation and confirmation of findings from the data.

The field visit to one school was conducted in 2006. The field visits to the remaining five were conducted during June and July 2007. Two interviews were conducted during the earlier field visit in 2006. The remaining 39 interviews were conducted over a three-week period in June and July 2007: 23 interviews were conducted at the program campus, 11 took place at the parent school, and seven took place in private homes during a holiday break and at the request of participating teachers. All interviews were conducted in a single session; five interviewees agreed to a second interview to follow up on questions arising out of the initial interview. The interviews were conducted in a friendly, collegiate manner and participants typically expressed willingness to disclose personal as well as program-related information.

The interviews followed an ethnographic style, allowing the interviewee to lead the conversation, monitored by the researcher for inclusion of key topics. Disclosure of further information on these and on matters that seemed salient to the interviewee was encouraged by some gentle prompting from the researcher. The interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to 80 minutes, with most taking between 50 and 60 minutes.
Each interview was recorded digitally using a Sony digital voice recorder; each interview captured by the recording device as a ‘digital voice file’ (.dvf file), which was then uploaded to a notebook computer. The interview files, totalling 37 hours, were transferred to a desktop computer and transcribed manually into 600 pages of digital text files. The initial line-by-line analysis of the files was undertaken using QSR NVivo 7.

4.6. **Analysis of Data Nodes**

The coding process produced more than 1,100 individual data nodes for further analysis. These were later reduced through axial coding to 14 major categories. The 14 major categories emerged from the coding process on the basis of frequency of mention and contextual importance to the comments made by teachers during the interviews. The organising framework used to generate these categories adopted the teacher’s subjective experience in designing and implementing their own program. The time references varied with each interviewee and within the interview. The choice of setting, selection of program philosophy, and design of facilities all reflected a level of inference in which the teacher referred to matters determined by others and in a different time frame. The categories referring to self, social interaction, communication, living in the setting, exploration, risks and mistakes in learning, reflection and program review and outcome reflect a perspective of direct personal experience.

The 14 major categories and 53 sub-categories of interview data are:

a. **Designing programs**
   i. Choosing program educational philosophy (reasons for choosing the overall approach to learning adopted)
   ii. Setting program parameters (location, year-level, and duration)
   iii. Designing outcomes (selecting desired skills, knowledge, and attitudes)
   iv. Choosing resources (facilities, equipment, and teaching and support skills needed to achieve program aims)
b. Choosing a setting
   i. Isolating students (degree of implied or explicit remoteness in setting)
   ii. Challenging students (setting obstacles and difficulties)
   iii. Accommodating students (design and construction of structures and facilities)
   iv. Engaging students (intrinsic interest for students in setting: physical beauty, potential for specific activities, excitement factor for secondary students)

c. Planning experiences
   i. Choosing program theme(s)
   ii. Designing activities (problems: challenges, degree of difficulty)
   iii. Deciding on responsibilities (duties, tasks, and obligations)
   iv. Reinforcing the experience (revisiting tasks)
   v. Reviewing the experience (formal versus informal reflection, forms of reflection)

d. Preparing for the program
   i. Briefing the students before departure (format, forum, and structure of briefing and its intended outcomes)
   ii. Integrating the setting into the program activities (continuity with school practices, connecting the setting to the activities)
   iii. Planning and assessing for risks (risk mitigation)

e. Exploring/understanding self
   i. Understanding self (assessing strengths and weaknesses)
   ii. Learning to lead (taking responsibility for others)
   iii. Being resilient (coping with setbacks)
   iv. Setting goals (working towards objectives and measuring progress)
   v. Believing and spirituality (personal values that shape behaviours and attitudes)
f. Building relationships
   i. Making friends (connecting with strangers and sharing oneself)
   ii. Handling conflict (mediation and negotiation)
   iii. Creating new social personas (trying new versions of 'self')

g. Communicating
   i. Writing down experiences and feelings
   ii. Keeping a journal (visual and diary)
   iii. Telling a story (oral history)

h. Living in the setting
   i. Living in the dorms (routines and sharing)
   ii. Meeting own needs (looking after self)
   iii. Serving others (duties, e.g., chopping wood and cleaning)

i. Exploring the setting
   i. Studying themes and phenomena
   ii. Embracing challenges (physical, emotional, or mental)
   iii. Developing skills (physical activity, climbing, and running)

j. Taking risks in learning
   i. Being courageous
   ii. Considering consequences
   iii. Exercising judgement

k. Making mistakes
   i. Recognising mistakes (detecting mistakes, analysing reasons for mistakes)
   ii. Solving problems (skills to recover, team-work, using resources)
   iii. Reviewing problems
   iv. Recovering from mistakes (resilience, planning to learn for the future)

l. Reflecting and remembering the experience
   i. Purpose of reflection
   ii. How to reflect (modes of reflection: formal, informal, verbal, written, assessment of reflection, audience)
iii. Choosing what was memorable: the content of reflection
iv. Selecting a time and place to reflect

m. Learning from the experience
   i. Measuring outcomes (parameters and ways of recording outcomes)
   ii. Using outcomes (integrating achievements into further learning)
   iii. Recognising changes to self (realisation of learning at personal level)
   iv. On-going and delayed learning

n. Reviewing the program
   i. Confirming and/or adjusting duration of program
   ii. Choosing year level or age targeted (confirmation of level of challenge in program)
   iii. Following on at parent school (continuity with future learning programs)
   iv. Learning by staff (professional and personal development for teachers)
   v. Coping with tensions at parent school program (mediating intra=institutional conflicts and contradictions)

All 14 categories are relevant to each program, but the degree of relevance for each category varies depending on the specific approach or focus of the program. For example, not all interviewees raised the duration of their respective program as an explicit matter of importance or concern, although it exists as an implicit factor in each program.

The major categories were cross-referenced and compared back to individual school programs to detect patterns and deeper structures in the data. A high-level structure based on the chronological orientation of each of the major categories was identified at this point: some major categories data referred to planning and preparation prior to programs, some major categories of data reflected the actual implementation of programs, while the remaining major categories of data referred to program outcomes, the way in which these were
identified and how program review helped shape future programs. These three higher-order categories reflect whether each of the 14 major categories have as a primary focus planning and preparation, a practice or implementation, or realization and measurement of outcomes. These categories – *design principles*, *design in practice*, and *program outcomes* – are described in greater detail below.

There are significant similarities and differences in the principles, practices, and outcomes across all of the programs in the study. In order to examine the design and practice of each program in context, it was decided to adopt a program-based structure for the initial presentation of three higher categories of data.

Closer analysis of the program-based data then led to the identification of major interlinked themes that are described in the final section of this chapter. It was decided to present analysis of these data in an in-depth, detailed, case study form, campus by campus. This reflects the qualitative method adopted for the study and offered the best means by which the overall aims of the study – identification of the shared, underlying model of learning – could be achieved. The retention of the discrete campus structure in the data analysis and presentation facilitated identification of common elements across programs. Quantitative analysis, while useful in identifying high frequency terms and ideas in the early stages of processing the raw data, and thus assisted in the identification of the major categories of data, did not prove useful in illuminating the essential elements and underlying model of education within each program. Thus quantitative representations of data analysis are not presented in this chapter.

4.7. *Analysis of Data by Campus*

This section presents three fundamental aspects of each program as understood by participating staff, which emerged as an over-arching interpretive framework through which to consider each program in more detail.
These were: (i) the design principles as an expression of intention, (ii) the ways in which design is implemented through practice, and (iii) the program outcomes – what is created or changed for the student through the experience.

*Design principles* involve campus location, isolation of the campus, the configuration of living areas, provision of communication facilities, living and learning schedules, program duration, gender configuration, group size and structure, pre-determined behavioural boundaries, staffing configuration, and specific site utilization through planned activities and skills development. Together, they act as an expression or reflection of educational intentions in the program.

*Design in practice* comprises mention of the fixed sites and activities, problems encountered, and mistakes made by students during the course of the program. This aspect focuses strongly on the experience of participants and their physical, emotional, and intellectual engagement with the students, and also considers the attitude towards risk, error, and problem-solving by participating students. Together, these reveal the theory-in-action of the planned experience.

*Program outcomes* for students, and includes consideration of the ways in which individual students are seen to create new knowledge through their experiences, as expressed through social interaction, reflection, engagement, and memorization. They reveal the goals of the program and hence the long-term values and beliefs of the school.

The analysis of the data is presented in turn by campus, with a brief introduction to the campus, a summary of the observations and a summary of the participating teachers by role and relative experience.
4.7.1 Acacia Campus

4.7.1.1. Overview of Campus

The campus is well established in a physically remote, wilderness location in mountainous terrain, approximately one half day’s travel from the denominational parent school. The program caters to a large cohort of Year 9 co-educational students who reside at the campus for 10 weeks at a time for one academic year. The campus residential and educational facilities were purpose built for the school and include accommodation for students in shared facilities and also for staff members and their families, all of which live on-site. There is a central campus administrative hub and dining precinct surrounded by classrooms, workshops, other support facilities, and dormitory dwellings for students. The campus dormitories are very basic in the provision of facilities, with 12 to 14 students sharing a common sleeping room in a single-sex house group. Bathroom facilities and a study area are attached to the dormitory. All meals are provided in a central dining facility, with students assisting in serving and cleaning at meal times. The campus is isolated from other communities in the immediate area and is not visible from beyond the property.

The Acacia program runs for a whole academic year and for five days a week offers a mainstream classroom-based academic program. The academic curriculum is similar to that offered at other independent schools in terms of lesson duration, length of school day, and content; it includes a full range of academic subjects. The experiential learning element of the Acacia program is conducted during times outside of the normal school day. Integration between the academic and experiential programs does occur, but is often incidental, rather than intentional. Following a recent review of the curriculum, an attempt has been made to introduce greater local content into the academic curriculum. This involves studying the local economy, industry, history, and natural environment. The experiential curriculum is heavily focused on physical activity undertaken in remote, wilderness areas.
Students are not permitted to have direct electronic contact with home and therefore must communicate with parents by letter. Parents are permitted to visit the campus once a term on a designated visitors’ day.

The data collection undertaken at Acacia Campus consisted of a two-day visit to the site to observe program activities and student-staff interaction, conduct formal interviews with staff members participating in the study, and interact with students on an informal basis. Extensive notes of the interactions and activities were taken throughout the visit.

A total of five members of staff from Acacia Campus took part in the interviews, which were conducted in a visitor’s lounge room close to the administrative hub of the campus. Participating teachers from Acacia Campus had typically worked on two experiential learning programs for an average 8.6 years, while one participant had worked on three different experiential learning programs; each of these other programs participated in this study. One participant was a Campus Manager, two were Program Managers, and two were Teachers.

All Acacia Campus interviewees appeared very comfortable in the setting and there was no difficulty establishing rapport at the beginning of each interview. Overall, there was little if any variation in the interview responses across the different staff roles. This consistency reflected the shared understanding of the design and practice that emerged from the interview data.

4.7.1.2. Observations

During the field visit, the students and staff interacted in what appeared to be an easy-going manner, using first names or nicknames as regular forms of address. However, student behaviour in certain settings or at certain times was clearly very constrained. For example, at meal times and chapel meetings students were expected to observe periods of silence and announcements in both the dining room and chapel were made with some formality. Staff supervision in these activities was visible, but the public
atmosphere was unusually subdued, with little chatter between students. Students moved quickly between their dormitories and the dining hall or classrooms. Outside of formal meetings and classes, students were not observed gathering informally for social purposes outside of their own dormitory areas.

All staff and students participated in observed activities, such as physical exercise, campus cleaning duties, minor maintenance and repair jobs, and campus meetings. Staff are expected to participate alongside students in the same physical activities and domestic duties. The staff-initiated contact with students observed during the visit focused on matters of campus activities and routines. Students and staff have adopted in-house names for many of the locations and regular activities in and around the campus and these have entered the language of both staff and students. Students were observed to interact with staff in a direct, yet respectful way.

The mainstream academic program and the experiential component of the curriculum at Acacia appear to be kept very separate, with little if any overlap. Experiential activities, such as hikes, kayaking, climbing, and skiing, are scheduled before and after timetabled lessons and at weekends.

4.7.1.3. Questionnaire Data

Acacia Campus staff all nominated student personal development as an essential element of the program. However, in contrast to other programs in the study, the staff also placed much greater emphasis on physical challenge and risk-taking; and ranked independence ahead of team-work. The Campus Manager indicated that student perceived danger was essential to the program, a judgement that was not shared by any of the teaching staff. Finally, the residential setting was considered an essential element by four of the five interviewees.
In staff narrative responses from Acacia campus, the words *resilience* and *challenge* appeared in every questionnaire, a strength in the pattern of response that was only present at this campus. Staff also noted the existence of *tradition* as an important element of the program.

There was a high level of consensus between the written questionnaire responses and the answers to questions at interview.

4.7.1.4. Design Principles

The Acacia Campus program works on a simple formula that is well understood by teachers, parents and students: *the experience speaks for itself* (*Campus Manager*). This phrase was repeated in the contributions from other teachers at Acacia Campus. The program design at Acacia Campus allows the experience itself to teach directly without a complex structure of preparatory lecturing and debriefing. The program relies on a relatively simple formula that has been sustained over an extended period of years and does not seek to be particularly innovative in its activities or approaches to learning.

The program poses a physical and social challenge to students over a period of a year under circumstances that are acknowledged to be difficult:

*There are lots of things we do here really to test and challenge them and we push, coerce (and) encourage to really bring out the best in students…it’s part of our tradition…it’s not something that’s hidden or new* (*Campus Manager*).

Program design allows for a degree of negotiation in the level of student participation and goals, but one principle is non-negotiable: participation is mandatory:

*There is less flexibility at Acacia Campus, but sometimes that less flexibility brings the students up…and encourages them to go to that next level* (*Teacher 1*).

The Campus Manager reported a clear philosophical prohibition against mixing mainstream learning, or post-activity reflection or debriefing, with experiential activities:
We try quite hard not to draw the lines between experiential and instructional...We would do a lot of briefing of the students prior to the science class...we hope in an experiential sense, they would identify say the change in the vegetation...from sub-alpine to alpine...We don’t do a formalised structural class room out there on the peaks because...the Bush does the talking for itself. (Teaching during activities) tends to diminish the experience...in an experiential sense we try to tool them up with all the knowledge and then send them out (Campus Manager).

Structured reflection at the conclusion of an experiential activity is not formally incorporated into the program structure:

Reflection time for us is at the end of the year when we sit back and reflect on the year. We don’t build in a lot of reflection time during the year. So this place is really about doing rather than reflecting (Campus Manager).

Kids at this age, especially boys, in my experience, don’t reflect well. I mean they can, but generally they don’t...I don’t think their mental/emotional capacity is up to their physical one just yet (Program Manager 1, Acacia).

It comes across as shallow and boring and goes against us with most kids...I think that that experience has integrity that it might not have if it’s been debriefed...I never try and force that stuff on kids (Program Manager 1).

The questionnaire data, however, indicated some ambiguity in the overall attitude towards the role of reflection in experiential learning. All teaching staff selected reflection as an essential element of the program, though this view was not shared by the Campus Manager.

Isolation is a defining characteristic of Acacia’s learning environment and the setting stands in stark contrast to the usual daily experience of the majority of students attending the program. It is described in the data as isolated, removed from outside influences, and remote (Campus Manager). The purpose of the remoteness, the isolation, is to encourage social interaction between students, a purpose that is supported by other design considerations:
Students don’t have access to the mass media they don’t have access to TV, internet, cable television and all the other bits and pieces that seem to influence their life enormously (Campus Manager).

The setting of the campus is visually attractive, but the surrounding mountainous terrain also presents a challenging dimension that shapes the tasks and the outcomes in every sense possible. The environment is intended to be both isolated and challenging:

I think the isolation is a huge key in what we do and I don’t think that you could replicate this program in an urban setting. We rely on the isolation enormously (Campus Manager).

One teacher noted in the questionnaire that the environment provides real consequences. Teachers at Acacia Campus expressed considerable pride in the setting:

Our mountains are pretty hard and that’s a genuine challenge for everyone who has lived here. They are also really aesthetically beautiful...With our mountains you can see where you have come from and that’s crucial too; that feedback, “this is what I have done” (Program Manager 1).

Students are placed in a structured environment in which social interaction between students and staff is seen as one of the most fundamentally important aspects of the program at Acacia Campus. Similarly, the requirement for students to live together in a structured setting is seen by participants as an essential element of the program design.

Having created a residential environment in which relationships form an important part of the program, the unique aspect of the learning at Acacia Campus was explained as access:

We have the students with us twenty-four hours a day and...learning can actually happen at any time. It doesn’t have to be between set hours in a normal school...We may decide to call it the weekend or decide to call it (an) academic day...our edge is (un)limited access (Program Manager 2).

(At) day school, come 3.30 you go into a new environment. Whereas here that’s not the case; you are with the same people throughout the day so you do need to develop those skills...and have time out from people using that small (space) for the year (Teacher 2).
The campus isolates students from the immediate support of parents. Handwritten letters are permitted, but this system is deliberately cumbersome and unresponsive to immediate concerns that arise in the course of the program. This has the intended purpose of building the decision-making capacity of each student:

*If for example students had email and every decision they had to make they (asked) their parents or their brothers or their sisters or their friends, then that decision is not their decision… We try and get them to build independence…through them making their own decisions (Campus Manager).*

Building the independence and resilience of students in coping with challenge and making their own decisions is difficult: *It’s a struggle to retain kids to do that (Program Manager 1).* Teachers believe that one of the reasons for this is that many students are accustomed to a quick resolution of problems: *the quick fix…we teach them to stop and think (Program Manager 2).*

Students find the process of writing down their thoughts and waiting for a response frustrating and some teachers noted that students lack the skills to communicate effectively in writing. Their parents, likewise, find time passes slowly and news takes a painfully long time to arrive.

The program requires students to shoulder leadership responsibilities, to make decisions and learn within very broad boundaries and limits:

*We provide them with opportunities for leadership, taking responsibility – they have to take responsibility – they don’t have hot water unless they take responsibility, or they get lost in the bush if they don’t take responsibility, they end up doing additional work if they don’t take responsibility (Campus Manager).*

*To the students it appears very free, that they are left in the (dormitory) to chop wood and they are not supervised at all, or if we go out hiking and we send groups off (Program Manager 2).*

The tension and anxiety arising in students from perceived risk associated with a hazardous environment is generated intentionally to put them on edge:

*We take kids into the country with a really hazardous environment and there’s a lot of risk involved…they do feel vulnerable and quite scared about it (Teacher 2).*
One staff member stressed that despite the students’ perception of freedom, there is an extensive network of support and supervision, both on campus and off. Great care is taken, however, to ensure that students are not made aware of the safety net so as to preserve the feeling of freedom.

This network of supports and constraints is gradually relaxed during the program as student skills increase:

_They are busy, they are focused, they are developing and their freedom increases as the year goes on because we start to pull back some of those overriding supervision elements (Program Manager 2)._ 

Many of the activities and locations in and around the campus have acquired great significance symbolically for staff and students. Some daily responsibilities undertaken by students have taken on educational significance that is unrelated to risk or challenge, and which hold an important place in the philosophy of the program:

_Chopping wood symbolises something here…It’s something that they have to do that is required that they give back to their (peers) or they give to themselves. It needs doing and it’s constant. They learn that in life there are certain things that you need to do…if they are not done it has a wider effect (Program Manager 2)._ 

Some campus locations are out of bounds to students and some unsanctioned student activities that occur in these locations represent a relatively mild challenge to campus authority, for example, leaving the student dormitory during the night; at the same time, they are seen by parents and students as an almost folkloric ‘rite of passage’. Students are tacitly encouraged to continue some of these behaviours by former students, even while staff at the campus continue to suppress or discourage the behaviours. There were places noted by participants as significant because they represent difficult physical challenges and the names of these places have entered the speech adopted at the campus, by both staff and students, representing the specific underlying value, activity, or consequence. These practices reflect the ‘traditions’ of the program noted in the questionnaire responses.
Modes of transport and camping sites are also significant for staff and students. For example, one important symbolic activity focused on the requirement for students to enter and leave the campus on foot.

Activity repetition is incorporated into program design in order to boost student confidence by giving perspective on the development of skills over a period of time. In reflecting on an activity that is undertaken by students at the beginning and towards the end of the year, one teacher described the impact of perceived progress on students: *they are just blown away as to how scared they were the first time* (Teacher 2).

The repetition cycles vary, depending on the activity. The nature of the challenge also changes; some focus on affective learning, where students have overcome an anxiety in managing risk, whereas other repetition cycles focus on the development of physical capacity:

> The first walk they ever do is a day walk...at the end of Term 1 they run it. It takes them all day to walk up it and it's a huge big deal and they know that later in the term that they are going to have to run up, and they wonder, 'How am I going to do that?' They run it in a couple of hours and that's incredible. I mean to go to the same place and realise how far they have come in terms of fitness and their ability to overcome a challenge (Teacher 2).

4.7.1.5. Design in Practice: Activities and Problems

The distinctive, isolated setting plays a significant role in shaping the activities and problems encountered during the Acacia program. The experience itself has a strong social dimension, shaped by challenging dormitory and outdoor environments. This day and night access to students in an isolated setting is closer and perhaps more intense than that experienced in a typical boarding program:

> The kids can see that you are a person (and) we see students on their good and bad days as students see us on our good and bad days as well (Teacher 2).
The social environment at the campus is actively cultivated, both through facilities design, and by staff management of student social interaction. There are some predictable problems that emerge out of the residential setting.

Why I think the (dormitories are) most memorable in a tough challenging way in the end is the sheer lack of personal space (Program Manager 1).

Pressures build within dormitory groups as a result of prolonged contact:

I think what you see is dangerous fascination in boys in (dormitories). Like throwing kids around, swearing their heads off as loud as they can. Like a few times this term we have had kids lose it; good kids, but just out of emotional energy I reckon, and that takes some working through (Program Manager 1).

Rapport between staff and students is built through the intense, daily interaction that occurs in the dormitories:

There are a lot of one on one chats that we have with the kids. To have fourteen girls in my (dormitory) I am constantly chatting to kids about where they are at, how they are feeling, and are they achieving the things that they want to achieve. (Teacher 2).

Teachers with dormitory responsibilities discussed some common strategies for dealing with the social pressures of dormitory life:

In Term One everything is exciting and everything is really rushed. In Term Two it plateaus…there was stress and anxiety and they were building up a lot of frustration with each other. We talked about how you can get away from it: things like going to a meal twenty minutes before the meal starts, just to hang out with others. They have to be comfortable within the (dormitory) to know that they don’t have to be a real tight little network; they can have friends outside (Teacher 2).

The type of situation that leads to a serious dispute requiring staff intervention often arises from a minor incident. Staff talk through the options in detail:

I only know with boys…it can be anything from someone’s magazine going missing (to) somebody says something negative to them…I could be any number of things that set off a chain reaction…They can start accusing other people…If they find out that somebody has it and didn’t ask if they could borrow it and lash out at them…So we try and turn those things that are quite negative into a learning experience. So you could say: “how do you think you handled that situation? Can you think of a better way to do it? How would you do it next time? You have made a mistake this time, how would you handle it next time (Teacher 3)?”
The activities are often conducted in circumstances that are physically and psychologically challenging:

*I think they have just had to experience things that are tough. They develop that resilience...*Last year we had students on the three days (hike) and we just had snow which covered the whole low and high country and that was the first time that they had ever had to deal with snow...they had to put up with being wet for three days...they just had to cope...We knew that these kids would be fine with whatever happened because they had had that experience early* (Teacher 2).

As students develop resilience, participants reported that their capacity to manage their environment improved, incorporating decisions based on a wide range of data, such as weather, type of activity proposed, etc.:

*Students spend something like sixty days in a tent a year here. So they become quite familiar with weather and it is a very important part of what they are doing here...It is forecast to be snowing on campus in a couple of days and that will affect what they do and what they pack and greatly influences what we expect them to do* (Campus Manager).

The campus implements a mainstream, day-time academic program for all students that runs in tandem with the experiential program. The Campus Manager described the campus as a *fairly normal school except that it’s in the bush*. He added that the curriculum was *fairly traditional*. The isolated setting poses some problems, and according to the Campus Manager some efforts have been made to achieve greater *integration* between the experiential and academic segments of the Acacia program. However, every effort is made to ensure the expectations placed on both students and staff are similar to those for students at the main school:

*There are not too many uncertainties that exist in the academic program. And we offer fairly normal type of exams that run for 1½ hours. We are quite rigorous in how we run them* (Campus Manager).

The setting itself acts to shape some of the subject offerings in the mainstream program:

*We have a fully working farm. We have a subject called Farm Management, which is an elective; we might as well make it compulsory because 95% of the students do it. It’s sense to have it here because it really is a hands-on subject...calving and lambing and all the other farming activities* (Campus Manager).
The highly distinctive visual aspect to the campus setting inspires students to record images and relate these to their reactions to the experience itself:

*It’s called a visual diary in Art because it’s where they keep all their displays and artwork...their visual diary in PE (is) a stress management tool. Getting them to log when they were feeling under stress...so they can identify issues...the idea of the visual diary at that stage was to allow them to keep on top of how they were feeling (Teacher 3).*

One of the skills developed throughout the program is effective written communication. Whether documenting their own experiences through a visual diary, or writing to parents about their experiences, the ability to express ideas or communicate visual concepts through the written word is valued:

*We try and teach them the skills of how to show, not tell – that’s a big thing in writing (Program Manager).*

These written and visual records of student experience could also be interpreted as a form of self-guided reflection, a practice that is not formally endorsed by campus management.

The setting of the campus imposes a daily routine of responsibilities. Water usage, heating, and other needs provide an opportunity for students to learn about campus energy and water systems, analysing efficiency, sustainability and ultimately, practicability. Students also undertake daily duties in the kitchen and dining areas, as well as waste management, low-level maintenance, and dormitory cleaning.

*It’s cold and it snows and the kids have to light their boilers all the time...they are such a big part of the program – lighting the boilers. They have to get the wood, cut the wood and work together...to keep the boilers alight all the time. It’s a real teamwork thing. It really fits into this environment and reminds them of a simpler life (Teacher 2).*

Given the setting of the program and the environment in which activities are carried out, there is a limited capacity to accommodate student mistakes. In many of the activities, safety standards leave little room for error. Teachers do, however see student mistakes as an important part of learning:

*Kids have to lead the trip. Each kid has a slot in which to lead the group and they have to organise meals in that time, cleaning up, packing, walking, break and snacks and things like that. That’s tough on them, especially when it’s cold, wet, windy and snowing. Lots of kids*
struggle with that. That’s the chance for people to make mistakes and learn to do better next time… I think any prompting of mistakes or creation of mistakes in this territory has to be carefully managed to avoid a fail situation, which is not productive either. I think you need to… nudge them across the line if you have to so they learn a little bit perhaps but learn it clearly. I would be more prepared to let a kid make mistakes on a group discussion. I would be prepared to let that go for a while, providing I was there the whole time. Other kids fight, that’s fine; that’s not going to worry me because I can control that and arrest it if it gets nasty (Program Manager 1).

 Asked if they would allow an error during an outdoor activity to continue, with consequences compounding for the students, the majority of staff were in favour of intervention:

 I have followed students where a couple have gone in the wrong direction… It’s all of a sudden dawned on them that they have travelled for a long time since they knew where they were and have started to argue with each other… That is where we usually step in and say, “We are not getting anywhere by arguing about it… do we know where we are? What do we see around us and how can we backtrack and go to our last point where we knew where we were?” And then put it back on them… catch up with them later on and say, “Well, you have been lost. Did you learn something from that and how would you deal with it next time?” (Teacher 3).

 Time constraints in activity completion were cited as one reason for the difficulty in handling student mistakes without staff intervention.

 4.7.1.6. Program Outcomes

 Acacia program outcomes can be divided into two distinct categories: concrete, visible behavioural changes in students that arise from their adaptation to the physical environment and daily routines at the campus, and attitudinal changes that emerge over a longer time frame and that appear to be more closely connected with student memories of their experiences.

 Student behaviour and their capacity to communicate with each other and adults undergo significant change during the year:

 Learning consequences for their actions right up to Term Four, most of them start to change their behaviour… and generally won’t be getting detentions and early morning labours and things like that… I think that
they actually have a comprehension change during the year...For the majority of the boys mature as the year goes along and have changed a lot over the year and really at the end of the year they understand the importance of most things...Their conversational skills are phenomenally improved half way through the year...It’s an amazing level of familiarity and acceptance (between students) because they are randomly chosen (Teacher 3).

The close physical environment within the campus shapes attitudes and patterns of interaction between students:

They learn life, which you might call tolerance. They have been chucked in with a group of thirteen other boys with two showers, two toilets, two big rooms, a dorm and a study. There are learning experiences in that that you can’t replicate...You learn very quickly that you can’t operate day to day with not talking to others...They learn a lot more about how to cope and appreciate others (Program Manager 2).

However, some male students struggle to understand the connection between behaviour and consequence:

A lot of the boys say: “Ok, this is a situation where I have got this consequence before and I am not going to do it now but I haven’t yet quite figured out why I am not going to do it”. But at some point they say: “I understand now because when I do that John gets angry at me or whatever it might be. I know what it’s like when someone in the (dormitory) doesn’t do their share, so I am going to do my share and make it easier on Mum” (Teacher 3).

It is difficult to gauge the long-term impact of these changes on student behaviour, but parent feedback, post-program, is one source of such information:

The parents say, “He’s so much more mature now and helps around the house” (Teacher 3).

Some students maintain contact with their teachers for a period of time in the following year as they adapt to life away from the campus:

A lot of them miss having something to do all the time – the sort of ‘busy-ness’ of the place. They have a lot of free time and some of them really struggle (Teacher 3).

In their comments on student attitudinal outcomes, staff typically nominated attributes like resilience and tolerance; they said students learned to cope with challenge, take responsibility and to appreciate other members of the group or
campus. The Campus Manager summarised the outcomes at Acacia for not just the experiential programs, but also the academic programs thus:

I think the key thing that (Acacia Campus) does is resilience…and that’s really what we are on about and we do that in a whole different set of domains. We do it in an academic resilience sense, we do that in a physical sense and we do that more and more in an emotional and social sense (Campus Manager).

Another teacher summarised the outcomes of the Acacia program in this way:

Being independent...being away from mum and dad and being in the new environment, all of the kids develop independence...the biggest thing here is resilience...just the strength to overcome difficult situations. We develop those skills that you need for that: a strong mind (Teacher 2).

The overall experience leaves particularly durable memories of setting, activities, and relationships:

The actual memories seem to be the physical or social interaction elements (Program Manager 2)

They will come back and know exactly who was next to them on either side. I think the closeness of the living they carry with them. They often remember events...hikes and what runs were difficult. So I guess between the living and the challenges that they have overcome are the major memories (Teacher 3).

Coping with difficulties and dealing with conflict, emerge as one of the most memorable aspects of the programs:

You quite often hear stories (later) about the time of an experience that kids, as a group, have achieved, like walking up the Bluff in the snow. They quite often talk about the hard times (Teacher 2).

Staff believe that reflection must wait until after the experience is complete to enhance its memorability:

It’s more difficult to reflect on (memories) during the year than it is for them to reflect once they have left. It’s more lasting I think when they have left (Teacher 2).

Some of the learning outcomes, however, may not be apparent for years:

Kids can achieve stuff and have memories...the consequences and implications of which they won’t get to for a few years (Program Manager 1).
Staff also reported on their own learning during the course of a program. One staff member, for example, noted that the capacity to endure hardship during the program was often underestimated by staff:

*I have learnt that I can be much tougher on kids without losing them. Kids are much more capable that what I thought before. What kids do when they haven’t got a choice is actually pretty extraordinary* (Program Manager 1).

There were different views on what happens to the students after the program, and this was seen as an area for improvement:

*There’s not much of a follow up afterwards. It does bother me a bit…You are all of a sudden removed from all normal school structure and home life to a different situation…and then go back to a more strict academic type program again* (Teacher 3).

By contrast, the Campus Manager and another Teacher in the questionnaire, both claimed there was a sound transition back to mainstream schooling.

4.7.1.7. Summary

The experiential learning program at Acacia Campus isolates students from their daily lives and relationships in a unique setting that is both challenging and memorable. There is a strong demarcation between experiential learning and classroom learning at the campus. The program is based on the learning principle that the activities and the experiences ‘speak for themselves’. Traditions and routines are important and are encouraged or enforced as deemed necessary, and these provide a strong, stable structure that focuses on the student as an individual.

Through the isolation of setting and system, students are immersed in a network of social interactions that have a profound effect on their personal development, particularly their communication skills, independence, resilience, and accountability for their actions and decisions. Independence is emphasised somewhat over collaboration, with a strong focus on individual challenge and performance. The removal of immediate outside contact has been shown to encourage development of communication skills through
frequent peer-to-peer verbal communication, and to enhance written skills through mail correspondence with parents.

Students are expected to participate in the program, achieve personal goals, and make mistakes along with way, all within a well-structured and closely managed environment in which student safety is paramount. Staff aim to avoid formal reflection during the program, in the belief that student memories will be more durable and effective in later years if left undisturbed by overt intervention. However, there is evidence of informal reflective practice firmly embedded in the problem-solving approaches adopted by teachers across the campus and in the visual and written diaries students are encouraged to produce.

4.7.2. Boronia Campus

4.7.2.1. Overview of Campus and Program

The campus is located in a remote, wilderness setting one day’s travel from the denominational single-sex parent school. The surrounding terrain is heavily forested and hilly. Vehicular access to the campus itself is quite difficult due to the state of the roads in the vicinity. The residential and educational facilities were purpose-built for the school and include accommodation for students in shared facilities and for staff members and their families. Physically, there is a central campus administrative hub surrounded by discrete dormitory dwellings for six to eight students. Each student dwelling has its own attached kitchen, bathroom, laundry, and recreation facilities. Students are expected to use these facilities to meet their basic physical needs during the program. Two meals each day are prepared by the students in their own dwelling, a task that is an intentional element of the experiential learning program.

The Boronia Campus program is designed as a one-term (eight to nine weeks), intensive course of experiential learning in which the experiential and academic are blended together in a seamless fashion. Program days are
broken into morning and afternoon sessions and mainstream academic activities are scheduled to run during these sessions. There is considerable integration between the academic and experiential elements of the program, particularly in the area of science and environmental education. The experiential curriculum includes physical activities, such as running and hiking, and exploratory activities aimed at developing navigation skills.

Students are permitted to communicate with the parents by letter only and parents are invited to visit the campus once on a designated weekend during the program.

Data collected over a two-day visit at Boronia Campus consisted of observations, program activities and student-staff interaction, two formal interviews with staff members, and interaction with students on an informal basis. A second data collection was undertaken at the main campus of the parent school; this consisted of another 11 in-depth interviews with the remaining campus staff.

All interviews and observations at both the campus and the parent school were conducted in an atmosphere of generous cooperation and sincere professional sharing. All participants warmed to the ethnographic interview style adopted and become increasingly comfortable with sharing personal opinions and confidences. Several participants, after reconfirming that transcripts of the interview would not be passed on to school management, disclosed detailed personal evaluations of program elements.

A total of 13 members of staff from the school took part in the interviews, 12 of whom were based at Boronia Campus. Participants in the study were: a school manager, two campus managers, two program managers, and eight teachers. The teachers had typically had experience working in two experiential learning programs for an average four years. Although they were not aware of which other schools were included in this study, data collected showed one participant had worked in experiential programs at four of the schools selected for this study; two participants had worked at three
participating schools, with a further two having worked at two participating schools.

4.7.2.2. Observations

The observations of students participating in program activities at Boronia Campus took place on the last two days of the program, at a time when students were preparing to depart for home while taking part in a range of closure activities. Although the observation period and range of activities observed were limited and informal, they were nonetheless confirmatory of staff comments at interview.

There was a strong sense of collaboration, shared experience, and bonding between the students and staff. Interactions between all students and staff were very friendly, open, and mutually respectful. Social interaction between students and staff extended well beyond purely operational matters. Student public speaking and performances were confident, effective in communicating the intended message and demonstrated a strong degree of trust within the group.

There were several locations within the campus that were seen by students as important, acting as a site of formal gathering by day and often informal and unsanctioned social activity by night. A pre-dawn gathering at one site close to the students’ residences for a period of quiet reflection revealed an element of student respect and even reverence for the setting. Many campus locations had acquired local names that were in frequent use by students and staff.

The observational data support the view that the development of a cooperative, harmonious community lies at the heart of the Boronia Campus program.
4.7.2.3. Questionnaire Data

All survey respondents completed a written questionnaire prior to the interview. They identified *personal growth* as the most important element of experiential learning. *Independence* and *teamwork*, were given an almost equal ranking in importance. The importance of *residential setting* and the surrounding *environment* of the program were acknowledged by all but one interviewee, ranking these two only slightly below independence and teamwork. The more senior members of campus participating in the study, however, rated residential setting and environment above independence and teamwork. The importance of providing time and space for student *reflection* was also acknowledged by all survey respondents.

Only one respondent from Boronia Campus mentioned *risk-taking* or *perceived danger* as an essential element of the program, albeit at a very low level of importance comparatively.

In the narrative responses, the most striking feature was the frequent reference to the physical environment and the repeated use of descriptive terms for the program setting, such as: *native bushland, coastal, dunes, lakes*, also *wilderness, isolated, and remote*. All but two of the narrative responses emphasized the physical features of the surrounding environment in answer to questions.

4.7.2.4. Design Principles

The most visibly evident element of program design is the campus setting, which is isolated in a bush setting, away from other settlements in the region, and quite deliberately shielded even from any ‘line of sight’ connection with other dwellings, roads, or structures. The physical isolation imposed on students is intended to separate them from the familiar and immerse them in a setting that is unfamiliar.
The isolated setting necessitates students leaving their home environment and travelling to the campus, a trip that typically requires a day to complete. Staff participating in the study frequently used the term journey to describe how they saw the program from the perspective of the student:

*It’s an excellent opportunity for the (students)… to be removed completely from their normal operating environment and be immersed in a place where they are on a journey…(a) journey of self-discovery (Program Manager).*

The first phase of the physical journey concludes when, in a well-established practice, marking the commencement of each program:

*They have to actually walk down to the school. And they learn…everything has a purpose and everything is interrelated (Campus Manager).*

Participants commonly made reference to an underlying philosophical approach informing program design that associated learning with every aspect of the experience at the campus, so that it was not possible to extract a discrete ‘formal’ curriculum from the surrounding living experiences:

*Everything here…is a curriculum. You can’t look at it as lessons, it’s a series of experiences, planned and unplanned…teachable moments where they just happen and you pick up on something (Program Manager).*

*They are really learning all the time. From the time they get on the bus and think about the people they leave behind to stepping off the bus and meeting the staff [here] (Campus Manager).*

*So [the program] is about taking students out of this [urban] environment and exposing them to another environment knowing full well that different learning happens in different environments (School Manager).*

Direct communications with the outside world have been eliminated:

*We’ve taken away their normal environment and deliberately removed some things…and allowed other stuff to filter in (Teacher 1).*

The setting is integral to the intended learning outcomes for the program:

*(Its) location…is its greatest asset and its greatest challenge on so many levels. There are so many things that students get out of that remoteness experience that is unique (School Manager).*

Said one of the teachers:
I think they are aware of the isolation…getting used to writing letters and the fact that it takes five days to get there, and the fact that you can’t just automatically contact…their family and their friends. Yet they have new friends around them that they can instantly talk to because they are there (Teacher 2).

Another commented:

It’s important they really feel that they’re miles away from home…it’s an environment that they are not familiar with (Teacher 3).

The pressure of this isolation creates learning opportunities, because there is no chance to break away from a problem by having a private space or having a parent solve it. One teacher observed that the greatest challenge for students at Boronia Campus was: living with other students (Teacher 4). With a week between writing home and the parent ringing up, the students have had to deal with the problem themselves and thus have learned some skills, which they otherwise may not have learned.

Another participant pointed out that the isolation gives students:

...time to reflect on what they are doing…time to be counseled, to ‘get on the horse’ if they have issues (Teacher 4).

Activity repetition is used intentionally in places in the program structure to create perspective for the student. This is where an activity with a significant element of challenge is undertaken during the early part of the program and then intentionally repeated at some point towards the end of the program when students have acquired skills and experience that remove or reduce the element of challenge. The purpose of activity repetition is to provide students with a sense of progress and achievement, drawing on durable memories of the first iteration that contrast strongly with a similar activity at a later time in the program.

Several overnight excursions for students – called expeditions – are arranged during the program. The expeditions are undertaken by small groups of students under staff supervision and consist of multi-day explorations of the district adjacent to the campus. They are intended to develop a range of skills,
including navigation, leadership, and camping. These allow very clear appreciation of a student’s development during the program:

_The students will often be anxious on that first trip, but by the second one...they are more comfortable within that environment themselves_ (Program Manager).

Key elements in successful development achieved through repetition are familiarity with the setting; and relevant interim experience for managing the challenge associated with the activity itself.

Student self-reports indicate that activity sites and commonly visited locations come to take on significance for a range of highly subjective reasons. Places identified as having special significance in this sense include a creek bed, a hilltop adjacent to the main living areas of the campus, and some of the paddocks used for livestock. They become significant due to activities undertaken there, from reflection, and from connection with special incidents.

The campus is designed as a working farm. Students help out with the management of farming operations, including the handling and care of livestock, and the management of land, under the supervision of specialist staff. Through the farm program, students also learn about sustainability, energy generation and conservation, water conservation and usage.

Another means through which program objectives are met lies in the design of discrete, independent student accommodation. Students are placed in house groups of eight to ten and as a team they are expected to meet the daily living needs of the group. This includes provision of some meals, management of domestic hygiene, and promotion of social harmony in the house. Over time, these living arrangements have become one of the core features of the learning at this campus is:

..._the tradition of the students living in houses, unaccompanied by staff and having to learn living skills and having to learn to live by the skills of existence_ (Campus Manager)

The design of the program has been modified somewhat in recent years, moving from a more traditional rural enterprise to a more pronounced focus
on sustainable living. This has resulted in moving the focus from short-term behavioural changes based on competitive practices within the campus community to long-term changes in patterns of living:

In the past there may have been water type competitions where students have striven to be able to use the least amount of power and water...that has led to students not having showers or not doing things that they can take back to (the parent school) with them. So sustainability is being able to manage our time, our resources over the long term...to live comfortably...with minimal resources (Program Manager).

I definitely drop any notion of competition out of the use of reduction of water usage and power wattage...students do need to conserve those resources for the bigger picture reasons (Program Manager).

Sustainability is also to be adopted at the parent school in the coming year.

In summary, the design of the program isolates students, both physically and socially from the home environment, immerses them in an inter-related network of learning activities that emphasise sustainability and independent living. The immediate setting creates opportunities for planned and unplanned learning. Staff have a strong belief in the depth of learning these factors can make possible:

I think in a classroom they would still learn exactly the same knowledge, but it comes back to having it right there in front of them and they can see the consequences of doing it or not doing it (Teacher 2).

4.7.2.5. Design in Practice: Activities and Problems

The problems and activities encountered in the Boronia Campus program reflect a wide spectrum of planned and unplanned experiences, from navigation exercises, or a gate-mending workshop, to conflict resolution and separation anxiety.

One of the first difficulties in examining the ‘activity’ dimension of the program is determining the point at which the program begins from a learning perspective. Some staff from this program in particular were very aware that the anticipation and preparatory briefing, both formal (from the parent school)
and informal (from previous students) mean that students from each
successive group begin to interact with the setting and the problems before
they have arrived at the campus.

Learning starts the moment (students) know that (they’re) coming. The
anticipation, the eagerness, the excitement: “How am I going to handle
that situation? How am I going handle not seeing my family for eight
weeks?” To me that’s where the learning starts…and that style of
learning is very different for each individual (Teacher 5).

Furthermore, the emergence of a specific group dynamic is well underway
before the students travel to the campus.

During activities, questions are seen as a critical part of the learning in this
experiential setting; they arise directly from the natural curiosity of students
when immersed in an unfamiliar environment, but as one participant noted,
there is an ad hoc element to the questions, arising as they do from the
interaction between student, setting, and the experience itself, so that the
teacher has to rely to an extent on the ‘right’ questions emerging. The
generation of more fruitful questions, however, can be prompted if necessary.

There is a strong sense of integration between the academic and experiential
elements of the program. In one example, a teacher described a fitness test at
the commencement of the program, which was used as an introduction to the
body’s energy systems. Students then measured their physiological reaction
to running up a hill (Teacher 7). She added that a major focus of the physical
education at Boronia was the science of the body and the energy system
(Teacher 7).

Participants gave many other examples of experiential activities that provided
opportunities for semantic learning scaffolded in an experiential framework.
These examples typically consisted of outdoor activities in which students
were able to observe environmental phenomena and thereby gain a greater
theoretical grasp of the underlying principles:

I have students walk through the rain forest up into the sclerophyll
forest and be able to identify the difference between the two...being
able to hold the soil in their hand, be able to see the trees move from
being quite dark green and wet to a more open forest and then go
away and work with the data…and write up on why they thought those two things were where they were (Program Manager).

New social connections and relationships appear from the start of each program, in part emerging naturally due to the new living and learning conditions in which students spend their days:

(Boronia Campus) is a leveler. I mean you have in this environment here all sorts of hierarchy and all sorts of politics and all sorts of issues that (students) grapple with in their relationship with one another. You have students that have more money than others, you have students whose Mum and Dad are working flat chat just so they can send their (child) here, you have got the students who take over…because they are the gang of Year 9s. It’s the whole power play stuff. However, when you go to (Boronia Campus), because very few have had that experience and it is so remote. I call it a leveler because everyone pretty much gets down to the same level…and we find that students start working together, students start problem solving together, students start making connections that they otherwise wouldn’t have made (School Manager).

The environment itself imposes a different set of obligations and demands on students and this tends to impact on the social networks and relationships. As social interactions change with the altered environment, the social structure of the student group as a whole begins to change in sometimes quite fundamental ways:

Where they might have had back here (at the parent school) a set of relationships, and (they) value this person and she’s the leader because she’s cool or whatever, and then they get in that house and after a few weeks they start to realise that although she’s cool and beautiful, she can’t plan, she can’t cook, she’s hopeless and (they) don’t value her opinion as much because in this new context these other values are coming through (Program Manager).

The Program Manager cites the close physical proximity students experience with each other through the program setting, as an important mechanism for imposing or facilitating changes in the group social structure. She believes that the opinions that emerge in the changed environment were already present in the individual, but the setting and associated pattern of interaction facilitate this process:

It’s the interaction that everything has, so everything is connected, so you need to understand the other people that you are interacting with and how that affects you and how you affect them (Program Manager).
The effect described as leveling sees the pre-existing social hierarchies replaced in the new setting, as the pattern of interactions between students begins to change and barriers that operated in the parent school setting are weakened or changed in significant ways. One participant in the study referred to students stepping through a boundary or barrier to join in a ‘community’ in which personal feelings might be revealed or disclosed safely. The expression of community emerges in new trust relationships, cooperation, and collective negotiated goals and behaviours.

In addition to the notions of ‘leveling’ and ‘boundary crossing’, staff also report the existence of a largely predictable chronological rhythm to the social dynamics of residential experiential programs:

*By Week Three they fall apart and we actually plan to send them out on expeditions that week and we break them up from their house groups (Program Manager).*

Time is managed at the campus to allow for activities and for reflection. Some of the activity time is therefore deliberately structured to leave gaps, to create space for the students to experience time that is ‘off-line’ in order to achieve a specific outcome:

*Actually, give them moments of ‘I’m bored’ because some kids can’t handle that because they have always been entertained with something (Teacher 1).*

Reflection on the experience is formally programmed with a day of individual isolation arranged at the conclusion of the program. This activity is referred to as a ‘solo’ expedition:

*They…have a day of solo to reflect…The night before the presentation they are encouraged to think about their time at Boronia…They also get a letter back, which they wrote (to themselves) at the start of term and they can open it up and that talks about goals (Teacher 6).*

The letter returned to the student during the solo expedition is self-penned prior to the commencement of the program. Its purpose is to provide students with an appreciation of their changed perspective – a ‘before’ and ‘after’ view of themselves.
Most participants believe that the campus farm takes a central place in the memories of students because of its contrast with their largely urbanised home environments:

For a lot of them it’s just another thing that takes them out of their comfort zone: work with animals, or walk through paddocks with cow dung everywhere…A lot of the kids connect with the animals and spend a lot of time with them (Teacher 2).

The centrality of the farming theme in many activities shapes the knowledge shared and the questions raised through interaction and participation:

I guess the process of where their food comes from…about grass and what’s important for the cows to eat and why we give them extra hay. They often ask questions about how long the cow is pregnant…They learn a lot about the vegetable garden and the compost (Teacher 2).

Student perception of risk is based on their experiences at a large urban school. One participant commented that students struggled with the process of judging risk, based on their urban experiences:

So while students here are quite able to walk down the street to the train station as it gets dark, if you said to them in the first week or two…“I want you to walk to the farmhouse (in the dark)”, they would have the perception that that wasn’t something that was safe (Program Manager).

Student error is also seen as opportunity to learn, and the handling of student errors seeks to strike a balance between student learning autonomy and excessive intervention. Provided safety is not an issue, students are expected to take a leadership role in resolving problems:

If it’s not…detrimental to them…I let them do something a certain way and they become so frustrated with each other, or they just give up, or there’s a tantrum: you have to judge that and might have to step in and help them out…I would be reluctant to tell the whole group to stop. I would approach a student and say, “What do you reckon?” I would try to do it that way so that it’s coming from them (Program Manager).

I like to give them parameters and sit back and let them make mistakes within reason and that often takes time to allow them to make mistakes…dealing with the consequences and recognizing that they are mistakes…problem solving and then reflecting at the end of it (Program Manager).
Staff work with students, scaffolding their problem-solving with leading questions, frustrating them in one sense, to avoid generating opinions that are aimed at pleasing the teacher:

*I was quite glad when the students got to the point when they were frustrated with me...they couldn’t find out what my opinion was, but they were able to go and formulate their own and deliver that to me* (Program Manager).

Students are actively encouraged to recognise the existence of problems, and seek resolutions without adult intervention:

*I like to let the situation evolve to the point where students realise that they had a problem and they needed something to fix it* (Program Manager).

Isolated from their daily social support structures during the program, students are permitted little respite or relief from the social pressures of the setting:

*There isn’t a release valve so they need to identify problems and work on them* (Program Manager).

The unrelenting social pressure motivates students to acknowledge problems and seek solutions themselves, rather than waiting for adult intervention.

### 4.7.2.6. Program Outcomes

Teachers acknowledge that measuring learning outcomes through observation and assessment is problematic. One teacher reported that one of the problems was the lack of a reliable and accurate instrument to measure changes in students throughout the program. The Program Manager noted that observation during and at the end of the program might not be productive due to the extended nature of the experiential learning timeframe:

*They might go through the whole experience and not realise it until months or years down the track and start to appreciate what they went through* (Program Manager).

Currently, students are informally benchmarked at the start of the program, with periodic follow-up from teachers using tests to gauge changes in participating students:

*I think you have to have an understanding of where (the students) are at initially. Maybe go through a series of questions about topics and*
then writing or expressing answers somehow. Then go through parts of
the program and just seeing how that changes with the same tool or
slightly different tool, to see if there is a change in the level of
understanding (Program Manager).

The main point of contention is the specific attributes, behaviours or
performances chosen to gauge performance because staff distrust the
subjective nature of performance evaluation criteria:

*When they have been given feedback either that the student has been
really good or really bad, once again they have to make a subjective
choice of what bit of information of that student do I value? (Program
Manager)*

Staff acknowledged the significance of reflection as a more reliable and
student-centred activity to identifying outcomes:

*Change definitely occurs: however, unless a student says: “This has
changed me”, there is no measurement of where they were at the start,
only at the end where they write self-reflections (Program
Manager).*

One of the ways in which students reflect on the experience is the practice of
creating a mock-up of the dormitory living environment as a part of the
program debrief at the parent school following the conclusion of the program.
This practice highlights the close student connection with the physical living
space, which was noted by nearly all participants in the study. Parents
participate in this activity that is also intended to assist in the reintegration of
students back into mainstream school life.

A staff member, who had been a student at the campus nine years before,
reflected on her most enduring memories:

*I think (my most enduring memory was) actually making a contribution
that was physical. I still remember putting in a gate and a post and
hammering it all together with the farmer and the gate is still there now
(Teacher 7 – former student).*

There is a clear distinction drawn at Boronia Campus between ‘debriefing’,
which according to participants implies a more formalised and teacher-led
‘processing’ of an experience, and a more informal, student-focused activity
called ‘reflection’:

*I guess reflection is an acknowledgment of learning change and
recognition. You always know that they are reflecting and you can do it*
in a million ways but it’s that unplanned stuff that they just do at whatever stage (Program Manager).

On the other hand, debriefing was not encouraged through the program structure:

There is reflection but not so much debriefing, because of the way the program is structured, in the true sitting down and processing the experience (Teacher 7).

In encouraging and leading informal reflection sessions with the students, participants reported on the different ways in which they played an informal facilitating role in the process of reflection:

Occasionally, I will have a ‘sitcom moment’ – we’ve all seen sitcoms where the person suddenly gazes off into the distance and gets thrown back to something that has happened in a previous time – so occasionally I will say: “Let’s have a ‘sitcom moment’, so what are the things that you guys remember and reflect on that have happened earlier in the term?” I do use those sorts of things…Expeditions are a fantastic example of that (Program Manager).”

One teacher offered an example of unexpected and significant change in a student’s outlook and demeanour. In part, this was attributed by the participant to the ‘clean slate’ that was offered to the student. However, it was also suggested that it arose from intense social interaction in an isolated setting.

Teachers frequently referred to the community spirit that develops within the student body during the program as one of the most significant outcomes for each program. Students share common interests, needs, and characteristics, while retaining significant individual differences. One house parent noted that the most important outcome for students was: “…the sense of community amongst the (students) and respect for diversity as well (Teacher 7).” She went on to explain:

I think towards the end they start to understand the differences …Whether it’s living in a house, even just the simple things like delegation of chores and helping each other, or whether to step in when that’s not their allocated chore (Teacher 7).
Some participants commented on the enduring nature of some student-staff bonds forged during the program, which continued into the years following graduation:

I have a friend who is an ex-teacher at (Boronia) and that’s now four years ago and she still meets with her home group outside school; they would be in Year 12 (Teacher 8).

The importance of a trust relationship with an adult emerged as one of the more challenging and perhaps unexpected outcomes of the program. The school developed a policy on the conduct of these personal relationships, to limit the on-going pastoral burden on campus staff, but this was not always an effective deterrent for the students or individual staff members.

Participants also reported on the impact the philosophy underpinning the program has had on the wider school community:

Fundamentally, (the campus) is a part of the (school) culture. I think if you turned around and said we are not doing (it) again, I think there would be uproar from students, parents and the…community would really struggle with that (School Manager).

4.7.2.7. Boronia Campus: Summary

In summary, the Boronia Campus program, in both design and practice, reflects the harmonisation of setting, program content, and campus community social interaction. All facets of the experience are intended to be incorporated into a comprehensive and cohesive, holistic approach to the learning undertaken by the students during their residency.

Student participation in the program starts well before the formal commencement of the program. While many of the experiences generate predictable responses from students, the dynamic nature of social interaction and the ever-changing setting and environment impose a certain degree of uncertainty on learning outcomes. Leading questions are used to help students solve problems during activities where possible. However, the setting is seen to have an impact on the student group structure, changing the peer group interaction in ways that are not predictable. The act of placing the
students within the setting of the program creates pressure and this impacts on the social structure of the group. Students are expected to assume some responsibility for solving problems, many of which arise out of social interactions within the campus.

Participants acknowledge that the program lacks accurate means and instruments to measure and record student outcomes in an objective sense. While some more conventional academic research activities are undertaken by students and assessed in unremarkable ways, there are significant changes noted by teachers and student participants that are more difficult to measure. Student self-report through formal and informal reflection in both verbal and written forms is heavily utilised during and after activities and towards the end of the program it is also used to capture the essence of the experience in a highly subjective but individually meaningful way.

The sense of community that grows between the students participating in each group and their teachers is seen to form a unique network of connections and relationships that, at least anecdotally, last well into the post-secondary years of some students. The changing pattern of social interaction is acknowledged by many participants as a visible sign of the change that occurs in students through the program.

The program is structured around the notion of a journey that takes participating students on a physical and emotional excursion to a remote and intentionally isolating setting.

4.7.3. Callistemon Campus

4.7.3.1. Overview of Campus and Program

Callistemon Campus offers a one-year program that is the only non-residential course in the study. The main reason for its inclusion in the study is to provide a comparison of the differences between the design principles, practices, and outcomes of residential and non-residential programs.
Callistemon Campus is located in the central business district of a capital city. The parent school is a secular, co-educational school located in an urban fringe area of a capital city. The campus occupies several floors of an office block, which have been acquired by the school on a long-term lease. The campus facilities were adapted from office space and consist of large open-plan learning areas that are used in a flexible manner by students and staff. Office accommodation for academic and administrative staff is limited. Apart from a shared common room, there were no other indoor recreational amenities.

Students attending the campus reside at home, travelling to the campus each morning by public transport, a journey of over an hour. The campus program operates a modified school day, with some early morning and later afternoon activities offered during the program. The curriculum is heavily modified around an inquiry-based structure in which students undertake research tasks individually and in small groups. Weekly physical education activities are conducted at the parent school. Parents are permitted to visit the campus on designated days only.

4.7.3.2. Participants

Data collection at Callistemon was conducted over two days, with all interviews taking place at the campus. Four teachers took part in the study: one school manager, one program manager, and two teachers. Their experience ranged from one to ten years, with an average of 5.2 years. The participating staff at this campus had not worked at any other experiential program or campus; this was the only school participating in the study where none of the staff interviewees had any direct experience of another experiential program. Although questionnaire forms were distributed to participating staff, no completed forms were returned and personal data had to be collected at interview.
4.7.3.3. Observations

The absence of a residential element in the Callistemon Campus program produced an observable difference in the pattern of social interaction between students, with groupings equating more closely to a day-school structure of smaller, more fragmented social groups, spread over the entire campus. This is in contrast to the residential programs examined, where strong social bonding in the form of large mixed student peer groups in close proximity, particularly at break times, was not seen. Interaction between students and staff in most observed Callistemon sessions tended to be similar to those of a convention classroom, with well-defined teacher-student hierarchy and roles.

During the period of observation, the range of topics covered in the student and staff interactions focused on operational and academic matters, with little observable interaction of a social or pastoral nature, although interview data claimed this did occur.

In contrast to their less experienced colleagues at Callistemon Campus, the more experienced teachers have created a learning environment that is closer in atmosphere to that observed at the residential campuses, with terms of address and interaction less formal than a mainstream classroom. Students also appeared to enjoy a greater degree of freedom of movement than that found in a mainstream classroom, with individuals and small groups moving in and out of teaching sessions, apparently of their own volition. Teachers, lacking a private withdrawal space away from students, tended to blend in physically with groups of students during breaks, although verbal interaction appeared to be limited.

Parent involvement in the Callistemon Campus program is sustained throughout the course of study, with visits and activity participation taking place on a regular basis. One student task scheduled during the visit involved parents travelling to the campus to perform a role in a student-led simulated business meeting or interview activity.
4.7.3.4. Design Principles

The main concept underpinning the program at Callistemon Campus is to provide individual students with a range of project-based learning experiences to facilitate skill development in an unfamiliar setting that offers a strong contrast with their home environment:

*There are also a lot of explicit skills teaching, totally connected to…the skills you are going to need to do the project based learning…The kids were very rural/semi rural in their outlook…and so it was our idea that our kids don’t really know the city, they don’t know it as a resource, they don’t know it as a place you go to, it’s not a familiar space for them. So it would be good for them to learn more about the city* (School Manager).

*New place…different opportunities* (Teacher 1).

There is a socio-cultural element to the unfamiliarity experienced by students at Callistemon:

*They are a very Anglo-centric community…there is a lack of empathy for people who don’t come from a relatively affluent background* (Teacher 2).

He added that the students: *didn’t have an understanding of the differences.*

Students participating in the program are drawn into the city as a part of the community, engaging with it, rather than treating it like an object of study: *The city is our classroom* (Program Manager).

Aside from the use of the city as a setting for the program, there is a strong focus on developing competency specific skills at Callistemon Campus; as stated by the School Manager: *“We run school-based training…explicit skills teaching.”*

However, a deeper analysis of the data on design principles highlighted a marked absence of overt discussion of the underlying philosophies and principles of the program. While initial coding identified some data dealing with design, closer examination linked these data to the practices associated with program implementation in its current form.
While participants did not articulate a strong underlying design concept or structure, the approach to learning adopted by the campus and its staff was clear: they believe that there is a negotiable structure to activities at Callistemon Campus that caters to the needs of individual students where possible:

*I think the programming here was always set up around student individuality than perhaps more traditional kind of schooling...if you have a particular interest...negotiate it and we'll work something out* (School Manager).

She added that one of the key attractions of the program for students was the sense of *freedom* being in the city.

One idea that emerged from the data was that students tended to drive many aspects of program design and content. For example, students are encouraged if not required to design their own research programs without excessive intervention from staff:

*They love the idea that you can be doing research and you can sit down with your team and work out a plan of action and then take yourself out into the city and do research* (School Manager).

The relationship that develops between students and teachers during each course is important in shaping the tasks undertaken by the students. This relationship is shaped by the design of the campus teaching spaces. Teachers are not given separate office accommodation and this encourages a very different dynamic in the teacher-student relationship:

*Not having a separate staff area where we are locked away, and not having discrete breaks away from the students, (is) at times, very frustrating because you don’t get that breathing space, but at the same time, great, because you are always accessible, whether you want to be or not, and the students really know you...I think that’s something that you wouldn’t get in a regular setting* (Teacher 2).

The approach adopted by campus management tends to place a great deal of importance on the capacity of teaching staff to understand the nature of the program and on building creative relationships with students based on mutual trust. One experienced teacher highlighted a problem with staff continuity, reporting a discussion between senior staff members on the structure and
direction of the program in which it became apparent that some major design
elements of the program had become hidden with the passage of time:

We had two leaders banging heads and both leaders wanted very
much to turn this place into a far more structured, very ultra-
conservative, almost business like situation. I actually had to put my
hand on the table and sort of have a yelling fit and say that this is not
what this campus is about and if they do that they are going to destroy
the program, because a lot these kids come from that wealthy business
background...What they need is to learn to be socially responsible.
They need to learn about the issues that they need to be confronting.
They need to learn about themselves and furthering themselves as
people, rather than how business operates (Program Manager).

The language used by teachers and program managers emphasises the
individual focus of the program, with little stress placed on teamwork or the
development of a collective consciousness within the student body; it is about
student individuality:

They are learning about themselves and their identity and how they
actually relate to the wider world around them (Program Manager).

Observations of the students at work during the field visit further supports this
finding, with the essential learning focus being on the individual interacting
with the wider program environment.

4.7.3.5. Design in Practice: Activities and Problems

In practice, the relationship between the teacher and the student reported at
Callistemon Campus appears to be much broader than one might find in the
classroom. There is a strong emotional dimension to the relationship and the
teacher actually adopts a range of roles during the course of the year;
teachers are responsible for:

...confronting them with certain issues, therefore they are raw and their
emotions are far more out there and as a teacher you have to deal with
that, so that further cements the relationships you have. You become
almost like a surrogate parent for them while they are in here. They
look at you not only as a friend, but a parent, as a counselor, as a
police person and a teacher as well. (Program Manager).

The close relationship that develops between staff and students creates a
bond of trust that sees students accorded a level of freedom that is not
typically a part of the mainstream schooling experience for Year 9 students, such as leaving the campus building in groups of three or more to undertake research at sites around the city without direct staff supervision:

They can eat wherever they like, they can go anywhere they like and agreements are made for safety reasons that you have to be in a group of at least three, you have to be back by a certain time, you have to sign in and sign out...But they often talk about the freedom of being in the city (School Manager).

The freedom accorded to students is also about learning to take risks:

I have students who are perfectionists that need to learn to take risks...learn coping mechanisms (Teacher 2).

However, the demands placed on the staff by the program at Callistemon Campus are not suited to all teachers and styles of teaching:

If you are a teacher who demands power and structure...it’s not going to work very well. However, if you are a teacher who wants to work with them and sit down with them and exchange with them and give your own opinion as well as listening to their opinion and converse with them...as a social or teacher-student relationship, then you are going to do far better and survive a lot longer and be more effective. (Program Manager).

The nature of the program places particular demands on the teachers to construct activities that take students out of the classroom into the city. From a program manager’s perspective, in practice, not all teachers understand the need to facilitate learning beyond the classroom into the city itself:

Sometimes they have to sit in front of the computer and do research and they are not getting out. There are some teachers, in the years that I have been here, that find this difficult where they have had a project where they haven’t gone out anywhere and they haven’t had a guest speaker in and they haven’t done anything that they couldn’t have done in the school in a world environment. And I question had they really understood what we are supposed to be all about (Program Manager)?

The bond of trust between teacher and student, however, is problematic from the student perspective as well: the program manager questioned the maturity of the student cohort participating in the Callistemon Campus program:

There are a lot of students at this age that really don’t get it. They are not mature enough to get it, or they are maturing into it (Program Manager).
The somewhat fragmented nature of the social interaction between students noted in the observations undertaken during the visit was reinforced by a comment from the School Manager on student peer groups:

*We were doing a small activity to do with relationships and I said to him, “Write down six words that other students in the year level might say about you,” and then I said, “You write down six words that you might think of students at your level,” and he said, “If they are not in my group of friends, I don’t have anything to say about them, I just don’t care because they are not important to me.” We had a bit of a chat about that because given that he has been in the school 2 ½ years now, how can you have that complete lack of connection with people that you have known for that length of time? I actually think this kid’s attitude is quite common at this year level (School Manager).*

Despite perceptions of immaturity, the expectations and freedoms enjoyed by students are negotiated with parents ahead of time and there is an expectation that students will fulfil their commitments during the course of the program.

Within these freedoms, however, there are also some fairly rigid constraints and structures imposed on the students, such as observance of time limits, and the requirement for students to participate in all activities:

*They can go out to the city to do research…there’s often lots of different groups doing lots of different things, but there’s still quite a high level of accountability back: “You must be back when you said you would be at a certain time and you work on what you are working on and there’s not a choice as to whether you go ahead and take part in that lesson or not, it’s still expected that you do” (School Manager).*

During the course of the program, students take part in a range of activities that encourage engagement with different elements of the city community. One program manager described an activity called the ‘Breakfast Club’ that left a particularly deep impression on students:

*The students twice a year in groups go to the Housing Commission …they have to be there by 7.00 a.m. and they help out with the students. They are all primary school kids and a lot of them are African and Middle Eastern and Asian students and most of them have been born overseas in refugee camps…(The) Salvation Army’s theory is that they at least get one good meal in a day at breakfast…Everything is donated …They help them with their breakfast, they play games with them and help with their homework if need be and they walk them over to the school (Program Manager).*
There is an awareness that program activities and approaches must adjust to the changing maturity and skills of the students as the program progresses, but in a way that continues to build on the developing relationship between the students and the city:

*How do we not only change the content and structures of what we do in the year in a particular area of study as different students move through that area of study, but also how do we respond to the growing maturity (and) capabilities of the students? So that in Term 4…not only would I expect to be teaching different issues…but also I would be expecting to be teaching it in a very different way…than in Term 1 when the cohort was new to the city. So trying to make sure that we are responding to student need, but also that we are linking back out all the time into the city where it is a city of people (School Manager).*

As the Callistemon program operates across a whole academic year, staff report that there are few problems integrating the students into the program at the beginning of the year and then back into the mainstream classroom in the following year. In fact, one of the benefits of running a discrete program that is remote and to an extent independent of the parent school is the opportunity it gives some students to ‘reinvent’ themselves during the program:

*We say to them: “This is a chance for you to start again. If you are a naughty kid you don’t have to be anymore”…some of them really respond to that, they just see that as a way to completely change…Often naughty kids who have been suspended or who have constant teacher altercation, swearing, yelling, throwing things, they come in here and they are angels with us and we say: “What on earth was everyone complaining about this student for? Because they are great”(Program Manager).*

A benchmarking practice that has been adopted by a school manager supervising the Callistemon Campus program is to conduct regular interviews with students throughout the course to track progress, and collect data on the effectiveness of various activities:

*I also do these interviews with the kids from the start of the year and then go with the individual as the year goes on. I talk to them about the program, what worked…what didn’t and what would have made that better…being one step removed from the day actually helps with that because students don’t feel worried to tell that a particular task didn’t work (School Manager).*

The program manager described the way in which teachers exploit key teachable moments in the development of students:
It’s almost like windows popping up in the students, you can almost see it when the penny drops, you can see this moment and for each of them it’s different, where they just get it and suddenly they are interested and suddenly… as a teacher you can go right in and put in some tools and you can help them to help themselves (Program Manager).

He also pointed out, however, that the key to such teachable moments is the recognition and exploitation of the opportunity in a timely manner, something that is often lacking at the campus:

_I think there are a lot of teachers out there (that) don’t want to put that effort into it and often that window can close up again (Program Manager)._}

4.7.3.6. Program Outcomes

Program outcomes were defined through student reflections on their experiences at Callistemon Campus, which are conducted in both a formal and informal sense throughout the program. One teacher spoke about the necessity of reflection and evaluation, but without overemphasizing these at the expense of the experience itself:

_There has to be a little bit of both and obviously when it comes to reflection and evaluation of an experience, the classroom model lends itself to a bit more of that. It’s almost as though they do need sometimes to settle and be quiet and consider whatever they have just experienced (Program Manager)._}

Reflection is a formalized part of the assessment for each unit of work, one component of which is direct feedback given to teachers on performance:

_They do formalised feedback sheets on subject areas or projects that they have done…feedback on the teaching itself…so that the teachers know where they are going. They are asked to do self-reflections on their own learning…That’s often built-in to the assessment (School Manager)._}

Reflection is incorporated into the structure of the program at Callistemon Campus through the use of booklets in which students record their reactions and evaluations of experiences that occur throughout the program. The booklets are seen as a means by which students can demonstrate concrete understanding of their experiences:

_There’s a lot of reflection and questions and evaluation of each experience that they do: when they go to the gallery, when they go to_
the church, when they go and visit, or have a talk like a multicultural representative coming in. Rather than just sitting there and experiencing it and then walking away, they evaluate it...they don't have to actually answer questions, but they have to give their own opinion and have to think about and reflect on it...we need to have evidence of that understanding (Program Manager).

It is well understood at the campus that the way in which reflection is handled has a disproportionate influence on the judgements that are made by the students in the reflection process. The importance of selecting appropriately skilled and experienced staff to manage the reflection process was also acknowledged:

_"I suppose how you actually get students to do that will determine whether it's either a positive or negative experience, because sometimes if they perceive too much, or they are somehow being analyzed and judged, they give you what you want to hear, or are negative about it. That's a really fine line and that comes back to what we were talking about the other day, about the type of teacher that is required for this sort of program (Program Manager)._"

Students gain an insight into their own learning through progressive, structured reflection that is sustained throughout the program:

_"I think that the students would say themselves that they do heaps of reflective work as they go along and they start to see where they have progressed – where they have made more mature decisions, or where they created a piece of work that is either a higher standard or is a more sophisticated way of thinking has been demonstrated (School Manager)._"

For some students, the formal reflection involves the sharing of learning with new students as a component of a formal induction and orientation activity for the following year’s cohort of students:

_"At the end of last year they had two kids from the cohort take out a group of the incoming kids on a personalized tour so they had to base the tour around what they thought was interesting. They had to create a map, they had to create a brochure about where they were going and why they were going there and they had to run the tour. And I went out with them leading this little bunch of Year 8s and it was fascinating the places that they thought were interesting or important. They kept us out for about two to three hours and showed me places in the city that I didn’t know. They explain things in different ways. Like they showed us where a little playground was because this was a fun place to come, they took us to someplace to eat where the guy would give you free drinks if you bought food. You had a real sense of identity and ownership (School Manager)._"
For some students, however, delayed recognition of learning at the campus appeared to be the norm. The program manager suggested that a lack of ‘signposting’ in the reflection process might result in students not really understanding their achievements until well after completing the course:

By the time they get to Year 11 and 12, they reflect back on that time and often say, “Oh, I learnt that when I was at (Callistemon Campus) and didn’t realise that I was learning it.” That’s part of the experiential learning concept, but if there’s a little bit more signposting as to what they are actually learning from their experience and how that fits into the process, I think we need to work on that a bit more (Program Manager).

Prior to each experience, student attitudes to many of the activities, such as the ‘Breakfast Club’ discussed previously, are quite negative. This contrasts strongly with the views that often emerge during post-activity reflection:

In my experience of doing it, nearly every student is quite negative beforehand: “What are we doing here, it’s boring.” And some are apprehensive...Then we go for a coffee afterwards and debrief. Without exception, I have never had a student who hasn’t turned around and said: “I want to go back. When are we going back?” They just love the experience so much and I think the reason that I love it is that it’s experiential. There’s no written work involved. There is no reflection involved, beyond the conversation. It’s purely an experience and that is one of the reasons that it works so well and because it’s very confronting. Many of them haven’t met an African person and the children are a great access point to culture (Program Manager).

Some of these confronting experiences had unexpected consequences for the students. One female student underwent something of a personal transformation through the course of the program as a result of her contact with homeless people:

I had one girl last year in our mentor group. She was so taken with the homeless situation; she was so shocked by it and had no understanding to begin with, that she suddenly wanted to have an out-of-uniform day to raise money to give to the homeless. She helped in the soup kitchen with the homeless people, in her own time. She then actually started to write stories based on the homeless person’s perspective and she just got so engaged throughout the year that the journey that she started at the beginning of the year with no knowledge, just thinking that this is really wrong, to the understanding she had at the end, where she could talk from that age group to the next group about statistics, about the research that she had done, about interviews that she had had with homeless organizations and homeless people. She grew as a person because of that project and
she used that as a tool to explore her own relationship with the world around it and herself. She still keeps in touch with me and emails me and tells me how she is going and has won awards. She was a ‘special needs’ kid as well. She wasn’t a high achiever. That is a good example of what we really try and do here. (Program Manager).

The phenomenon of typically disengaged students demonstrating a dramatically improved attitude to learning during the program has led some teaching staff to reflect on the reasons behind this positive change:

A good example is a boy that we have just had recently, who had all sorts of learning attitudes, being disengaged from the program. He has just conducted an interview with the parents, who came in and did the interview with him, and he just got a glowing report. I mean what happened to him? Somehow, at some point along the way, over the last two terms – is it things that the teacher has said? Or how they dealt with him? (What) he has actually understood for the first time in his life is the reward that he gets out of it is what he puts in (Program Manager).

While some students achieve significant gains during the year at Callistemon Campus, the permanence of these changes was questioned by some teachers at the parent school. As one of the campus program managers noted, the journey back to the parent school at the conclusion of the program often resulted in disappointment for both students and teachers:

What they actually want is responsibility and respect. With the history that they have built up and the name they have built up themselves, they can’t escape that label while they are in that environment. Some of them have complained when they have gone back because their teachers are still treating them the way they were before in Year 7 and Year 8 (Program Manager).

He went on to add that the setting of the program and the choices that these students were required to make in the course of the study appeared to be the critical differentiating element:

The only people that they ever got along with were the people in (Callistemon Campus). And it’s not us as people but the environment and the decisions that they chose to make while they are in here (Program Manager).

The espoused program focus at Callistemon is about skills training in an urban classroom; however, the School Manager cites student commentary on learning outcomes at Callistemon Campus that is quite different:
I have been to two Year 12 valedictory nights...I have to admit that I haven’t had anyone say that I saw a lot of history...of the museum. The kids in here keep talking about how much they think that they have grown, how much they feel that they are standing on their own two feet, they have matured (School Manager, Callistemon Campus).

After a period of reflection over two or three years, it is personal development that is presented by students as the primary learning outcome.

In a final observation on outcomes, the program manager noted that the program had become too ‘safe’ and that management caution is acting as a barrier to development of the program to its full potential:

*Maybe there are barriers in the way to actually let them open up and I think the reason for that is management...it’s partly the way the world has changed in terms of everything being a little bit safer and people are less inclined to push things and go against their comfort zone (Program Manager).*

4.7.3.7. **Summary**

The program at Callistemon Campus is based on the notion that immersing students in an unfamiliar environment will arouse their curiosity and that through staff assistance, students will engage in productive individual learning that will shape their identity in social and intellectual ways. There is much of the presumed benefit of the program that appears to be tacit, and this is reflected in the uncertainties that exist within the staff team on the structure and purposes of the program.

Students engage in a range of strong, self-directed learning activities in an urban setting and while the outcomes are not entirely predictable, staff reported evidence of change in students, some dramatic, over the course of the year. There is little evidence in the data to indicate that the students develop a strong sense of group identity during the program; the students tend to learn from interaction with the city environment, not from each other.

The practices employed at the campus were seen by students as being more relaxed than at a mainstream school. Some students with poor academic or
track records previously were able to shape a new persona for the purposes of the program and achieve success in their studies.

Formal and informal reflection was adopted throughout the program as a structured means of allowing students to track their own learning.

4.7.4. Darwinia Campus

4.7.4.1. Overview of Campus

Darwinia Campus is located a day’s travel from the co-educational, denominational parent school, and of the schools participating in this study, it is the most distant site, as measured by distance from the parent school. The campus is located within an urban residential and commercial community and students are expected to interact with members of the local community on a regular basis as a part of the program.

The Darwinia program suspends the normal learning programs for the duration of the program, adopting a purpose designed, problem based learning approach, setting students a graduated set of challenges to be undertaken with minimal if any staff intervention or assistance. Students undertake written research tasks, physical activities, navigation exercises, and public speaking and performance tasks during the program. The program duration is less than one term and is therefore the shortest program taking part in the study. Each activity day extends from early morning through until late evening. The activities focus on a detailed, cross-disciplinary study of the region in which the campus is located. While the program does not offer many typical outdoor ‘adventure’ based educational activities, it does take students outside of the classroom for the majority of the program time. Studies undertaken at Darwinia Campus are formally integrated into the mainstream curriculum at the parent school, with preparatory activities undertaken before the program and a strand of inquiry based learning incorporated into the academic program in the year following the Darwinia program.
Students and staff are accommodated in a purpose designed residential facility that includes student dormitories – typically four-bed rooms – dining and recreational facilities, office accommodation, and staff residences. Personal and public space for students and staff is quite limited and this had a visible impact on the shaping of interaction, particularly during free time, when students had to share spaces and amenities.

Students are permitted to maintain e-mail contact with family members and friends, but no other forms of electronic communication are generally permitted. Parents are not permitted to visit the campus at any time.

4.7.4.2. Participants

Seven members of Darwinia Campus staff took part in the interviews: one School Manager, one Campus Manager, and five teachers. The length of professional teaching experience ranged from three years to 29 years, with an average of 13.1 years. Only one teacher at Darwinia Campus had previously worked on another experiential learning program. All teaching staff are qualified teachers with expertise and qualifications relevant to the major themes addressed in the Darwinia program.

4.7.4.3. Observations

During program activities, staff emphasised active participation and teamwork in problem solving, with most activities having a focus on student leadership. Students participating in the Darwinia program are typically not from the same single class grouping, and therefore may not have an established relationship with other students prior to arrival at the campus.

Students were given resources for each task, such as information and funds, and some limited support from staff, but they were expected to make decisions about the running of program activities and mistakes were an acceptable part of this process. Students were asked to plan and lead activities outside of the campus area: these tasks involved navigation, group
management, equipment preparation, organising meals and water for group members, preparing first aid supplies, and briefing other student members of the activity group. Observed staff intervention in student-led activities was infrequent, with students left to make decisions about the route, travel, meals, rest breaks, and group management. Staff were observed to intervene when they perceived a risk to the safety of the group or when the activity ceased to progress; interventions appeared to be limited to reorientating the group and restarting the activity.

All activities concluded with mandatory formal spoken reflection session that was usually conducted at the campus and involved all of the students taking part in a given activity, usually a group of 15 to 20, and the supervising teacher. Each evening all students in the program returned to their rooms before the mandated ‘lights-out’ time and were encouraged to write a journal entry reflecting on the events of the day.

The informal interaction between staff and students was frequent, particularly during scheduled free time in the afternoons and evenings. Students appeared very confident to approach teachers on duty at these times to help with personal matters, such as when they reported feeling ‘homesick’, or ‘lonely’. Teachers joined in some informal conversations with students during free time. Teachers were also asked to intervene to settle disputes between friendship groups. Students were observed to spend much of their free time corresponding or chatting with parents and friends using Internet chat-rooms or e-mail. This was in contrast to Acacia and Boronia where students were not allowed access to electronic communication with the world beyond the campus.

4.7.4.4. Questionnaire Data

Darwinia Campus teachers nominated student personal development and problem solving as essential elements of the program; reflection, teamwork and setting were also identified as important. The rankings of program
element importance were consistent between teachers and also with the interview data. The narrative responses focused on students finding their *place in the world*.

4.7.4.5. Design Principles

The data gathered on the experiential learning program at Darwinia Campus suggest that activities are intended to be guided by three inter-related principles. The first is that experiential learning should be student-centred, with direct teacher intervention tightly controlled and limited. The second guiding principle is that experiential learning is held to be inherently unpredictable in realistic and challenging settings, requiring greater staff vigilance and flexibility to shape learning around emerging opportunities. The third and perhaps most important guiding principle is that experiential learning should be sufficiently challenging to encourage students to move beyond their level of comfort and confidence, to take risks and make mistakes, all within the structure of a teacher-managed learning scaffold.

Staff all reported that the espoused position at Darwinia Campus is to adopt a student-centred approach as one of the key philosophical tenets of experiential learning, with students directing, organizing, and leading each activity:

*Students directed the learning…they took control of the learning…initially under guidance, but…the students knew what they had to do without being told. Without being shy, they were able to organize themselves, manage themselves, direct themselves and learn together, either in groups or separately and then share that knowledge (Teacher 1).*

With students ‘directing’ learning, individually and collectively to the maximum extent possible, the specific role of the teacher shifts from that of a leading problem-solver at the student activity level, to a role in which the level of difficulty in any problem-solving situation was constantly monitored and adjusted according to the ability of the students:

*As a teacher, my role was very different to what it normally would have been in a school…the input came from the students themselves in*
response to the environment…it was them organizing and managing themselves (Teacher 1).

Staff expressed the belief that learning unfolds naturally from real-life encounters that occur through structured activities. As one participant explained, there is an accepted randomness attached to these learning transactions:

There is a lot of incidental learning that goes on, I don’t think it can be systematised because experiential learning, just like life, doesn’t happen in a prescribed order…is equally probably random, I don’t think it can be planned (Teacher 2).

Another highlighted the fact that outcomes were sometimes unknown:

I think (we have) real responsibility and real problems. A lot of learning that happens in a classroom, it’s not designed to have real problems; we know what the aim is and the result. In an experiential program, it is to do with things that are not step-by-step where we already know the outcome (Teacher 3).

The apparent ad hoc nature of the experiences and the consequent learning impedes rigid planning of the type associated with more tightly controlled conventional teaching environments. This places the emphasis back on teaching staff to have the skills to exploit incidents in the pursuit of learning objectives.

One experienced participant explained the way in which her growing confidence as an experiential educator contributed to her ability to manage student learning in a more flexible way, and particularly through student mistakes and errors:

I think the beauty of an experiential learning program is that you don’t solve their problems and you allow them to flounder and allow them to realise that if they don’t work on their problems they are not going to be solved. I also think that’s dependent on the facilitator. The more confident you are, the more happy you are to allow them to run with problems and not to solve it for them. In the early stages when you first start and you are not as confident that you can solve the problem because you want to fix the problems. But if we’re horribly lost, through my own confidence, I will know when to intervene and when not to intervene and when to probe with a question and when not to probe. It would be easier for me to solve the problem for them, because I know we would get to the (destination) faster, I know that I can control it and therefore it won’t get beyond what I know I can do, I
won't have an argument between some grumpy students, but I rob them of an opportunity to let them solve it themselves. And as I become more confident as a teacher, I can sit back for longer and observe for longer and predict what’s going to happen, to a degree, and I can see the progress with the student by asking a question, by facilitating it towards a resolution without then giving an answer (Campus Manager).

This notion of teacher intervention ‘robbing’ students of learning opportunities was raised by several participants, highlighting its importance as a guiding principle in the structuring and delivery of learning activities. One teacher went on to explain:

*I actually find it more difficult working with a kid who never gets lost compared to someone who has frequent navigational issues, because you can only challenge yourself when you are making those mistakes. So if they are not making mistakes they are not challenging themselves to the full degree...they have to draw on more than themselves and they have to learn about problem solving from making mistakes, they usually have to communicate with (a competent adult) or they have to get out resources, but they have to rely on more than their (own) knowledge base, therefore they have to learn more, they have to challenge (Campus Manager).*

Another teacher commented on student errors:

*(The students) had what I think was true responsibility and accountability because if they made a mistake they then had to discover that for themselves, then had to find a solution to that for themselves (Teacher 1).*

Working with students in a physical and philosophical setting in which it was expected that mistakes would be made, the issue of teacher confidence in managing accountability appropriately was raised again:

*Once I got more comfortable in my role I got better at doing this. My role wasn’t to find out when they made a mistake but to let them discover the mistake for themselves as well. For me that’s true responsibility. I am not looking over their shoulder as a safety net, although in the worst-case scenario I am there (Teacher 1).*

Managing student mistakes in this fashion places particular demands on the teaching staff at Darwinia Campus, as the parameters of each learning activity must be adjusted in a flexible way to permit proper follow up.
The setting of any learning is seen as having an immediate impact on students; according to the Campus Manager: *If you have to teach in the Art Room, there’s a different mentality when the kids walk into that room.* Another teacher drew a further distinction concerning the experiential authenticity of the setting in mainstream schooling: *The classroom is basically a fake environment* (Teacher 2). He went on to comment on the importance of contrast in the setting of the Darwinia Program:

*The setting is what makes it...it’s the biggest thing...I think the setting is massively important...it’s their world, it’s a new world, it’s very different from the old one and I mean the first impression of that world is going to have a deeply entrenched impact on the kid...The setting is the key in the sense that they are being dropped right in the middle of the experience, they don’t have to go and get it...It’s going to entail a whole lot of experiences just in a single day; again, challenging, highly challenging, sometimes very frightening, (and) confronting (Teacher 2).*

The experience is seen as something in which students are immersed, with strong, deliberate contrasts with the norms of the parent school and it is this contrast that creates the opportunity for learning:

*I think it’s got to be different, I think it’s got to be different to the point of being fascinating or uncomfortable, otherwise I think you’ve lost an opportunity...If there were students who weren’t confronted by (the program), then they didn’t really have their eyes open and there were some who didn’t, some who didn’t take anything in. But those who really saw what was going on were always confronted on some level (Teacher 2).*

The confronting or difficult nature of the experience itself changes the way in which students remember the experience and also influences the learning that arises from it. The Darwinia program is expected to produce highly durable memories, which challenge existing attitudes and values and bring about changed perceptions and behaviour:

*Any confrontation will stay in your memory...it upsets you and obviously it is going to stay in your mind...you have been forced to see life from someone else’s perspective...it remains in the memory and that is where the learning is. You are not going to forget it (Teacher 2).*
4.7.4.6. Design in Practice: Activities and Problems

In describing the relationship that develops between student and teacher, one experienced participant outlined what she felt was a strongly individualised form of experiential learning in this program:

(There is) a level of individual learning where it’s often depending on what the student wants out of it, so I could deliver the (lesson) to the same class of fifteen or twenty kids, but the learning that goes on could be quite different for each individual student: because of their skills, their experience, because their background, so that in the process of teaching them, in the process of aiding them to learn it, I have to consider all of those things. I have to consider the social background...consider their contact with the world, beyond the world that they know (Campus Manager).

A strong distinction was drawn between the relationship that exists between the classroom teacher and the student in a conventional setting that is often informed by procedural considerations and the highly personal bonds that can develop between students and their teachers in an experiential setting; these bonds are largely based on trust developed through extended contact:

In a classroom setting, I am forced to give a tick or a cross or put a number, or a percent or give a ranking, or something else. So I compare one student to another student. In experiential learning, I can praise a student for problem-solving, for identifying what the problem was...and I am not comparing them to the other person (Campus Manager).

One of the challenges for participants themselves is their tendency as competent adults to intervene in problem solving situations, which leaves:

A lot of students that are 15 don’t have a lot problem solving strengths...because people solve their problems for them (Campus Manager).

One teacher reflected at length on an incident in which she withheld intervention to allow the students to solve a problem that arose from their own mistakes:

There were two girls responsible for getting us back (to campus)...they took us in a completely different direction...and realised that they were unable to find where they were on the map and they both decided that it was too hard for them; they were not going to do anymore. I had never been in that situation before. (I said): “We will stay here until tomorrow morning, but you girls are going to get us home.” We sat for
probably twenty minutes while they complained and then they actually
realised that this was their responsibility and they asked for other
students’ assistance, who up until that point hadn’t stepped in, and
said, “Let’s do this.” They managed to get redirected. All five of those
students together…made the right calls to get us back. That was a bit
of an experiment for me, because I would often feel the need to guide
the process, but that particular day these two girls were quite able and
so they interacted and reflected afterwards and wrote at the evaluation
at the end that that was highlight for them in being able to get through
when they really realised that they were responsible for their decisions
(Teacher 3).

With students more vulnerable and exposed through a challenging and at
times confronting learning environment, additional demands are placed on
teaching staff to make complex judgements and to provide strong pastoral
care:

    I think that in some ways being a classroom teacher is quite easy for
the teacher because you really get to sell your product for forty-five
minutes as a staffer and you probably don’t have to worry about some
aspects of the kid’s life before (Darwinia)…I mean a kid’s had problems
outside class and they didn’t choose to talk to me about it and so they
weren’t my problem (Teacher 2).

When taking on the care of students in a residential experiential program,
participants acknowledged the strong sense of exposure to the risks and
needs associated with caring for children who at times presented with very
difficult problems:

    I think it’s harder in an experiential setting where you realise: “Oh, that
safety net’s gone”; I can’t just leave at the end of a lesson, I am stuck
with this kid and I’m thinking of one particular kid, who I was stuck with
for whole of the five weeks and he was just, he was really difficult and I
had to cope with him and as a teacher that made an enormous
difference to me and I learned a lot (Teacher 2).

The immediate setting and design of the campus residential and recreational
areas impose a range of constraints on students and in particular necessitate
a degree of sharing of amenities and facilities by students:

    One thing that seems to go hand in hand with a privileged background
is the need not to share: you can have your own TV in your room, you
can have your own phone in your own room…You were able to live a
very isolated lifestyle within the comfort of your own home, if you
wanted to, relationships with siblings were often not really valued,
because they are not all in together they are not sort a big group and
not always but often these kids had TV dinners and they had dinner
when they get home from whatever they do, so their…Any kind of residential situation requires teamwork by necessity otherwise if there was no teamwork, forty, fifty or sixty kids in one place can’t possibly work, so it forces kids to stop being selfish and to make sacrifices and to think about the group as an organic whole (Teacher 2).

The teacher added that this sharing extended to social interactions: it was the structure…forcing students to spend time with other kids (Teacher 2).

One of the consequences of this extended contact is that the social interactions change the nature of the social structure itself, particularly the status of leaders:

Leading students (in the mainstream) end up being weaker…their leadership isn’t a real sort of leadership when they are in that extended twenty-four hours a day, seven-days a week environment (Teacher 4).

The social forces that shape the peer group change fundamentally in the Darwinia residential setting. Teachers believe that sharing and teamwork are the more confronting aspects of the program for students such as these whose lives are perhaps more disjointed than families once were. The social environment creates conditions in which the worldview of some students may move from self to others to varying degrees.

Overall, staff said a much more ‘holistic and positive’ relationship emerges between staff and students at the campus, one which goes beyond the typical classroom relationship and even beyond the relationship that exists between boarders and residential carers in a mainstream boarding setting.

4.7.4.7. Program Outcomes

At Darwinia Campus, all participants reported on the extensive use of post-activity discussions in which the experiences of the day are relived in summary form, the learning is reviewed, and personal reflections from participants are invited. The process reportedly involved the frequent use of written reflections in the form of daily journal entries or other written genres in
which students were asked to reflect on selected aspects of the day’s experiences.

One experienced classroom teacher, who had worked at two very different experiential programs, offered a personal definition of the significance of debriefing and reflection within the context of experiential learning from the perspective of these two programs:

Experiential learning means to me rather the opposite of what the classroom is. The classroom teaches you theories, which you are then supposed to, at some undefined point of time in a real world, apply. You know you learn partial fractions in Year Ten in the hope that maybe someday in your mid-thirties you’ll be on a building site or something and be able to use them. I don’t know, I never use maths for anything. The part of learning that we used in (Darwinia) was the opposite, we actually saw the stuff, sometimes quite confronting stuff and you then had to do the learning afterwards, preferably on scene, as it was happening in front of you. The teacher could remove the kids and say, “Do you see this, let me explain to you what is going on.” (Teacher 2).

In this scenario, learning, as constructed through teacher-led facilitation, often occurs after the experience itself, framed by teachers as a form of 'debriefing':

Our kids of fourteen or fifteen are not accustomed to reflecting and analysing and don’t do it particularly well and they are used to the ‘cop-out’ comment: ‘I don’t know’, and it obviously works in a classroom environment (Campus Manager).

At first I was a bit confused (about debriefing), I thought it seemed all a bit of a waste of time actually (Teacher 1).

Through the experience of working with students in different experiential programs of learning, however, this teacher had an understanding of the need to offer students a structure after an experience through which they could explore its educational meaning. Student memories require something that gives a frame of reference…something that physically ties a student to a concept (Teacher 3). The memories of experience provide one part of the framework, the other is the teacher or facilitator:

Kids in particular tend to qualify an experience in one sentence, so that you will have been on a camp with a kid and the kid’s had a ball…and I have had a note from his mother saying how much he hated camp and how unhappy he was and you say, “well I was with the kid for a whole week and he always had a smile on his face, he never complained and
every time I asked him how he was going, he only said it was good. And has come home and has turned it into a sentence. You know and maybe there was just something at that moment, maybe he didn’t feel like talking, to you, maybe he was in a bad mood, maybe he was tired and he just said he hated it.” From that, the whole experience has been coloured by his own recording of the experience, so in a sense, an experience in itself only teaches for the second that the experience lasts and what stays with kids is the way that they have been directed to understand the experience afterwards and the way that they have turned the experience into a story or into a lesson or into whatever it’s turned into. Without that process, the debriefing, the role of the teacher, the experience in itself can be lost (Teacher 2).

Teachers draw a strong connection between the process of reflection and the integration of the experience into the overall understanding of each student:

Through talking about what they were doing, through talking about what they achieved, it helped them to appreciate what was happening in their lives. So through that process I think they had a better understanding of it and with a better understanding of it, they were able to apply that to other situations in their lives more fully than the experience was, and actually integrate it into who they are as people (Teacher 1).

Teachers believe that success at Darwinia Campus depends on open-mindedness where:

...people who come to things without prejudice, but with a general willingness to participate, because, for no other reason than the fact that life is to be participated in (Teacher 2).

Another teacher emphasised the phenomenon of ‘discovery’, where the experience itself unlocked something inside a student, resulting in a change in behaviour and participation level:

You would get students who were quiet...suddenly discovering their voice and discovering abilities and they were able to contribute. I remember one student ...he was in a bit of trouble and had a bit of a reputation...having this amazing experience...enjoying being able to share that with students and having the students enjoy the sharing of it by him (Teacher 1).

Participating staff also recognise that learning about self, rather than accepting a judgement from another, is a key outcome of the program. However, this view contrasted strongly with a contrary view from another teacher that the learning is essentially focused on the emergence of a group:
Students discovered things for themselves and shared with the group and the group appreciated it and through sharing those skills becoming part of the group… I think that how the program was structured the students could actually see it for themselves (Teacher 1).

He added:

The peer group became quite inclusive… people respected differences (Teacher 1).

The peer group of students, however, is not based on existing peer group structure within the parent school, and the billeting arrangements often take students away from their friends. This approach produces an opportunity for personal growth that is recognised by the students:

Students themselves acknowledge that they wouldn’t have made those choices… they wouldn’t have grown (Teacher 2, Darwinia Campus).

Taking a comparative perspective between programs and the mainstream, the teacher observed:

Classrooms are still fundamentally academic… we are not allowing the development of all those different intelligences, whereas in a place like (Darwinia) you are actually looking at the whole person (Teacher 2).

This contrast creates difficulties for students when integrating back into the mainstream classroom. Despite the relatively short duration of the Darwinia program, teachers acknowledged the difficulties reported by both staff and students regarding integration back into the mainstream learning programs at the parent school.

4.7.4.8. Summary

At Darwinia Campus, the program setting and activities have been designed to take students beyond their zone of comfort and competence and allow room to make mistakes within a scaffold of safety and support provided by teachers. Learning is directed by students, but with teachers providing a framework of support. Teachers offer support through prompts, targeted questioning, or suggestions as needed. Apart from reasons of safety, intervention by teachers is deemed to be counter-productive to effective learning. Much of the learning is believed to arise from real life situations that preclude tightly controlled and predictable processes and outcomes. Learning
is assumed by teachers to be individualised, with each student constructing a different set of understandings within a single learning event.

The unusual setting of the program is an important element in creating a challenging learning environment. Some students find the experiences to be confronting and educationally, campus staff believe this to be one of the essential elements of highly memorable and effective experiential learning. Facilities design deliberately ‘ration’ or limit access to some resources, such as computers, thereby compelling students to engage in negotiation.

Student reflection and debriefing at the conclusion of activities and at the end of the program is seen by all staff as a crucial element of the learning process. The debriefing process allows the student to recall and retain the experience in a way that contributes positively towards learning. Students mature significantly during the program, developing more sophisticated problem solving techniques and achieving an understanding of self, greater open-mindedness and tolerance of each other and others through the program.

4.7.5. Eucalypt Campus

4.7.5.1. Overview of Campus

At Eucalypt Campus, the students participate in a one-year program that is a combination of experiential activities and a mainstream academic program that is strongly aligned with the curriculum structure and content at the secular, single-sex parent school. The academic and experiential programs are timetabled separately. The academic program is implemented under the oversight of program subject managers at the parent school.

The setting of the program in a secluded valley close to a range of mountains cultivates a sense of isolation and unfamiliarity for the vast majority of student participants. It is located in a bush setting that is both physically and visually isolated from other residences or communities.
Students are housed in shared accommodation, typically in groups of 10. There is a recreation hub with dining and study facilities. Staff are accommodated in separate houses in close proximity to student dormitories. The standard of dormitory accommodation is high when compared to other, comparable programs. Meals are shared in the common dining facilities, but students are expected to contribute towards the domestic duties on campus.

Students maintain contact with family members and friends by surface mail. Parents are permitted to visit the campus on designated visitors’ days.

4.7.5.2. Participants

A total of six members of staff participated in the interviews, all of which took place on campus over a period of two days. Participants included one Campus Manager, one program manager and four teachers. All but one participant had previous experience at either two or three other experiential learning programs. Participants had worked in experiential learning programs for an average of 5.4 years.

4.7.5.3. Observations

During the period of observation, the students were settled into the campus routine and there was little observable evidence of social disharmony or tension in the group. Student behaviour at meal times and meeting times tended to be boisterous and unfettered by formality. The students interacted confidently with staff and each other, and were informal, friendly, and appeared to project an element of personal trust. Students were comfortable in approaching members of staff to raise personal matters of concern.

The campus offers a mainstream academic program as well as an experiential program, with the mainstream classes being conducted during school hours on weekdays. The visit coincided with two days of mainstream academic classes. There appeared to be a good deal of latitude granted to the scheduling of program and academic activities during the day and
evening, although the timing of some activities, such as meals, were managed with more precision. Freedom of movement around the campus itself appeared to be unrestricted during the day and evening.

4.7.5.4. Design Principles

The fundamental idea underpinning the Eucalypt Campus program is to isolate the students in a residential environment in which there is little personal space and no immediate access to support from friends and family in the outside world. The isolated setting intentionally seeks to create a strong emotional reaction in the students; as the Campus Manager remarked: *We see nothing but trees here. I think that real alien feeling is where the power comes from.*

The *alien feeling* experienced by students reflects the intention to make the experience something that offers a strong contrast to the home living and learning for most students; the Campus Manager added:

*One of the things that we do is try to make experiences as different as we possibly can.*

The living environment is designed to evoke a similar response:

*The (students) don’t have technology, so that’s another familiarity that we take away from them* (Campus Manager).

However, the program is still designed to allow students to reconcile themselves to what is unfamiliar at first:

*We take kids to new places…where they can see the connection of themselves to that new place* (Program Manager).

The distance between the parent school and the campus creates the opportunity for the journey to the campus itself to perform an important function at the commencement of the program:

“The bus trip here…is symbolic. It’s almost like a passageway between the two experiences (Teacher 1).

*I don’t know if you could replicate this experience in (the city) because they would still have those links to the environment that they feel comfortable with and understood and they would still have the*
communications. *Isolation: physically and socially as well, they’re in an environment here that’s very alien to them* (Teacher 2).

Their journey at the campus is intended to create a strong connection with the local environment:

*It doesn’t matter where you are around the campus or in the house you can’t escape the outside world…When it’s raining you can hear it, it’s tin. All of that is not being able to escape being exposed to the bush…We have very strong values and philosophies around that* (Campus Manager).

The residential environment is designed to create a strong contrast with home, while demanding a greater degree of student engagement in its management:

*We have been offered microwaves from parents and small technologies and cooking gear and let’s get air conditioning in. I have said “no” on a philosophical level…when it’s cold we want the kids to know they have to do something about it. Something organic, like grab some wood and make the effort and get it lit and when it’s hot you have to slow down. You can’t run around anymore, you have to slow down and it takes a long time for the (students) to understand the value in that* (Campus Manager).

The rhythm and pace of the program is therefore constructed to allow time for consideration of the richness of the environment and the activities on offer:

*I often have a lot of students that can’t listen to a song and you see what they do, they plug it in for a few moments and then switch over to another song. So it’s slowing down. There’s something really rich in reading an entire poem or an entire novel, actually going through the process and the hard work of admiring a work of art like that rather than little snippets…There are no phone calls and no parent contact during term and letter writing is very much part of the experience and it’s almost like revisiting skills. The parents have this pile of letters at the end of the year where there is a chronology of their (child’s) experiences, not to mention the practice of writing. That form of communication is where the students are far more deliberate in what they write* (Campus Manager).

The limited physical space allocated to a student within the dormitory area, in addition to the deliberate absence of some environmental comforts, is also intended to reduce the availability of individual private space so as to create a more intense social dynamic at the campus, and within the house group in particular:
It helps to have a space around the campus where they can go and have a bit of a timeout (Teacher 2).

While acknowledging that it would be easier for staff to control students in a highly structured way, there is an understanding among staff that some controls must be loosened to achieve better educational outcomes:

I would just love the hard-edged boundaries on young people, but it is control of them by putting them in a box. But whenever that feeling comes over I know that feeling’s about me and it’s not about the kids. Here it’s about trying to find a middle ground between ensuring some degree of an environment where it’s safe physically and emotionally and it’s respectful and we can get some good stuff done (Program Manager).

The practical effect is that some of the campus routines lack the regimentation associated with more traditional residential practices:

If you look at it at mealtime, it’s rowdy and we work one on one a lot to try and manage those behaviours and if it’s a bit silly then we manage it with immediate intervention, but we also have an environment where we want the kids to interact, we want conversation and we want them to have fun, we want them to feel relaxed and we don’t want them to feel that they are in an environment where they are constantly controlled and manipulated (Program Manager).

While students have some room to move and interact socially, however, there is a practice of close monitoring that may lead to intervention and diminution in the degree of freedom exercised if necessary:

We want them on the edge of feeling a bit of freedom, of feeling a degree of power, but not too much (Program Manager).

Coping with the unfamiliar setting and the different social dynamic this creates within the student group creates pressure to adapt. In learning to cope with a new environment, there is also a conscious attempt to engage the students’ imagination in some of the less formal activities: They learn the value of imaginative play (Campus Manager).

One senior manager at the campus described the way in which the program has sought to remove the element of competition from many activities as another means of changing the structure of social interaction between students:
Competition in education has a way of extracting energy... We try to promote a competitive spirit that you support yourself. We don’t have soccer matches and we don’t encourage teacher-student football games (Campus Manager).

The absence of technology also serves to create a ‘manual’ lifestyle that is in strong contrast to the daily experiences of most students:

I think that the learning that is quite different is learning out of the classrooms throughout the day, everyday life, getting up in the morning and living with nine other (students) and learning to live in a very different environment where you can’t just push the button to put the air conditioner or heater on. I guess it’s taking them out of a lifestyle that is modern (Teacher 3).

This teacher also noted the impact this simplified setting had on the behaviour of students, particularly in relation to student self-image and what was projected to other participating students and staff:

They find they don’t need TV, they don’t need Internet, they don’t need DVDs, they don’t need to be constantly entertained. After a while of being up here they don’t care what they look like, they walk around school wearing tracksuits and Ugg boots and everyone accepts each other, they are just being themselves (Teacher 3).

The intensity of the experience for students and staff is reflected in depth and complexity of relationships and associated conflicts that emerge in the course of the program.

The program is designed to run for a full academic year, which of necessity creates the need to maintain a course of mainstream academic studies in addition to the experiential activities on offer. The mainstream academic studies include courses such as English and mathematics. The more experientially focused elements of the program include a range of outdoor activities, such as hiking, mountain-biking, and running.

The structure of the program and the setting, particularly through the design of the residential facilities, create opportunities for learning that are intentional, but not predictable in a direct sense. The Program Manager referred to this type of learning as incidental learning:

From a structural perspective there’s the academic content knowledge based on the English and it’s formal and then there’s the incidental, informal learning that occurs through the interaction with relationships.
Incidental learning is the stuff that’s never planned. I mean it is planned in a way because there are structures that create certain learning. For example, the (students) live in a small cottage and (are) self sufficient for breakfast, snacks, they have to organize all daily functions including cleaning, laundry and they have to interact with each other, they have to work together. It’s through the interaction of the (students) within those structures, that I think contributes to the most significant learning here (Program Manager).

All participants interviewed at the campus noted the existence of varying degrees of tension between the demands of the academic and experiential programs. The Campus Manager, for example, identified the structure of some mainstream studies like mathematics, as the source of this tension:

You have to prepare, especially for subjects like (mathematics) that are so sequential... I don’t think across the board that there’s tension between experiential learning and academic programs, but I think certainly with subjects that are sequential like mathematics (Campus Manager).

A teacher observed:

I think logistically, it’s really difficult to adhere to all of the demands of being in an academic program... as well as trying to achieve outcomes that go over and above what they are hoping to achieve at (the parent school)... yet often the school program takes precedence over everything else that’s going on (Teacher 1).

Similarly, others believe that the development of the experiential program has been compromised by the demands of maintaining a mainstream academic program in a remote location over an extended period of time. The Program Manager suggested that the duration of the academic program is the main reason for the limited potential to innovate in the experiential program.

In considering the possibilities for diminishing or eliminating the academic-experiential dichotomy, the Campus Manager acknowledged parental pressures as a factor counting against greater integration of experiential approaches in the academic program.

According to the program manager, the formal classroom learning does not make a significant contribution to the uniqueness of the learning at the campus:
I think if you would try and weigh up a remote residential school against a day school and say, “OK, what is the quintessential difference?...it’s a residential school and the formal learning, the academic based and school based learning, can occur in any environment and (the parent school) is trying to, in some way, keep the academic connections between here and (the school) (Program Manager).

He emphasised the educational importance of the residential nature of the program:

*The uniqueness of this place is that they don’t go home at night. They are confronted by each other as (the students) say because the conflict here is far more complex because they can’t run away from it. The (student) or the staff member that they might have conflict with, they have to be sitting and having meals with and seeing them around the place, they are going to go on an outdoor program with them. There is significantly greater interaction with other people on a very regular and constant basis than you get in a day school (Program Manager)*.

He summarised the purpose of the program:

*It is an interaction between the internal place and the external world and that happens incidentally, simply because relationships are ongoing here and are constant and the remoteness and the natural environment and then some of the formal process that we have in place continue to I guess, put them into small crises which then facilitate, to some degree, introspection (Program Manager)*.

4.7.5.5. Design in Practice: Activities and Problems

One of the first challenges in the implementation of the program is the alignment of student and staff expectations in relation to life at the campus and the program itself. The commencement of the program is acknowledged to be challenging for students as the social dynamic of the student ‘houses’ begins to impose itself on the students individually and collectively:

*The hardest thing the (students) do here is arrive in that house. The have got ten people with them that they probably don’t know very well and they have to learn to deal with that and I think that’s the most profound learning that happens here, in that they just couldn’t get it anywhere else (Teacher 2)*.

The overall isolation generates a degree of discomfort for students:

*Some of them find that this place is too alien and I guess that if they were a little older and a little wiser they would see that as a reflection of themselves ...they go into their personal space as much as they
possibly can...(but) it’s difficult to find their personal space (Program Manager).

The expectations of students prior to arrival, however, do not always match the reality of the challenge. Many students commence the program with a set of fairly low expectations about the nature of the learning and the way in which the program is to be conducted. For example, the program demands concerning scheduling are at variance with the preconceptions of many students at the beginning of each program:

*I think a lot of them expected it to be lots of social time, lots of free time, lots of unstructured programming and they actually found it to be the opposite, lots and lots of structure* (Campus Manager).

Even where students receive careful and extensive pre-program briefing about expectations, many students still express surprise at the level of challenge. Homesickness, community expectations and campus rules all combine to create difficulties for students at the start of the program:

*“It was hard”, they all said that* (Campus Manager).

After arrival at Eucalypt Campus, the teaching staff focus on making the students feel that they are safe and will have their basic needs met:

*We spend a lot of time trying to make the (students) feel safe and let them know that they are going to be able to get some sleep and something to eat, they are going to be ok and I think that’s something that they have to learn and I also think that the ability to put up with people when normally they would go home…it’s only something you can learn from experience* (Teacher 2).

At this campus, all teachers are expected to take part in all experiential programs in order to generate a richer, more multi-dimensional relationship between students and teachers:

*So we don’t have the teachers along for a ride, they actually are heavily involved in running the program. Maybe that’s one of the reasons that the attitudes of (students) change and they look at you and see that you have so many strings to your bow, you’re not just a one-dimensional human being* (Campus Manager).

From a staff perspective, teachers working on the program reported a depth of relationship with the students that extended well beyond the experience of the teacher working only in a classroom environment:
You get to know the (students) on a much deeper level because you don’t only see them in a classroom. You see them in the house in the mornings, once they have woken up, you see them after school and you spend a lot of your spare time hanging out with them, taking them for rides and runs, you see them at night, you help them with homework, you eat meals with them (Teacher 3).

The sustained and intensive nature of social interaction at the campus is more likely to generate relationships based on a genuine understanding of the individual:

*Your life is, rather than it being a job, it’s more like your life and they are a part of your life, not just a part of your work life but a part of your whole life. They get to know what’s going on in your life and it’s harder to hide a bad day, or it’s harder for them to put on an act, you get to see what they are really like because they can’t sustain an act for the whole year. I think because they get to know us better and we let them be involved in our lives and we feel that we can have more fun with them and be more open with them. You feel respect. I mean you are a teacher in the classroom, but outside of the classroom you are not really a teacher, you are their mum, or their sister, or their outdoor leader (Teacher 3).*

With comprehensive staff engagement in all aspects of the program, there are efforts made to integrate the residential and outdoor activities with the mainstream academic tasks undertaken by students:

*If we are teaching any type of curriculum, we often ask, “how does this compare to your experiences in the house?” We do that in English quite a lot. Also again in terms of integration, if we are on a hike you might draw links between that and the (dormitory). Often on Thursdays I will ask them to think about how something worked on a hike or didn’t work on a hike and how that might relate to the house (Teacher 2).*

This integration takes place in both formal and informal ways: some activities target the local environment directly; whereas there is only an implied connection in other cases:

*The first term for instance, we worked hard on the water management and tried to integrate the water use around the campus and the environment in general and pollution. Trying to relate their experiences with the academics and the other place that we do it a lot is English, for instance, “To Kill a Mocking Bird”. It was nice to put that into context with understanding and misunderstanding putting people in boxes and not give people the benefit of the doubt, which obviously applies to directly to house scenario all the time (Teacher 2).*
However, there is also an assumption operating that students will make their own connections between the experiential and mainstream academic elements of the program.

The experiential element of the program requires students to develop a range of skills, from the more technical, such as navigation, bushcraft, and fire lighting, to the more personal and emotional, such as resilience, leadership, and teamwork. When taking part in experiential activities, students are allowed to make mistakes and deal with the consequences, particularly where these might have a ‘real life’ impact on the students, such as food shortages or navigational errors:

I mean if they can’t read a map, then they can’t read a map and I don’t want them to get lost. But when they have more experience I think it’s healthy for the (students) to get lost and it’s also very rewarding when they get themselves out of a situation, if they run out of food and realise that by using their own initiative, get by. By solving the problem of initiative, you can give them some suggestions that will solve the problems for them. I think that’s much more rewarding for them rather than you warning them and making a problem for them (Teacher 2).

The point of intervention in a situation might be determined by the perceived consequences of failure to intervene and might reflect the risk, relative skill level of the group, and prevailing or anticipated conditions at the time of the decision. Student mistakes or errors are treated with a great deal of care: some mistakes or judgement errors are allowed to stand or unfold to create learning opportunities:

Getting lost would be the big one and you might just make some suggestions as to how they could fix it…This doesn’t happen often. I mean if they decide that they are going to have a lazy day, have a long lunch and sit around, that’s their decision. I am not going to tell them to get up and start walking because I don’t think that’s the nature of the experience. Generally, it doesn’t come to that. Maybe once, but if you sit back and don’t interfere they will make the decision themselves. They have to understand how to use their equipment properly, how to ration their food, how to walk well so that their breaks are appropriate and water and spacing out their food (Teacher 2).

Teachers expect that students will encounter difficulties during the experiential activities, some of which arise from student inaction or poor decision making:
Like getting tired, getting sore feet, getting lost, getting wet, running out of food, getting angry with each other; all those things that happen when not making basic decisions on a hike (Teacher 2).

These problems, largely arising out of student mistakes, are accepted as a part of the learning challenge associated with the experiential program, the resolution of which will build resilience and a sense of accomplishment for participating students:

At the end of a hike when there has been something challenging, for instance, if it’s been raining the whole time or they have run out of food. I think they find the experience much more rewarding rather than when they come back from a hike when everything has gone to plan. They don’t have that sense of achievement (Teacher 2).

In allowing students to make mistakes in order to build problem-solving skills and a perception of achievement, there is an acknowledged element of risk for both staff and students:

The (students) have a lot of responsibility attached to their experience here. We trust them a lot and expect a lot from them. For example, once they have got used to the place they are able to run on running tracks in groups of four on their own, right out on the mountaintops (Campus Manager).

The margin for error and risk appetite among teaching staff varies according to familiarity and experience and may also be influenced by subjective factors such as the prevailing dynamic within a specific group of students during a particular program:

One would be my own knowledge of the area, because I am new to this area I would probably be a bit more wary about getting too far from where I know I am, particularly, I am still learning what the weather conditions do so I need to feel confident in my own ability to get the (students) out of a situation that they might get themselves into. You might also take into account how the group is going (Teacher 1).

One teacher with extensive experience working on another program where there was a more liberal risk appetite prevailing commented on the factors that shaped operational decisions made relating to student errors:

It’s not quite the done thing to let the (students) make a mistake without coming to their rescue. But I know personally here I have been less inclined to, particularly in outdoor programs, to let things get too out of hand, whereas at (‘K’ Campus) I would just let them go for it and if they were still walking at 1:00 a.m. that would be fine and that did happen.
Often that happened because I planned it that way. I was quite comfortable to let the kids run the trip and sleep in till ten in the morning and take five hours to pack up and consequently get back about four in the morning...I don’t think I would ever do that here (Teacher 1).

The prevailing protective ethos of the school and the program has a distinct influence on the way in which decisions are made in the field by teachers when faced with difficult or ambiguous situations in experiential activities. Yet there is an aspiration to change the campus culture and encourage greater student risk taking:

I would like to see the students hone their risk taking abilities. Forget about the assessments, not just catering to the criteria, actually take a risk, do something new and test the theory out properly, don’t just spew out what you know in order to get good marks (Campus Manager).

One acknowledged impediment to this aspiration is the negative impact of parental expectations on this ethos:

They are just used to rescuing their (child) from every situation. I would say the (students) have to accept the consequences because a lot of these (students) don’t have consequences at home…There are a lot of consequences in life and you need to learn to accept the consequences for what happens (Teacher 3).

Paradoxically, parent attitudes send mixed messages to the school about risk:

The reason that the parents thank us is they get home students who are not so protected (Campus Manager).

The relationship between students and teachers changes over the course of the year and in a similar way, the relationship between the parent, the child and the campus changes. Parents of students participating in each program are drawn into their child’s learning, often through written communication between the child and parent. Participants acknowledge the difficulties associated with handling parental expectations and reactions that are sometimes based on incomplete or inaccurate accounts of events occurring at some distance from home:

But I think it is hard for the parents sometimes because they have had a way of dealing with their child and then they send them away and someone else is treating their child completely differently (Teacher 3).
Parents sometimes react in a negative way to a problem that comes to light through student rather than teacher initiated correspondence:

If something goes wrong and the student has been upset about something (that) has happened in the house or wherever and the parent hasn’t been informed of that, they can be quite upset about that...I mean the times that parents have been upset, it’s almost as though something has gone wrong and they haven’t been informed about it and they have heard about it from a letter from the student and...you explain that it’s not exactly what happened and the picture that (they) have got isn’t entirely clear (Teacher 2).

The management of incomplete or inaccurate correspondence between students and parents poses some challenges for the program:

Often (the students) will use letter writing for escaping frustrations in the house and they use their diaries for the same reason. Often I get a call from a parent who I have had this letter from so and so and they sound really upset and I don’t know what it’s about so I say I will get back to them when I know more and by that time they have received another letter saying everything is good (Teacher 2).

Students have to come to terms with the delays in the communication cycle with their parents, with an exchange of letters often taking up to ten days. They also encounter difficulties associated with their written communication skills. During the program, students are asked to take part in a range of writing activities aimed at improving their capacity to express themselves in writing. For example, record their experiences in a formal way using an informal journal that is not assessed:

The (students) are encouraged to keep a journal or scrap book and a lot of them make scrap books and a lot of them write in their journals every night before they go to bed, but some of them don’t at all. So it’s encouraged but a little bit up to them. It’s compulsory to have a journal but not to do it properly because it’s never read. It’s completely private and personal (Teacher 3).

The formal report on the experience requires students to reflect on different aspects of life at the campus and the challenges and benefits of activities undertaken during the program:

They look at seven different areas of their life and the things that they have learned in the health workshops. It just asks them to reflect and they actually enjoyed the experience and they produced some kind of hard copy record of their experiences at (the campus) and there were elements like managing conflict, difficult and isolating emotions,
meeting the challenge and analysing your own behaviour, all of those kinds of things (Campus Manager).

4.7.5.6. Program Outcomes

The program sets out to maintain a mainstream academic program while exposing participating students to a range of experiential learning activities that are intended to develop independence, resilience, problem solving skills, and confidence. Identifying and measuring student learning outcomes derived from the experiential component of the campus program remains problematic for teaching staff. The importance of observation of changed behaviour as a reliable indicator of learning is acknowledged, and at the same time, highlights the difficulty in using measures and means that are based in language:

It’s in the actions, in the behaviours that one sees change...these students are very good at (using) the language to tell us what they think we want to know and that’s...why I don’t think you can measure it (Program Manager),

Student behaviour is seen as a more reliable indicator of change, but realisation of the learning may take years:

With some of (the students) it will be three years down the track before it kicks in to see the relevance of their learning (Program Manager).

It takes time. It’s a slow process and not the academic side of it but the other side is a bit difficult to determine what is going to be learnt (Teacher 1).

Knowing what to observe and how to measure it is also seen as problematic:

It’s hard to measure but it’s also hard to know what exactly the (students) are going to get out of here...The most valuable learning...is when the (students) are interacting with each other and the staff...in different situations (Teacher 1).

The learning is unpredictable to an extent, and does not produce similar or comparable outcomes for every student:

While you can have ideas about what you hope that people will get out of being in a new environment and being in difficult situations and you hope what they get out of it will be positive, you don’t know that every student that comes here will get from A to B (Teacher 1).
The employment of formal reflection emerged as an unresolved issue for a number of participants. One participant with personal experience at another more traditional experiential program, noted that *debriefing* was not popular with students:

*We experimented a little bit with debriefing…The (students) didn’t enjoy it and were quite resistant to it…so we cut it back. I still believe that those hikes speak for themselves and if they don’t, they won’t until much later (Teacher 2).*

On reflection, he added: *I don’t enjoy it and I don’t think the students do either (Teacher 2).*

However, there was acknowledgement that informal reflection through feedback occurs as the experience itself unfolds for each student group:

*I think that the benefit of these hikes is that after one they really should be learning things on their own and suffering the consequences if they don’t…So the teacher really doesn’t have to illustrate those things because they become pretty clear on their own. Obviously you don’t want the students in danger…but, I think you can protect them while letting them experience themselves without mollycoddling them (Teacher 2).*

At Eucalypt Campus, one of the most important aspects of learning for students is a greater self-awareness and an understanding of self within the social context of the campus. One program manager used the metaphor of the ‘mask’ to explain the phenomenon whereby students become aware of discrepancies between their public and private personas. The intense social interaction that takes place during the months of living together with other students in a confined space creates a heightened awareness among students of what is presented to others:

*We have many masks that we present. I’m helping the (students) to understand that the one they might be wearing at the moment to manage relationship situations, or just to manage being in the world that they are in, isn’t necessarily the one that they have to have all the time (Program Manager).*

For some students, coming to an understanding of the *mask* they present to others is a difficult experience:

*(Students) are challenged by the masks they wear and then over time they learn that there are effective ways to relate to the world…and the ability to choose that is sometimes improved by how they are*
supported through the different experiences that go on here (Program Manager).

The program manager cited the example of a female student who underwent a significant change:

One girl who had been presenting this persona this mask of being very gruff and short tempered, moody, (and) dark. Through a series of different sorts of interactions over time...she came to realise that this was not really how she actually wanted to respond and not how she wanted the world to see her. The motivation came within her to make some changes...all of a sudden she was a different person in the sense that she walked about the campus without the scowl, her face was more open...she was able to articulate exactly why she had been going through this moody stage, why she needed to make the changes and then she made the changes (Program Manager).

According to this manager, the point at which a student becomes aware of the mask is the individual student reflection. Through the process of reflecting on their experiences and interactions, students are often confronted by what they present to other students, friends, and even family:

I know the (students) are definitely challenged by their own masks; they are challenged by reflection here, formal and informal and many of the (students) are confronted by themselves and (how) they see themselves in relation to other people...they want to be themselves (Program Manager).

The manager sees this outcome as highly individualised, emphasising the difficulty in measuring growth in self-awareness and confidence in an objective or meaningful way:

I believe (what) they learn a lot more about is their own sense of confidence in the world that they are operating and it’s hard to measure though and hard to put that against any standard. It’s utterly personal. It’s related to not only where they are at in their own personality, their own beliefs and values, their own sense of themselves, but also their own motivation (Program Manager).

Somewhat paradoxically, students who experience a series of crises at an emotional or personal level during the program are more likely to benefit from working through these issues with staff, whereas students who remain largely unaffected are more difficult to reach:

A kid who has a lot of crises throughout their time has the potential of learning a lot more about themselves if they choose to take that on and
work with it. So the kid who might be struggling and decides to stay here and to work through that with their peers and adults, often has expressed a greater understanding of how they can interact with the world, manage their emotions more effectively, improve relationships by how they deal with conflict that doesn’t push people away and but just to help themselves defining the boundaries (Program Manager).

As students become more aware of their own public and private personas, they also become more aware of the nature of the social structures around them. The social order within each cohort of students tends to undergo significant change during the course of the program. One staff member at Eucalypt Campus noted the intermingling of groups of students that would normally remain socially distinct in the parent school:

The cool kids had come being cool and the dorks had come being dorks and they came back and they were friends with each other and they all mixed and this hadn’t been forced on them by the school (Teacher 4).

The status and performance of individual students in an experiential setting sometimes confounds expectations, with students who demonstrate dominance in a social context at the parent school sometimes failing to live up to expectations in a residential setting. A teacher remembered the difficulties and early departure experienced by one student:

I remember one girl…who was unquestionably the ‘Queen of the hill’, a very, very powerful character and had a whole group, of maybe even as many as a dozen kids running round at her beck and call…she was the leader…She came back within the first term…she couldn’t deal with a whole lot of things but it was really about the fact that she was just like one of the other kids. She’d been put on a pedestal, she’d been given a sort of a role by her peers that she couldn’t maintain…she never showed any of the leadership that perhaps she would have been expected to show (Teacher 4).

The intense social interaction that occurs throughout the program creates stress and conflict for individuals and the group as a whole. The intensity of social interaction often leads to an increased acceptance of individual differences and for some the willingness to engage in social interaction that might not have been possible in a mainstream setting:

Learning about tolerance…they see each other so often in so many different contexts. They can’t ignore each other they can’t get away from each other...(They are) exposed to people who they may not
have spoken to or had anything to do with in a different world, in a different environment (Teacher 1).

In addition to generating some conflict, the intensity of the experience also accelerates the developmental processes for many students. Isolation also plays a role in providing a suitable setting for a concentrated focus on the development and understanding of ‘self’ and a heightened awareness of the social context in which the students live:

Students mature a little more quickly and they go away…possessing a greater knowledge of themselves…they have a clearer understanding of their own values because they are isolated and are away from other influences…I think they have a better understanding of the environment from where they have come from socially…Certainly they have a much better relationship with their parents (Teacher 2).

Another teacher concurred that the parent-child relationship seemed to undergo considerable change over the course of the program:

They used to fight with their mum all the time and they are really ashamed as to how they treated their parents and since being away they have realised that when they go home they are so happy to see them, that they realise how important that they actually were. They took them for granted and they also realised after having to do everything themselves, get ready for school, get their own breakfast and they don’t have a mum to ask, “How was your day at school?” (Teacher 3).

She added that the most important learning outcomes lie in the personal growth achieved by individuals:

I think they learn the values that their friends and families have (at home) may not be the only values that they can have. They learn about what it’s like to live in a small community rather than being one person in a massive big metropolitan area. They learn about themselves and what sort of people they are, what things they can cope with and they realise that a lot of stuff that they thought they didn’t like, they find that they actually do like: a lot of activities and outdoor stuff that they have never had a chance to do. They also learn about being independent and a lot of relationship skills, so I guess intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Teacher 3).

These outcomes are not transmitted, but are apprehended by the learner, possibly over an extended period of time, and awareness of the learning emerges not through formal reflection and debriefing, but through informal social interaction:
I don’t think it’s something that is taught; I think it’s something that they realise over a long period of time. I realise this by little conversations they have with each other like: “my friends when I went home, they couldn’t believe what I was wearing”…or, “they just have no idea what the house is like.” They talk about how they learn to occupy themselves and be themselves and not to rely on multimedia bombardment all the time. They just mention to one another informally and you just pick up on it. I mean before they didn’t realise that but as before they might not have realised that where they have grown up and society and culture has had an impact on them but now they can see what impact it has had (Teacher 3).

In considering learning outcomes, one of the unanticipated consequences for students at the conclusion of the program was the difficulty of re-integration back into a mainstream academic curriculum at the parent school. Based on participant comment, this has not been an easy process for students or their teachers. Teachers at the parent school have reported back to Eucalypt Campus on a number of changes in student behaviour and attitude post-program:

*The teachers (at the parent school) notice that there is definitely a change…they come back much more independent and free thinkers. They don’t just accept exactly what’s told to them. They ask questions and then they challenge norms and ideas and potentials (Teacher 3).*

Reintegration into mainstream schooling after the program, however, is a difficult process for students. The changes experienced by many student participants in the program are not completely compatible with the expectations of the parent school:

*Their values have changed. They are frustrated that they can’t build the same relationship with the teachers (at the parent school) that they did here and they all of a sudden have to wear a school uniform and comply to rules and expectations that they see as superficial and not important anymore (Teacher 3).*

4.7.5.7. Summary

The program commences with a journey that seeks to establish a feeling of distance and alienation in students. The setting of the program is intentionally isolated in a physical and a social sense. The campus facilities are also designed to create a direct connection with the surrounding environment.
Campus living conditions are basic and designed around a ‘manual’ lifestyle in which students are expected to look after some of their own living needs.

Program activities are informed by the notion that students should enjoy a feeling of freedom, but within a tightly controlled social structure. Imaginative play is encouraged and competitive behaviour discouraged in many of the formal and informal student activities. Students make mistakes and the learning is held to be more effective when they learn from their own mistakes.

The house setting is considered to be a particularly challenging yet important element of the learning at Eucalypt Campus. Students learn about tolerance and understanding of each other within the confines of a house setting where sharing of limited space and facilities, along with the burden of shared responsibilities, places pressure on the students. Students become aware of the social masks they develop to cope with social interaction and some choose to adjust or redesign their social masks in the light of the heightened personal awareness that emerges during the course of the program. Relationships with parents also change significantly for many.

Reintegration with the parent school is difficult for many students and some do not come to terms with the learning from the campus program for some years.

4.7.6. Ferntree Campus

4.7.6.1. Overview of Campus

Ferntree Campus is located in a rural area within two hours’ travel of the parent school. The location of the campus close to a rural community allows the students to interact with residents in the district on a regular basis as a deliberate element of the program structure. Students spend one term (eight weeks) at the campus.
The campus is located in a purpose-built facility that provides separate housing for staff and students. Students are allocated to a dwelling (called a ‘house’) that consists of common living, food preparation, and dining areas, two or four bed dormitories, laundry, and shared bathrooms. Students are responsible for the care of the house throughout the program. They prepare their own meals each day and undertake all cleaning tasks, under the supervision of a member of staff.

Students undertake a heavily modified academic program during the Ferntree program, incorporating activities and themes that are relevant to the immediate rural setting of the campus. Academic activities involve project research for students working individually and in smaller groups. Other activities include campus based performance skills, physical activities, and the development of home management skills.

Students communicate with parents by e-mail and telephone. Parents are permitted to visit the campus on designated visitors’ days and may also be given permission to visit for other school approved purposes.

4.7.6.2. Participants

There were five members of Ferntree Campus who took part in the study: one campus manager, one program manager, and three teachers. Participants had worked for an average of 11.9 years on experiential learning programs; only one study participant had worked on three experiential learning programs in total.

4.7.6.3. Questionnaire Data

While confirming the data collected through the interviews, the questionnaire findings particularly emphasised the importance of extended contact with students in a residential setting as a core element of the program. Risk taking and perceived danger were omitted or seen by questionnaire respondents as the least important elements of the program.
4.7.6.4. Observations

During the two-day observation visit, students were engaged in a series of closure activities aimed at summarising the experiences of the previous weeks and the opportunities to observe students were therefore limited. The students worked independently on computer workstations, without staff direction, in an atmosphere that appeared to be purposeful. The social interaction between students observed during the visit was somewhat fragmented. Staff-student interaction was highly informal in comparison with the modes of address and interaction normally observed in a school classroom.

All interviews were conducted on site at the campus. Participating staff disclosed personal views about the program and management decisions confidently during the interviews.

4.7.6.5. Design Principles

The key term that captures the essence of program structure and approach to learning at Ferntree Campus is ‘community’, both from an individual and a collective perspective:

*So unlike many other places this is about education within the community and by the community (Campus Manager).*

The campus was established as a learning community embedded within a community and remains true to the original purpose of community building through growing in understanding of the social fabric, its complex network of relationships and obligations, and the way this affects both individuals and groups in the experience of life:

*The essence of (the) learning: I'd like to think that it's an opportunity for kids to experience...life in that three months without parents physically being there...and I think it's a mixture of independence, interdependence, the notion of...self, but also community (Teacher 1).*

*It's very interactive (Teacher 3).*
One of the fundamental units of this community is the ‘house’ structure that is created to allow students to have an experience of life in which they take on a significant degree of individual and collective responsibility for their living needs:

*The big wow factor for people is kids working in the house, kids cooking for themselves, kids getting a budget and shopping for themselves… community service and our ability to have interactions with the local people. I can see that that is really powerful for the kids* (Teacher 2).

Meaningful responsibilities embedded in a communal setting form one element of an underlying structure for the program in which exploration of human relationships in the absence of parental guidance and influence is seen as an essential educational experience. While parents are not part of this experience, the setting permits a strong connection with other community residents outside of the school and this is seen by staff as an asset to the program:

*I feel really happy about that because that's one of the reasons why it was chosen to be here, rather than in some remote setting. The idea that there was going to be that involvement in this town* (Teacher 1).

For the students taking part in the program, there is not so much a focus on the conferral of adult-like responsibilities in the management of a house, but the establishment of a new social structure and the need to find their place in that structure:

*Most important for them is: “Where do I fit into the social group, who is going out with who?”… Through the whole of the eight week program it’s always the number one thing for them and I don’t expect that to be any different but I think for us to achieve what we really like to think that we want to achieve here, we have somehow got to get rid of some of that stuff* (Program Manager).

While this emphasis is seen as inevitable, it is also seen as an impediment to learning. One member of staff at the campus took this notion further, commenting on perceived distractions arising from interaction between the two gender groups. A view expressed by one participant focused on the desirability of separating gender groups for the purpose of this type of learning:
I really think that for girls that single sex is the way to go, particularly if you are trying to give them an understanding of really who they are: that real sense of, “I can do and I am important.” I mean they can’t get in there when their main focus is socializing (Program Manager).

The choice of a community setting emerges as a deliberate attempt to draw a distinction between the Ferntree program and other programs:

We don’t do that separation…we are not removing them from things…they can still ring home (Program Manager).

One other member of staff was attracted to work at the campus because of this; he explained that other programs are stuck out in the middle of nowhere; Ferntree is right in the middle of town (Teacher 3). However, this choice itself attracted a mixture of responses from participants. Not all expressed complete support for the choice of setting or the way in which the program structure has been implemented in the chosen setting:

It was put here…because it is different…it was to be different from the other programs and to be unique. I think that the concept of people sitting around a table and saying: “Wow, let’s go smack bang into the middle of a community. It would be so exciting we could do this and do that.” I think in reality it turned out quite different (Program Manager).

She added that in her opinion, in a remote setting you can achieve much bigger things quicker.

The development of the program since those initial planning sessions, reflected through the responses from participants, indicates a certain degree of early uncertainty, since corrected, about the nature of the program:

It’s not an outdoor program. I remember when I first started here people were ‘hung, drawn and quartered’ if they referred to the place as a camp. It’s about learning in the community and learning to contribute to the community and learning to step up and take your place in the community. So it’s about the welfare of the community…it’s about the immersion in the community and then there is a lot of reflection on your own community such as family, socially what you are in at school and things like that (Teacher 3).

The notion of community forms the central focus at a design and activity level in the program.

The use of program repetition to create key moments of reflection, rites of passage, or perspective on progress is strongly present at Ferntree Campus.
The campus utilises a relatively prosaic event such as a sunrise and sunset to mark the starting and finishing points of the program:

We are very much into bookends up here so on the very first morning that they are here they get up and watch the sunrise and the very last night they are here we go down...together and look at the sunset on the last day. So all the way along we try to say this is you at the starting journey and look at how different you at the end of that journey (Teacher 2).

Participants commented on the setting of the campus and the role it plays in creating an environment in which relationships form an important part of the learning:

It’s more intensified and accelerated here because of where we are. I mean you can learn about relationships and you can understand who you are in a relationship (Teacher 2).

The school prepares students and parents for the experience in advance, with a series of briefings that outline the nature of the challenge, the living arrangements, and other conditions of taking part in the program. Parents and students are warned in advance about the house duties to be undertaken during the program and some skill development is recommended prior to departure.

One teacher who has responsibility for a house group, explained the briefing process in which the staff meet individually with each group to discuss how the group will cope with the living and learning challenges; she described the matters raised at the briefing and the questions put to the students:

We outline what coming up here is all about facing challenges and give an idea of what the program is all about. Then they find out who their house group is because they don’t know before that day. Then, as a house leader, you take away the people from the two houses that you are looking after and then you give a little personal time, like: “What sort questions do you have? Do you know what the program is about? Do you know what a house looks like?” Then I ask people: “What’s the best thing that you can cook? What’s your definition of playing?”, and let them ask questions about how things work and what they can bring and what they can’t etc.? (Teacher 2).
The pre-departure briefing attempts to establish an understanding that not all members of the group share a common definition for behaviours and habits that will impact on the entire group throughout the program.

From a physical layout perspective, student houses have bedrooms that are generally designed to accommodate two students, shared bathroom facilities, a fully equipped kitchen and a common lounge-dining area. The facilities were designed to generate a social dynamic within each house group that would contribute to the learning at the campus through participation in domestic responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning:

*The house works. It’s sort of driven by the students I guess. I like to think of myself as a shepherd, I’m just there to advise them and help them and not tell them necessarily what to do but as you can imagine the dynamics are different and what will work for one house may not work for another and vice versa. Pretty much what students have to figure out is what is a fair position to them in a house in regards to cooking and then when it comes to food they have to think not just of the physical act of cooking, often we have dietary requirements so we have to take all of that on board and have to work a system that is a fair one (Teacher 2).*

Given the explicit focus on ‘fairness’ as a guiding principle in the establishment of the social dynamic of each house, the initial phase of each program presents potential difficulty for campus staff. A senior member of the campus staff described the challenge that each student faces in arriving at the start of the program to share a house with a mix of students from different peer groups:

*They face challenge right from the word go by being put into a house with people they know and people they don’t know. So they don’t organise who is going to be in the house before they come up and I think that’s crucial…. the fact that everyone comes with that same feeling...In other words, no one comes with an advantage as far as who is in the house (Campus Manager).*

The learning experience has evolved into something that is not just for the child, but also for the whole family. Sometimes parental expectations clash with those of campus staff:

*I have had parents come up here and say my child’s in a house and unless you shift them I’ll take them home. I would answer, “Sorry that would be your decision.” And they would take them home (Campus Manager).*
The success and longevity of the program can be an onerous burden for the staff leading a group through the learning activities. Anticipated outcomes driven by previous sibling participation or community expectations can become a limiting factor in designing a challenging and evolving program that meets the differing needs of each group:

You have to be careful...that folklore doesn’t rule the expectations. I mean 20% of students, at least, would have had a sibling that has been up in previous groups and by and large they have all talked to their mates who have been already. It’s about encouraging them to learn what is going on and step outside their comfort zone and not to have made their mind up about how it’s going to be based on other peoples’ journey (Campus Manager).

Where students arrive with strong preconceived notions of the purpose of the program or the way in which the experience has unfolded for previous groups, this reportedly has a negative impact on the experience of the individual and the group.

While some participants focused on isolation from parents and the intensive social atmosphere that is created by the design and structure of the program, one participant expressed the view that there was insufficient isolation and that this diminished the degree of challenge, potentially compromising the experience itself:

I think that core set of what we are on about where we want each kid to lead, where they are having a journey that’s shared, because at the moment they are doing all different things. I think that we are not challenging enough in the sense that the kids are still exposed to music, movies, magazines, and dentist’s appointments. It’s not like it’s a block that’s separate (Program Manager).

4.7.6.6. Design in Practice: Activities and Problems

The chronological structure of the program creates a certain pattern of expectations and pressures, challenges and responses for all students and the experience of participants interviewed for this study indicated that there is predictable pattern of corresponding behaviour with each group:

There is certainly a pattern to it as a general rule to the group. They come with nerves and excitement in the first week. Early on in the second week the novelty is a little worn off about living with other
people. I often see conflict arise in that second week. There’s a build-up of excitement to the middle weekend, which is a visiting weekend...After the visiting weekend, for some kids it’s a down period. They pick up again, you know, there’s the excitement and the nerves before exams and the anxiety night before presentation day. Then there’s a week to go and in some ways a party atmosphere in which time we keep them busy...There’s a lot of rituals involved including all the things we do in the last week...It’s a tradition and lots of fun and a great social event (Campus Manager).

Participants report that the programmed rituals, such as the parent visit and the final performances, act to focus a great deal of energy at key times in the program. The knowledge of this pattern of behaviour provides teaching staff with a form of social blueprint that allows preparatory and remedial work to be carried out with individuals and groups at critical points in the program.

Within the framework of rituals and expectations, students own the houses and create different identities for each group:

Every group up here is different and in general their own feelings and vibes of each group are different from the previous one. They tend to develop their own community as a group and spirit as a group then you get that on a micro level where they see their house as a community, where kids often say, “Oh, that Clive’s house, that’s Peter’s house” – they all have a sense of identity of the house (Teacher 2).

One of the optional elements of the program focuses on performances skills and prepares participants for some public performances involving other students and visiting parents. Participants reflected on the performance program run as an option for students at the campus:

It’s totally voluntary…It’s basically learning circus tricks, things like hula-hoops, there’s a dance element to it, there’s acrobatics. These a small groups to work on their circus skills. Basically what we are aiming to do is to put on a circus performance at the end of week seven for the rest of the students. Also on Presentation Day we also actually put on a smaller version so that kids can actually be acknowledged for the work that they have put in and perform for their parents when the come up (Teacher 2).

The performance program tends to attract an atypical cross-section of students from within the campus community and for some students provides a way of getting back into a more positive mode of interaction with the program and campus staff:
It’s performance based and honestly what we see come out these kids and it’s not usually the ‘cool’ kids and I think it’s for the kids that are not in the limelight and will not be given a second chance, they are extraordinary and I think for them in the last few months more and more kids have reflected on that have been highlighted in (Ferntree). That is being in the community and they are doing something extraordinary and they know that and they have this want because are doing something completely unique (Teacher 3).

The difference in the experiences of the performance participants and non-participants was significant and in fact created some negative outcomes for those students who elected not to take part in the performances staged at the end of the program:

It was interesting in this last term the separation between those who were doing the (performances) and those who weren’t; and after the performance nearly every single student who (wasn’t) involved ran amok. I think it was attention-seeking behaviour and they came to the realization, (it) dawned on them that they hadn’t been part of this extraordinary (performance)(Teacher 1).

The different needs of the two gender groups within the social dynamic of the campus community present some difficulty for the planning and staging of some events:

We try to have a mix of activities in the program where some activities are going to be more comfortable for girls, so for the discos the girls love it and the boys say ok I’ll go, but it’s not that big a thing for guys. Whereas the boys like competing and stuff and a lot of girls do too but they are more happy getting dressed up (Teacher 2).

Where student activities combine the different needs and predispositions of the two gender groups, they also tend to reflect the multi-dimensional character of the community, from both a social and an educational perspective. A participant commented on the evolution of some social events on the campus activity calendar and the social importance these events assumed for students:

We started doing a ball, so on Saturday night we had just a fun night, like a performance night where kids get up and perform, or we have like an 1980s theme disco and one of the things that we did was the ball like old time dances and it turned into this (we just wanted it to be like a dance) big social thing about who is going to take who to the ball. They were only down there for an hour and they weren’t dancing with their partner the whole time but it was a really interesting dynamic to the kids. So obviously in forefront of their minds was about mixed relationships of boys and girls. But as you can recognize, they are at
such an interesting stage of their development where some are approaching adult(hood). Often the kids that we get here are taller than the staff and physically mature for their age and have romantic relationships and others are just little kids and just hanging out and not really interested in it (Teacher 2).

While reflection is considered an important part of the program, written reflection in the form of a daily journal is not an obligatory part of the daily routine. One participant commented on the gender disparity in motivation to maintain a journal during the program:

We encourage them to keep a journal, but journal writing is not part of our program. Most students hated it, but you would get some students that would keep the most magnificent journals and they will have them in ten/twenty years from now to look back on them and you will have some that wished they had. It’s very difficult to encourage, particularly fourteen year-old boys (Teacher 3).

A senior manager at the campus commented at length on the poor performance of some students, selected as peer leaders within a mainstream school setting in the parent school, but who found the learning and living environment at the campus challenging:

I have had a couple of kids in last term and this term (who) got into trouble. Their behaviour left a lot to be desired and they were school leaders and I ask the question: “Is it because they came up here, or were those sorts of things apparent (before) if you looked hard enough…?” The leaders were not very nice kids…I think if they had a better selection process…I sent the school captain back. The deputy leader…may have been fantastic…but didn’t cope well up here (Campus Manager).

This phenomenon was not limited to a single group or a single campus and apparently confounded conventional wisdom within the parent school as to the types of attributes that marked a potential student leader. Again, one participant offered the view that leadership demonstrated within a fixed and highly organised school structure would perhaps founder in an environment in which students learned to cope with more freedom and responsibility:

I believe that some kids do find it difficult here while other kids actually shine. I guess my feelings about it, although I haven’t got any hard and fast rules why it’s like that but I think it’s something to do with some kids are better at adapting to change and some other kids who are so called good kids within a very strict structure, back within that framework and structure of what we normally call school, they shine but when it comes to here and they have to make decisions about
making choices about the way things are, if they are given more freedom, they are apt do the wrong thing (Campus Manager).

Another view offered by a member of the campus teaching staff focused on the forces that serve to shape the social structure of the group, forces in particular that act to identify or select natural leadership structures within any community. Power within the social group in particular appears to undergo a form of redistribution, leading to a change in the student pecking order:

I think it’s driven by people who are a little further down the pecking order or a little further down the hierarchy and they will associate and mix above and below that bridge really between them and the people up the top learn very quickly that they don’t have the same power up here as they do (at the parent school) because there are a lot of opportunities here (Teacher 3).

Those students finding their status eroded by the new environment are faced with difficult choices, all of which amount to a loss of power within the new group social structure:

You have top dogs from each campus, so they can either assimilate or, they are not popular because they are nice people they are popular because they are powerful people, but here they lose some of that power (Teacher 3).

Other students not high on the social pecking order decide to engage in aspects of the program out of interest or motivation that resulted in greater responsibility and hence greater opportunity to shape events and ultimately the group structure itself, effectively emerging as a new leadership cadre:

So this term the interesting mix was there were some kids there who barely spoke but they wanted to come to those meetings every week and be able to have a chance to hear what was being said and to make a comment if they wanted to and we had some of those cool kids as well, the ones who were leaders, not necessarily with the leadership badge at school but were leading and they all improved as well, so it was really interesting being kind of an individual decision of whether you wanted to be in that group. Those kids stepped up (Teacher 1).

Students earned peer respect through their actions and contribution to the group, not because of pre-existing power structures or popularity, but through their ability to be flexible and offer real leadership as and when needed:

It’s usually people who can cross over the border. The leaders here are the ones who can lead the popular ones as well as the less popular ones. These people don’t dominate because they are popular or they are strong or whatever. They become leaders because people are
willing to be led by them because they are respected. They learn a lot about what it is to respect and what it is to earn respect and what it is to deserve respect, not just power (Teacher 3).

Part of the respect equation focused on the ability of individuals to meet the needs of the student community at critical times in the program. These students were not necessarily popular or charismatic in any sense, but were visible and recognised for their ability or skill and as a result, earned the respect and acknowledgement of peers. This recognition effectively translated into a new form of social power for those students:

_We had it again this term with a couple of boys who were really socially quite inept but technologically brilliant and ended up mixing sound for the dance that we had, with concerts that we had, the performance nights that we had and it got to the point where in the weekend if something (went) wrong with someone’s computer, they would fix it. They had an enormous amount of respect...because they are able to cross boundaries. People were willing to see them as valuable members of the community not just some geeky computer nuts (Teacher 3)._ 

Participating staff commented at length on the changing social dynamic that emerges over the course of the program, a dynamic that commences right from the start of each program when students arrive with an attitude that is different to that prevailing at the parent school:

_That’s what really sparked all that social stuff between kids when they come up here because when they originally arrive, they come up with quite an open mind that they want to be friends with everyone (I mean that’s their ideal). So they are quite open to being friendly and probably more engaging than they are with kids at (the parent school) because of the whole notion of community (Teacher 2)._ 

Starting with an _open mind_, the social interaction that develops in the emerging community created at the campus produces some surprising attitudinal changes over the course of the program:

_We had a term last year and some...females sat down and said, “There is only one good guy here this term.” I said, “What do you mean only one good guy?” They said: “There’s all these guys here that we wouldn’t give a second glance to.”...By the end...one of the girls actually reflected that they were forming very close friendships and sometimes relationships with boys that they would not have given a second glance before they came...We allowed them to see past the structured hierarchy...(Teacher 3)._
Again from the same participant, a reflection on the changing nature of social interaction that allows students to see individuals at a deeper level, stripped of outer layers or shells:

Again I think it’s because they don’t just see the exterior, they don’t just see the social group, they see the person and they realise that that person is worth knowing and they realise that they are quite willing to know that person and I think that they lose their outer shell and the outer shell usually on some people is invisible. You know it’s there but it’s not something that you can see (Teacher 3).

Participants reported a range of different attitudes and approaches to dealing with problems and mistakes made by students during program activities. There is an acceptance by all staff at the campus that students will make mistakes in their learning and that they must be given room to make those mistakes, but at the same time, consequences may follow some mistakes. One participant outlined her approach to student mistakes:

I would try my utmost to warn them first thing, but ultimately, if they choose to wander off in the wrong direction and (metaphorically) fall off a cliff, it is part of the mistakes that they have to make. Although it’s very dangerous making mistakes, giving them the freedom to make mistakes is part of growing up (Teacher 3).

Where student behaviour falls short of expectations, there are consequences imposed by campus staff for falling short of the standards expected of participants; these are typically shaped around three major elements of student life at the campus:

I reckon the three big things that powerful incentives for kids are about food, sleep and social times and if we give them those or take away those (they) can be very effective control mechanisms, for want of a better word (Campus Manager).

Consequences are therefore tied to some basic student needs and these are seen as a practical means of behavioural control. Consequences are, however, negotiated within the community, with particular focus on times and social needs. Warnings for deficiencies, along with commendations for strong performances, are communicated to students, with the possibility for some negotiation at various points in the follow-up process:

If this house has done a fantastic job you get a half hour's sleep in. If you are mucking around at 10:30 at night and you have been warned a few times, you are up at 7:00 instead of 7:30. If you have got to the point where things aren't working you are going to have detention
between 4:00 and 6:00 while everyone else is socialising (Campus Manager).

Some attempts have been made to systematise the relationship between performance shortfalls and consequences. One participant working directly with students on the program, explained the underlying philosophy and the practice of the current system:

*A couple of years ago we just thought it would be a good chance to have another go at this, so a…counsellor here at the time, came up with this idea about you know another way with the behaviour management would be, its sort of like a ‘strike’, it's a warning and o.k. so you've late this morning for the meeting, that's a strike, you've got four more to go before you're going to miss your sleep in…so giving the kids a bit more scope about things. It's about saying, “OK, so you mucked up today, it's a warning, you have got four more to go (Teacher 1).”*

In the current system, each student is allowed five strikes before a consequence is formally imposed and this is intended to allow students to reflect on mistakes and effect attitudinal or behavioural changes. The system is also predicated on the assumption that rewards are meted out to students who do not acquire strikes in the course of a week. Scheduling flexibility around the length of the program day is one such element of behavioural currency used to reward students that was discussed by participants:

*All kids get a sleep in…and that's a great incentive, because sleeping in, free time, that's sort of like the currency that the kids really go with….If you've got five strikes or more you are up at eight o'clock and you are doing jobs like cleaning the bus, doing the compost you know that sort of stuff and generally the kids think it's fair. They like the idea that they are sort of in control about how many strikes they are going to get and it’s not all blown in one misdemeanour…so it’s a graduated sort of thing about what kids do (Teacher 1).*

Participants note that this system still promotes the principle of responsibility for actions, with some form of consequence levied on students for a range of reasons. Some participants also related incidents in which parents had attempted to intervene on behalf of children to renegotiate boundaries or consequences during the program. A senior member of staff commented that parents receive a consistent message from campus management on the extent to which campus practices and decisions are subject to review:
I say to parents there are boundaries and they are not negotiable because we are not doing the kids a favour if we keep shifting the boundary line and society works that way in boundaries that are not really negotiable (Campus Manager).

4.7.6.7. Program Outcomes

The concept of community is a guiding principle in the design of the program and also appears in the contributions of participants taking part in the study. The acquisition of visible skills, such as house management, as reflected in participant comments, is accepted as a given by the school community. However, taking the concept of community as a yardstick to measure outcomes, participants also report that the program does succeed in different ways and on different levels in its attempt to develop the capacity of students to create, develop and reflect on relationships and the building of a community consciousness. Students undertake a wide range of activities that they choose based on interest and temperament. The range of engagement reported by participants varied greatly as did the observed outcomes:

So basically they can learn a lot more because of their involvement. Part of what I have been saying is we are going to present you with all these opportunities but it's up to you to choose how much you can take on. And what's going to be valuable for you. So some kids want to get involved in everything and other kids find just being away from home to eight weeks is a big enough thing in itself and probably won't get involved in much and therefore won’t have the learning opportunities that other kids do but, may be even bigger just because of where they are at and develop emotionally and mentally and things (Teacher 2).

One house parent commented on the capacity many students display for self-evaluation based on reflection of personal and group behaviour:

I think that kids are really challenged about what's O.K. and what's not with behaviour. I found with the kids that they have got a lot of stuff inside them already and that this experience and the way that they deal with other people. What's happening is that they are going to find out: “Hey, wow, I didn't realise that I could be this patient”, or “I didn't realise that I had this much resilience”, or “I didn't realise that I actually need help”...we have some great success stories and also in those hard times as well kids who are directly involved learning what's OK and what's not in questioning their own behaviour and their own thinking (Program Manager).
The use of reflection as a means of developing student awareness of problems encountered and progress in learning as illustrated in the previous quote was noted by all participants in different ways, but particularly as a component of the house group, which was intended to offer an effective and well formed social vehicle to facilitate reflective discussions on learning. One house parent identified an apparent need to develop further reflective practices within the campus program beyond the house structure:

Certainly we have tried to in the house programs and part of the community, we do reflective stuff but we need to do a lot more. They don’t do enough reflecting. They do but probably not through the whole program, they do in the house projects they ask, “How are you going, rather than you as a person, how are you going (Program Manager)?”

While participants frequently cited the skills developed through engagement in the life of the house, one cited a lack of consistency or perhaps coherency in program outcomes as a matter of concern:

I mean obviously kids learn to cook and clean and they certainly learn those skills. Then there’s the stuff about learning about myself and I don’t think every kid walks away having a deep reflection of who they are… they are probably a bit loose here and I can’t say that each walks away with a core set of anything much…There are some kids here who learn about what it is to live in a community and the giving and receiving concept of it but there are also lots of kids who don’t get that…there is nothing ‘core’ for the kids to walk out of here (Program Manager).

Another staff member felt that the outcomes were difficult to gauge and the structure of the program and approach of the teaching staff worked against some of the program objectives:

It’s difficult marrying students back into (the parent school). There was a lot of subversion amongst the staff…because there was very little structure. The kids arrived back and they turned the corner but only just made it. They knew they didn’t really have to change and they played lip service to the values and ideas of (Ferntree program) in order to make it through, but they quickly dropped all of that when they got back to school (Campus Manager).

In another sense, the highly individualised outcomes noted by participants were seen as a positive factor for some students. Participants at this campus commented on the successes and achievements of students who otherwise
might not be expected to achieve based on previous academic track records.

In some cases, the outcomes are strongly at odds with expectations:

Now we had a kid in here in this house this term who was a very angry kid who was on computers: very poor interpersonal skills. He happened to be in with a house of very confident boys but who were tolerant and this kid, he was so proud that he said to his dad last Saturday, “Dad here’s the badge, I have got the badge.”...Yes that kid was a screaming success story and (of) that kid (it) would have been predicted as well: “He’s gone, there’s no way he’ll last (Campus Manager).”

One of the less visible outcomes of the program is the impact the intense and concerted contact with a student community has on the images each student develops to ‘survive’ during the normal school day. An experienced participant noted that the prolonged exposure to the program peer group within a residential setting has an impact on the perceptions of others and self-perception that undergoes a significant transformation:

Kids can have an image at school and they can keep up that image from 9 to 3 or whatever the time is in school but up here because they are living at 24 hours a day I think by the end of eight weeks everyone has cut through that façade and they tend to see people for what they are and that can be a good thing or a bad thing. I think that that’s just (some) of the indirect stuff that’s just part of the program of being up here for us to facilitate and help kids with (Teacher 2).

Ultimately, outcomes vary significantly according to individual capacity to engage and derive benefit from the activities, which in themselves offer considerable room for choice; participants note the highly individualised nature of the learning outcomes:

It all depends on the individual student as to what they learn up here as well because it depends on the courses that they choose – what’s their collective potential called. They can have a different focus in the program so not every kid will necessarily gain the same things out of it because it is their individual gain (Teacher 2).

A final comment is offered by a member of staff on the organisation of class groups at the parent school. The integration of mixed groups of students, some of whom had not undertaken the Ferntree program, worked against the effective integration of student groups back into the parent school and created difficulties for those wanting to exploit the skills and experience of the Ferntree program in the classroom:
Just the organization of experiential learning at (Ferntree), you had to have a class away at a time. So you had kids coming back into class and you had a whole lot of other kids who hadn't had the experience. So they were on a completely different level. So it was very difficult to integrate them back properly and smoothly into the program (Campus Manager)

4.7.6.8. Summary

The Ferntree Campus program is essentially about community building and living. The notion of community guided the design of the campus facilities and program activities and also shapes the outcomes that students achieve during the program. Students develop and demonstrate skills that allow them to work effectively within a community group, sharing, communicating, and negotiating. Students learn about independence but also interdependence. Students search for their place in the new social order and develop skills to work within that social network.

The setting of the campus is an important contributor to the program. The facilities were designed to make students look after themselves in their 'houses', cleaning and cooking meals. The house groups are seen by both staff and students as challenging, but effective in shaping student attitudes. There is a predictable rhythm to the program that follows a certain pattern. While some of the rituals and program elements create milestones, there is still a great deal of individuality in each house group.

Some students arrive with high expectations and good track records from the parent school. In the new reality, some perform poorly as leaders, a failure that is strongly contrary to expectations. Students who often emerged as leaders were equally unexpected. Teachers noted a fundamental change in the social order at the campus, based in part on leadership skills that are relevant within the campus setting. The demands of the program on students serve to promote students who were not high on the pecking order at the parent school. Social relationships between girls and boys also changed in unexpected ways, with students who had not previously been perceived as
'attractive' to the opposite gender displaying attributes that changed perceptions markedly.

There are concerns that there is a great deal of individuality and lack of coherency in the type of outcomes achieved by students. There is also a concern with the integration of students back into the parent school at the conclusion of the program, with graduates and non-graduates of the program mixed together in a way that tends to confound the outcomes of the program.

4.8. **Thematic Analysis of Data**

The analysis of data presented above, reveals four fundamental structural components common to each program: *challenging setting, constructing social interaction, tolerating risk,* and *enduring learning*. They appear as salient in the interview data, both within and across programs and a high proportion of interviewees emphasised their importance to the respective programs. The four components are closely inter-related and the sequence in which they are presented reflects the structure of these relationships.

There is a strong correlation between the four components and the core educational values and practices at each program site. These core elements have a recurring central role in each program, but there are, nonetheless, some differences in emphasis and even some contradictions as to how they are understood to function and, hence, in how they have been realised in a particular program.

The four core elements are grounded in the 14 major categories of data identified at the beginning of the chapter. *Challenging setting* is founded on b) ‘Choosing a setting, h) Living in the setting, and i) Exploring the setting; *Constructing social interaction* is based on e) Exploring and understanding self, f) Building relationships, and g) Communicating; *Tolerating Risk* emerges from j) Taking risks in learning and k) Making mistakes; *Enduring Learning* connects directly to l) Reflecting and remembering the experience and m) Learning from the experience. The other major categories of data – a)
Designing programs, c) Planning experiences, d) Preparing for the program, and n) Reviewing the program – are common across all programs, but reflect a more procedural or operational orientation. These aspects of program design, implementation, and review, while important, do not provide particular insight into the nature of experiential learning undertaken in these programs.

4.8.1. Challenging Setting

Challenging setting emerges from the data as the primary core component of program design, practice and outcomes: *The setting is what makes it…massively important (Darwinia)… it's the biggest thing (Acacia)…the greatest asset (Boronia).* While setting is common, there are differences in the way that the choice of setting is expected to challenge students and make its contribution to learning. Some program settings offer challenge through separation from home and family, or through an unfamiliar environment, whereas other settings challenge through the imposition of physical hardship. In all cases, however, program settings contrast strongly with the parent school and surrounding community.

A common aspect of challenge in each program setting is that students are separated from their normal living environment and placed in an unfamiliar setting. A total of 40% of all interviewees refer specifically to isolation and being removed, remote or separated from the familiar environment of home and school as a key aspect of program setting. In five of the six programs, the isolation of the setting and its contrast with the home environment are identified as significant factors in creating desirable conditions that expose students to experiences beyond their home and school life.

There are different ways in which isolation is defined and realised. In some cases isolation means a setting apart or withdrawing, and also a severing of connection with family, school and community. It is achieved by means of distance, unfamiliarity, and a rupture of contact. In four of the six programs, isolation is achieved by means of physical distance. In other programs, unfamiliarity of setting is an important isolating factor. While not removed from
human settlement, even Darwinia Campus maintains both physical distance and unfamiliarity to isolate its students. In all programs rupture of contact is a further means of creating isolation.

Social isolation is incorporated into the design of four of the programs through restrictions on access to the site and on residents’ rights to communicate with anyone outside in any form. At Callistemon, by contrast, isolation is achieved by having students spend time among people who are both literally strangers and also unlike themselves in some key ways.

Another common aspect of setting is its authenticity, where students have real problems to solve. All of the residential programs are designed to allow students to participate cooperatively in the management of the student living environment. At four campuses, student problem solving is, in part, facilitated by setting design that involves an intentional simplification of the living environment. These simplified design characteristics create the need for self-sufficiency and teamwork from students; these choices structure what it is that students do on a daily basis within the setting.

In addition to the main experiential program, two programs offer a traditional curriculum that runs in parallel to the experiential activities. At another, the connections are more opportunistic, with contextual connections being drawn between texts employed in the academic program and the student experience of the program environment. This approach creates some time-related tensions with the demands of the experiential program, with both aspects vying for scheduling priority. At the same time, due to the isolation of the setting, both campus programs struggle to integrate the normal classroom learning fully with the academic programs being undertaken at the parent schools. Callistemon adopts an unstructured approach to the setting itself, a central business district. Here students become a part of the city population, exercising a high degree of individuality and self-direction in shaping discovery learning activities.
Finally, setting also plays a specialised role within the learning activities in each program, acting as a focus of learning in its own right. For example, two campuses, are working farms.

Settings *isolate* students through distance, unfamiliarity and rupture of social contact; they *provoke* strong emotive reactions through confrontation, alienation, conflict and fear; settings are intended to be *authentic*, and designed to pose *real problems* for students to solve; and settings are *worthy of study* in their own right, as highly specialised learning environments. Ultimately, the setting is judged by staff teaching at all programs to be the program’s *core* element and hence offers an experience that cannot be replicated in the classroom.

4.8.2. Constructing Social Interaction

Setting and social interaction are closely inter-related in the data, with the isolation of setting, in particular, acting to create the conditions in which a pattern of intense peer to peer interaction occurs, often in marked contrast to pre-existing social structures within a given group. How social interaction is facilitated in each program varies, but at all sites, both internal interaction among students and between staff and students, and external social with members of the wider community, are carefully arranged.

Life in the residential setting affords students very limited physical privacy, over an extended period, which shapes the way in which students interact with each other. *Living with other students* is seen as one of the hardest challenges in residential programs.

*Conflict* is mentioned by teachers and managers at every residential program in the study. Each program values the conflicts they know will arise, regardless of how space is allocated, including by personal choice, and the common rule is once arrangements are made students are given no choice: *they have to learn to get along*. There is strong belief across all programs in the value of this provoked tension and sustained over a period of weeks,
tension leads to a lowering of personal barriers. While confrontation is present in the non-residential program, conflict is not an essential feature in the experience of the students.

The desired outcome is that in a relatively short period of time, pre-existing social structures developed over an extended period at the parent school are quickly overturned, reshaped – often leveled – by the elements of setting and social interaction. The cool students and the dorks, when placed together, mixed and became friends, often with students who would not have been given a second glance. In this social environment, students with low status discovered their voice and abilities. Students are challenged by their social masks and experiment with modified social personas, but ultimately they want to be themselves.

Competence, defined through these new values, emerges as a key determinant of social status: some students are hopeless in the new context, whereas others emerge as brilliant. The social setting forces students to stop selfish behaviour; it requires teamwork. This compulsion is needed because it is not a natural choice for students to make themselves; some choose not to cooperate and are penalised.

As a non-residential program, Callistemon lacks the sustained contact time of the residential programs; socially, it has an individualised focus on training specific skills. The key terms wherever and anywhere highlight that within the classroom in a city setting of this program, the structure of the learning activities focuses on signposting and places, rather than relationships; the action focus is the city. Teamwork is best expressed by travel in groups of three for safety when off-campus.

Social interaction between students is not a prominent feature of the Callistemon program. Students feel that other students who are not part of their peer group are not important; they don't care about them as much. The Callistemon program is less socially engineered than the residential programs and relies on specific program settings to create opportunities for social
interaction: the *homeless situation* or the *soup kitchen* for example. Callistemon is based in a *city of people*, where the social interaction with others beyond the campus is of primary importance in shaping the learning.

The different modes of social interaction observed at each of the programs, between students, staff, and people encountered in the course of program activity, arise directly from conditions created by the design of the setting, firstly in its location and broad conditions and then more finely in the close encounters on a daily basis built into the program. The ensuing friction and challenges bring on a series of crises, disrupting the pre-existing group social order, giving rise to questions of individual social identity, and facilitating the emergence of new relationships.

4.8.3. Tolerating Risk

*Tolerating risk* is a quintessential part of program rationale that differs according to setting, the nature of the challenges and problems faced, and the extent to which intervention is exercised to resolve problems, reduce challenge, and thereby ameliorate risk. Students are isolated in confronting settings and engage in constructed social interaction that is designed to provoke crises. Previously learned coping strategies cannot be relied on as an adequate response, and so experimentation and risk taking need to be adopted in order to resolve them, with minimal adult intervention. The *beauty of experiential learning* is that teachers don’t solve student problems.

This approach to learning serves an unmet need: students *don’t have a lot problem solving strengths* as adults normally *solve their problems for them*. This need arises from the practice in mainstream education where teachers tend to prioritise getting a correct solution to the problem, rather than developing the process by which the mistake and the solution can be found by the learner. Experiential teachers don’t point out mistakes; they let students *discover the mistake for themselves*. Teachers commented on the danger to learning when students focus on the *right* answer and perfectionism is dominant. Learning experientially, students take risks, they *test the theory out*
properly, and they challenge themselves. While they acknowledge the dangers, teachers believe that *the freedom to make mistakes is part of growing up*.

So deeply valued is this opportunity to experiment and take risks that teachers deliberately withhold opinions during activities to ensure that decisions are actually made by students; students become frustrated because they cannot find out the teacher’s opinion.

Within the common appreciation of the value of risk and error, confidence with the nature and timing of teacher invention are the main factors that distinguish one program from another. At the extreme ends of the continuum, this leads to very different experiences for the participants. At Boronia, for example, Teachers sit back and students make mistakes within reason, dealing with the consequences, problem solving and then reflecting at the end. At Darwinia, students are allowed to flounder, because teachers know when to intervene, they are in control. Inexperienced teachers are not as confident and want to fix problems. Here, the intervention point is subject to teacher judgement based on experience.

This is not a view shared by all. At Acacia, hazardous situations are treated carefully and teachers avoid a fail situation. Teachers help students to achieve a measure of success: they nudge them across the line. At Eucalypt, there is concern over disrupting the balance between risk and responsibility. They want students on the edge of feeling a bit of freedom…but not too much. Consequences are emphasised, however, because teachers believe many students do not have consequences at home.

Acacia, Callistemon, and Eucalypt all noted a growth in risk aversion due to changes in community values, where parents expect students to be rescued and there is less inclination to push students. Yet, there is a contradiction implicit in parental attitudes as some teachers assert: the reason that the parents thank us is they get home students who are not so protected.
The tension between challenge and consequence is summarised thus: there is an experiential dichotomy of *suffering* versus *protection*; they are the two end points of the risk spectrum present in each of the programs. Risk arises from tough challenges and confronting experiences leading to *suffering*, with varying degrees of *protection* afforded through a supportive scaffold of teacher intervention. The measurement of risk and its associated risk appetite varies greatly across the programs in this study, with each seeking a balance between *risk* and *safety*.

4.8.4. Enduring Learning

The enduring impact of experiential learning is built upon the cognitive connection between reflection and episodic memory. Enduring experiential learning is constructed through vivid and durable autonoetic memories; i.e., memories in which there is a strong self-awareness of personal participation in the experience.

Setting, interaction and risk-taking, through a combination of isolation, novelty, challenge, and conflict, create intense reactions in students, which in turn assist in creating lasting autobiographical memories. As discussed in Chapter Two, learning arising from these experiences lies *in the construction of knowledge, or the making of meaning, leading to modification of behaviour*. Learning is thus manifested in the transformation of memories of an experience into understanding, attitudinal transformation, and skill acquisition.

In these programs, the essential process employed to shape and reinforce the encoding of student memories is the use of formal and informal reflection. Reflection is typically facilitated by teachers, who provide students with scaffolding through guided questioning, or direct tasking, during dedicated reflection sessions. Time is also allocated to students for self-reflection in programs without staff facilitated scaffolding, or other forms of staff intervention in reflection.
Reflection is practised in both written and verbal modes, utilising a variety of different genres, in all six programs, with subtly different emphases in each. In all programs, however, reflection is strongly linked to a process of individual structuring of autonoetic memories.

Modes of reflection, purpose, and intended audience are examined in detail in the next section.

4.8.4.1. Modes of Reflection

The most common genre of written reflection is the personal journal or diary, which all programs require students to maintain and program time is allocated for this. A less common form of written reflection is an anticipatory reflection or prefection in the form of a letter to self, written before the beginning of the program, which provides additional perspective in post program reflection when reviewed by the student (Boronia & Darwinia). Visual reflection through the collection of images connected with individual experiences are included in journals at three programs, Acacia, Boronia, and Eucalypt, where it is believed that these provide reinforcement of the experiential memory. Personal reflections in the form of journal or diary entries are written for either a private or staff audience.

Formal verbal reflection on experiences is practiced as a means of scaffolding the encoding of autonoetic memories. A formal verbal reflection, referred to in most programs as a debrief, denotes a structured summary of outcomes from a day’s activities facilitated by the teacher. Informal verbal reflection is another very common phenomenon, embedded in teacher-guided informal social interactions during free time in the evenings. A form of extended individual reflection – a solo – refers to an extended period of solitary reflection conducted during the Boronia program, but in isolation, away from the campus.

Visual reflection occurs when students are asked to look at an object, picture, or scene that is believed to symbolise the experience and then use the
sensory impression of the image to think about the nature of the experience itself. Visual reflection may incorporate an artefact, such as a photograph or sketch, but may also involve a direct visual experience.

Three of the programs with formal religious denominational affiliations, Acacia, Boronia, and Ferntree, implement a particular form of ‘spiritual’ reflection that takes place within the framework of a weekly formal religious observance. All three programs utilise the services of a chaplain who has the formal endorsement of a recognised religious denomination for this purpose. At both Acacia and Ferntree, a dedicated facility is provided for spiritual reflections. The format of this type of reflection is exclusively verbal and while spiritual in nature, has the individual experience within the program setting and consequent personal growth as its formal focus, albeit with elements of denominational liturgy as the formal procedural framework for the activity itself. At Acacia, religious activities are not perceived as a form of reflection on the experience, whereas Boronia intentionally incorporates its religious activities into the reflective process.

The genres of reflection practised in the six programs are presented in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Reflection genre</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Orientation/Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acacia</td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Recording personal milestones and dormitory experiences</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual diary</td>
<td>Stress management: associated with visual arts program and academic assessment</td>
<td>Public: Visual Arts teacher and dormitory head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Self-measurement of progress</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Verbal reflection on experience</td>
<td>Public: peers/teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boronia</td>
<td>‘preflection’ Letter</td>
<td>Anticipatory reflection on likely nature and impact of the experience</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Meeting</td>
<td>Spoken reflection on recent events</td>
<td>Public: peers and leading teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal and scrapbook</td>
<td>Record of personal journey and images of experiences</td>
<td>Public: pastoral care teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solo meditation</td>
<td>Extended reflection of whole experience</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Verbal reflection on experience</td>
<td>Public: peers/teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callistemon</td>
<td>Student Meeting</td>
<td>Spoken reflection on day’s events</td>
<td>Public: peers and activity teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Formal account of progress in program for student assessment</td>
<td>Public: Head of Program or Campus and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback sheets</td>
<td>Written reflection on activities and teacher performance for staff and student assessment</td>
<td>Public: activity teacher and campus management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Self reflection on participation and learning</td>
<td>Public: activity teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwinia</td>
<td>‘preflection’ Letter</td>
<td>Anticipatory reflection on likely nature and impact of the experience</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Meeting</td>
<td>Spoken reflection on daily events</td>
<td>Public: peers and activity teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Daily account of learning journey</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self Appraisal</td>
<td>Formal report of learning on program for assessment</td>
<td>Public: teaching staff and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eucalypt</td>
<td>Student Meeting</td>
<td>Informal recounting of stories and experiences</td>
<td>Public: peers and activity teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Written and visual record of experiences for assessment</td>
<td>Public: activity teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Formal written report of student learning</td>
<td>Public: teachings staff and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferntree</td>
<td>Student Meeting</td>
<td>Verbal recounting of experiences</td>
<td>Public: peers and activity teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Written record of experiences</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self Appraisal</td>
<td>Assessment of personal performance in program activities and projects</td>
<td>Public: teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Verbal reflection on experience</td>
<td>Public: peers/teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Formal Modes of Reflection**
4.8.4.2. Purpose of Reflection

There is considerable variation in the stated purpose of reflection across the six programs, and some programs are seeking to achieve a number of objectives through reflection. The most common explicit or implicit purpose of reflection is to scaffold the encoding of durable, structured memories. Written reflective practices are intended to capture the individual insights of students while the experiences are fresh in their minds. Some written reflections are unguided self-reflections, which serve as a self-guided assessment of learning outcomes. Reflection may be an end in itself, in which skills of pausing and reflecting are taught experientially: students are taught how to show, not tell how to stop and think.

Reflection is a means of facilitating student realisation of progression through challenges. Reflection is used to remember events that are difficult or hard times, as well as achievements. A visual diary may serve a number of purposes, such as a stress management tool, where teachers believe the visual diary allows students to log their feelings in association with images.

Reflection linked to the experience is held to form a scaffold that allows students to go beyond the initial sensory stimulation of the experience. Students take the experience evaluate, give an opinion, think, and reflect. Reflection is seen to provide a means of demonstrating evidence of student understanding through the verbal or written expression of knowledge gained. Another way in which this idea is expressed in the data is that reflection offers a kind of signposting, a form of progress guidance.

The form of reflection is significant in structuring memories of an experience: a common phenomenon is that students turn the experience into a story. The reflective process serves to generate a narrative structure that shapes what is remembered and how these memories are linked together with other experiences. For example, at one program, verbal reflection on an experience is called a sitcom moment (Boronia), where reflection is part of recalling and
constructing an episodic framework of informal verbal narrative surrounding personal impressions of earlier events.

The status, timing, and practice of reflection, however, show a marked polarisation of position regarding the role of teachers across the six programs. The majority of programs endorse and practise teacher-led reflection, albeit with some reservations from individual teachers. Where practised, teacher-facilitated reflective scaffolding shapes the way in which the experience is remembered: *what stays with kids is the way that they have been directed to understand the experience afterwards*, thus highlighting the importance of the teacher’s role, attitudes, and approach to facilitation of reflection.

The way in which an experience is recorded and encoded in memory is influenced by the way in which the experience itself affects the student at the time. The absence or presence of reflection as a form of scaffolding influences the memories retained about a particular experience. One teacher noted that students tend to qualify their experience in a single sentence to suit the audience. Long-term memories of the experience are quickly coloured by the way in which they are recorded and communicated. Teachers believe that the experience *only teaches for the second that the experience lasts*. The way in which the experience is encoded in memory relies on the presence or absence of teacher direction in the forming of a personal narrative. Without teacher-directed scaffolding, *the experience in itself can be lost*.

One program – Acacia - however, believes and practices that facilitated reflection is contrary to the spirit and objectives of its program. Formal reflection, or *debriefing*, is seen as a potential threat to the purity of the experience itself: *the experience has integrity that it might not have if it’s been debriefed*. Acacia Campus has an action focus – it is about doing, not reflecting. Informal staff observations claim that students don’t reflect well, or that staff believe students find reflection *boring*. Reflection is said to be undertaken informally by students in the months and years after the program. A rationale offered is that it is difficult for students to reflect during the year. Reflection away from the site of the activity is *more lasting*. 
While formal reflection is eschewed at Acacia, teachers offered several examples of *ad hoc* reflective practice in the dormitories and outdoor education activities. Similarly, the highly structured weekly spiritual reflections at Acacia provide evidence of a form of reflective practice that is at variance with the espoused views of teachers.

Reservations regarding the practice of reflection are present in other programs. At other campuses, some individual teachers expressed either doubt or ambivalence about reflection or *debriefing*. Teachers believe that students *really should be learning things on their own* without teacher *illustration*. An experiment with debriefing led to the students being *resistant*, resulting in a debriefing being *cut back*, as both students and teachers did not enjoy it.

Other teachers raised questions regarding the effectiveness of reflection on educational grounds. At Eucalypt it was observed that students are good at using language *to tell us what they think we want to know*. The way in which students are asked to reflect, either positively or negatively, is seen as a key factor in shaping the content of the reflection. Reflection is thus seen as being open to potential influence or manipulation by teachers. Students who become aware of the analytical dimension of reflection may give teachers what they *want to hear*. This suggests a form of predictive manipulation by students themselves. Another concern is that students are not adept at reflection, that they lack to skills to reflect. Students who are reluctant to reflect or who find the task of reflection difficult tend to offer the *cop-out* comment: “I don’t know”.

Teachers report that their own attitudes towards reflection underwent change through their contact with the practice: one teacher began being *confused* about reflection, but developed an appreciation through experience. While teachers at some programs claim to see evidence of student learning at a cognitive level through self-report in the reflective process, for others, action and behaviour offers a better yardstick.
A commonly reported phenomenon is delayed student *realisation* of learning undertaken in the course of the experience. Students frequently report to program teachers that they only realised what they had learned much later, after the conclusion of the program. In contrast to the notion of the experience teaching for a moment, teachers typically report a timeframe of *years* in which students become fully aware of the experiential learning undertaken in respective programs. The *consequences and implications* of experiential learning are found in active learning processes that manifest new knowledge and changed behaviour over a period of years.

This phenomenon of delayed realisation leads to the establishment of ongoing connections between students and their program teachers, as the experience is refreshed and renewed through extended reflection and new discoveries. A common theme in the data describes relationships between peers and teaching staff at experiential programs extending well beyond the duration of the program, with teachers at all programs offering anecdotal evidence of these relationships enduring to the end of Year 12, typically four years after the conclusion of the program.

4.8.4.3. Enduring Memories

The most enduring memories reported by students in the years after leaving the program tend to be tied to strong recollections that are connected to a physical *frame of reference*. For some, this is achieved through visual images, which are used in some programs as a means of strengthening the links between the experience and the memory: a *visual representation of their journey* is seen as a *good tool for memory*. Enduring memories are created by the satisfaction gained through physical task completion: *putting in a gate and a post and hammering it all together*. Physical artefacts act as *evidence of contribution*, signs of *helping out*. 
For others, the enduring memories lie in the challenges and social interactions, particularly those that are unexpected. Sharp discontinuities with previous experiences and expectations are also a source of memorable experiences. Another programmed frame of reference is at Ferntree Campus, where *bookending* is used to place a formal beginning and end around the experience; for example, the *first sunrise* and the *last sunset* forming a formal element of the program structure. Symbolic activities are also used at Boronia, where students *walk into the campus* as a group to provide a memorable experience to mark the commencement of a journey, but conclude with a *solo* to highlight the individual nature of the journey.

Physical elements of an experience are also the focus of shared narratives about an experience: *hard times*, walking in the snow, stormy nights, *hard hikes*, and watching a sunrise; these are a strong feature of enduring memories. Others include: *chopping wood*, *lighting the boiler*, or telling stories with backs against a tent wall during a storm. The alarming or confronting nature of some experiences creates memories that students will carry in their hearts forever.

There are structural elements within programs, particularly the longer programs, which aid the formation of memories through sharp contrasts in student experience. Students at Acacia are *blown away* and *scared* the first time they attempt an activity that is then repeated at a later date, usually with greater success, to demonstrate perspective; this adds a layer to the memories acquired during the first encounter. It is another form of *bookending* noted earlier.

Emotional states also provide particularly durable points of reference in the overall framework of an experience for the purposes of reflection and long-term memorability. Students are *confronted* by some of their experiences: *Any confrontation will stay in your memory*. Students retain memories where they have been compelled to see the world from another’s perspective, to cope with something upsetting.
Durable memories are intentionally created by providing likely stressful and even shocking experiences that challenge basic assumptions, attitudes, and emotional states. Connections between emotional states, unexpected or confronting experiences and the images and feelings are captured in memories. The learning derived from this is observed in knowledge gained, attitudes changed, or behaviour altered.

Reflection is practised at all programs as a means of allowing students to construct durable memories from their experiences, both individual and collective. These enduring memories are a significant part of the process to construct new knowledge, develop new attitudes, or effect behavioural change, all of which are evidence of learning. These programs are each designed around an expectation that student experiences are memorable because they are confronting, challenging, unexpected, or demanding. The learning arising from these enduring memories is linked inseparably to the memories of the experience and is thus expected to extend for years beyond the formal program conclusion.

The reflective mechanism to achieve this learning is subject to debate and uncertainty among the teachers participating in the study, illustrating the different philosophical positions of the respective programs. The expectation that learning will arise from reflection, however, is also supported by evidence of sustained engagement in interaction with staff and other participating students in later years. While the reflective scaffold employed to achieve enduring, long-term learning varies greatly across the six sites, it is in evidence in all programs; teachers and schools see it as an indispensable aspect of the means by which each program achieves its learning outcomes.

4.9. Summary of Chapter

Six long-term programs provided case study data for the examination of experiential learning in Australian independent secondary schools. The three meta-categories of data emerging from analysis – design principles, design in
practice, and program outcomes – offered a flexible and reliable framework within which to place and present the 14 categories of data derived from six very different versions of experiential learning programs.

Within this analytical framework, four common essential thematic elements emerged in the view of all staff as the effective keys in the program for creating new knowledge, shaping attitudes, and building skills: challenging setting, constructed social interaction, tolerance of risk, and ensuring the enduring impact of experiential learning.
5. CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the four essential thematic elements underpinning the experiential programs identified from the data analyses in Chapter Four are discussed in the light of the writings examined in Chapter Two. The findings of the study are presented and the research questions, which have driven this study, are then addressed.

A challenging setting is the primary design element of the programs studied. Selection of the program’s setting has practical consequences for the experiential learning that can and does occur within it. This primary choice and the form it takes provide the framework which informs and constrains three further essential design parameters: how social interaction is constructed, what kind of, and of what degree, risks are tolerated, and how enduring learning is ensured.

These three additional parameters of each program are linked to the primary choice of challenging setting in a tight, mutually interactive relationship. They are manifested as the specific characteristics that the setting permits, and together, can be read as reflecting the goals and means professed by the school and parent culture for the program. In this, the relationship between these four parameters unites all six programs, despite significant differences in the realisation of these choices within each.

5.2. Discussion of Essential Design Elements

This section discusses the four essential design elements of the experiential learning programs examined in this study. For the purposes of this discussion, the notion of experience and its associated theoretical implications is limited to the activities undertaken in the experiential learning programs participating in this study.
5.2.1 Challenging Setting as Primary Design Element

The nature of program setting is the essential force in the experiential learning programs studied that shapes and defines the student experience and provides the framework on which the other essential parameters are based. The setting, in all of its dimensions and parameters, constrains, informs, and shapes all aspects of the experience: the frequency and type of social interaction, the risks and mistakes associated with the challenges, and finally the memories and reflections that underpin and facilitate enduring learning.

Each of the program settings is intentionally chosen to be highly distinctive, confronting, challenging and ultimately, highly memorable. The element of challenge in each setting creates the physical, social, and cultural space in which students interact with each other, creating the learning problems and associated risks that face the student. These challenges reflect deliberate choices in program design. However, the importance of setting as the element of the program that triggers the cognitive dissonance, thereby initiating the learning process, remains largely tacit, virtually taken as a given and not strongly articulated or examined by the schools or the teachers themselves.

Program settings are designed to offer contrast with mainstream learning environments: they are explicitly chosen by the designers to be unfamiliar, novel, and even alienating; they are to make students feel anxious, vulnerable, and isolated. The extent to which learning undertaken in these programs endures is seen to be directly connected to the challenges posed by the setting: high peaks, hard mountains, natural bush, physical isolation, cultural alienation, social separation and remoteness, and personal confrontation are all intended to have a deep impact on the students. The settings are chosen to create learning problems that require student intervention, such as the acquisition of food, provision of shelter, or the achievement of other specific program specific tasks. Teachers in these programs show a high degree of understanding of the fact that fundamental to the program, its setting requires students to face these challenges, cope, adapt, and overcome in ways that are not possible in a mainstream
classroom, where the setting for learning is tightly controlled by the school, parents, and other regulatory or institutional constraints.

As well as isolation, the setting creates a degree of anxiety or vulnerability for students through perceived risk or danger, partly due to unfamiliarity, but also due to apparent inherent objective danger associated with the setting. Settings are designed to make students feel anxious, vulnerable, and isolated. This affective dimension of experiential program settings confers a quality that distinguishes them from the safe and well-regulated environments in which learning typically occurs in schools.

The very novelty of the experiential settings provides an important learning motivation for students, which is largely absent from the mainstream classroom. Teachers report that the experiential settings are also seen by students as authentic, connecting students to social, cultural, and physical realities in a way that classrooms do not, in part because of the perceived risks. By contrast, the mainstream classroom is characterised by informants in the study as a fake environment, insulated from the real world, especially in its aversion to risk and uncertainty.

The authority or power exercised by the experiential setting over the students, both physically and emotionally, derives in part from the student perception of the setting’s authenticity. This is a place with real problems, real risks, and real consequences, all of which entail students being much more personally engaged in the activities that take place there than in regular school.

There is an irony in the authenticity imputed to the experiential learning environment when it is actually a highly artificial environment compared to the very familiar, conventional classroom setting students encounter each school day. While projecting the authenticity of being in the real world beyond school, from a student perspective, experiential learning settings are highly memorable because of their novelty and lack of school world normality.
The choice of a natural setting in some programs reflects a deliberate choice of contrast and challenge. However, tacit philosophical reasons also underpin the selection of a natural setting. While care for the environment, resting on a thoughtful pattern of interaction with nature, is a hallmark of the programs located in natural settings, there is also a deeper, implicit – almost reverential – importance attached to these natural settings. In this evocation of natural setting as a mythical, revelatory space, students are encouraged to explore their true selves in communion with nature by facing and overcoming its challenges.

In summary, the three primary dimensions of program setting are physical, social and cultural (Engeström, 1993; Marsh, 2004, p. 125). There is the physical dimension of setting, reflected in the impact of terrain, climate, facilities design, and immediate location/environment on the learning program. There is the social dimension of setting in which interaction between students is shaped or created through the deliberate isolation, separation from family, and forced congregation with others who are often relative strangers. Finally, there is the cultural dimension of setting, reflecting a choice of mainstream urban culture, rural culture, natural or wilderness culture, or foreign culture. While the first two dimensions are easily discernible, the third dimension, culture, reflects a more subtle range of choices and values, particularly for those programs that choose a setting that is physically close to the parent school, but is still within a distinctly different cultural setting, for example urban versus rural settings, or urban settings that highlight the contrast in the socio-economic status of different communities.

5.2.2 Social Interaction and Personas Shaped by Experiential Challenges

Cooperation and collaboration between students taking part in these programs are imposed in a sustained and purposeful way, profoundly influencing student social interaction, which in turn reshapes the group social order and even individual social personae over time. This factor is particularly marked in the residential programs. These novel patterns of social interaction reflect different challenges, pressures, and demands in these programs that
require students to work together in a sustained manner, pressures that are largely absent or only fleetingly transient in the home school setting.

Program designers and teachers anticipate some reshaping of individual students’ social personas as an intentional learning outcome of the program. However, the realignment of relationships within peer group structures in the residential programs is not an explicit expectation of any program. In particular, the potential transfer of social authority from peer leaders in the home setting to other students of hitherto lower social status emerges as a social phenomenon that is difficult to anticipate.

These new patterns of social interaction are due in part to the isolation and challenge of the program setting, and also to the type of tasks with a strong collective, collaborative focus imposed on students. Previously constructed student social personas from home and school are stripped away under the influence of powerful social forces arising from sustained and specialised contact between students, particularly within the residential programs.

In contrast to the typically individual assessment methodologies adopted in mainstream classroom settings, task outcomes in the experiential learning programs are more often measured on the basis of collective performance: communal living, group survival, collective physical chores, and shared research and reporting tasks.

The social forces within novel experiential learning settings shape the formation of student peer groups in ways that differ markedly to those found in typical educational settings in parent schools. The setting shapes how the students interact, and even influences the language of interaction. As a result of these new dynamic social forces and pressures, the structure of pre-existing peer groups established in the parent school environment is often modified in significant ways during the course of these programs.

Furthermore, modifications occur over a relatively short period of time and the resulting changed social dynamic effectively amounts to a resetting of the
social order, generally creating a spill of positions which has an initial leveling effect on student social status, followed by a re-ordering of social ranking. High status students undergo a tacit re-evaluation within the group on the basis of relevant skills competence and capacity to contribute in the new setting and may be reduced in status. Previously low-status students may be elevated on the basis of newly revealed competence in relevant skills or the demonstrated ability to serve the practical or living needs of peer group members in the new setting.

The changed social dynamic allows, encourages, and even compels, students to experiment with different social personas, as they seek to become what they believe is a more accurate and authentic version of themselves. This perception of greater social honesty among students leads to more open public and private reflection on experiences. Students may also interact with program facilitators and even members of the public in ways that contrast strongly with their prior typical classroom social interactions.

Modifications to peer group structures are particularly evident in the residential programs, where the setting itself creates a social environment which constructs and shapes social interaction in ways that are substantially different to that found in the parent schools and homes, where students have considerable volition in their interactions with members of other peer groups or complete strangers. Within the residential setting, students are typically compelled to mix with, cooperate with, and even live intimately with students with whom no social relationship previously existed. This constructed social interaction generates strains arising from unfamiliarity, lack of personal space, the need to share and cooperate, and an inability to achieve release of built up tension, until expressed as frustration, conflict, and anger. These reactions are tolerated and even expected, with teachers facilitating the development of negotiating skills to diminish tensions, share access to resources, and resolve conflicts.

The key factor influencing social status and interaction in residential programs is social utility. Students who emerge as leading figures have the
demonstrated ability to offer something – knowledge, skill, or attitude – that meets a peer group social or physical need that is not available from another source within the setting. The setting itself generates the group need and the student that can meet that need in some way is accorded an elevated group status as a result, regardless of previous social status. This element of social status due to distinction is in contrast to the similarity, which typically forms the basis of a coalescing social force in the formation of home school peer groups.

Peer to peer contact is markedly different in the non-residential experiential program in the study, confirming the impact of setting on student interaction. One conclusion that can be drawn is that the non-residential programs’ lack of sustained peer-to-peer contact in the confined, isolating environment of the student dormitory results in a largely undisturbed set of pre-existing peer group relationships and hierarchies.

Students working in settings that are embedded within a community that is not directly connected to the school are expected to have regular or even frequent interaction with members of the host community. Street pedestrians, workers, residents, vendors, street people, and even refugees, all may come into contact with the students in ways that are not planned, but that still shape the student experience of the setting, but not the peer group structure. These interactions tend have a much more random quality, however, as they are purely chance encounters. While the encounters are expected and are an intentional consequence of this choice of setting, they are also subject to a high degree of uncertainty. There is an essentially opportunistic aspect of social interaction in this kind of setting and when they do occur, their impact is often brief and only rarely enduring.

In summary, student social interaction in the residential experiential programs studied is profoundly influenced by the nature of the challenges and the setting in which these challenges are met, at both a collective and individual level. This results in changes to peer group structures and status, and also leads to experimentation with the social personas adopted or projected by
individuals. The non-residential program provides social confrontations with strangers, but only a few of these encounters were reported to have a lasting impact.

5.2.3 Risk Essential in Experiential Learning

The third essential thematic factor is that risk is an essential precondition for experiential learning to occur. Experiential learning depends on the experience itself providing some form of novel sensory input that causes a cognitive dissonance for the learner. As a novel experience by definition lies beyond the learner’s existing experiential frame of reference, the precise nature of the consequent interaction between the learner and the novel experience within the setting is inherently unpredictable and hence entails risk.

Constructed social interaction between learners taking place within a challenging, confronting setting creates multidimensional uncertainty. This environmental and social uncertainty creates a margin for error that entails an element of risk in experiential learning that schools and teachers seek to manage, but cannot eliminate entirely. As each experience is unique to the individuals experiencing it, so too are their reactions to the experience, making the experience itself inherently unpredictable.

There can be no novel experience without introducing uncertainty and risk and it is the tolerance of risk within each program that informs and constrains the challenges emerging from the setting and the social interaction that occurs within the setting. The tolerance of risk creates a space between what is known or understood and therefore deemed to be safe, and what lies at the outer edge of social, institutional, or legal tolerance of uncertainty in an educational setting.

Risk is moderated in different ways in each program, according to student ability, but more frequently in accordance with institutional risk appetite, a largely invisible parameter of programs reflecting the threshold of program
constraint based on parental acceptance and demand, legal precedent, and professional practices and standards.

The type of risk present in the programs studied varies according to setting, social dynamic, and tolerance of risk of the parent institution. Students face physical risks that pose a range of potential dangers from mild discomfort through to fatal exposure or injury. Students face social risks that range from exposure to mild forms of social embarrassment, isolation or ostracisation, through to extremely harmful forms of bullying, self-harm, and obsessive behaviour. Students may also face cultural risks depending on the program setting. These range from mild disorientation caused by superficial cultural differences through to fully developed culture shock that causes serious psychological symptoms requiring medical intervention.

Each of these types of risk can be adjusted: risk can be minimised or exaggerated in practice, through intervention points, thresholds delimiting scaffolding support, and the degree of difficulty inherent in the program settings and tasks set. These adjustable parameters of risk can also be interpreted by individual teachers according to personal conviction, professional judgement, and relative level of experience, both in their working with students and with the setting itself.

In the higher risk programs, teachers willfully withhold their opinions to ensure students are making their own decisions and make their own mistakes. Where mistakes are tolerated, so too are higher levels of risk, as the possible outcomes are often understood only imperfectly beforehand.

There is a tacit responsibility for risk that is shared between the institution and the individual based on this grant of freedom; the students focus on the freedom given and it is understood by teaching staff that this freedom will inevitably result in mistakes to which some danger is attached.

The point at which teachers intervene once an error has occurred varies greatly, reflecting institutional values, parental expectations, and anticipated
student capacity to succeed in a given activity. Students might shine in the absence of adult intervention, they might be nudged to success by teachers, or they might be punished for abrogation of responsibility. These approaches reflect the institutional value of the role of the teacher lying beneath the surface promotion of student leadership. The degree and timing of teacher intervention is judged so as to avert catastrophe, while allowing a level of success. The balance between the two represents optimised learning.

One of the implications of this aspect of these programs is that it highlights the place of the parents in setting the standards for both risk and success. It is the parental tolerance of risk that is pivotal to maintaining program challenge. At the same time, it is the parent who determines the degree to which students face risk in the programs. Some parents find this dichotomy particularly challenging, given the role to which many are accustomed as saviours of their children at the first sight of trouble. Unable to rescue their child from challenge and risk due to isolation, parents observe the learning process from a literal distance. Some express gratitude for the removal of protection, but the tension for teachers in all programs between risk and protection, exposure and shelter, is ever present.

In summary, for there to be experiential learning taking place, students are exposed to novel situations in which there is uncertainty and therefore risk. There is a constant tension between risk and protection, exposure and shelter; safety and challenge and the balance between the two exert a constant pressure on teachers in all programs. Teachers manage risk, but parents exercise the final right of arbitration in determining the degree of challenge, the level of risk, and the margin for error.

5.2.4 Reflection as Cognitive Mechanism for Enduring Learning

The extent to which an experience might result in enduring learning depends on the making and employment of acts of meaning arising out of the experience leading to long-term impact on behaviour. By reconstructing, reorganising, and transforming the experience, reflection plays an essential
role as the mechanism for the making of meaning from it, enabling it to influence behaviour and future experience.

There is a sharp dichotomy, however, in the practice of reflection in the experiential learning programs, between teacher-facilitated reflection immediately after the experience, and student self-reflection taking place at some later point. Reflection is seen by all teachers to be critically important to the learning process, but there is no consensus on the extent to which a third-party must be involved in the reflective process. All programs in the study plan around a timeframe of years for the learning derived from it to be processed and realised in more concrete outcomes, albeit through different mechanisms and practices.

Reflection is practised in both written and spoken modes and in many different genres, all of which provide the structures in which language is used to reconstruct the experience. In reflection, language as the essential condition of knowing provides the means by which experience becomes knowledge. Language acts as the carrier, the vessel in which experience is transported from a collection of sensory stimulation to a rich, interconnected set of impressions, feelings, and ideas that become associated with the original experience. As such, the way in which language as a social artefact is used, both formally and informally, through peer-to-peer and teacher to peer interaction after the experience, is of pivotal importance in shaping the process by which the experience is translated into meaning for the participant.

In summary, students make sense of their experiences through reflection. Reflection itself may be either self-guided or teacher facilitated, and is effected through oral or written genres, both formal and informal. Students, whether under guidance or independent of adult intervention, recall events from memory during the reflective process and subsequently construct narratives linked to these memories. Reflection therefore acts as the mechanism by which experience is reconstructed or reorganised.
5.3. **Findings**

This section discusses the broader theoretical implications arising from the discussion above when viewed in the light of the theories of learning examined in Chapter Two.

5.3.1. Setting as the Third Component of the Experiential Learning Transaction Model

The first theoretical implication of the study arising from setting being the essential design element of experiential learning programs is that the basic model of an *experiential* learning transaction evident in these programs must incorporate setting, alongside the learner and cognitive dissonance, in the form of the learning *problem*. This experiential learning transaction model therefore comprises three constituent components: the *learner*, the *problem*, and the *setting*.

The basic conditions for learning to occur as set out by Piaget (1952, pp. 4-5) require just two essential components: the *learner*, bringing a set of pre-existing cognitive structures based on previous experience; and the learning *problem*, reflecting a novel situation, which creates cognitive dissonance in the learner. Learning occurs through learner resolution of this state of cognitive dissonance, either through *assimilation* or *accommodation* (Piaget, 1952, pp. 4-5). In resolving the cognitive dissonance, knowledge is constructed by the learner.

In this model of learning, termed *semantic learning* here, the spatiotemporal setting of the learning transaction is not – or, at least, is not necessarily – theoretically significant in the construction of new knowledge. In essence, the Piagetian model of learning transaction has just two parts (see Figure 1.): *learner* and *problem*. 
Ontologically, this semantic learning model must take place in a spatiotemporal setting, but this is theoretically insignificant in the learning transaction. In this model of semantic learning, the *where* and *when* are not essential components of the learning transaction itself. The setting therefore acts as a container or a boundary for the model. Thus semantic learning can be said to possess a *weak* experiential dimension, which is explored further below.

In contrast, the model of experiential learning transaction evident in this study is fundamentally dependent on the setting in which the experience takes place. In resolving the cognitive dissonance, learner and problem interact within and through the setting itself: setting becomes a *co-participant* in the learning transaction model. Thus, the basic model of the *experiential* learning transaction that emerges from this study must comprise three basic components – *learner, problem,* and *setting*. The physical, political, economic, social, and chronological parameters of setting are all relevant and significant in this model of the *experiential* learning transaction. There is a strong interactive relationship between learner, setting, and problem, where each
element has an influence on the two other elements (Wells, 1999). One way of depicting this tri-partite model is shown below in Figure 2.

![Diagram](image_url)

**Figure 2: Three Components of Experiential Learning Transactions**

This illustration of the experiential learning model, with *learner, problem* and *setting* as mutually interacting co-equal partners, however, fails to convey fully the pervasive influence of setting on the learner and the problem. Setting includes the available artefacts which afford possibilities for activity in the Gibsonian sense (Gibson, 1986); setting as system includes the community constructed by the learners (Engeström, 1993; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 9) as well as the available artefacts. As shown in the study, the essential finding is that both learner and problem are immersed in, and strongly influenced by, the setting. The setting in these experiential learning programs is of critical importance to the existence and nature of the learning problem and to the learner. When learning experientially, learners are immersed in settings that present problems that cannot be ignored, negotiated, or deferred. The setting acts as both a *facilitator*, determining the specific conditions and parameters of the problem and influencing the state of the learner, and a *filter*, shaping what is memorable and subjectively significant about the learning transaction for the learner (Miller & Boud, 1996; Wells, 1999; Tulving, 2004). This relationship is illustrated in Figure 3.
As noted above, all semantic learning transactions occur within a spatiotemporal boundary and have an experiential dimension that is not essential to the transaction itself; these transactions can be described as weakly experiential, due to the ontological impossibility of removing setting entirely from the transaction. Learning transactions in which setting plays an essential role in facilitating the learning are strongly experiential. The significance of the role played by setting in learning transactions is a measure of the experientiality of the learning.

In this model of experiential learning, each learner experiences setting in a unique way and as a result makes meaning through, and within, the setting (Bruner, 1997). The presence of setting in a learning transaction separates experiential learning from semantic knowledge: it distinguishes knowing semantically – noetic awareness – from knowing autonoetically about one’s own experience (Tulving, 2004). Unlike semantic knowledge about a setting, which reflects subjective learner constructions of the understandings and experiences of others, experiential learning within a setting is shaped by the
physical, cultural, and social dimensions of the setting directly; these qualities of setting are thus incorporated into the learner’s own episodic memory and the knowledge constructed (Hickey, 1997; Wells, 1999; Tulving, 2002). A learner cannot vicariously experience another learner’s experience of the world; autonoetic awareness comes only from personal experience, the setting of which is an essential component. Thus, the experientiality of learning is also reflected in the autonoeticity of the learning transaction: this is measured through the extent to which an experience generates autonoetic awareness in the learner, which is then encoded and made available for re-enactment in episodic memory (Tulving, 2002, 2004).

For example, the semantic knowledge acquired through the study of the design and operation of wood-fired combustion stoves becomes experiential when the learner has need to operate a wood-fired combustion stove to provide their own heating and hot water. Likewise, a theoretical knowledge of the principles of navigation becomes highly autonoetic when employed by a learner who needs to return home through difficult terrain and challenging weather conditions. When faced with hunger in a wilderness setting, the learner must deal with the problem of how to apply their semantic knowledge about foraging to meet a personal need created by the program setting. In all three examples, the setting of the problem encountered provided the conditions, and hence the potential, for personal experiential learning to take place. The role of setting thereby determined the degree of experientiality possible in the learning examined in this study.

The cognitive dissonance arises out of the relationship between the learner and the setting, which informs the creation of the learning problem and thus creates the conditions under which certain types of human intelligence, such as problem solving, are deployed and manifested (Greeno, 1994). Applying the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1986), settings and all associated artefacts are a special class of objects that afford or invite certain actions, facilitating certain kinds of learning possibilities by virtue of their own fundamental properties. These affordances are more than just innate characteristics of the setting. They are activated through the interaction between the learner and
the setting and as such are a shared property existing between the learner or
learners and the setting (Greeno, 1994). The setting creates the potential for a
range of allowable or potential actions, which reflect what is afforded by the
setting. If the setting is changed, therefore, the allowable, potential or needed
actions afforded by the setting are similarly altered (Zhang & Patel, 2006).
The intelligence deployed by a learner in solving a problem within a particular
setting is therefore a shared property of the two components, learner and
setting, working together. A further implication of this finding is that exposure
to a range of settings commensurate with the full range of intellectual
properties of each learner may be needed to ensure full deployment and
development of problem solving skills.

Figure 4: Affordances and Intelligence: Shared Properties of Setting and
Learner

This has implications for the factors informing setting selection in experiential
learning, as the specific properties of each setting will constrain the type of
learning problems afforded. Setting selection as such is therefore actually
about problem finding (Pea, 1993, p. 68). Settings are selected to afford a
range of problems based on the previous experiences of learners.
In summary, setting emerges as a fundamental part of the experiential learning transaction model. This stands in contrast to the semantic learning transaction; experiential learning is transacted through a three-way interaction of a learner encountering a novel experience within a specific setting. The nature of the interaction between the setting and the learner in experiential learning may be described as a property of the setting or a unique property afforded by interaction between the learner and setting. Thus the experientiality of any learning transaction may be measured by the extent to which its setting facilitates the learning transaction. Experiential learning is characterised by its generation of strong autonoetic awareness in the learner.

5.3.2. Social Interaction in multiple settings

The social dynamic of adolescent peer groups undergoes change when immersed in a new setting, which in turn can alter the structure of the peer group and the status of individuals within the group. This phenomenon appears to be particularly marked in residential experiential programs. The theoretical implication of this is that the configuration of student peer group structures will be a function of the setting in which they are located, and that the social dynamic reflects an interaction between the peer group and the setting, at both a collective and individual level.

Individuals cannot know or be in isolation (Leontiev, 1981; Vygotsky & Luria, 1993 [1930]); they form their identities and construct their understanding of the world within a social context relative to the understandings of other members of a social group. What an individual knows or does is fundamentally dependent on the particular social dynamic, the flow of interaction, between members of the group. One of the factors shaping this macro-level, social dynamic is setting.

The specific social pressures and circumstances associated with a particular setting have a clear impact on the formation of social structures and individual social identity within that setting. Extending the notion of settings and artefacts
affording or inviting a certain kind of action, pre-existing peer groups formed under the influence of the prevailing physical, social, and cultural setting of the home school are modified under the circumstances present in a different setting. The interplay between the setting and the individual in the experiential program affords the possibility of displaying or deploying a different set of skills and knowledge, which in turn unsettles the social order.

Individuals occupy positions of higher or lower peer group status relative to other members of a group on the basis of contextual need or merit within a pre-existing social context, such as the home school setting. When this setting is changed, the social dynamic is disturbed, and different implicit forces emerge to influence and perhaps alter the social standing of individuals within the overall structure of the group. Students of merit or standing in one context do not automatically enjoy a similar status in a different setting. Each student goes through a process of social reinvention that is often marked initially by the phenomenon of leveling, in which there is a re-settling of social status followed by a re-ordering of status. The impetus for this social dynamic is generated by the properties of the specific setting and the associated challenges, needs and circumstances arising in the setting.

The relative social standing of any individual is determined by the capacity of that individual to contribute to the needs of the collective whole, but in a way that is informed by the setting in which the group and individual needs are framed and generated. It is the community in a specific setting and with specific group and individual needs arising from conditions prevailing in that setting that affords the learner the opportunity to deploy or display individual attributes to benefit the whole (Greeno, 1994; Gibson & Pick, 2003).

This constructed or facilitated social interaction also illustrates the Vygotskian notion of external social forces overcoming the internal, egocentric voice (Vygotsky, 1978). Social forces lead to the re-evaluation of the social status of some individuals, with some of high status in the home school setting finding themselves placed in a lower position and vice versa. The needs of the group and the affordances of the setting (Gibson, 1986) are the driving forces
behind this peer group re-evaluation and reconfiguration. Ultimately, these novel social forces act in a Vygotskian manner, that is, with the external forces overcoming individual egocentricity to challenge and change the social masks that learners have previously developed to cope with the social interactions that occur on a daily basis in the home setting.

In light of this reconsideration of the role of social interaction within the experiential learning transaction model, Figure 5 modifies the model depicted in Figure 3. This amendment depicts the relationship of learners interacting with each other and the learning problem, all within the learning setting. In line with the theoretical picture, the new knowledge and modified behaviour are depicted as attributes of the group, rather than the individual.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5:** *Socially Mediated Learning Within An Experiential Setting*
A way of illustrating the hierarchy of relationships between the components of the modified experiential learning model is depicted in Figure 6. This figure takes a learner-centric view of constructed social interaction within an experiential learning setting. The learners interact with each other, within the setting, and the problem is activated or manifested through interaction between the learners and the setting.

Figure 6: Hierarchy of Components in Social/Setting Mediated Experiential Learning Model

As each setting affords specific learning opportunities, one implication for the comprehensive development of individual learners as social beings is the need to consider the desirability of learner exposure to multiple settings. In mainstream schools, student contribution, merit, and achievement reflect a particular set of explicit and implicit values that shape peer social structures and determine the nature of success. This system reflects the needs and functions of the community, institutional and individual, and develops within a
specific educational and social setting, a setting that affords the potential for certain types of learning to take place.

If learner peer group structures, individual social status and role, and even academic success, are dependent at least in part on the particular challenges and social needs afforded by a specific setting, then exposure to multiple settings would allow the development and deployment of different social roles, personas, and abilities. A range of different settings and challenges may be needed to allow the development of different skills in individual students, something that may not be possible in an educational ‘mono-setting’.

A further implication of this finding is the need to examine the type of problems and problem solving skills that are favoured by each choice of setting and what is perhaps neglected or underemphasised as a result.

**Figure 7: Multi-setting Learning**

Ideally, education designed around the concept of ‘multi-setting’ (Figure 7) could create the potential for learners to experience multiple peer group structures, encouraging individuals to explore different dimensions of their social persona within those settings. This could afford opportunities for learners to deploy and develop different skills and generate different knowledge through the experience of a multiplicity of settings and challenges.

One potential point of difference between wilderness and urban programs is that by virtue of the expanded range of potential social contacts offered in
urban settings, there is the potential for a richer range of social interaction within the experiential mode of learning.

In summary, an immersion setting exerts a strong influence over a learner peer group, shaping social interaction and individual group status. The interaction between the setting and learner(s) affords the deployment of different types of skill or patterns of behaviour, both of which are a shared property of both the setting and the learner. The comprehensive development of the individual as a social being may rely on exposure to multiple settings. Social status and role, along with academic success, are dependent on the properties afforded by learning settings, the implication of which is that the development and deployment of different social roles, personas, and abilities in all learners may depend on exposure to and immersion in a range of different settings and challenges: educational multi-setting.

5.3.3. Risk Tolerance in The Zone of Proximal Development

The presence of risk as an indispensable element of the experiential learning transaction lies in the inherent uncertainty about the learner reaction or result arising from any cognitive dissonance. The types of risk to which learners are exposed in experiential learning programs reflect the ways in which experiential learning problems are constructed and posed to the learner. The imposition of institutional limits on the degree of risk permissible in a learning problem is an observable phenomenon in the study, pointing to a potential conflict between the educational limit of learning risk and the institutional limit of learning risk. The theoretical role of risk, however, and particularly its relationship, if any, to other theories of learning and development, such as Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), is not clear in the relevant theoretical writings.

The notion of risk arising from uncertainty in novel experiences is linked to the concept of a cognitive dissonance. For the learner, what is unknown, or has not yet been experienced, forms the cognitive dissonance – the knowledge gap – that is the genesis of the learning process (Piaget, 1952). Logically,
there is an unavoidable element of risk or uncertainty associated with learning that is beyond the demonstrated level of experience of a learner. The potential for error and hence risk therefore cannot be eliminated in experiential learning.

In fact, the learner’s detection or awareness of their own mistakes and the subsequent handling and recovery from those mistakes give rise to questions that are powerful in guiding learning (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1992). The learning strategies used to detect and resolve mistakes with maximal independence are not typically found in approaches to learning that seek to minimise or eliminate errors. In fact, where errors are reduced, there is a reduced potential for learning (Seiffert & Hutchins, 1992). In one sense, by increasing the ‘margin for error’, the potential for learning increases. In settings that are authentic and unpredictable, the existence of uncertainty itself introduces a heightened element of risk to experiential learning that is largely absent in the mainstream learning environment that is seen as more controlled and synthetic (Hoberman & Mailick, 1994).

The experiential learning programs studied are structured to varying degrees around the principle that learners should be given problems or tasks to complete with limited outside intervention in order to maximise opportunities for learner problem solving. As discussed above, the nature of the learning problem or task is facilitated by both the setting, and the structure of the social interaction within the setting. These problems arise out of the interaction or relationship between the learner and setting and are the core of the experiential curriculum (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994).

As the learner encounters novel situations, their learning moves incrementally, from areas of competence and certainty, into a zone that is beyond their existing set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Vygotsky, 1978). In typical experiential learning settings, these novel situations tend to reflect a more uncontrolled and unpredictable reality that is in contrast to the more ordered and controllable environment of the classroom. Both learners and
teachers may be unaccustomed to a realistic learning setting in which the answer to a given problem may not be known.

One of the unpredictable elements that gives rise to risk is that the reaction of the learner to a novel situation is essentially unknowable prior to the experience. An authentic setting may also present problems that lie outside of the immediate experience of the supervising teacher. Even when teachers do have a solution, the culture prevailing at all experiential learning programs participating in the study is that teachers don’t solve learner problems, or at least not immediately.

Risk is an inherent property of experiential learning that lies at the centre of the interaction between setting, learner and problem. Where setting, learner, and problem interact, there is an element of uncertainty and hence risk.

The properties of the experiential learning problem are reflected in the following seven basic characteristics, which highlight the nature and extent of the risk tolerated in experiential learning programs:

a. experiential learning problems are authentic, a quality derived from authentic settings; authenticity implies a degree of unpredictability, hence risk;

b. the learning problems or tasks are learner-centric and as such are identified or defined by the learner and require only minimal if any outside definition to be understood; learner inexperience may result in an ill-defined or misidentified learning problem;

c. the learning problems require learner participation or intervention based on need (e.g., food and shelter), so there is little room for a learner to opt-out under normal circumstances; intervention is based on trial and error;

d. the learning problems are closely connected to a learner’s basic needs and interests, they are non-trivial or contrived, so that learner motivation to engage in the problem or task is high;

e. the problems require learner organisation and planned resource allocation to be handled properly, thereby posing social risks and
mistakes associated with the misallocation of resources to handle a problem;
f. the problems require some form of negotiation and social interaction with other learners for resolution – also a social risk; and
g. the problems, if unresolved, or mistakes if they are made, involve real consequences, that impact on the learner personally, thereby posing a range of risks from social, through physical, to cultural.

These seven properties of experiential learning problems reflect the essential elements of experiential learning: that the setting determines the nature of the problem handled; that learners are placed in an isolated environment where assistance or support is tightly controlled; peer social interaction is designed to be unavoidable through imposed immersion in isolated or socially insular settings; and risk is an ever-present factor, arising from the realism of the setting, the unpredictability of learner action and reaction, and the potential for consequences arising from mistakes.

Risk is inseparably linked to novel experience and the degree of risk is directly proportional to the level of challenge or difficulty in a learning activity. As learners move beyond their level of competence, they enter a mode of experiential learning where some assistance or scaffolding is needed to complete a learning activity (Vygotsky, 1978): the higher the degree of challenge, the greater the risk to the learner. Therefore, the extent to which risk is tolerated within a program or learning transaction is a measure of the operationalisation of the Zone of Proximal Development within the program.

The ZPD is interpreted in theoretical models of learning in at least two different ways. One interpretation asserts that the ZPD is a state, rather than a zone, where there is no explicit differentiation between types of learning activity or levels of learner competence: a learner is either learning in the zone or not (Chaiklin, 2003).

Another way of viewing the ZPD is that it has the properties of a virtual zone rather than a pure state and as such it possesses boundaries and therefore
allows for the possibility of differentiation within the zone boundaries. This implies that there is an implied property of the ZPD that allows for some variation in both the extent and type of adult or competent support provided, and the degree of achievement a learner might attain with that support. The extent to which a learner is operating within ZPD therefore may be qualified, depending on the specific circumstances of the learning task. Learners might be operating on the ‘fringe’ of ZPD, receiving minimal support, or may be at the very limit of their capacity to undertake a task with maximum assistance.

**Figure 8: ZPD as Variable Zone: Learner Performance in a Learning Task**

Figure 8 shows learner performance in a complex task that requires different levels of scaffolding intervention by a competent adult or peer. The blue zone reflects what the learner is able to undertake without support. The areas depicted by three shades of red reflect task performance with increasing levels of assistance or intervention.

Whether the ZPD is seen as a *state* or *zone*, there is a strong element of institutional volition exercised in the provision or denial of scaffolding support (state) or the progressive introduction of scaffolding depending on the subjective difficulty of the task with respect to the learner (zone). In either case, it is the institution and ultimately the teacher who must manage the exposure of the learner to a learning problem beyond demonstrated competence and the provision of scaffolding (if any).
In experiential learning, the learner is exposed to problems that reflect authentic difficulties and risks. The existence of risk in these experiential learning tasks provides a form of *real world* practicum. These real world risks, however, are managed by experienced educators, who are expected to use their judgement to manage and control risk to ensure optimised conditions for learning without undue risk (Schön, 1987). For the student learning experientially, therefore, there is a boundary between learning related risk and individual safety that must be managed.

Institutional tolerance of risk, or institutional risk ‘appetite’, in experiential learning reflects the extent to which the learner is permitted to work beyond a notional degree of competency in a given learning problem, and the degree and scope of competent intervention that is available to aid learners working beyond their competency. Through observation of risk tolerance in a school, it may be possible to examine the institutional culture that determines or influences how far students are permitted to operate beyond their actual level of competence, and how much scaffolding is likely to be given in situations before a teacher intervenes or terminates the learning activity. This professional intervention point, whether institutionally or individually determined, does not necessarily align with the notion of the ZPD as a purely individual phenomenon that identifies the gap at a learner’s level between independent task competence and aided or facilitated task competence. Individuals will of course have different learning needs and differing levels of competency, hence the property of any individual child’s ZPD is subject to many influences and factors. The way in which a school, program, or teacher works with a learner to provide some form of support, guidance, or scaffolding is subject to institutional policies, practices, and to the teacher’s personal experience.

At what point does intervention take the locus of control over a learning experience away from the learner and for what reason? This reflects an aspect of *tolerance* of risk related to learning challenge that influences the *size* of the ZPD (Chaiklin, 2003), which has been sketched out in the study data, but not fully mapped from an individual institutional perspective.
The ZPD relates to the type and detail of supporting instructions given, the provision of a more competent peer or adult, or the provision of other forms of scaffolding. These forms of intervention become operational at the point beyond which a learner is not able to work independently on a problem. In theory, the point at which a learner is no longer able to access or benefit from scaffolding or collaboration to undertake a task is the theoretical outer limit of that individual’s ZPD as determined by the learner. In reality, it is the institution, through its policies and practices, which typically determines the limit at which there is intervention or a task is further modified or concluded.

Figure 9 provides an illustration of the difference between the risk tolerance of a hypothetical school and the ZPD limit of a notional learner. The ‘x’ axis (tasks 1-5) reflects a progression of increasing levels of difficulty for the learner across a series of tasks, with an increasing likelihood of unpredictable and erroneous outcomes, including risk to the learner of an emotional, cultural, or physical nature. The ‘y’ axis reflects the percentage of task completion. These are set at arbitrary levels for the purposes of illustration only.

The green zone in Figure 9 reflects the capacity of the learner to undertake elements of a task independently. The blue zone reflects the risk tolerance of the school with respect to scaffolding and supporting a learner in handling the task and the point at which the school will intervene to terminate an activity. The red zone is the area beyond the school’s tolerance of risk that the learner might still successfully undertake the task, given scaffolding. The 100% mark is the limit beyond which the learner is unable to undertake the task with or without scaffolding. The higher the risk inherent in the learning task, the earlier the institution requires intervention to protect the learner from potential or actual harm.

The gradient of the intervention point may vary from school to school according to differences at an institutional level and even individual teachers within the same program may set different standards for intervention. This risk
tolerance reflects a complex mix of parental expectations, institutional philosophy, program history, legal precedent, and the nature of the setting itself. Programs with a longer history in the study demonstrated a higher risk tolerance in actual practice. This may be due to a higher level of parent trust in long-standing institutions and experienced teachers.

Figure 9: ZPD and Institutional Tolerance of Risk

The gap between the actual extent of ZPD and the institutionally imposed limitations driven by risk for a hypothetical program and teacher is depicted in Figure 10.

This figure shows a ‘radar’ plot view, where the green zone reflects the completion level of a hypothetical task undertaken by a learner independently, expressed as a percentage; the blue zone reflects the completion level of the same task if scaffolded by a teacher, taking into account the risk appetite of the institution; and the red zone reflects the theoretical level of completion if fully supported by a teacher, regardless of risk, thereby reflecting the full extent of an individual’s ZPD. Again, the intervention points are shown for the purposes of illustration only, depicting set of tasks with an escalating level of difficulty.
This depiction of a hypothetical learner undertaking a set of hypothetical experiential learning tasks illustrates one of the difficulties of operationalising the ZPD to its full extent in an institutional setting. Scaffolding is provided to assist the learner to achieve a higher level of accomplishment in a given task than would be possible through individual effort. The conflict between what is acceptably safe for an institution may not align with an individual teacher’s view and may not be attuned to the potential of the learner to cope with risk in a novel situation.

In experiential learning, taking measured risks is seen as both a need that is met experientially and a learned skill that must be practised and honed through testing theories and new ideas. Similarly, coping with adversity and failure requires mechanisms that are not innate to the learner. Experiential learning presents problems that are authentic and therefore subject to uncertainties and risks that provide a way of meeting the need for learned risk taking. It abandons the safety of the mainstream classroom; the problems encountered entail risk for learners, because to make the challenges meaningful, there must be freedom, responsibility, and difficulty, and the possibility of mistakes and failure is an unavoidable concomitant of challenge.

In summary, risk is fundamental to experiential learning, due to the uncertainty and unpredictability generated by novel circumstances. Different
types of setting, social interaction, and even learning problem generate different types of risk. Learners may also be exposed to different degrees of risk depending on their individual level of competence and the nature of the learning problem itself, but risk is more likely to be determined by institutional risk appetite.

5.3.4. Reflection as the Mechanism for Enduring Experiential Learning

Reflection provides the primary cognitive mechanism by which sensory stimuli captured through experience become learning, and hence the nature of reflection itself and its contribution to the learning process need reconsideration. There are differing practices applied to processing experience for the purposes of learning, however. The role and function of episodic memory in processing novel personal experiences in reflection is a key to understanding the enduring and highly personal nature of experiential learning.

In experiential learning, the experience itself is the immediate objective of the activity, with the making of meaning through reflection on stored memories to produce knowledge to follow. The learning associated with the practice of reorganising or reconstructing an experience through reflection is manifested in its ability to direct future experience, even tacitly and within the same program (Schön, 1983; Dewey, 1997 [1938]). Reflection, in the Deweyan sense, is:

*The explicit rendering of the intelligent element in our experience. It makes it possible to act with an end in view: reflection consists of both thinking and action* (Dewey, 1921, p. 171).

The experience must be sufficiently memorable that it challenges the habitual assumptions that arise from routine experience. Without a reflective, analytical stage, however, the sensory input from novel experience is essentially inert; it contains no experientially derived knowledge in and of itself for the participant and does not lead to any direct action (Wells, 1999; Daniels, 2001). Understanding an experience and learning from it can only occur through active interpretation and meaning making (Wells, 1999).
The thinking associated with any reflective act relies on the language employed, either as inner speech or as a communication act. The language employed to reflect and interpret experience to make meaning is critically important. Language shapes the inner speech associated with processing memories and ultimately shapes the way we think (Wells, 1999). The personal meaning and knowledge that is produced through reflection on experience depends on language as the essential condition of that knowing, as language informs the process by which experience becomes knowledge (Halliday, 1993). The intramental processes and inner speech employed in reflection on episodic memories of an experience affect the way in which the images and other residual sensory impressions are processed and emerge post-experience as knowledge. These processes are critically important to the experiential learning process and rest themselves on the manipulation of semiotic tools that reflect prior experience (Cole & Wertsch, 1996).

The structure of the reflective process and the way in which language is employed to interpret experience is therefore of interest in the context of this study. The ubiquitous presence of reflection as a post-experience practice contrasts with the absence of a unified approach in its practice. The dichotomy of differing reflective practice that emerges from the study in some ways mirrors the divergent theoretical perspectives on reflection in experiential learning encountered in the relevant writings (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1997 [1938]; Quay, 2003; Miettinen, 2006). Learning is separated into immediate, subjective concrete experiences and deliberate, long-term reflective learning.

The two different modes of reflection are: teacher-centred and structured as a discrete post-activity cognitive process in its own right; or student-centred, implicit reflection-in-action in which the learner engages in the process in a highly individualised manner, allowing the experience to speak for itself. The teacher-centred approach reflects the Vygotskian notion of the mature outer social state conquering the immature introspection of youth (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934]). The student-centred approach reflects a more Piagetian pattern of
inner cognition constructing an assimilation of the novel experience over time (Piaget, 1952; Bruner, 1997).

There is a stark polarisation in the study on reflection: experience either only teaches for the second it lasts, therefore requiring immediate structured and socially mediated reflection to provide a form of cognitive scaffolding; or reflection is most lasting when it occurs implicitly, long after the experience is over. This dichotomy is further refined in the two value statements about reflection: either integrity is lost, if reflection is guided; or learners cannot make meaning unless they are guided.

The following three figures (figures 11, 12, and 13) illustrate the three different observed modes of implementation for reflection in the programs studied.

**Figure 11: Unfacilitated Reflection**

The structure depicted in Figure 11 shows reflection occurring in an unguided and informal way in the months and years following the experience. It is a learner-centred, indirect reflective process in that the purpose of the reflection is an inner assimilation or accommodation of a specific novel experience, activity, or problem. Experiences are allowed to build up, layer upon layer,
without any overarching reflective structure to articulate the links between the experiences and the broader context of the learner’s journey. There is an individualised randomness to this structure that allows learners to reflect in a highly subjective, yet personal, way on the experiences they believe to be relevant and at an appropriate time. The learner experiences a form of reflection-in-action and draws the explicit connections at a later date, exploring the impact of these highly personal experiences free of any school orchestrated structure or agenda (Schön, 1983; Estes, 2004). This structure does allow others to influence reflection implicitly, through social interaction that does not have as its primary purpose the processing of a particular event or experience.

This indirect approach reflects an institutional and professional confidence that reflection occurs, with or without intervention, as it is a function of the cognition of the individual, not the group. The subjective reflection thus generated is believed to speak clearly enough to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the experience. There is a strong underlying belief implicit in this approach that the individual’s experience of the setting, social interaction and problem solving results in learning that achieves the intended range of outcomes.

The indirect approach does reflect a philosophical commitment to the individuality of each learner’s experience. At a cognitive level, each learner will construct a unique analogue or calculus (Bruner, 1997) of the experience, regardless of the programmed structuring of the experience through post-activity reflection. There is an assumption implicit in this approach therefore that accepts the fact that each learner’s memory of an experience will reflect a wide range of random and unique elements. Allowing the reflection to occur over an extended period of time and in an unstructured way demonstrates an institutional conviction that reflection will happen with or without facilitation, and that it will be right for the individual learner. The reflective ‘pathway’ will be unique for each learner.
The approach to reflection depicted in Figure 12 is one of direct, teacher-led facilitation. This approach is based on the belief that an experience has a highly transitory impact on the learner and that the experiential stimulation must be woven into a socially mediated and interconnected network of formalised thoughts, impressions, and ideas as quickly as possible. Social interaction is seen as critically important to the process of knowledge creation post-experience (Wells, 1999). The reflective process is one of creating a personal narrative through interaction, retelling the story from an individual perspective, one that is coloured by the subjective impressions left behind by the experience. The personal narrative thus created becomes the memory thread that connects the different experiences for the individual and aids in later recall. Teachers and peers both contribute to the intramental processing of the experience in an explicit way. Direct reflection has a chronological structure that is generated by a facilitating teacher, in which events are recalled soon after occurring, typically on the same day. The outermost structure is therefore similar for all learners, but their own construction of the detail of the narrative is subjective.

**Figure 12: Facilitated Reflection**
The facilitated model of reflection is potentially problematic, due to the possibility that the social mediation of the reflective process itself might shape, taint or contaminate the learners' memories of the experience (Estes, 2004). Socially mediated reflection may influence reported memories in situations where learner experiences are subjectively assigned value and meaning by another agency (teacher) or summarised to suit an audience (teacher or parent). A complex range of emotions and memories collected during an experience may be expressed as indifference, or negativity, depending on subjective learner perceptions of the intended audience. Where a complex experience informs a purpose driven reflective process, there is a risk of trivialising the experience through excessive distillation: learners turn months of experience into a sentence to meet an expectation of process-driven reporting.

The recording and encoding of experiences as memories emerge as critical factors in how the memory of the experience is processed, stored, or even coloured for future recall and reflection. There is an implicit contradiction in the different ways in which reflection is practiced. On the one hand, the experience only teaches for the second it lasts; it is cognitively perishable, requiring some form of teacher scaffolding or intervention to assist the learner to capture and structure the experience into a meaningful narrative. On the other hand, the experience teaches for years, and the learner is left to await a suitable moment after the experience to engage in reflection-in-action, where what has been learned emerges in the form of action (Schön, 1983, pp. 54-55), or a more discrete and considered form of cognitive processing, independent of teacher scaffolding.

One of the central influences on the practice and outcomes of reflection is learner retention and recall of the experience. The narrative developed through facilitation is likely to be different to the narrative developed by a learner in isolation, some months or years after the experience. While both may be cognitively rich with connections to the experience, the aim of immediate processing through facilitation is to capture the stimulation of the experience itself and channel this into enduring memories. By contrast,
allowing the experience to lie fallow for a period of time suggests that only the most enduring residual stimulation remains for the individual learner to shape the narrative created through reflection.

In the latter case, the process of *reflection-in-action* becomes *knowing-in-action* and the passage of time potentially acts as a filter in which only those enduring memories that are significant to the individual, proven by testing in action, remain to create the long-term story of the experience (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983). These memories are more enduring because they have already withstood a preliminary test of time, reinforced through application in action.

![Figure 13: Predictive Reflection](image)

A minor variation on the explicit, mediated reflection approach is one where it is assumed that reflection will be informed by the sum of all previous experiences to a greater or lesser extent. In anticipation of later reflection, a predictive reflection (or *preflection*) is intended to create anticipation of future experience in the learner (Figure 13). This is intended to foreshadow the coming learning experience and the formal reflective process to follow. The purpose of *preflection* is to assist in creating an awareness of learning.
opportunities in the learner and to perhaps prepare the learner for the anticipated cognitive dissonance associated with the experience. This practice is an explicit manifestation of the Deweyan notion that educational experience is informed by past experience and, in turn, informs, shapes, and directs future experience (Dewey, 1997 [1938]). In a chronological sense, this model of predictive reflection and post-activity reflection forms a kind of metacognitive primer, or a *bookend*, scaffold to the experience.

Reflection, both tacit and implicit, is the mechanism by which an experience is turned into meaning, where sensory stimuli become knowledge. Reflection itself facilitates the process of learning from experience and is undertaken in both written and oral modes and by means of many different genres. Learning can also take place at many different chronological points along the timeline, from the initial occurrence of the experience through to the considered reflection years later. Reflection provides evidence of experience becoming learning, but there is no immediate, visible *causal* link between the experience and the reflection that facilitates the learning. The evidence in fact is just the opposite. Teachers report that learners experience both immediate learning (in action) and delayed learning, realised at a much later date.

The phenomenon of delayed *realisation* of learning: the manifestation of experientially acquired skills and knowledge at a much later date, sometimes years later, reflects the notion that learners *know more than they can say* (Schön, 1983, p. 51). The mechanism by which learners become aware of learning or through which learning is realised is reflection leading to action or reflection in action (Schön, 1983). This highlights the importance of the act of reflection when transforming an experience into knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Through reflection, these experiences may continue to ‘teach’ for years beyond their initial impact, regardless of the specific mode of reflection (Dewey, 1997 [1938]).

The foregoing shows that there are two fundamentally different approaches to the institutional *management* of the relationship between experience and learning as facilitated through the mechanism of reflection. One view is that
the learning must take place immediately, as without the scaffold of reflection, the experience may be lost through forgetfulness. The other perspective is that the experience is about doing and that reflection follows at a later time and is largely tacit. Both approaches report that learning follows reflection, whether immediate or delayed, explicit or tacit, thereby supporting the notion that reflection is critically important in the learning process, no matter the duration of the delay between the experience itself and the realisation of learning.

The two different approaches to reflection – immediate/facilitated and delayed/independent – are therefore reconciled through what the experience eventually becomes: action. The directed, explicit interpretation of experience and the student-centred implicit reflection on experience both translate into learner action. Whether teacher directed or self-directed, the shape of the experience afterwards, and the ultimate structure and detail of the individual stories recorded as memories, are profoundly affected by the reflective process, as are the resultant actions that reflect changed behaviour and new knowledge.

5.4. Addressing the Research Questions

As proposed in Chapter One, this study has been undertaken to examine the following questions:

1. What is the theoretical model of learning which underpins these programs?
2. What are the essential elements of the model and how do they contribute to achieving program learning outcomes?
3. What elements of the model might be incorporated into mainstream schooling?

Responses to the research questions are discussed in the following sections.
5.4.1. A Theoretical Experiential Learning Model For Study Programs

The primary purpose of the study was to discover the theoretical model underpinning the experiential learning programs examined in the study. As a first step, the study reviewed the key concepts of learning in Chapter Two (section 2.5.2, pp. 92-93), finding that experiential learning:

a. is socially-mediated and student-centred (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978; Henson, 2003);
b. is strongly autonoetic (Tulving, 2002);
c. relies on distinctive settings (Miller & Boud, 1996);
d. requires realistic problem-solving activities (Bruner, 1996, p. 65; Gordin, et al., 2000);
e. involves risk; learners make mistakes (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1997 [1938]);
f. involves reflection (Dewey, 1921, 1997 [1938]; Fenwick, 2000);
g. is transformative, leading to personal growth (Miller & Boud, 1996; Dewey, 1997 [1938]); and
h. leads to the construction of new knowledge (Wells, 1999).

Through close examination of the data collected at the six programs in the study, however, it is shown that these elements are common to all programs and that they do form a closely interlinked theoretical structure that underpins experiential learning. There are three basic components in each experiential learning transaction: learner(s), problem, and setting. These three components comprise the model of experiential learning at its most fundamental level, which is operationalised within the tightly interlinked structure formed by the four essential elements of experiential learning: challenging setting, constructed social interaction, tolerance of risk, and enduring learning through reflection. These four essential elements determine where experiential learning takes place, how learners interact in problem solving and with what degree of risk and novelty, and how learning outcomes, in the form of new knowledge and modified behaviour, are realised through reflection.
5.4.2. Essential and Optional Elements of Experiential Learning Programs

The second research question sought to identify the essential and optional elements of the experiential learning programs studied. The core learning processes in each program in the study reflect a strong degree of similarity, despite the diversity of choice in settings and program emphases. The four essential elements identified in the findings are common across all programs in both importance to, and function within, the learning processes.

This commonality of essential elements across programs is supported by, and reflected in, the high degree of successful staff mobility between the programs. Successful teacher mobility across four of the six programs suggests that the core experiential learning processes are common and therefore teacher skills and experience are readily transferrable between programs. Although staff mobility may also be a factor in promoting the commonality of essential elements, two programs – Callistemon and Darwinia – did not have any teaching staff with experience in any other experiential learning program and yet still demonstrated a similar consistency in the core learning processes. The way in which these shared elements are specifically manifested in each program, however, reflects subtle variations in choices of design and implementation.

The options available to experiential learning programs are exercised in the institutional choices of program design and implementation. Specifically, these are choices of the actual location of the program, program duration, the degree of risk tolerated in both design and practice, the mode of reflection, and content emphasis made by each institution; the delivery of a parallel mainstream curriculum is also an option. These choices reflect the character and culture of the parent school, choices made by founding managers and teachers, and institutional factors such as parent expectations, academic expectations, and financial means.

Choice of setting reflects a complex range of institutional and individual factors. The setting of the parent school is an important factor in the ultimate
choice of setting, as all schools observed deliberately selected a setting that offered contrast with the parent school setting. Three recently established programs in the study, Callistemon, Darwinia and Ferntree, all took the notion of contrast further, choosing settings that offered contrast to other existing experiential programs offered by competitor schools. Choice of setting may reflect what is thematically or culturally important to a school, such as the environmental emphasis at Boronia, the community emphasis at Ferntree, and the adventure emphasis at Acacia.

Program content is inextricably tied to the range of activities and experiences possible within the immediate setting chosen by the school. Settings range from urban streets to farms and remote mountaintops, each affording an opportunity for a specific type of experience that is unique to the setting, but each of which performs a similar theoretical function in experiential learning transactions. Schools, therefore, shape the thematic content of their programs through selection of setting and vice versa.

While risk is an essential element of experiential learning, the degree of risk tolerated in program design and implementation may vary considerably. This variation is based on school and teacher choices, such as the properties of the setting itself, institutional risk appetite reflected in the type and degree of challenge in experiential activities, and the level of teacher experience and confidence. Some settings are, by the nature of the challenge offered, or the operational complexities associated with the specific location, more inherently risky than others. Schools may moderate risk by adjusting the degree of contrast, or the physical, social or cultural distance, between the experiential and mainstream settings. The range of challenges and activities offered also reflects institutional choices regarding risk. Finally, individual teachers may also exercise choice in the level of risk tolerated in their own programs and activities.

Program duration offers choice to each school. It is not evident in this study that the programs of one year’s duration are experientially superior to the shorter programs studied. Whether this holds true for even shorter programs
of one week’s duration or less is not evident in the data, as a comparative analysis of the impact of program duration on learning was not a specific aim of the study. However, it could be asserted that many of developments would be hard to replicate except in embryonic form in a week or less. The data did show, however, that two one-year programs, Acacia and Eucalypt, both implement parallel mainstream academic curricula at the respective remote campuses for reasons of long-term educational continuity for participating students. This choice results in some intra-institutional tension and compromise for both the experiential and academic programs. Similar tensions exist at the other one-year program, Callistemon, but the integration of the academic and experiential elements is much closer there, in both intention and execution. The three shorter programs all demonstrate a greater degree of integration between the experiential and academic elements of their respective programs and parent school curricula are suspended for the duration of these programs.

While the practice of reflection is common to all programs studied, the modes and genres of reflection adopted in each program are informed to an extent by choices made by individual teachers, even within a single program. For example, one teacher might prefer a written reflection to a verbal one, or one institution may require students to submit a formal reflection to teacher scrutiny, whereas another may leave this to student discretion. The mode and genre of reflection as a secular or faith-based activity also reflects an institutional and individual choice that affects the specifics of the practice, but not its central position in the experiential learning process.

In summary, there are no optional elements in the experiential learning model, but there are choices to be made in program design and implementation that lead to variations in the specific realisation of experiential learning in each program. These variations reflect both institutional and individual teacher choices, arising from a wide range of factors that have an impact on the individual character and specific learning content of each experiential learning program. The core experiential learning processes evident, however, are universal.
5.4.3. Incorporation of Elements of the Experiential Learning Model into Mainstream Learning

The third question posed at the beginning of this study sought to find ways in which elements of the experiential learning model might be incorporated into mainstream learning. With their insistence on being different from their own parent school, the programs studied here cannot, by definition, be replicated in the mainstream. However, evidence from the study suggests that it may be highly desirable to incorporate findings regarding the experiential learning model into mainstream learning. The pivotal role played by setting in experiential learning, for example, suggests the wider role of setting in all forms of learning could bear greater scrutiny. The nature of risk and reflection in learning also need closer consideration for the role both elements not only do but also might play in mainstream learning. If setting and risk are essential elements of experiential learning, then they are potentially important in all modes of learning.

The primary implication of the study finding on the role of setting in learning for mainstream classrooms is that the design of all types of learning spaces should reflect and incorporate the experiential principle of learning that setting is a co-participant in the experiential learning transaction. The higher the degree of experientiality in the learning activity in the mainstream, the more important the contribution to learning made by the setting. To an extent, this principle has been adopted in the Reggio Emilia Approach (Gandini, 1998), but its application is limited to early childhood learning. What could be realised is that setting is significant in any learning that either explicitly or implicitly involves autonoesis, as this is, by the definition developed in this study, experiential. Thus, experiential learning transactions may take place in any educational setting.

At the start of this study it was noted that schools tend to select specialized, and often remote, settings for their experiential learning programs, each offering a strong contrast to the mainstream learning environment. To bring
these challenging settings to the classroom in a literal sense would therefore logically require the translocation of the setting itself. This is both impractical and undesirable. The certainty of the controlled classroom setting is needed by other modes of learning conducted in the classroom. Furthermore, the strength of the contrast between the daily safety and certainty of the classroom and the novel risk and authenticity of the experiential setting lends power to the latter. To make what is novel routine would remove some of its power to challenge learners and shape memories into enduring learning.

The study provides a theoretical justification for the incorporation of multiple settings into learning programs, to ensure that learners have experience learning in a diverse range of settings in order to develop fully learner cognition. Social roles similarly require a range of settings to approach a higher state of development. Higher cognitive functions, and specifically language, are developed through social interaction, which often occur in settings that are not formally educational in structure or purpose (Wells, 1999), but which afford opportunities to learn in many different ways. A multi-setting richness may facilitate the development of more complex systems of social and linguistic interaction. Indeed, the homogenising isolation of learning in the safe, dedicated settings of mainstream education may be counter-productive: the segregation of learning environments from everyday life has been seen as the principal reason for the perceived failures of mainstream education for many decades (Dewey, 1997 [1938]).

Experiential learning emphasises teamwork, joint goals, shared resources, shared success and consequences, and reflection, elements that are often less important in mainstream learning, with its stronger focus on hard evidence of individual performance (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994; Neill, 2006). This individual and evidence-based approach is seen to create inert or irrelevant learning by some critics, lacking an immediate or even mid-term practical, real-world applications (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994, p. 268; Breunig, 2005, pp. 112-116; Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008). Learning must lead to the creation of new knowledge and modified behaviour that is not just measured or manifested individually, but must also be directly relevant to the
learner. The contrast between the enduring, episodic memories of experiential learning and the context-free semantic learning of academic curricula is measured in its autonoeticity: the extent to which learning is cognitively linked to a learner’s self-awareness of their experience of the world. This suggests that experientially enriching mainstream learning might be achieved through a greater focus on learner autonoesis as a highly durable and personally relevant form of cognitive process within an overarching framework of learning.

Autonoesis and reflection are linked through the post-experiential cognitive and metacognitive processing of experiential stimuli that facilitates the realisation of learning. Reflection also exists in mainstream education. In some curricular frameworks, for example, the International Baccalaureate Organisation’s Learner Profile (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2008), there is an explicit acknowledgement of the need for reflection in all learning. However, the extent to which reflection, both formal and informal, is a widespread practice in all learning was not clear in the review of key concepts. The clear link between reflection and experience evident in the study emphasises the need for reflection to be incorporated into all learning with an experiential component.

In the context of this discussion on what elements of experiential learning might be incorporated into mainstream education, the broader educational challenge remains unchanged from Dewey’s time: how to make learning more effective, more authentic, and ultimately, more relevant to life beyond school (Dewey, 1997 [1938]). The lessons of the experiential learning model point to the need to reconsider how where we learn affects what we learn. It shows that risks are necessary for learning to take place, and that mistakes arise in the process of learning. Finally, pausing and reflecting are integral to the cognition of learning.
5.5. *Summary of Chapter*

The sections in Chapter Five have identified the model of learning underpinning experiential learning, and presented the primary theoretical implications arising from the study findings. The research questions were then addressed.

The study identified the model of learning underpinning the programs examined and also found that the elements of the experiential learning model identified in the study are all essential; choice is exercised through the specific challenge, content or character of each program. Finally, the study offered ways in which an increased focus on setting, experientiality and autonoeticity might enhance mainstream learning.
6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1. Overview of Chapter

This chapter offers conclusions drawn from the study concerning the educational applications of experiential learning. The wider societal and cultural role of contemporary experiential learning and possible links with traditional rites of passage for adolescents are also considered in the light of the findings. The chapter concludes with a summary of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research in the field of experiential learning.

6.2. Educational Implications

The study opened with questions about the proliferation, purpose, and theoretical base of experiential learning programs in Australian independent schools. These programs are promoted by schools, and accepted by parents and students, as innovative, progressive, and memorable. Without a clearly articulated theory of experiential learning on which to base promotion of the programs, the schools attach importance to the intended learning outcomes, such as independence, leadership, resilience, courage, and maturity, as a way to secure parental and student commitment to the programs.

There is a degree of implicit student and parental trust and acceptance of the educational value of the programs to justify the cost and disruption to schooling. The proliferation of this type of program among independent schools suggests that there is a widespread belief in their value and this has inspired others to emulate the pioneer schools. Access to these programs to date, however, has, in all but a few cases, been limited to Year 9 students attending well-established independent schools.

From the evidence of this study, it can be asserted that the broad popularity of these programs for Year 9 students in independent schools has not been informed by a strong understanding of an underlying theoretical model of
experiential learning. This suggests that the trust or belief in these programs derives from other sources, and that the programs may be seen to serve other educational and social needs of the students as perceived by parents, teachers, and the students themselves.

In Chapter One, it was noted that the reason for targeting Year 9 for these programs was unaddressed by the schools in their program descriptions. However, it is no secret that in mainstream school settings, Year 9 students are often reported to be difficult to teach, disengaged, and disaffected (Cole, 2006; Office for Policy Research and Innovation, 2009). The proliferation of these programs may be seen as a response to this problem, and their popularity, a measure of their success in meeting the special learning needs of the age group. Recent Victorian studies of Year 9 students have found that student motivation in learning declines steadily in all schooling sectors from Grade 4 Primary (10 year olds), with school disengagement and absenteeism peaking in Year 9; and that mainstream learning environments were ill-suited to the educational needs of this latter group (Cole, 2006; Cole, Mahar, & Vindurampulle, 2006, pp. 2-3; Office for Policy Research and Innovation, 2009, p. 9). One study has also found a strong correlation between student intentions and engagement at Year 9, and completion of Year 12 (Cole, et al., 2006, p. 3). Year 9 is therefore both a difficult year to teach, but at the same time, a critical year for student retention and educational outcomes in later years. It is a period of adolescent development, in which any innovation that enhances learner motivation and engagement will potentially reap long-term rewards for learners, schools, and the wider community.

This study sought to discover a shared or unified model of education underpinning this type of experiential learning program. It demonstrated that, despite it not being made explicit, the experiential learning achieved in these programs conforms to a clear theoretical model with a high degree of congruence across the programs studied. It was showed that while there are many different implementations and variations on approach that are used in these programs, at a fundamental theoretical level there is a single model.
The nature of the experiential learning transactions in the programs was found to be structurally different to that which might be expected of the Piagetian model of constructivist learning in a typical classroom. Blending engaging settings, social interaction, authentic problems, risk, and reflection, this mode of learning is qualitatively different to classroom learning and, in the programs studied, the model of learning developed from the study findings explains how enduring educational and developmental outcomes that are not possible in a mainstream school setting are achieved.

Educationally, it might be concluded, therefore, that wider employment of experiential learning of the type examined in this study offers schools a means of addressing the disengagement and disaffection associated with the particular year group. The theoretical model explains how experiential learning works, and provides a set of principles by which programs in other settings might be designed and implemented. Access to this type of program, therefore, should and can be far more widespread than is presently the case; students across all schools should have access to experiential learning activities designed around the setting-based model theorised in this study.

6.3. Socio-Cultural Implications

At a socio-cultural level, the residential experiential learning programs, in two different dimensions – setting and socialisation – appear to parallel very traditional, even ancient, ritualistic practices that are deeply rooted in the cultural observances of earlier civilisations (Andrews, 1999). These programs therefore may be seen to act as a form of social initiation rite for adolescents, a rite of passage (van Gennep, 2004 [1909]), marking their transition into adulthood, thereby meeting a social need that is perhaps frustrated by the widespread abandonment of such traditional rituals in the contemporary western world (Stokrocki, 1997; Davis, 2003).

As a form of initiation, the residential experiential programs prepare learners for their adult responsibilities in the wider community through a process of isolation, confrontation, risk, engagement, and reflection (Maddern, 1990;
Bell, 2003; Neill, 2003). Through isolation and challenge, students are encouraged or compelled to take responsibility for themselves and others, and exercise courage in the face of physical challenges. In particular, the strong emphasis on the natural environment in the wilderness or rural experiential learning programs may be interpreted as a form of initiation for environmental custodians, who are appreciative of the setting’s natural beauty and protective of its flora and fauna (Boulet & Clabburn, 2003).

In the structure and challenges of these experiential programs there are discernible echoes of adolescent initiation rites from earlier ages and cultures. Traditional initiation rites comprise different stages: separation or isolation from society through a journey; preparation and instruction from adult elders; a transition or visioning process; participation and testing; and a reincorporation with a change in status and responsibility on return (Maddern, 1990, pp. 29-30; Delaney, 1995; Neill, 2003; van Gennep, 2004 [1909]). Given the Australian setting of the study, the traditional initiation rites still practiced by Australian Indigenous cultures – known as ceremony – manifest strong parallels with some of the philosophical elements underpinning these experiential learning programs (Bourke & Bourke, 1995).

For example, Indigenous ceremonies are conducted away from family and community, in settings that are deemed to be particularly significant because of their special qualities; the time of testing is confronting to the participants and can take many weeks to complete; on completion, initiates assume adult responsibilities within their respective cultural group (Bourke & Bourke, 1995). Thus the initiation ritual itself consists of isolation and testing, and its purpose is to prepare initiates to construct special knowledge and accept adult responsibilities, both of which reflect deeply embedded cultural values.

These rituals mirror the type of experiential learning examined in this study in many ways: the isolation of special experiential settings, the leadership and instruction from teachers acting as elders, the testing through challenge, and the changed learner perceptions and status on return to the parent school. At both a philosophical and practical level, therefore, the parallels between
traditional forms of initiation and the type of experiential learning examined in this study are clear and compelling.

As an initiation rite, the experiential learning program contributes to the socialisation of these adolescent learners, marking a critical milestone in their journey towards adult independence. It offers an alternative to the contemporary trend towards a steady incremental creep into adulthood, where many of the traditional social events and ceremonies that marked the end of childhood in an earlier time have been abandoned or rendered meaningless (Stokrocki, 1997). Experiential challenges offer the potential to act as rites of passage, providing visible and memorable social markers in the otherwise undistinguished contemporary journey towards adulthood from childhood (Garrison, 1998; Davis, 2003).

The settings examined in this study act in a way that is similar to those chosen for rites of initiation, as they afford the learner both knowledge and testing. Initiates and learners gain status and new responsibilities in their respective communities through their mastery of knowledge and testing in the ritual setting. Traditionally, these ritual settings are seen as special places with particular qualities that are needed to complete the rite successfully (Bourke & Bourke, 1995). Isolated settings offer rupture of social contact, particularly with immediate family members, testing independence, courage and character. Natural experiential learning settings in the study in particular are treated in a respectful, even reverential, way that is strongly congruent with traditional practices. There is a tension, possibly even a contradiction, to the notion: on the one hand, from an environmental perspective, natural settings are held to be pristine, possessing a purity of spirit that can be known and appreciated – that speaks for itself – and demands our respect and protection; on the other hand, and at the same time, the untamed dimension of wilderness affords a test of character, challenging our courage, probing our fears, questioning our civilisation.

In the former view, appreciation of setting as a manifestation of natural edenic perfection is similar to that which inspires and motivates the environmental
movement, where natural wilderness is seen as the last remnant of paradise lost, endangered and in need of protection (Merchant, 2004, p. 3). Learners learn to suppress their selfish inclinations towards exploitation, or taming, of nature. Through direct experience, learners develop an appreciation of nature’s aesthetic beauty and also its fragility. They experience a direct sensory connection with the setting through visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile stimulation that is constructed through the learning experience. This direct experience of one’s surroundings is the *education of things* (Rousseau), with setting as both the object and agent of learning. The setting is treated as a precious and threatened heritage, given over in stewardship for future generations.

The latter view sees nature having the power to test of our *civilisation*, where the untamed, *hard* elements of nature, and our own fears and shortcomings, must be faced and overcome. The experiential programs in the study offer challenges that test skill, endurance, courage, and intelligence. This testing is physical, emotional, and even spiritual, for learners. With this testing, there is a risk, of mistakes, of consequences, and failure. Each generation of learners must face *risk* in this passage into adulthood, as challenge without risk, and particularly the risk of defeat, is meaningless from a ritual perspective. Risk makes the achievement of mastery more significant, more memorable, more enduring. Success in the testing serves as an important symbol of survival, of the reassertion of human supremacy over nature.

There is a potential contradiction implicit in associating both *nurturing* and *testing* with setting. This apparent contradiction is reconciled through the notion that both our reverence and our testing of setting are informed and constrained by our humanity and its attendant needs. We nurture and protect the environment, but it must also provide for us, and sustain us. We pit our skill and courage against the environment, but not to the point of mutual destruction. It is a metaphorical form of *sparring*, where competition and respect strike a dynamic balance that must be monitored and carefully managed. Testing and appreciation demand commitment and maturity from learners: both pose risks to learners and demand adult-like judgement. This
metaphor of setting, as both a worthy adversary and an object of admiration, highlights further the extent to which the setting acts as an important co-participant in experiential learning.

The learners in these programs were taken to places in which the experience of learning reflects deep-seated, yet implicit, cultural beliefs that are largely hidden from view in the mainstream classroom. To their families, their schools, and perhaps the community, these experiences serve to replace forgotten rituals and abandoned socialisation ceremonies and mark their transition into the adult world. The myths of natural perfection and ritualistic mastery of the elements are not uncommon themes in western education, but essentially as objects of semantic inquiry, not direct experience. It is only when the relatively safety and predictability of the classroom and the family home are forsaken, that these learners experience and remember, transforming their attitudes, knowledge, and identity in ways that resonate deeply and broadly in their future learning.

6.4. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

6.4.1. Limitations of Study

The scope of this study was limited to an examination of long-term experiential learning programs offered to Year 9 students in Australian independent schools. Experiential programs of one month’s duration or more were not typically offered to other year levels, although the majority of independent schools surveyed at the beginning of the study offered shorter forms of experiential learning to both older and younger students, typically of one week or less. This common practice suggests that there is a shared belief among independent schools that this type of program is not suitable, or at least less suitable, or less needed, for younger and older students and that the learning needs of Year 9 students in these schools are best met in this type of confronting, isolating, and challenging program.

Sources of data were limited to publicly available documents, direct observations, and ethnographic interviews with teachers and managers
directly involved in the implementation and leadership of participating school programs. The ethnographic interviews in particular offer a teacher-centric perspective on experiential learning, with learner perceptions reported second-hand through the eyes of teachers. Constraints on the time available to access to teachers, limited the window of observation in each program to a visit of two to three days’ duration. Visits of longer duration would have added to the possibility of more extensive observation of teacher practice.

Finally, as noted in Chapter Three, this study focused on the experiential learning programs of six schools. Data provided were detailed in context and content so as to permit the greatest chance of re-use in other settings. The extent to which the findings of this study might be applied to other similar programs of experiential learning, however, remains to be tested.

6.4.2. Recommendations for Future Research

There are four key theoretical aspects of the findings of this study that point to the need for further research: the role of setting, the potential educational implications of episodic memory, the place of risk in learning, and the structure and practice of reflection in learning. The limitations of the study outlined above also highlight specific aspects of experiential learning programs that need further study, particularly the methodological constraints imposed by using teachers as the primary informants.

The role of setting as a co-participant in learning emerges as the main area in which further research is needed. As suggested above, examination of a wider range of settings may shed further light on nuances the role of setting in experiential learning. Beyond this, the broader theoretical question of setting as a co-participant in learning bears further research scrutiny.

The intentional incorporation of episodic memory in learning activities is still in its infancy, with relatively few references to the practice in educational writings (Herbert, 1999; Herbert & Burt, 2004). Specifically, the role of episodic memory in both experiential and semantic learning needs further exploration.
The connection between experience, self-awareness, and episodic memory described in this study could also be explored in greater depth, as could the connection between semantic and episodic memory functions.

The experiential function of risk, as a dimension of cognitive dissonance and its function in the formation and resolution of the learning problem, suggests that it may have a wider educational role that was not evident in the writings consulted during the review of key concepts. The capacity of teachers to assess risk, both for student and themselves, and act accordingly is a part of this question. Institutional risk, as opposed to a teacher’s individual, professional risk, and its impact on learning outcomes and teacher intervention thresholds in experiential learning, offers another area in need of further examination.

The impact of facilitation on experiential reflection and the role of reflection in non-experiential learning are areas warranting further investigation. The apparent contradiction between the espoused student centredness of experiential pedagogy and the implicit teacher-centric structure of facilitated reflection requires clarification.

The study sought to discover a single unified model of education underpinning these experiential learning programs and the structure and essential elements of this model are evident in the findings presented in this thesis. The wide variations observed in the manifestations of this type of learning suggests that there is a need for further multifaceted and integrated research into the ways in which these variations impact the effectiveness of learning.

Finally, the methodological constraints arising from the selection of teachers from a limited sample of Australian independent schools as the primary informants for the study suggests two avenues for further research based on a different methodological approach. Direct access to more teachers involved in the delivery of other programs, particularly in state system programs, may shed light on the possible contrasts in independent and state school cultures and the impact this may have on experiential learning programs. Adopting a
methodological approach in which students themselves become the primary informants for research on experiential learning programs offers another avenue.

6.5. **Summary of Chapter**

The study achieved its intended purpose of identifying and describing the model of learning underpinning the experiential learning programs examined in the study. It was concluded that these programs are believed by parents, schools and students to meet important educational and social needs of Year 9 students in their respective school communities, despite a lack of theoretical information. The programs are held to deal with adolescent disaffection with mainstream education and, as such, make an important contribution to future educational outcomes for participating students. The model developed in the study, if employed more widely, offers the potential to enhance educational outcomes for a much larger group of disaffected Year 9 students. A further conclusion was that the programs may meet the need to provide social ceremonies as developmental milestones for adolescents, and in so doing, fulfill the function of a form of initiation ritual for their respective school communities.

Finally, the limitations of the study were outlined and possible directions for further study of other experiential learning programs set out, particularly targeting a different schooling sector, sample of settings, program duration, and age cohort.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix 1: An Investigation of Experiential Learning Programs in Australian Secondary Schools: Participant Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Interview transcripts
Appendix 1: Participant Questionnaire

An Investigation of Experiential Learning Programs in Australian Secondary Schools

Participant Questionnaire

1. Personal Information

Surname: _____________________________ Given Names: _____________________________

Male: [ ] Female: [ ] Age: _____________________________

Highest Qualification: Bachelors Degree  Position: ____________

Years of teaching experience: 1

Teaching method/specialisation: (1) Outdoor Education (2) ____________

2. Program Information

School/Campus: _____________________________ Year Level(s): _____________________________

Length of Program: _______ days  Number of students: _____________________________

3. Essential Elements of Program

Please indicate which of the following are essential elements of your program (place a tick in first column) and prioritise your choices in the second column (beginning with ‘1’ as highest priority):

- Problem-solving [ ]
- Team-work [ ]
- Perceived danger [ ]
- Isolation [ ]
- Physical challenge [ ]
- Unique setting [ ]
- Environment [ ]
- Skill development [ ]
- Knowledge creation [ ]
- Highly memorable [ ]
- Active participation [ ]
- Reflection [ ]
- Personal growth [ ]
- Risk taking [ ]
- Independence [ ]
- Self-reliance [ ]
- Extended contact [ ]
- Residential setting [ ]
- Other (specify) [ ]

4. Unique Elements of Your Program

What are the elements of your current program that you believe are unique?
5. **External influences on program principles**

What (if any) have been the major external influences on the development of your program or your teaching?

6. **Contrast with mainstream learning programs**

What are the major points of distinction between your program and mainstream educational programs?

7. **Use of setting**

In what ways do you use the setting of your program to achieve outcomes with your students?

8. **Student response to your Program**

What aspects of your program do you think students find memorable?

9. **Student outcomes**

What are the most important outcomes for your students?

10. **Staff outcomes**

As a result of your involvement with your program, what are your most important outcomes, both professional and personal?

11. **Integration with Mainstream Curriculum**

In what ways are the student outcomes in your program linked to the mainstream curriculum in sponsoring/parent institutions?

12. **Summary**

How would you summarise the learning that is undertaken in your program?

Please save this form when complete and forward it as an attachment to: mpritchard@kormilda.nt.edu.au

Thank you for participating in the study.

(note: This questionnaire form was produced and distributed as an electronic form with forced choice options for qualifications and experience. As these choices were only available from drop-down menu in the electronic form, they cannot be reproduced here.)
Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts

This section includes 39 interview transcripts. Two transcripts have not been included to protect the confidentiality of the participating school and informant. Note that pseudonyms have been used in all transcripts to preserve anonymity. Place names and school specific nomenclature have also been modified to protect confidentiality.

Interview 1

Interview on 16/06/2007
Brian Niven – (School A) Acacia

MP
What do you think is distinctive about the learning that happens at Acacia?

BN
I guess it’s an all encompassing program. It’s got physical aspects, it’s got the academic aspects, living with others and a very unique environment and setting.

MP
Ok so it’s got all those elements. How do they create a learning experience for students?

BN
I guess from taking them away from their normal lives, their normal experiences to somewhere their life becomes more simple. They learn quite simple units. They have a fairly straight forward timetable where things happen pretty much the same week in and week out. The regulatory of life, which I guess is challenging at the same time. A lot of them don’t come from a background of doing a lot of running, or a lot of hiking or a lot of physical activity. So there is a challenge in that area and the academic area where there is high expectations in that area and that comes from some of them living at home and others living a large boarding houses in a quite close compact unit of thirteen people.

MP
Is there one way that you would characterize the learning that the students do here?

BN
I don’t know if there is just one thing but life skills I think would be the major learning. Yes general life skills. There are so many things here that equate to how things happen here. Those skills become important. How to manage conflict, having to do something that you don’t particularly like doing but still do it well and those sorts of things. They are all sort of things that are part of the program but not written into it.
MP
So those things are not explicit, they are implicit in what happens here daily?

BN
Pretty much yes. But who knows, something might go wrong in a dormitory.

MP
What might go wrong in a dormitory?

BN
Any number of things. I only know with boys dormitories, but it can be anything from someone’s magazine going missing and somebody says something negative to them. Then their world breaks down and they lash out at someone else. It could be any number of things that set off a chain reaction.

MP
What would a student at Acacia learn from that?

BN
It could be any number of things. If you are looking at the person on the side who’s magazine has gone missing, they can deal with it in an appropriate way or an inappropriate way, it’s their choice. They can start accusing other people, or they can nicely ask some people if they had seen it. If they find out that somebody has it and didn’t ask if they could borrow it and lash out at them and that’s obviously another inappropriate way of dealing with it. So we try and turn those things that are quite negative into a learning experience. So you could say how do you think you handled that situation, can you think of a better way to do it, how would you do it next time? You have made a mistake this time how would you handle it next time?

MP
So you approach is to reflect on it. How would you handle the magazine example? Would you say let’s look for it?

BN
Yes. I guess you would do it a little like our parents would do it, initially. Where do you last remember having it, or then can we go somewhere else, do you think it might be in some ones property, was it in the unit or outside the unit? Start with leading questions.

MP
I am really interested in learning from mistakes or errors and that’s one example of it. Are some other ones that you can think of? Where you manage the student through and how would you go about doing that?

BN
Depending on the situation in a number of ways. Small things a simple chat might be all that’s required. A larger thing there is generally a consequence around here. So there will be a point where you say ok you have obviously
done this wrong and we have a consequence that we have to enforce. How are you going to ensure that this isn’t going to happen again? Quite often it’s a reconciliatory consequence as well. So it might be an enforced consequence when you are out of bounds you need to go to an early morning labour and your labour is because you were out of bounds by going into X dormitory and throwing a rock on the roof and you will be picking up rocks in the front of the garden area, or something like that.

MP
So you pointed out the consequence of the mistake?

BN
Yes only because in my view there are consequences to everything and we have to deal with it in this way. This is your action, this is your consequence to fix it up and make sure that it doesn’t happen again.

MP
What about as part of the program that you are working on would that have consequences? I mean students make decisions pretty regularly outside of a classroom. It might be on a hike, or a run, or a navigation exercise. What time would you intervene?

BN
Generally I guess when you can see that its going to either erupt or they have reached a point where they are just imploding or not doing anything to move forward basically. Like when we are out hiking I have followed students where a couple have gone in the wrong direction, knowing that its in the wrong direction. Its all of a sudden dawned on them that they have traveled for a long time since they knew where they were and have started to argue with each other and that sort of thing. That is where we usually step in and say we are not getting anywhere by arguing about it. Where do we know where we are, what do we see around us and how can we backtrack and go to our last point where we knew where we were? And then put it back on them.

MP
Is that something that you would use later on?

BN
You mean reflect on later on? More than likely, or at least catch up with them later on and say well you have been lost. Did you learn something from that and how would you deal with it next time?

MP
How will they generally respond to you if you raise it again?

BN
They generally pretty good and they are normally receptive kids. I guess as long as we know what’s going on and at least try and direct them in the right direction, but we will let them go in the wrong direction up to a point.

MP
Because I have been involved in some of these programs myself. I wonder what is it that sticks in their brain? I wonder it is that they carry in their memories. What sticks and what evaporates?

BN
There’s a lot of things, like seeing people come back like that. They will come back and know exactly who was next to them on either side. I think the closeness of the living they carry with them. They often remember events and things like that out on hikes and what runs were difficult. So I guess between the living and the challenges that they have overcome are the major memories.

MP
So it’s some of those memorable challenges that they have made?

BN
Yes and when the weather was bad and they woke up in the morning and they were snowed in under (XXXX) with probably 30 cm of snow once they told the story about three times! Those challenging times. It’s tough and its cold and you are uncomfortable but you make it through.

MP
This is coming back to your experience as an educator here. Do you use the memories that the students collect as they go through the year?

BN
I think to a certain extent. It’s more difficult to reflect on them during the year than it is for them to reflect once they have left. It’s more lasting I think when they have left. For the majority of the boys mature as the year goes along and have changed a lot over the year and really at the end of the year they understand the importance of most things.

MP
How do they express that realization? How do they say that was important?

BN
I think they will generally come up and thank you for something or say that was a really good time that we had on (XXXX) or wherever it might be. In a reflection where you know that it’s important when they actually bring it up and speak about it again. Also, I think it’s also important once they have left and actually realise what they miss about the place and what then they see as not being in their lives anymore. A lot of them email me back at least in the first term after they left saying how are things going, what’s this year like?

MP
What do you think that they miss?

BN
A lot of them miss having something to do all the time. The sort of business of the place. They go from just having a fairly structured environment to finding that they have a lot of free time and some of them really struggle because of the fact that they have so much free time.

MP
There’s suddenly lack of structure?

BN
Yes suddenly lack of structure. They have weekends that they can do whatever they like, after school there’s no runs organized or they don’t have to show at a certain time or chop wood or those sorts of things to keep other things running.

MP
How many of them keep running after they leave here?

BN
Quite a few do initially and slowly peter off, but I think a lot of them pick up sport because they are now fitter than they were beforehand.

MP
How would a student measure their achievement in being here? I mean tests evaluations you can’t give them if you have got 76% at Acacia. It would be hard to do that wouldn’t it?

BN
It is a bit hard to do that. I guess they get little indicators along the way. They record their …time every week so they can see if their times are getting faster. They can watch their grades and academic attitudes and see if they are performing better in class. A lot of them will keep track on how many km a day they did on a hike. So in first term I could only hike 8 km and we did just 25 km in term four. That was a big day but we did it.

MP
Do you think that those achievements are well integrated into what happens at Acacia?

BN
Probably not so much. No there’s a definite discontinuation of some of the things that they do here. They started (I am not sure if they are still doing it or not) a bit of a lead up in year 8 starting to get the kids running and more active before they show up. There’s not much of a follow up afterwards. It does bother me a bit. I had a concern when I was working at Grevillea Campus (note: Grevillea Campus is a long-term, Year 9, experiential learning program offered by another Australian independent school. This pseudonym is used for
all other references to this program in the interview transcripts). I was actually at Brown Street. So the way they had the program running at that stage was that each house went down to Grevillea for a term and then came back and the transition from going from Brown Street down to Grevillea and back to Brown Street was I guess pretty much the same as this. You are all of a sudden removed from all normal school structure and home life to a different situation where they are living in a house and they have to cook for themselves and have a reasonable amount of freedom and able to make choices and then go back to a more strict academic type program again.

MP
Are there some similarities between the two programs do you think?

BN
There are some similarities like the beach and that sort of thing and different in focus as well I think. The focus on cooking for your selves and cleaning for your selves and smaller groups. It was more self sufficient. The problem with it just simply a program that ran for that term and there wasn't a lead up to and a post. It would probably be a good idea in this program to have something leading up to it in year 8 and something after in year 10.

MP
Any sense of comparison between the outcomes between the two? Any comments between the differences?

BN
Yes they actually in different ways achieved quite similar outcomes. A lot of them matured and became good decision makers and more accountable for their actions during both programs.

MP
Do you have a sense for example here that you could achieve the outcomes in say a semester?

BN
Yes possibly. But it is good to have them for the whole year where for some of those boys it doesn't make sense to them until they are in term four whereas, I think the girls may understand the program in a term or a semester.

MP
I am interested in the social interaction that occurs here. You mentioned some of the boys not getting it until term four. What do you mean?

BN
Learning consequences for their actions right up to term four. Most of them start to I guess, change their behaviour but they generally won't step into the wheel shed in term four and generally won’t be getting detentions and early
morning labours and things like that. But that’s a behaviour change and I think that they actually have a comprehension change during the year.

MP
What’s the difference do you think between a behavioural change and comprehension change?

BN
Well a behavioural change is like to teach a dog to sit. Whereas a lot of the boys say ok this is a situation where I have got this consequence before and I am not going to do it now but I haven’t yet quite figured out why I am not going to do it. But at some point they say I understand now because when I do that John gets angry at me or whatever it might be.

MP
So there’s a strong sense about them learning of their affect on others. Would you say that’s the important part of it?

BN
Yes. A lot of the consequences are imposed because it has an effect on the community then themselves and that’s why those rules are there.

MP
Do the students get to negotiate any of these rules or are they things that are imposed from the outside?

BN
There’s a combination of both. Within the unit themselves they can come up with their own set of rules and there are external ones that they can’t change. Like being unable to walk around out of their unit at night.

MP
Are there any examples of those sorts of macro rules that might change through the year?

BN
No not really, there’s no overbearing macro rules that will change over the year. There’s nothing where we remove everything, but the need for them to be there as the year goes on but the rules are never removed.

MP
Does the need disappear because of the learning that occurs?

BN
Yes they realise that it’s for the betterment of community that those rules are there.

MP
Do you have any evidence that those changes are longer term? Do they actually apply in their relationships here beyond Acacia?
BN
I get a bit of feedback from parents when they go home in the break the parents say he’s so much more mature now and helps around the house and I guess it’s the realization that mum does all the cleaning and I haven’t been doing that and I know what it’s like when someone in the unit doesn’t do their share. So I am going to do my share and make it easier on mum. The parents are the major feedback for those sorts of things.

MP
Do students get a chance to write those things down?

BN
Yes they keep a journal that they fill in of their journey as they go. The boys write how they did in their cross country and how good the community is going and how they got to have a roast dinner and things like that. We don’t get to see a lot of that either it’s a purely personal thing.

MP
I heard someone mention at one of the meals the visual diary. What’s the visual diary?

BN
A visual diary is being used in PE and Art. It’s called a visual diary in Art because it’s where they keep all their displays and artwork and they were using their visual diary in PE as a stress management tool. Getting them to log when they were feeling under stress and what had been the lead up to that so they can identify what issues.

MP
What sort of things would they log in?

BN
I didn’t do my maths work last night and got a detention today and that meant that I missed out on doing music practice and that sort of thing. I think it’s trying to get them to realise that there is a chain of events that led them to being under stress.

MP
What form does the ‘visual diary’ take?

BN
It was just a spiral bound book with a white cover and white pages. A journal is just a diary that we give them at the beginning of the year – a day to a page. They are not expected to write every day as such but there is the opportunity there for them to. The finish their (homework) at 8.30 and if they are done by 8.00 they can get their journal and write in their journal about the day or the last two days.
I am not sure - what is the visual diary?

The visual diary is for a specific part of the time and looking more at specific things. It was during the project period when they were doing a bit of self directed learning when a lot of their teachers were out on hikes and they had teachers filling in and they had projects to do which meant that they could go to the library and do research. And the idea of the visual diary at that stage was to allow them to keep on top and how they were feeling and how were they getting behind dealing with stress and that sort of thing.

What has your own experiences been here? What have you learnt?

Probably quite a lot but I don’t think I have ever stopped and thought about it. I guess in a lot of ways I have been challenged as much as the kids have. I was never a much of a long distance runner. A lot of what I have tried to learn about is the dealing with the whole unit which is basically more about conflict, resolution, leadership skills and I guess generally dealing with teenage boys. What’s the best way to talk to them where classroom teaching you never really focus on or have need to learn about.

Is that something that can be learnt only in this type of setting?

Probably not but I think it makes it more focused in this kind of setting.

You were just in an ordinary boarding house, I guess you would know Ed Stevens. But he had the same opportunities working with his boarders as you would have here?

I don’t think it’s as close. You are basically living with them day to day here and spend a great deal of time with them. I have worked in boarding houses as well and a lot of that interaction is one night a week or after school on the weekend or something like that. You don’t do as many things with them so you don’t have the same relationship with them. There is still a divide between them.

So the distance that you open with their normal life with their life away from Acacia, is at the same time, closed with the staff?
Yes we are much closer because we are out here doing the same things all the time.

MP
Are there any risks to you as a teacher?

BN
Oh there are some things. The boys call me Brian all the time; they find it quite funny, but I think in a way they do look up to you as a father type figure because you are the only person they have got I guess. If they have issues or they want to speak on the phone to their parents I am the one they want to see.

MP
Does that mean that you become a surrogate parent?

BN
I try and keep a definite divide between those two. Their parents are obviously the ones that are their major carers and it is difficult at times but I do try very hard to keep a divide. But at the same time a person who they can feel that they can approach.

End of Interview - BN
Interview 2

Interview on 16/06/2007
Stephen Edwards (School A) Acacia

MP
What sort of learning occurs here at Acacia?

SE
Acacia is an institution that, in my mind, straddles two areas. It’s quite innovative in terms of what it does yet it has one foot placed in tradition. Initially, I thought that tradition is something that would hold us back, but it’s all about how you perceive these things and it actually can work very much in our favour. It allows us to do lots and lots of things that institutions that are a little younger are not able to do. That’s good and it’s well understood in our parent body of what we do.

Acacia has an edge (I don’t know if edge to explain it) but it’s not easy for students here. There are lots of things we do here really do test and challenge them and we push coerce encourage to really bring out the best in students. I think the fact that we have that for well over fifty years now and it’s part of our tradition and therefore we can keep doing that because it’s not something that’s hidden or new. I think the key thing that Acacia does is resilience……and that’s really what we are on about and we do that in a whole different set of domains. We do it in an academic resilience, we do that in a physical sense and we do that more and more in an emotional and social sense.

What I find nowadays is that the young students of today tend to be less resilient than previously. The students that we have here can go to a restaurant look at a menu and converse an order in a very adult proficient way, yet they haven’t got enough life experiences underneath them to deal with experiences that don’t go well for them. I can think of a number of girls that we have here that outside their Acacia life they dress up, they have got credit cards, they have got mobile phones, they have access to money, but they struggle enormously to deal with difficult situations and they tend to fall apart.

Like every other institution we deal with issues like depression, self harm, which are all signs of their inability to cope when times aren’t exactly as you would like them. And I think more and more so that’s the case.

MP
You mentioned that you have traditions and that’s a strength here. What are some of those traditions do you think?

SE
Well I mean if you go to our hiking program. We generally cover pretty substantial kilometers in our hikes and we have done that for a long time. I am talking about 30kms in a day with big packs, early mornings, late nights.
That’s about physically pushing students and getting them to understand what they are actually capable of. So hiking is the vehicle in which we do that. This has been going on for a long, long time we tell parents what’s going on and students know what to expect.

I think if a new institution, Acacia Mark 2 if it was built down the road, would struggle to do these things. They would have a parent body that would rebel and say that we are pushing too hard or we have an unreasonable expectation.

We believe strongly in keeping students very busy with the richness and diversity within our program means that students are pretty much flat out the whole time and I think that they achieve and do enormous amount and most of which they never thought they could do, or they never thought they could do so much in one day. And that’s been the focus of this place.

A lot of people talk about reflection time. Reflection time for us is at the end of the year when we sit back and reflect on the year. We don’t build in a lot of reflection time during the year. So this place is really about doing rather than reflecting. Reflection comes later.

MP
I am interested in the fact that you are here. You are not close to Town XXXX or Region YYYYYY or the ZZZZ Peninsular. I was wondering if you feel that in any way shapes what it is that Acacia is about as an experience.

SE
It certainly does. I mean here hasn’t just happened by chance. Our forefathers when they were looking for an appropriate location to establish Acacia looked at three or four different locations and this was perceived to be the best one. They were looking for something that was really quite isolated, so removed from the outside influences, but also having said that you are dealing with year 9 or year 10 back in those days, students. You needed to have access to a reasonable sized town where there is medical facilities, and they can supply you with food and bits and pieces that are necessary.

My feeling now if we were to pick a site for Acacia, we would actually be looking something a little more remote. Our remoteness has been nibbled away at over the years and the remoteness is important. The isolation is important so that we can focus entirely on the students. Students don’t have access to the mass media, they don’t have access to TV, internet, cable television and all the other bits and pieces that seem to influence their life enormously.

We encourage strongly for students to talk to each other and socialize with each other, as opposed to text. So students here don’t have phones they don’t have email. I mean we had a meeting the other day and it was agreed unanimously that they will not come into Acacia. To be really honest (perhaps not at the beginning of the year), the majority of students would agree that this is the right way and most parents (accept for the odd one) actually think it’s good. That it’s appropriate. I guess the beauty is and this again is a traditional
argument again, that we have always been this way. So we are consistent in our approach and that is clearly articulated in all the information that we put out. Verbally I say it at all the meetings I have with parents and it’s consistent. It’s really not something that should be any surprise.

MP
It’s not something that you would compromise do you think?

SE
No. In fact we would go the other way. Our response would be instead of watering it down we would strengthen it.

Back in the late 1980s they trialed phones for a year where students had access to phones. The head at the time, Trevor Matthews, did say that that was the worst decision he had ever made. Look to be honest, that doesn’t mean that students never get to phone. The party line is no you can’t ring home. There are times when it is considered beneficial for the student to ring home, or there has been an injury or a death in the family and sometimes they would go home for funerals and things like that. There are other times when they are not coping very well when major issues have occurred then we put them on the phone, but it’s very controlled and regulated and not publicized.

MP
So really you are maintaining an independent and social environment here that is very strongly insulated from the outside world.

SE
Exactly and ………resilience. If for example students had email and every decision they had to make they counseled their parents or their brothers or their sisters or their friends. Then that decision is not their decision. It becomes someone else’s decision. We try and get them to build independence and we do that through them making their own decisions and being responsible for making their own decisions. Now we here give them lots of advice. The other reason is communication. I mean you can imagine we do long runs and sometimes they are quite difficult. You can imagine after an 8 km run it’s been very difficult because we encourage students to push hard and run as fast as they possibly can. We would have half the students ringing home and say mum get me out of here! Two days, or even two hours later, it’s completely forgotten about. So that immediate response about something that’s been a little difficult has been removed.

MP
A long run that’s…..

SE
We do a running program here that all students and staff are involved in and that’s one of the strengths of Acacia is that basically, we try as much as possible that staff do what students do. We do normally two crosses a week and the crosses are the same each week but at the end of term we change
which are progressively longer and we do a long run each week. Which is basically a race and each week each long run get longer. So we start from a very low level, just a few km and finish up with a 28 km marathon which everyone runs.

**MP**

You have taught in a number of locations before. If you were to compare what happens here to say what goes on at School A. If you move the isolation, would the learning be the same? The learning that happens here?

**SE**

I think the isolation is a huge key into what we do and I don’t think that you could replicate this program in an urban setting. We rely on the isolation enormously. The fact that they don’t have access to the McDonalds down the road so they don’t have the temptation. When students go outside of Acacia there’s no where to go. We rarely take kids to town but they went to the production of “Oliver” the other week and they did go to Town AAAA for a movie, but that’s probably about it for this semester.

**MP**

What were the purposes of going to town then and take them out of the isolation then, is there a learning purpose in that?

**SE**

At Town AAAA we have what we call a project period in second term that goes for about twenty one days. So within their subject areas they do a number of projects. They do one big one which is an integrated pneumatic project based …..culture and every subject areas have their projects. Students have to finish their projects and those who don’t get done in time have to stay back here and do extra work and those who get it done in time go to Town AAAA and watch a movie or tenpin bowling. That is probably the day of the year that doesn’t fit into the Acacia philosophy. It’s done as a reward for those who get it done and we do it at this point because we find students comply very well because they want the reward.

**MP**

I am interested in the way that you set things up at the start of the year. How students come into it? You talk about the isolation independence and they clearly don’t have those things before they come here. Yet they arrive and it’s this system that cuts them off.

**SE**

To be honest, for a student it’s quite difficult and traumatic for those first few weeks from when they walk in and we often toy about how you teach education guide and instruct students about so many things that are different. In the first two weeks they get bombarded with a lot of information and some students do struggle. I think that over the years we have got better delivering it in a more moderate way and getting the same message through. Whenever you come into such a different life style like this place, there will always be a
period where they need to settle in. But it’s amazing how quickly the lifestyle becomes entrenched. For instance, just after a few meals the procedures of line up become so entrenched (and that happens in days). I think also, because the program has been going on for quite a while, there are certain parts which nearly everyone knows before they come here. So students have a chance to prepare themselves. We do a number of information evenings in the preceding year to get them used to the thought of this and this will happen. We encourage students coming to the school next year to call us if there’s something that they don’t understand and we’ll do our best to try and explain it.

MP
Line up?

SE
We have a procedure and we do it three times a day and there’s a legal requirement with this that we have to actually count the students. Now most schools do that counting in classes (I think by law it has to done twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon). We do it three times a day at meals. At 7.25am at breakfast in the line up and the leader will count the students and then report to the teacher on duty to say that everyone is here, thirteen here and one on (clean up), or whatever the situation is. The procedure is always the same and is rotated through.

MP
(clean up) I gather, is when students do service in the dining room?

SE
Exactly. The student is rostered on for a week throughout the year and everyone gets a go.

So just to break it down. Students are in dormitories and we have fifteen dormitories. There are six girl dormitories and nine boy dormitories and on average we have fourteen students in each unit and each unit within those fourteen students there are fourteen jobs which rotate each week. So everyone will become a unit leader for a week, everyone will do slush for a week, everyone will wipe the toilets for a week etc. and then you rotate. You start back to the beginning. Normally, I think everyone does at least two. I know there are more than twenty eight weeks in the year, but by the time you have broken weeks and extended weeks it works out that way.

MP
Are those tasks driven by any educational theory, or is it just a matter of meeting basic needs of the community?

SE
It’s meeting basic needs and it also gives everyone a chance to take on positions, either whether its leadership or service within this community. Probably the biggest one in the unit is lighting the boiler. Here at Acacia their hot water and heating come through the boiler. So to light the boiler students
have to collect the wood cut it and then a student lights the boiler so they can have a shower at night. That is a direct cause and affect and it is one of the keys of this place, because it is very obvious if you haven't done your duty and lit the boiler and there is one key role here is to make sure you do your jobs because you are carrying your weight. If you become lazy you have students complaining to you that the boiler is cold.

MP
That’s something then that would break down what you are trying to do in terms of the fourteen students? If someone within the fourteen are not pulling their weight.

SE
Each unit has what we call of head of unit and we expect these things to break down every now and then and then and we pull the students in we have a chat and explain things and we encourage them to pull their weight and work their way around it and work together as a team in the unit. The unit becomes an incredibly strong bond that often lasts a lifetime. A good example is we had a student who was killed in a car accident a few years ago up here. We had two students, one was at School A about to go into year 12 and one girl here at Acacia and there was a car accident and both died and it was one of those horrific occasions. Amazingly, the first people to turn up to support the father were students from this unit thirty years ago and some of them he hadn’t seen for twenty years and they all felt the need to support.

MP
What are the formal programs? You have talked a bit about the duties and the service and the building of independence and the running program. Are there any other formal activities that occur here?

SE
We have the academic program and I think the best way to look at Acacia is that it’s a fairly normal school except that it’s in the bush and we do all of these different things. Our academic program is what I would say fairly traditional. We have our core subjects, maths, English, science, studies of religion in society (SRS), ethics, health and PE. In our elective program the music, the visual arts, history and geography. The language subjects so we do German, French and Japanese. In actual fact, how we present it academically you could say is probably ‘old school’.

There are ongoing arguments whether we should change our academic program and we are going through a thinking process on that and there are two schools of thought. Yes we should have a more integrated program (which in one way makes a lot of sense) and the other argument is that we do so many other things which are a challenge to students that if we do too much that’s different, we could tip students over the edge. So we try and keep them in what we think they are fairly comfortable with.
So even though we provide children with direct learning we provide them with a high degree of instruction initially, to get them going. There’s not too many uncertainties that exist in the academic program. And we have exams here and that happens twice a year and are fairly normal type of exams that run for 1 ½ hours. We are quite rigorous in how we run them. I think that anything we do at Acacia we try and do very well.

MP
That’s interesting that you say you are currently reviewing the notion of possibly an integrated program. What might shape it?

SE
We haven’t come out the end of the review process and the review process is partially driven by me because I have an integrated studies background and I think there is quite a lot of value in the integrated process and to me it seems like a sensible way to go. This year we have trialed an integrated project during the project period and that’s a combination of English, Maths and science. To be honest it’s not a fully integrated thematic approach and we do a bit of culture. How we have done it this year is they do a whole lot of things for the integrated project and then they do a presentation. Which is daunting and they have to talk for nine minutes to the English, Maths and Science teachers. They are bored and they have to try and convince them that they are a young executive on a high-powered bit of cultural business and they are looking at starting up a vineyard in this area. They have to work through a number of issues. They have to decline it, is it suitable, they have to do costings and also have to write a descriptive piece to explain to their board why they should buy this land and set up this beautiful vineyard in this area because of the potential tourism etc.

We explain to them in that sort of way and we encourage them to get dressed up for their presentation and we try and carry it through. So if they talk for two minutes they will get seven minutes of appropriate questions from the teachers. Most talk for close to nine minutes and don’t get any questions from the teachers.

It went remarkably well. The students were very keen and they rehearsed because they knew they had to and it was truly an accountable process. So we had days before students walking around reciting their speeches and getting to know and had their data protectors all set up and ready and showing pictures and graphs on rainfall and what they felt was appropriate like the testing they had done on the grapes in the area which is part of the science and chemistry which happens, making wine. So it went very well, but the part that didn’t work (and was out of our hands) was that I wanted to attach a sort of marketing part to that. So we were going to. What we normally do is pick the grapes and they go down to BBBB Winery and then we bottle it and I wanted to per unit sell the grapes off to parents and we couldn’t do that because of the bushfires. The smoke tarnished the grapes. No one picked grapes this year because of the massive fires that we had over this area.

MP
Viticulture is that something, (along with) oenology, are these things that are important at School A or is that a function of where you are?

SE
Well Viticulture, we are in the position and we have the land and the opportunity to set up a vineyard and I guess well it’s alright having this vineyard but there’s no education associated the vineyard. The wine just happened to be a bi-product of having a vineyard really. It justifies the expense of having it.

MP
That’s very interesting that you are drawing in the possibilities of the setting here and more into the learning that the students are doing.

SE
This is a working farm so it’s about seven hundred acres and we have a fully working farm. We have a subject called Farm Management, which is an elective we might as well make it compulsory because 95% of the students pick to do it. It makes so much sense to have it here because it really is a hands-on subject. I mean we time calving and lambing and all the other farming activities working with students throughout the year if they choose that elective.

MP
So by what you are saying seem to be really shaping your thinking about the learning down here. We try and make the learning like history of this region...Some of the local settlers like Graham Gresham who was a pioneer who live down here basically most of his life on his own and built these magnificent slab huts and there’s a number of other identities that Acacia has been closely linked with over time. Most of those identities have died or moved on. The same with geography. We do components on weather and all that which because students are outdoors so much here. Students spend something like sixty days in a tent a year here. So they become quite familiar with weather and it is a very important part of what they are doing here. Like its forecasted to be snowing on campus in a couple of days and that will affect what they do and what they pack and greatly influences what we expect them to do. We wouldn’t be sending students up to the high country in that weather.

MP
Sixty days in a tent – that seems a lot?

SE
Yes that’s about right and those in trouble spend more! Sixty, that’s the hiking program. We do a lot of hiking predominantly in terms 1 and 2. We do a school and community service program in term 2 which they have just completed. So on each weekend and our weekends are Thursday and Friday. So they would spend Wednesday and Thursday night in tents somewhere, so it varies. Different locations, different activities.
MP
What do you think that students gain out of being in a tent for so many days?

SE
It becomes their home, it's independence, they are closer to the environment and to nature, it moves them out of here so they don't get cabin fever in their dormitories. When they go out in their tents, normally it's structured on friendship groups, which they love and it's also a very convenient way. I mean for example students go out and do community service four times this term and they go and stay with one of seventy families in the district that volunteered to have students in exchange for some service.

MP
How many students to a tent?

SE
Two, maybe three but we never allow one (although very, very rarely). We design the tents. They are single sloped so they can handle the snow but not a blizzard very well. They are as light as we can possibly make them and if there are two or three in a tent they divide the parts of the tent between them.

MP
So they walk to these places?

SE
No generally they are too far away so they get the vehicles out transported out. A group is normally about five or six students. So school service, community service, hike groups, ski groups are all that same structure – five to six in a group.

MP
With a member of staff?

SE
No. Staff drop them off and pick them up and these families we know we have had them all checked out. A lot of them now are let's say ex staff of School A or Acacia and we have a number of maintenance staff that will have groups to their place over Thursday or Friday.

MP
One of the things that I am interested in this sort of program is the function of memory. How it serves to give the students participating a memorable experience and how that might be integrated in some way into the students learning? Whether that's done here deliberately, or perhaps it's not a factor at all?

SE
Most students and I am talking in the high nineties walk away from here and have a love for the place and it's very powerful and is measurable in so many different ways. We have reunions from groups fifty years ago and I don't know
too many schools that have reunions for year 9s normally it’s year 12s and they have this incredible bond and love of this place. We have endless numbers of requests of old boys and old girls wanting to return but we can’t do this because it would impact having people coming in and out all the time. We generally we organize these reunions through holiday times to look and reminisce. So there is an incredible bond that lasts over the years. And why is it so? I think it’s to do with achievable challenge? We present students with incredible challenges that most of them don’t think initially they will be able to do. With that you build up tremendous self esteem, tremendous price.

A few years ago we did a survey of a group of students prior to coming to Acacia and asked what were they looking for? It was very interesting. The thing that came in number one was the down hill skiing because we down hill ski every Thursday and then we did basically the same survey at the end of their year here on what were the most important aspects of Acacia? And skiing came down the bottom of the list. The thing that went up the list was unit life this tremendous bond they have with their peers in their unit. I guess self built resilience and set esteem.

In the hiking program it’s interesting that Acacia students at the end of the year in an outdoor sense very good and proficient capable and confident in the outdoors. Because they spent sixty odd days in a tent. Now their navigational skills and abilities are very high. That’s why we don’t have a huge diversity in the outdoor program. We keep is pretty simple. Basically, it’s hiking and a few other things but not much of because they walk away from here and say I can do one thing really well. That builds up their self-esteem enormously.

MP
It's very interesting you talking about the perceptions before and afterwards. So you often survey kids before they come here?

SE
We did that last year. We do often and we often survey them in year 10 – what did they enjoy and what didn’t they enjoy” and it’s pretty consistent year in and year out. Some things they say they don’t enjoy, which I am sure there, but we still keep them in the program because there’s a purpose for them being there.

MP
What don’t they enjoy?

SE
Sometimes they don’t enjoy hiking (or some of the harder hikes). We put some quite difficult hikes in there to extend and to really show them what they could do. In the end it’s difficult and it’s quite hard. It’s about pushing boundaries.

We will have kids now in the running program and they say well we'll go for a 10 km run. If you say at the beginning of the year they are going on a 10 km
run we would have half the school in tears. Now it’s not perceived as a barrier and have pushed the boundaries. So if you say we are going for an 8 km run they will say ok we did 10 km the other day.

You see a lot of students that come here are not particularly Acacia students. I don’t think they are fully exercised. We would have a number of students on the first run and they will say I think I am getting asthma! We’ll say no you are just breathing heavily. There’s a difference here and we say you are allowed to breathe heavily. And many students initially don’t like running but they end up loving it because of the benefits they gain. They feel fitter, they look fitter, they are proud of their performances, they invariably write home and say I came 27th in the long run and I have improved four places and we congratulate them on trying. We never really award winners we always reward effort. So we try and gauge those that are trying.

That’s the same in the academic program. We don’t really acknowledge the dux of the year group but we acknowledge that get the best effort ratings.

MP
How do you measure effort then?

SE
Each subject is given an effort rating and each student is given a rate of 1 to 5. 5 is minimal effort to 1 is the best. We give them a guide and it’s nothing to do with you got five As, no you have an effort rating of 1.2.

MP
What do you think an Acacia student would say is the most difficult thing that they have to manager and does that change through the year?

SE
The hardest and most challenging thing they do is live within the dormitories with thirteen or fourteen other, eventually, friends. So you get students and put them together for twelve months – that’s a big call. Every unit has ups and downs and we expect that and in a lot of ways that’s good as long as it’s not too down. Because with that we work through issues with them, we find solutions, we might to that as a whole unit or individualize it and pull a student out and say your behaviour needs changing and give them ways to do that. As I have said we have the head of unit, sometimes it ends up with me and we have counseling and nurses that might help out and we have unit staff can give a lot of assistance, we have people in the dining hall that provide us with information on how students are going. We have a maintenance staff and some students get on very well and we get feed back from them.

MP
If there is a student that comes to you and they are completely dysfunctional within a unit. Would you remove them and put them in another unit?

SE
Never. If you do that you basically are just moving the problem, you are not solving the problem.

MP
Do you have pressure from parents to move the student from this unit to that unit?

SE
Sometimes. I never do. Another thing also, if you move a student from A unit to E unit those in E unit are already bonded and probably not going to work anyway.

MP
How many students get sent home a year? Do you have a process where you can remove a student from Acacia?

SE
Yes we do. We have a process to suspend a student. If a student is particularly dysfunctional in a unit (and assuming it’s that person’s fault), we might internally suspend. Which means we put them in a tent and they would camp out for a couple of nights but that would have to be reasonably serious and sometimes it’s just sort of mucking around at night and keeping other people awake.

Internal suspension is more than that is one level and we have external suspensions where students go home and then there is the odd expulsion.

MP
How many internal suspensions would you have?

SE
It’s a hard number there’s quite a few. Sometimes in a week we might have four or five.
Externals are fairly rare. We have had about three this year.

MP
That sends a strong message to others?

SE
We approach it at two levels. We approach it for the individual and I mean obviously external and that involves parents. So as much as humanly possible we ask the parents to come up and I will talk to them. We all sit in the one room and the student can hear the words and dispute.

Also, yes there are certain things at Acacia that are golden rules and it’s as much as anything a message to the community that this is not tolerated and these things evolve around the boys and girls issue. Bullying which is huge thing which is the greatest of all evils and probably the third one is drugs. Which we don’t really deal with too much.
MP
Do you have problems that are generated by students bringing things in?

SE
Occasionally. I mean alcohol at that level we haven’t had (not to my knowledge) and we haven’t had any other drugs here.

MP
Cigarettes?

SE
Occasionally but very few and we manage that internally. Mostly these kids just don’t smoke. I don’t think that I am naïve.

MP
You mentioned that unit living is what students to be the hardest thing. What do you think they consider to be the greatest risk? What would they perceive dangerous or risky?

SE
The hardest thing they do (and potentially the greatest risk) is leaving their friendship groups at home and that causes much angst and we try to explain that true friends don’t just disappear and they still will be there and you can communicate and you have holidays the next semester to spend with them.

As far as risk of life and limb in terms of this era of litigation that now exists. We try and eliminate. Perceived risk is fine but real risk is not. We go through risk committees and we are in the process of going through risk management that we have been ordered to.

I don’t think that ‘risk’ is a good word. We present them with a lot of challenges and its up to us to actually put a safety umbrella over what they do so that we know they are safe. We try very hard of that perception of freedom and outdoors. We try not to marry groups up with staff all the time and we try to get them to make decisions and the consequences of those decisions. However the outdoor department has to be smart enough to be one step in front of the students to know that they are going to get lost if they go down this way and we have someone down there and we have a massive radio network that we do behind the scenes and I don’t think kids have any idea of behind the scenes and the working and coordination that goes on to make sure they are safe.

MP
Is that shadowing groups when they are outside, or anticipating where they might go?

SE
All of that. We have a log book set up there they sign it and staff will check that off. When it's possible to sit on high peaks when it’s possible, and observe what they are doing. You need to remember that we know the high
country very well. We know exactly where groups get lost normally and we know how long it takes to walk from here to there. We know the safety escapes if the weather turns foul and how to get them out quickly. Plus we all believe that you empower students with the appropriate training to make good and clear and rational decisions. So we don’t let any group out if we don’t feel with make those decisions (or we shadow them very closely if that’s the case).

So the program is strongest when everyone is working the one direction, thinking about problems issues and solving etc. So it’s all about empowering students and that’s what they love, that perception of freedom is very important and the perception as well.

MP
What do they love about perception of freedom?

SE
In charge of their own destiny autonomous. Towards the end of the year they can sign their own hikes, where they go, how far they walk, where they camp. So with that they write hike notes and that is done with real enthusiasm because they are in control.

MP
So you are working towards the students charting their own course.

SE
Yes and they go through an interview processes with the actual staff where they will have meetings and they will say we want to walk here or there and the outdoor staff say well do you know that’s 55 km? But we try never to say know. They will say do you think that’s possible and they will say well no we don’t.

Some groups are physically challenged and they will say we want to see how far we can walk in a day and we’ll say fine but let’s do it in a safe way. We have got checks and balances along the way so that we know you are ok and we always reserve the right to pull the pin on.

You see kids by the end of the year. They are so motivated that we have to hold them back if anything and the staff that struggle.

MP
Are they all single sex groups when they are hiking?

SE
Yes they are but the camp sites are mixed, but we have staff at the camp sites and we have a clear line and they may have a social area in the middle. So we have a standard camp site.

MP
Ok so you may have a number of groups of five or six congregating in one camp site.
SE
At night. They might come from different directions.

MP
Do they all meet up at the one place or do they have different sites?

SE
Oh what I am thinking of at the end of the year we might have twenty or thirty camp sites. Early in the year when they are still in their high groups we have three to start with. So as the year progresses the more and more spread out they become because of the better trained they are and their fitness is better.

MP
What sort of new knowledge do you think that the students create as a result of the Acacia specialties?

SE
We try quite hard not to draw the lines between experiential and instructional. So what we do is we don’t very much carry say a science lesson on a hike. We would do a lot of briefing of the students prior to the science class and then they would go out and we hope in an experiential sense, they would identify say the change in the vegetation – 1600 mtrs from sub alpine to alpine. They would pick it up then or maybe talk about it themselves. Or a staff member might be sitting with them on top of Mt Howard and in conversation would come up about something the development of the crosscut saw. We don’t do a formalized structural class room out there on the peaks because things like the hiking program or the outdoor program, being the outdoors, I mean the bush does the talking for itself. It tends to from the students perspective seem to diminish the experience to some degree and it’s also their weekend. But in an experiential sense we try to tool them up with all the knowledge and then send them out.

Some of the things that they take away which are uniquely Acacia and there are a huge number and I am not sure all students take them all the way, so it’s a pick and choose type of approach where some students latch on to something and that’s what they love at Acacia. I think if you asked the two hundred and ten students you would probably get a hundred different answers of what they thought was the best part of Acacia or what they have taken away that’s uniquely Acacia. But when you really come down to what makes an Acacia student different from other students, I don’t know, I think you end up with a confident but not over confident individual, reasonably comfortable in their own skin and their abilities and they have an honest type of understanding of where they are in the world. Which is far more realistic when they leave than when they come in.

MP
A moment ago you drew a distinction between experiential and instructional. What does experiential learning mean to you?
Well you go out and you experience the instructions. So we provide knowledge in a whole lot of ways back here and then they go out and experience whatever it is and we try not to interfere with that. If you ask me I have an outdoor background so I keep relating things to that.

In the outdoors the making of mistakes is actually very important and more learning happens when mistakes are made than when they are not made. So the students going out into the outdoors and the social thing that happens within the group hopefully they use the approaches that we have taught them about issues that might be confronting them. They have to rely on themselves to fix tents, to do whatever it may be, to navigate. The consequences are that they get something wrong. They might have major social issues which we do intervene if we have to. They maybe geographically embarrassed which we do intervene when we have to, but we always like them to solve their own problems because through that that’s when the learning happens.

Is there a policy when you intervene? If students or groups make a mistake, at what point do you direct/redirect them?

There’s no written policy in fact I don’t know how you would write a policy on that and I think its judgmental on the staff members’ observance. I am, as much as possible, a hands off type but if they can’t solve it there is a point where you have to intervene and it depends on the situation.

I don’t have an issue getting lost in the outdoors or camping in the wrong spot, but I would have an issue of knowing that they are unwell. I wouldn’t have an issue with a minor dispute within the group but if it crosses that line and becomes abusive that’s when I would intervene.

If you were out on a hike and camped in the wrong spot. Is there a point when you would say ok you have go in that direction otherwise you are not going to make it back in time.

Yes. I mean it’s all tied in with the bigger picture. If there’s bad weather coming in and they are sitting on top of a peak and that bad weather is coming in two hours then you know you have to get them in. That’s a safety issue where we would intervene. There’s other logistical issues that we might intervene. If we know the vehicle is picking you up in two hours and you have an hour and a half walking and you are going the wrong way.

So the vehicle pick up example, you would intervene to make sure they were picked up. They wouldn’t say spend an extra night out?
Normally not although, it has happened. It depends on the situation. It depends on how great a need there is for the learning to occur. Some students there is a greater need for learning to occur and others they just made a mistake and we know they will work it out and are comfortable with that so we might short circuit that process.

MP
It’s really along the lines of staff/student interaction. The culture of the place. How does staff and students interact?

SE
Firstly we insist that students call staff by their surname and I think a lot of people get confused as to know why that is. It’s actually to aid the assistance of normally year 13 straight out of school and they struggle with that very, very grey line of them being a staff member and not a student. So we believe this helps them to some degree. The staff throughout the year generally, form a very close relationship with students and I guess that’s evident in, for example, today I’ve got an old boy who was in my unit coming up just to say hallo and that’s not unusual at all and it’s because we have such a common bond with what we’ve done and staff doing all the things that students do as best as we can possibly manage it and that is a real strength of this place and is something that we try not to water down. From a programming point of view, staff having no time off and doing exactly what the students do is the best way for this place to operate, but for sanity for staff and OH&S Labour laws we can’t do that so we try the best we can to go that middle path. It’s very difficult because there’s two conflicting almost philosophies, that just don’t marry together at all very well.

End of Interview – SE
Interview 3

Interview on 16/06/2007
Dylan Nalder (School A) Acacia Campus

MP
If we could start then with your role here at Acacia, please.

DN
I have two roles. I am Coordinator of Learning Support so I look after gifted
and talented any individual learning differences, especially, and I am also the
Director of Student Welfare. Which means that I work with the Head of
Campus overseeing the students on campus and their welfare. So I have a lot
of dealings with parents more than a lot of people here and with the students
as much as I can. I am also a Head of Dormitory as well and that gives me an
individual pastoral with fourteen boys. I started that this year. I came here just
as a Head of Dormitory and special ed. teacher. I have been here 2 ½ years.
It suits me perfectly here because I love being busy. This is my thirteenth
year teaching. If you have to teach you teach and if you have to play you play.
You don’t make one part suffer because you are so focused on the other.
Everything we do is actually part of what’s expected of us. In schools and
boarding schools that I have worked you actually have to your time off
teaching if you are doing something else.

MP
You have had experience in other contexts. What for you is unique/special
about Acacia as a learning institution?

DN
It’s access. We have the students with us twenty-four hours a day and
whether it’s a life skill style learning or whether it’s a formal academic learning
it can actually happen at any time. It doesn’t have to be between set hours in
a normal school when you send home half the students at night because the
other half are boarding. We have them here to model to interact with at all
times and that includes weekends. So I think access is very much one of
those strengths and the isolation and whether it’s just implied isolation, in a
valley away we can recreate whatever day it is. We can create what that days
focus is going to be. We may decide to call it the weekend or decide to call it
academic day. I think that is probably our edge at the moment and it is with
the limited access students have to home. We get to turn the focus on here
and external forces aren’t as great as they could be. Their emotions are pretty
much day to day in this place so you can get to the bottom of what it is,
whether they are upset tired or just worn out. Generally, because of what’s
happening here and then you can deal with that.

MP
I was interest when you said external forces.

DN
Yes external forces and external pressures. There are lots of different ways, whether it’s parental stress and pressure, whether it’s the media of expectations of how they should be looking dressing or acting. The most important things that happen everyday are mostly related to here. We know if they can’t get their homework done. If they haven’t prep that night we know why because they are out but we can get them next morning and adjust our program. Also the ‘quick fix’: “I need to complain to someone”. If they are having a bad day they don’t necessarily jump in and get in touch with their parents. If they need to express something they generally come to us, but if they are going to write to their parents it’s a slower process. We teach them to stop and think. They can’t phone. It’s a struggle to retrain kids to do that. To them their weeks fly by. They are timetabled twenty-four hours a day here. They know exactly (and we do too) where you are what you should be doing when you should be doing it. But to parents the weeks don’t move as quick and it’s very hard to get them to understand that we might write once a week and we try to get them to write. Understandably some of them have never written letters before they come here and they are used to email (which they don’t have as well). They are used to get instantly information across. We try and teach them the skills of how to show not tell – that’s a big thing in writing – to try and show in their writing. If they do have that skill at writing letters. The girls are so much better at writing home.

MP
So in a sense they have to communicate with their parents in written form and they have never done that in their lives and they therefore have to try and articulate the experiences occurring here.

DN
There is a whole lot of kids out there that expression, particularly written expression, is their weakest skill when it comes to expressing themselves. It’s interesting that most parents (who have boys generally), they tend to understand that the kids are in that situation. As a head of dormitory (and we are all very different), on a regular basis I send our very brief snapshots of what they are doing or send out a digital picture of kids cleaning the dormitory or something like that. Very often that just fills in the gaps between the few and far between letters. I think that the parents are accepting that it’s going to be a very different year and communication is going to be difficult and I am amazed at how accepting they actually are and of the faith that they put in us that everything is going on ok.

MP
So it’s a huge amount of trust.

DN
It’s an incredible amount of trust. At the beginning of term we had dormitory hike and if you look at the time with the other program that was linked to it they would have had no contact either from myself or their child for three weeks. All of the parents seem to accept that and take what information they can. I always wonder when they go home and they get the kid in the car after a big day at school and whether the kid will say nothing, whether it actually
takes a certain amount of days before they start talking about what they have done and trying to bring their parents into their world. I have never had a chance to know. It’s almost like when they go home it’s like another world. It’s very full on and the staff do the same. We were talking the other night and 80% of the staff are going overseas at the next holidays. You tend to just be done with work and go off and experience something else. You just want to get out of here. But when you get back this place is good, it houses us, it feeds us, it clothes us. It does everything that it does for the kids.

MP
You mentioned the isolation and in a number of different ways you have implied how important the setting is and I just want to focus on that for a moment. Just how important a player is the setting in what is done here as an educational program?

DN
There’s a core curriculum which we do pretty much on a basic level. We have English, for example we do a key English program and that’s all done in class on a day to day learning of what we do and we should do something somatic that matches into the environment that we have got and to a degree we do that. We look at things such as colonial poetry or we look for stories that talk about the history of the area and those types of things. It always could be used more. But for example though, we just did a project period where we joined the science the maths and the English as an idea together where the students based it upon the vineyard that we have got down the hill. Where they worked out rainfall, they worked out the vines whether they could make good wine and then we had the kids talk about vineyards and trying to sell it, but that’s a first step. I think the school is interesting because of the rollover of staff. You start to get ideas for example (campus head) has come in and he is very much in trying to bring together as much as we can into the school that actually joins together our curriculum and when that’s based here whether the students can use the environment as a concept that have got around, like the vineyard and going down to Acacia creek and measuring water flow. We are trying to implement that a lot more into the curriculum. We also have pressured from School A because we are seen as a link to School A. That we do a thorough and appropriate year 9 program that will link from year 8 to year 10 no matter what school they will go back to. So a lot of our topics, say for geography for example, are actually determined down in School A as a year 9 topic and then you do struggle with how do you fit that into the environment. How do we make it special and unique? Plus having the external forces here. We will have kids that come from (another school in NSW). They come here and go back and that learning has to slot back into the…year 10 curriculum as well. So there are a set level of skills and competencies that year 9 are meant to have that we try to put in place. You always look at the school and say gee we must really try and get out of the classroom a little bit more and we really need to try and use the resources we have got and as a school we do. We use the environment a lot more its more personal development of how students approach things in general. We talk about resiliency and the kids having the courage to organize themselves. The environment such as the dormitory, hiking, running, pushing themselves
knowing there’s a lot more in them, but it’s applied to the classroom a lot more. There’s more in you than you think and here you can apply that to anything you do. The, I can’t, I am having trouble with this and I need help. I find that that comes into our learning experiences more. We organize their thoughts, their approach to life, how they approach people and what they find difficult and to know their limits and can push their limits. That comes into it as well because you see you are always concerned with external examinations and expectations on curriculum and skills and it’s a really fine balance.

We have a policy here that every student hands in every piece of work and that again is because of the nature of the campus. Because the student is with us for twenty-four hours a day. It’s called ‘catch up’. Before any student goes away for a holiday everything has to be handed in. So there’s no student at the end of term that hasn’t had a go at every piece of work academically. The students find that very hard at the beginning because they don’t really believe it to have everything handed in. But because of the closeness we know if work hasn’t been handed in. We can be sure that they get all their work done and it’s not seen as a punishment, we see it as an expectation in life.

MP
So what does ‘catch up’ mean?

DN
Catch up means that there’s a period of time at the end of term where we have sessions to give the students the opportunity to complete the work and to get the work that they missed and didn’t hand in and tried to avoid doing. So there are set evenings and days at the end of term where students who haven’t handed in their work, actually do it. The teachers assist them with it and work through with them if they need help (which is very often why they haven’t done the work). We don’t expect students to do work over the holidays because it is such a demanding program and we can do eight days of academic work and we sometimes do to fit in what we need to fit in.

MP
If I am a student and have completed all my work what do I do to catch up?

DN
We have for instance drama performance put on by students, we have a concert and during those times the kids who are on catch up miss out. It sounds incredibly draconian, but the students accept it incredibly well because they see it as fair and very often they actually appreciate the help that is given. There is always that motivation and some kids get that and finish their work because they want to go to do the other things. But we do have the group of students that need the extra help and want get things finished and we provide that for them. We run a lot of support structures here academically. We have at least twice a week we call them extra help sessions, where students can their apparent free time between 5 and 6 there is at least one subject teacher in a room and you can easily end up with 20% -
30% of the school in that room on a regular basis. I have never been in a school where teachers give up a lot of their free time. We run formal (study) in the evenings with the Director of Students Learning, for students who struggle.

MP
I started to talk about setting and you were talking about setting in terms of the environment and using the environment in a formal sense in the curriculum. What I am hearing from you is that almost all aspects of what you do are shaped by the fact that you are here. I mean even this were say, a setting of School A campus, you couldn’t do what you are doing, could you?

DN
It’s hard but I think after 2 ½ years I am starting to accept how unique. What’s that line – if you see something day after day you start missing what’s special. The Acacia program is unique and the boarding is extreme. It is very much our edge what that line – it’s much copied but I don’t think you can do it again. It would interesting if someone could set up a program like this that is polar (opposite) to where we came from at School A.

MP
What do you mean by polar?

DN
School A is a place that looks in over the oval. It’s a traditional private school that’s created its community within the space that it’s got. But we talk about we look out at the chapel and we talk about our mountain and you look across (even though it’s not on our property), the students look across out through the chapel and they see the mountain – it tends to look out and they have greater access to the community here where they go out and work with families. I know that we are a bush setting but we are also a rural setting as well so they go out and help rural families. The students here have no idea of the boundaries of the school and we get to run through everything and I think that we are very much accepted by the neighbours, the landholders because over the years they have let us do that.

MP
I like that sense of looking out rather than looking in.

DN
It’s very different to the traditional brother school where it’s designed to keep the world out in a way. You look at the latest buildings they are putting up here like the dining hall and the music centre. They are starting to really understand the fact that unless you put more money into the buildings that looking out is what the place is about. Because the weather changes so dramatically and the sky is different. It’s a constantly changing palette.

I spent a night the other night where I did school service and we camped down the bottom of the ……..paddock and that’s part of they do and they do it as a group. It’s just a different place on campus. The dormitory is important to
them but they are so now at the end of term two, used to having a degree of self-sufficiency. There’s no complaints it’s very much this is what we do so let’s get on with it. It’s just the small things. Like they had a footy down there and that kept them occupied for hours or just sitting chatting to people for an hour. Their conversational skills are phenomenally improved half way through the year than what they began with. It’s an amazing level of familiarity and acceptance because they are randomly chosen for the dormitory they are in and always very different kids.

MP
That’s very interesting that notion of the conversation skills and the different games and they seem to find different sets of experiences and activities in I guess their social time. It’s structured from elsewhere, is it?

DN
Very much so. They are what they have got for their social time. You have to deal with what you have around you. We had a student two years ago who wrote this letter back to the school and was talking about how when he looks back he can’t believe how happy he was. That he was happier than when he had everything that he should have had. He said that in life you are told about things that are very important, like media, you need to have instant gratification, you need to have everything, but he was happier here with so little.

MP
I think it would be fair to say that as a group they don’t come from a background where in any sense would be deprived.

DN
If you come here you certainly come from a background that’s doing quite well. It costs ($xxx) for the year to come here and there are a lot of extra expenses but you do get parents that pretty much is what they have saved up for. School A is an expensive school in itself. It doesn’t feel like when you are here that you are educating the privileged few. There’s such a broad range of students who come different worlds. Literally, yet the problems are the same as any school that I have taught at. There problems are just as important to them and their happiness is just the same and their sadness is just the same and what they struggle with is just the same.

MP
Just setting aside for a moment what we would call the mainstream learning that they do. Is there a way that you would summarize the other learning that occurs here?

DN
It goes back to what we were talking about experiential in that we put students into situations and it’s highly manipulated. The parents would be very comfortable if they saw what we do with the kids. To the students it appears very free. That they are left in the dormitory to chop wood and they are not supervised at all, or if we go out hiking and we send groups off, but the actual
structures and boundaries, there aren’t any grey areas in what we oversee of how we look after the students. They learn life, which you might call tolerance. They have been chucked in with a group of thirteen other boys with two showers, two toilets, two big room, a dorm and a study. There are learning experiences in that that you can’t replicate other than doing that. You learn very quickly that you can’t operate day to day with not talking to others and they may go away. They learn a lot more about how to cope and appreciate others. Year 9 is the perfect year for it. They are desperate for this freedom but they also want guidance and you can balance that out here very much. We provide them with opportunities for leadership, taking responsibility (they have to take responsibility) they don’t have hot water unless the take responsibility or they get lost in the bush if they don’t take responsibility, they end up on catch up with work if they don’t take responsibility. I always say that I don’t mind if they have free time as long as it’s structured. They are busy, they are focused, they are developing and their freedom increases as the year goes on because we start to pull back some of those overriding supervision elements. But they are responsible to have themselves showered and cleaned and clothed. They have to be at certain places they are responsible to get themselves there and it is amazing how quickly (many) fourteen/fifteen year olds work that out. We try here to explain to them as much as we can. I mean the meals thing, it takes them very little time to work that out. You want in you want out and you want food if you stall it just doesn’t work. Try feeding that number; the meal one that comes from externally that’s the thing that people say oh it seems so harsh. We try and balance tradition with innovation. We hold on to what we have got and I don’t think you can replicate although others have tried to copy. So start off with out traditional base of how our dormitories really do operate, how our communication is set. Things like chopping wood symbolize something here. It goes back to that what do they learn in the broader context. It’s something that they have to do that is required that they give back to their dormitory or they give to themselves. It needs doing and it’s constant. They learn that in life there are certain things that you need to do. That you have responsibilities and if they are not done it has a wider affect. We need to think about what we try and do as innovation. I think as pastoral carers we are incredibly innovative. And I think that you would never be able to replicate the knowledge of a student that we have in separate dormitories because we spend so much time with them.

With School A heading very much towards pastoral care and School A have their pastoral centre being built. It’s positive psychology and it comes right back to resilience. Building into students in adolescence the ability to identify and work with what actually positive. What actually is happy, what actually makes them interact with their day in a much better way. In psychology it’s a shift at looking at disease and disability and what’s wrong with somebody to looking at what is right. And building up within students the strength and fortitude and ability to deal with their day. It’s something that Acacia has been doing for years. There is a whole of people coming in next year to train our staff right across the school. It’s going to be a focus of School A. School A is no different from any other school whether it be private or public, it’s just here we have the resources.
Acacia is a hard place for the kids both mentally and physically demanding. It’s an emotional place on lots of different levels and with each other but also being so far away from home. Physically it’s incredibly demanding and on the staff. It’s something that we talk about with the running where you are very much competing with yourself rather than competing with anybody else and that can be with the hiking as well where you get the most out of what you are doing. What’s interesting here is that the staff do it and the students see us at our weakest times and there’s a degree of transparency and they get to know when we are tired and reacting. I mean we are very honest with the kids. I mean when we stuff up and snap when we shouldn’t we apologize. You see it in the first year teachers. They struggle climbing that hill just like the kids do. Working from 6 in the morning until 10 at night and we have such a turnover of staff which is a positive thing. It’s not an out of control turnover. There’s a feeling amongst the staff that if you have given to Acacia what you can give that’s great whether that’s one year or six years.

MP
Do you have low staff morale?

DN
No not in that typical sense. Having worked in other schools, low staff morale seems to be based on other people are getting more than you, other people aren’t working as hard as you and there was no information being given. That is opposite here, there’s a degree of achieving here. There’s no teacher who has been sitting in a corner waiting for five years and retirement and talking about everybody who comes up with anything innovative and new. The biggest thing here is yes give it a go try this do that. I would that there is no low morale but people get tired and have pressures because our time frames are tight and they get frustrated. There’s no long held animosity against any staff member.

MP
I am interested in the memories that students develop here and whether those memories are cultivated or drawn upon in terms of the learning?

DN
The learning in a formalized sense I think just washes by. I know they enjoy having teachers that they know well. I know I love teaching my mainstream English class because you rarely get a class that I have walked up mountains with for one week. So that has that comfort and access to the kids. They are not frightened to come and ask a question. The memories come from what they write about is don’t waste opportunities. They talk about the run that’s hard on everyone, they talk about the do it hard hike and it seems to be based on that whole thing of what we offer out the interactions with others. Things like make the most of your dormitory, they get to know people better I wonder if those memories carry on. They are certainly what they leave with. The whole take advantage of, don’t waste your time, get to know the staff better, let’s take more risks. We have traditions…The actual memories seems to very much be the physical or social interaction elements.
Are those things drawn on to do you think either intentionally or unintentionally by staff in terms of shaping the program?

Very much so and it’s used as an opportunity to try and enhance the mainstream curriculum which we have legal expectations from that, but it’s used to build a bigger and better picture of that child so that you know sometimes how far you can push and encourage. Other people have productions, others have their big shows if they are drama teachers but in learning I think you have small achievements which need to be celebrated. We have so many opportunities of instant reinforcement to try and build and talk on the positives. Tell the students what you want them to do not what you don’t want them to do. If they are constantly being berated you are really not going to get much out of them.

You use those things, are the students themselves encouraged to use their memories? You might call it reflection or building on what happened in term one to build term two.

It is as much as you can in a fast moving program. Its almost like a collective knowledge amongst the staff. You are about to interview X and I know she’s fully aware of the whether it’s a pastoral development, whether its academic pushing themselves in the running and the height in which they organize. We are all part of it. So we do think that they have high expectations of resilience and get them to use that and know that you can achieve this. As the year goes on we expect that the way they deal with each other in the dormitory we expect them to deal that way with the entire community. Whether its respect for the property or the environment that covers everything else.  We certainly encourage the kids socially and pushing themselves and choosing what activities they are go to do in general, whether its choosing hikes and which hike are you going to do. It’s working on rather the success of pushing themselves rather than taking a step back.

So students get to choose their own hikes do they?

They do until term four. We train them up in the beginning of the year and towards the end we see whether.

In those groups of five or six students they might band together and do a particular hike. Do they get to stay in those groups?
No they get to change. They can change each week they tend to work it out pretty quickly how they are happy together, who they operate best with and that can be from across the community.

MP
Do you have the one kid that everyone leaves out?

DN
We don’t this year but we have in other years. And that’s very often based on them leaving themselves out but we work on that.

MP
Thank you.

End of Interview – DN
Interview 4

Interview on 16/06/2007
Davina Ottens (School A) Acacia

MP
What sort of learning does go on here?

DO
A lot of personal learning. A lot of learning where kids learn who they are and behaviours that maybe they think that they can change. Learning through a challenge and what you can do if you put your mind to it. Learning about relationships with others and staff student relationships are pretty strong here. Dormitory life is a big thing. I think it’s the essence of it.

MP
Class student relations. Is there anything interesting there do you think?

O
I think it’s like here at Acacia. Like I have never had closer student and staff relationships in any other school. Just because we live together as a community, every day you are doing things you are sharing your recycling. I mean the kids can see that you are a person and you have things to do as well and that comes out a lot more. We see students on their good and bad days as students see us on our good and bad days as well.

MP
Is there any difference in the way that students interact with each other compared to how they might interact somewhere else?

DO
Oh definitely. I think there is less opportunity for an out. Like at home and going to a day school come 3.30 you go into a new environment. Whereas here that’s not the case you are with the same people throughout the day so you do need to develop those skills and how to get away from that and have time out from people using that small environment for the year.

MP
How do you ‘get away’ here?

DO
It’s really challenging. I was talking to my group about that the other day when they got the term two blues. In term one everything is exciting and everything is really rushed. In term two it plateaus I think they spend a lot of time with fourteen other girls in their dormitory. We have a huge discussion about how that made them feel and what was the consequence of that and there was stress and anxiety and they were building up a lot of frustration with each other. We talked about how can you get away from it. Things like going to a meal twenty minutes before the meal starts just to hang out with others.
They have to be comfortable within the dormitory to know that don’t have to be a real little tight little network. They can have friends outside. So there was a lot of communication about how to deal with it.

MP
You talk about personal learning and who the students are; (saying) that happens a lot here and they discover who they are. How does that occur?

DO
Well partly in their own learning journey where they discover it in their own way, but also through who they are themselves and they put themselves in their own situation to learn, but also it’s guided by the head of dormitory or academic staff and other people try to guide them through that. There are a lot of one on one chats that we have with the kids. To have fourteen girls in my dormitory I am constantly one on one chatting to kids about where they are at how they are feeling and are they achieving the things that they want to achieve? Where are they at in their own learning, what can you do to get them like that in the next weeks?

MP
Is that what you do you set up two week blocks?

DO
Yes. At the start of the year I have a big chat to them about the year and it can be extraordinary for you and I stress that to them and I revisit that. I say are you making this year the year that you can set yourself up for your life? I am talking first half of term second half of term to break it up into halves really.

MP
Is there a reason for breaking it up? Is it that students can’t focus further than that?

DO
Yes. In some ways. Like I really like the whole year and say this is your year and what you do with it is up to you. In terms of like if someone is homesick, someone is struggling in some way academically, I talk so it’s a bit more achievable and they tend to set themselves for that time rather than getting overwhelmed. But in terms of pumping them up and saying this is a fantastic year and get them out of it and make it happen.

MP
What are the challenges do you think for the student being here?

DO
Well obviously there’s physical challenges. They are asked to do some really hard physical things like big runs and a lot of hard work as well. They are given a lot to do in a short space of time so they have to work hard and consistently to get that done.
I guess a challenge for them is to go without and to live a bit simply being without TV and all those things. The isolation and dormitory life is difficult also. I mean living with thirteen other people. Just responsibility as well. Living here they get a lot more responsibility that they wouldn’t normally get elsewhere.

MP
What sort of responsibility?

DO
Being accountable for the running of the dormitory, such as tidying it everyday and their jobs that they have to do. Just the responsibility for, like they are given different roles such as a dormitory leader who has to make sure that the thirteen other girls are doing the right thing.

MP
What are the roles?

DO
The dormitory is set up into different cleaning roles. So whoever looks after the pantry or the dorm there’s someone down in the dining hall preparing meals or cleaning up after meals. They also have to do jobs around the whole campus like cleaning out the drains and cleaning the classrooms and things like that.

MP
So there’s a lot of work focused on meeting the needs of the dormitory and the campus as a whole.

DO
Yes, we don’t employ people to clean up our campus, we do it ourselves – that’s our responsibility.

MP
So the challenges are a lot of business that keeps them focused on all these different things. Do you think that they find some things riskier than others in that sense of perceived danger? Or social risks as well?

DO
Yes. There are a lot of risk that they encouraged to have a go at, like I know just in social situations with girls there often happens little bitchy things and I say to them that you have a few options as to how to deal with this and one of those options is to actually take that risk of saying what you are doing is unfair, or standing up for someone else and I think that is a huge risk I reckon and they are nervous about doing. As you get older it seems quite a simple thing to say how you feel, but with those girls living in such a small close environment to actually do that is essentially intimidating because it could affect relationships.

Risk. We take kids into the country with a really hazardous environment and there’s a lot of risk involved, but we have a lot of staff and I feel comfortable in
taking students out into that environment because I know that they have been well prepared for it. For them walking along West Bridge in the rain when they have new packs on and are quite unbalanced, they do feel vulnerable and quite scared about it. Well we the staff run it and do it all the time and you can forget and you take a year 9 girl out there. I mean walking is one thing but carrying a heavy pack it’s quite risky. They do it again later in fourth term and they are just blown away as to how scared they were the first time. So that’s really rewarding and that’s one of the greatest things about a year-long program. It gives them such a chance to really develop and they get to do things twice and see how far they have come.

MP
So there’s a repetition of things over the year.

DO
Yes. The first walk they ever do is a day walk up Acacia and at the end of term one they run it. It takes them all day to walk up it and it’s a huge big deal and they know that later in the term that they are going to have to run up, and they wonder how am I going to do that! They run it in a couple of hours and that’s incredible. I mean to go to the same place and realize how far they have come in terms of fitness and their ability to overcome a challenge.

MP
Could you achieve much the same thing in six months or three months?

DO
I don’t think so. I have worked in lots of residential schools and one was for just a term and I felt that although we changed a lot, but everything was just happening at a much faster pace. I feel here it’s a more sustained. You are here a year and you don’t have to rush the learning so much it just unfolds itself.

I worked in Grevillea Campus and I have done a bit of work for Boronia Campus as well.

MP
The timing here is more relaxed is it?

DO
Yes. It’s a bit more of a marathon rather than a sprint. You put in as much effort but it’s just not so intense and rushed.

MP
Yet it is intense in other ways isn’t it?

DO
Yes.

MP
There’s that sense of busyness and every moment being programmed.
DO
Yes. It is very programmed whereas, at Grevillea Campus it was really flexible. But they are just both really different. For one term the amount of energy that you have to put in over nine weeks was just quite unsustainable. Whereas for a year you are just chipping away and it unfolds itself. I think the kids seem to click. Something goes clicks in their heads. In the nine weeks I felt that I had students who just didn’t get it and if they did I had to really probe them constantly trying to make it happen for them rather than themselves making it happen and let the experience speak for itself.

MP
Yes. Do you think there’s a difference between the kind of learning that occurs between the two (or three) schools’ programs? Or is it much the same in terms of timing?

DO
I think in terms of being independent and things like that it happens in all the programs. Like from being away from mum and dad and being in the new environment all of the kids develop independence. I think here at Acacia, the biggest thing that's different from the other ones is resilience. We talk about that a lot in our outdoor program as being the big thing.

MP
What do you mean by resilience?

DO
I guess just the strength to overcome difficult situations. We develop those skills that you need for that. A strong mind.

MP
Do you feel that this program is challenging?

DO
The kids do it tough definitely. And something just cracked me up is just how you see that anything that comes their way, they have an amazing attitude toward it because it’ll be ok. I think they have just had to experience things that are tough. They develop that resilience because they know that’s the way it is and you have to deal with it. Like last year we had students on the three days and we just had snow which covered the whole low and high country and that was the first time that they had ever had to deal with snow. Before they had beautiful days and warm and then they were just landed in three days of very cold conditions, and to have that in first term to set themselves up. It was an amazing experience and education. They had to deal with it — they had to put up with being wet for three days and work out what they had to do for themselves. Like there was no way we could get to all of them and they just had to cope. For the continuation of the year we knew that these kids would be fine with whatever happened because they had had that experience early. Whereas this year they haven’t camped in cold or wet
weather yet and it will be interesting to see how they cope with it when it comes.

MP
How important is the setting do you think? Is it just the change of terrain?

DO
I just think it’s something unique, something different. I think that the setting is really important actually. Like at Grevillea Campus we had that close sort of environment as a theme and we taught everything through using that as a base. So all the subjects like literacy and sciences were all done through that environment and here it’s a little bit the same. Based up in the high country and using that as a base for learning.

MP
So the setting does have a big impact on the learning?

DO
I think so. It’s something new. A place that they can come to that’s different and makes what they are learning a little more special. I mean you can do poetry up here like Lawson because we are up here and that makes it a bit more relevant a bit more interesting and a bit more unique for them.

MP
If you transplanted Acacia and lifted it up and moved it to say AAAA Moutain or something like that. Would it be the same, would it be different? Like what you achieve with the students.

DO
No I think it’s just being in the high country. It’s cold and it snows and the kids have to light their boilers all the time. Like the boilers are huge and it’s such a simple thing, but I think they are such a big part of the program – lighting the boilers. They have to get the wood, cut the wood and work together as to how they are going to keep the boilers alight all the time. It’s a real teamwork thing. It really fits into this environment and reminds them of a simpler life. Where they come from, is it sustainable to be using this amount of water off the property. Just one simple thing that you can’t get anywhere else. We need wood here all the time more than you would need at Boronia.

MP
Is that a deliberate part of the learning? Like the amount of wood that they use.

DO
Yes definitely.

MP
So each dormitory is rationed?

DO
Well one dormitory said the other day what are we going to do we don’t have enough wood, how are we going to get enough wood? And I said I don’t know, work it out. And they came up with this whole idea in a group discussion that each person every day needs to cut five bits of wood and if you don’t do this you have to do ten. They had all these rules. That’s learning, that’s what Acacia is all about and to get that from the boilers. If you took those boilers away you are taking away a huge amount of the program.

MP
So if you could generate solar hot water?

DO
It would change it dramatically and I am sure that in the way the world is going it’s something that we need to think about. How sustainable is what we are doing. But to lose the boilers is pretty sad I think, whether we can replace them with something else it’s something to think about.

MP
What do you think that students find that’s most memorable about being here?

DO
I think one thing is the relationships that they build and I think also how they develop those relationships. I think that the times that they are put into hard situations and how they deal with those, strengthens the relationships. Like you quite often hear stories about the time of an experience that kids, as a group, have achieved like walk up the bluff in the snow. They quite often talk about the hard times. I think the life again just living in the dormitory and all the silly things they get up to and other friendships that they develop as well.

MP
Do you think the telling of those stories is not an intentional structured part of what you do, or it flows out of where you are?

DO
No I think it just flows out. I don’t often ask kids to tell me stories about what have been doing, although I probably could. It just seems to be part of sitting around with the kids and they just want to talk about it. They like to share those memories quite often. Especially towards the end of the year, the kids really hit at a point where they just can’t stop reflecting. We do a six day hike at the end which is a wrap up and the kids just don’t stop reminiscing on the year. This is the first time and I am hoping they won’t forget me until the next group comes along.

MP
How would you deal with that?

DO
I have found that very hard because you put in so much for a year and then they go and I think for some of them integration is a big problem. Like going
back into the program it can be really hard and they write to you about that. One of the hard things is that you have put in this effort and swap to a new group and make the effort there. You get all these emails from past kids and I think it’s so important to return those emails. But finding the time to do that is really hard especially this half of the year.

MP
Do you think, given that the year is so intense hard and challenging that it is well integrated with the study that they get afterwards?

DO
I do question that a bit. I would like to know more about that. I think being a one year program isn’t really a big benefit to that in terms of rather than one term. I found Grevillea when the kids were leaving to go back there was two weeks holiday and they just go back. Especially second or third term, it was really hard to go back and they lost their enthusiasm because they were just going back to the year 9 course. Whereas, here at Acacia at the end of the year you go back and that’s the end of year 9 in the summer so you have the whole lot to be excited about and then do something new again in year 10 you start working. It’s a whole new chapter.

DO
But you don’t know if year 10 draws on that experience?

DO
I don’t know but I haven’t heard that they are especially good at that. There are question marks about it. I often wonder if they do and if they could do more. I think they do a little bit but I am not sure how good that link is. In terms of the kids at Boronia, leaving a place that’s special to them, their year on program I think it makes it easier.

End of Interview – DO
Interview 5

Interview on 16/06/2007
Terry Cussons (School A) – Acacia

MP
What’s your position here?

TC
I am an outdoor education teacher.

MP
What sort of learning do you think that happens here? What typifies the Acacia learning experience?

TC
I think it’s much more about what the kids learn outside the classroom than what they learn inside the classroom. I think the kids can learn the academics but not here as easily as somewhere else probably better because they aren’t pulled in different directions. So I think we have to say that kids learn what are non-academic essentially. A big one for me is they learn life reflection and I think they learn to be accountable. I reckon this place is pretty tough. There is room to slide if a kid is determined to but because we see them so often and know them so well and they are here for so long, they have to work pretty hard to evade our expectations. So accountability is a big one and linked to that is resilience. Something that the kids have to learn is the way you respond to a situation is much more important than engineering situations that aren’t always sociable. So I would say accountability is the most important thing and teamwork.

MP
What do you mean by resilience?

TC
Again it means lots of things I suppose. To me it mean acknowledging a situation which is difficult or unfavourable or unpleasant. Of having the emotional capacity to turn your thinking around in response to that situation. Say well it’s not fantastic but this is the best I can do here to make it as good as it can be.

MP
For students to show resilience, to you, that would mean that somehow that they demonstrate a turning around somehow.

TC
A poor student initially, might demonstrate a turning around of their behaviour. With a good student or a poor student who has improved, you are not going to see that turning around, it happens in their head.

MP
So the learning focuses on accountability and you said Acacia is tough, could you just explain a little.

TC
Yes. I was at another program a bit like this. I was at Grevillea Campus for three years. This place is pretty tough. Long hours. Our kids are really pulled in a lot of directions at once. They know we care for them and our rapport with them is generally good. But there are a whole range of pretty solid and inflexible discipline managements here. The kids work long hours and not have any hot water so they have to build a fire and this place is tougher than I have seen before. Kids run three times a week and some love it and some hate it they have to run up massive hills.

MP
Does that sit well with you philosophically?

TC
I think it’s really hard. Our job sometimes is to push kids and staff sometimes here well beyond where they feel comfortable and that can mean things can get pretty nasty. I mean it got to a point a few times in the last two years where you trust that your judgment is ok and you can push colleagues as well as kids well beyond what they are happy to do. I reckon that is really good but its not fun but it’s really where genuine learning comes from, or capacity perhaps. You don’t know what you can do until you try. Until you are pushed to try.

MP
Then how important is the notion of then comparing that to the .............?
Doing the reflection from a kids or staff perspective because you are actually working on the learning for staff as well.

TC
No that is more of an aside that isn’t my focus, it just happens sometimes. Look I think that another one of the strengths of a program like this which is physical and based on the environment is kids at this age especially boys, in my experience, don’t reflect well. I mean they can but generally they don’t. And that’s because I don’t think their mental/emotional capacity is up to their physical one just yet. So a kid’s physical appearance if you speak to him in a way but they won’t understand you. So kids can achieve stuff and have memories but the consequences and implications of which they won’t get to for a few years.

MP
That’s interesting.

TC
That’s an important part of it physically. That’s one of the reasons why a program that’s as physical as ours is important.

MP
So what would enable them to access those memories or to somehow then benefit from them, if it’s some period down the track? I mean this is a self contained year. I mean it’s not as if they can revisit at some point

TC
I think maturity. I mean some people talk about a switch with kids where one minute they are thinking about the world from their perspective and then they see it from a more global perspective. It might be a maturity switch where kids say things with more perspective. I mean grow up and see things in hindsight that we didn’t see at the time.

MP
How important are memories?

TC
I think they are very important. I think if nothing else the hope for this place for most our kids have strong positive experience or memory and hopefully they will frame for the future.

MP
What do you think they remember most if you talk to them? Now we had those two guys at lunch today, what do you think they will remember at Acacia?

TC
I don’t know really not being a student and having not asked the kids but I would say that living here with fourteen boys would be pretty full on I would imagine. I imagine that running would feature next and hiking would feature third.

MP
So dormitory life features in a lot of things really. You mentioned the wood chopping, being pulled in different directions and the need for them to work together in some way – is that so?

TC
Yes they are all the most obvious things. Why I think it will make the dormitory most memorable in a tough challenging way in the end is the sheer lack of personal space. This goes more often unsaid but that’s going to be everyday grinding down thing. For almost every kid.

MP
Do you get reflections from that in terms of behaviour or what they say to you?

TC
Not very often but I think what you see is dangerous fascination in boys in dormitories. Like throwing kids around, swearing their heads off as loud as they can. Like a few times this term we have had kids lose it. Good kids but just out of emotional energy I reckon. And that takes some working through. I think that ultimately each kid leaves here with a pretty strong connection to their dormitory and the people in it. But they have worked for that connection. With a whole lot lack of personal space and annoyance.

MP
So the learning that comes from that is in your view, getting back to that resiliency?

TC
Yes that’s the core of it be also tolerance and patience, all those things. For me I reckon it’s the knowledge that they can grind stuff out. It’s a pretty important skill.

MP
Do you think they have a sense of that being the intention while they are here?

TC
Yes I reckon they have a measure of awareness I think the kids could articulate a lot of the stuff if you said what do you think we are asking for? Kids know, especially at School A because this place is an institution. There are some aspects to our program just because it Acacia that gets some brownie points before they start whereas you might not get in another school because everybody is aware of this and what it is and they will know a bit about the age of the place and the legend of the place. If you are asking for honesty they will respond, if you ask them to reflect on something for instance without that context around it and they weren’t aware of what you are looking for – they would have no idea.

MP
Do girls know it more that boys?

TC
As a gender they are more aware or articulate and it must be articulate I think.

MP
I think that word you used ‘mental awareness’ is interesting. Do you think that is tested at any point? I mean in your experience as an outdoor educator would you test it at all?

TC
I would say occasionally with some kids in a one on one conversation but I reckon that stuff comes across as pretty shallow with kids. It comes across as shallow and boring and goes against us with most kids most of the time with groups and I think if you run that sort of agenda you will compromise or you may compromise. The kids think oh its just a school thing to be learning about. I am prepared to let anything speak for themselves and it might be longer time before some kids clue into the implication of their experience but I think that that experience has integrity that it might not have if it’s been debriefed. I really want to get my hands dirty with the kids in a real life learning it. I never try and force that stuff on kids.

MP
Was that your experience at that other program?

TC
At Grevillea Campus it was a bit different, much more intimate significantly closer to our kids than we are here just because there were only thirty or forty them and six staff. You could push the ..........I reckon to that in a way that you couldn’t here.

MP
No I am not advocating it necessarily but it is the feature of some outdoor education programs.

TC
Absolutely, it’s a feature of education that you do stuff and then reflect on it. I just think for this age group with their maturity you can compromise the experience by squeezing it too hard. With kids a little older who may see more readily between their experience and their education and the importance of both.

Like how I would handle a year 12 leadership course is quite different to how I handle my boys in the year during Sunday inspection.

MP
So …there is an awareness of going through the program and the memories that they are constructing of the experience are not really at that higher point in the process.

TC
I don’t think they are in a minute by minute day by day context, no. Take any student at the end of the year and they will do a reasonable job of articulating something and there will be some mention in respect of the value of the place and the experience and parts of that specifically, but even at year 10 for some kids you will be a bit of a what you want to hear discussion. I think for even those kids that do understand those things it’s still one think to have an understanding of a concept and another to live it out........
I mean the what you want hear phenomenon is I am talking to you I am not talking to the students. Methodologically it’s very difficult to any sort of meaningful research the age groups that we are talking about. Because they will either tell you exactly what they think you want to hear or exactly the opposite. But at some point their needs to be an acknowledgement of a change in behaviour.

One of the things that I am interested in exploring is what new knowledge is created as a result of being here and being in dormitory life and doing the academic work. Do you have any views on that? At the end of the year what is it that the student knows at that point that they didn’t know at the start of the year.

TC
I don’t know. I would like to say that they have attributes that they didn’t have before.

MP
Is that knowledge itself?

TC
Yes. They might know that they can tolerate more than they though they could, or they can do more than they thought they could, they might know how to light a fire, But I would be very surprised that kids could tell you I know something that they didn’t know at the start of the year. That would be a hard ask for anybody at any age, I reckon.

I guess one way would observe behaviour in the same context and see how they do it differently. Some of it is very tacit.

MP
It is very tacit, isn’t it? Someone else mentioned that year 9 allows students to do any activity twice so that you get the chance to compare post with pre. And then get a sense of what has changed. Whether they apprehend that change is something else.

TC
Yes, it would be a pretty rare thing if a kid performed so much better or so much worse the second time around. I am guessing that it’s more of a gradual accrual and hopefully improvement than a marked turnaround.

MP
What does the setting of Acacia allow you to achieve that you couldn’t do elsewhere?

TC
I think it’s very important. I think for any of these programs to work if you don’t have a genuinely engaging feeling you may as well pack up and go home. Like I have heard staff who come from Ferntree who just say it’s boring, the
kids are bored and they will just revert to whatever they do at home. But this place is positioned about as best it could be anyway. Our mountains are pretty hard and that’s a genuine challenge for everyone who has lived here. They are also really aesthetically beautiful and you get the views and I reckon that really is important to our program. With our mountains you can see where you have come from and that’s crucial too. That feedback this is what I have done gives you a buzz. Walking into our campus rather than being driven out or in all the time and also symbolically important I reckon to rely on your own legs.

MP
That word engaging. You have said rewarding views, it’s hard and the scenery. Is there anything else for you satisfies the notion of engaging? I mean would you call Grevillea Campus engaging?

TC
Grevillea Campus was more fun than here. Like we were in the water everyday there. Probably some notion of risk there by being dumped by a massive wave and up here it’s walking everyday up the hill. It has to have a level of risk about it and it’s got to have a reward. I think in this context at Grevillea Campus it was social.

MP
Are the same social rewards present here?

TC
Yes for the kids, more so. Ferntree was boring because there was nothing there to grab the kids’ imagination.

MP
The idea of risk and uncertainty. Is risk an important part of this program?

TC
I think it’s an important part of growing up but I don’t know that’s an important part of our program. There are lots of things that are risky, it’s part of growing up. Safety wise we take lots of considered risks with our kids. We push them to far places with big packs when they are relatively experienced. They come from their dormitories unsupervised everyday. I think kids have to take risks to explore their personality capacity and ability. But I don’t think though if you asked them that they would say they were pushed to take risks.

MP
I suppose it depends on how you define risk I suppose. I mean standing in from of a group of people, to some people that’s risky.

TC
If you asked my fifteen year old about taking risks they will jump immediately and maybe exclusively, to physical risks. Like a physical program for six days.
They process what they do and probably the idea of social and emotional risks are a little beyond their understanding.

MP
What about mistakes?

TC
Certainly kids make them. In some ways I think the program is so big here and complex and so busy......but it can sometimes be hard to get kids to work through their mistakes. Just because of the nature of this place. The fact that we are here. Oh, at School A, I was much better at that than here because I had more time. If kids weren't going to make mistakes it wouldn't be worth bringing them here.

MP
How do you respond when you see a mistake being made?

TC
That would depend on the whether that was the first time the mistake that had been made.

MP
And the consequences of the mistake?

TC
Only if it was safety. I get frustrated after a while but I try not to do that because I think after a while the kid is making the same mistakes it's like they will not do what they know they should do after a while and then the kid sees the staff upset and that's probably a sign of care.

MP
Do you create situations with your formal involvement with the students where students encounter problems and make mistakes?

TC
I think that’s good but it’s really hard for me to do. I am actually pretty controlling and I hate for things to go wrong. So.........hikes of....actually where we have four individuals together in the dormitory and that’s pretty important. That was in term two this term and kids have to lead the trip. Each kid has a slot in which to led the group and they have to organize meals in that time, cleaning up, packing, walking, break and snacks and things like that. That’s tough on them, especially when it’s cold wet windy and snowing. Lots of kids struggle with that. That’s the chance for people to make mistakes and learn to do better next time. Realistically, often what we ask the kid to do is here and their capacity is here and I think any prompting of mistakes or creation of mistakes in this territory has to be carefully managed to avoid a fail situation which is not productive either. I think you need to bring the task and accountability pretty close and nudge them across the line if you have to so they learn a little bit perhaps but learn it clearly. I would be more prepared to let a kid make mistakes on a group discussion. I would be prepared to let that
go for a while, providing I was there the whole time. Other kids fight, that's fine that's not going to worry me because I can control that and arrest it if it gets nasty.

MP
You mean fight in the sense of argue?

TC
Yes. Like there are conflicts in the dormitory between personalities. That stuff is fine and inevitable and in front of me I can supervise that argument and that helps me to understand how to fix it.

Traditionally, I think this place has always been a place where kids are on their own to make mistakes, but I reckon that's pretty risky business and we are paid to teach kids and that means making the chance for mistakes or the scope for mistakes appropriate for the students that you teach.

MP
And recognizing the point where you need to intervene for it to be meaningful – is that so?

TC
Yes. If kids walk a way from a dormitory (in my case), or a time in the bush and think that was............that isn't good teaching and .......outcome and if they learn a little bit less then that’s the .......that I think they ought to make.

MP
Do the students have a sense that adults will intervene?

TC
No. I have had boys at my door, probably twice this year........and that’s when things have really gone quite badly. But they are largely on their own and we are around if push comes to shove but it’s the shove before we come. I reckon the dormitory is very much their place and they see it that way.

MP
If you were redesigning this program, what would you change?

TC
Maybe smaller dormitories of say ten and there are pros and cons to that argument. Look any place like this I think there is more scope for soft driven passion(?)...............Give you much more contextual stuff that is ..................time towards reflecting on the....... that could be, even though it's a good program. I am not sure if I would be in favour to those things. In some ways it's like history in the old school. You do maths English and those things and you bush walk and you walk away. More modern programs maths science English and they will do subjects like personal......or personal futures or something and that’s fine, but I am not sure that that stuff is reflective or just a modern curriculum. I don't know but I don't think so.
MP
For a program of this length is it aimed at the right year level?

TC
Yes I think it is. I mean I haven’t taught year 10 yet, but I suspect ……to (A) handle it and (B) understand it. I expect that year 10s wouldn’t be bored but I reckon that it may not challenge them as much and I think that practically, you can’t have pre Year 12 kids away for the year.

MP
I want to finish up and ask you just to reflect on your own learning here. What have you learned as a result of being here?

TC
I reckon I have learnt to be much tougher on kids without losing them, than I have taught before and that kids are much more capable that what I thought before. What kids do when they haven’t got a choice, is actually pretty extraordinary. Literally, a lot of adults couldn’t do it but they do it because they have to. It’s very hard but it’s pretty powerful stuff. That’s one thing I would say. I don’t know if…………the program. I don’t think that the community would be as strong if it were smaller, but I think that what you lose in community you gain in self-reliance kinds of learning. The Grevillea Campus program is much smaller and much more intimate, but the outcome for the kids was much more about staff/student relationships and less about what they were capable of doing on their own. I mean they left the Island and said that’s that. They didn’t leave the Island and say wow I can do all these things. Here the kids don’t form the same levels of relationship with us, but that’s fine because I believe that skills that they need……….

MP
Do you think that what happens here is well integrated with what comes after?

TC
I don’t know. I suspect that it works alright because we are black and white at the old school here and they are black and white at the old school as well. I think that the kids have a lot more free time here and get a …I don’t know at all if they are treated as having the same capabilities down there as compared to here. Certainly things aren’t as strict at School A, I don’t think.

End of Interview – TC
Interview 6

Interview on 19/06/2007
Tamara Houghton – (School B) Boronia

MP
Tamara what do you do at Boronia?

TH
I coordinate curriculum and expeditions. I coordinate right across the whole department here at Begonia (another campus at School B) and Boronia.

MP
So you still hold a role over at Begonia?

TH
Over curriculum.

MP
What does curriculum mean in the context of Begonia and Boronia?

TH
It's like a program of events that come together to facilitate a certain outcome and at the moment they have introduced my role because its very unclear what we are doing and we have started to establish what we want to do and trying to put that in place.

MP
So there was a lack of clarity of what was happening in Begonia and Boronia?

TH
Mainly Boronia. Begonia has had this progressive curriculum over five years now, whereas Boronia has had this chop and change impact and now has lost its focus. It's a reactive curriculum and very hard to figure out what the initial reasoning behind why things were done. It's been lost in the methodology and things have changed.

So we are looking it in terms of where our whole infrastructure of everything and that includes a new curriculum. So the school has been given a curriculum which is going to sustainability, that's personal sustainability, community and environmental sustainability and possibly introduced at the start of next year. We want to make it really clear when we introduce this one as to what the reasonings are behind it and give the framework so that people can change methodologies, or whatever. As long as we don't lose sight of that initial objective.

MP
Has it been quite hard at Boronia to hold a focus on why you were there in the first place?

TH
Yes. I don’t think a group of people have a single understanding. There’s all these different interpretations.

MP
How does that impact on the learning do you think?

TH
It’s really messy because teachers don’t have clarified aims and then assessment is harder because there’s actually not very much objective assessment at the moment. The only assessment really is the home group teacher’s report after the seven weeks of work. That home group teacher has to write that quite subjectively because they would have spent time eating with those students and going through the initial setup of welcome to Boronia and preparing to leave, but in the middle of all that (between one and week seven) they may have only taught those students for eight two hour classes. When they have been given feedback either that the student has been really good or really bad, once again they have to make a subjective choice of what bit of information of that student do I value?

MP
How do you measure what a girl gets out of Boronia?

TH
I think you have to have an understanding of where they are at initially. Maybe go through a series questions about topics and then writing or expressing answers somehow. Then go through parts of the program and just seeing how that changes with the same tool or slightly different tool, to see if there is a change in the level of understanding. Change definitely occurs. However, at the moment you can’t, unless a student says this has changed me there is no measurement of where they were at the start only at the end where they write self reflections. There’s no equivalent of that activity progressively through or back at the start to measure where they were originally at, so unless they say this is a big change for me and this is what I’ve learnt, then…

MP
Do you think that the program tries to achieve something similar for all students?

TH
I don’t think that all staff are on the same page in terms of what they are delivering. They share certain things but they yes we have a set of departmental outcomes but everything is a lesson you can’t just say part of it is. Everything here at Boronia is a curriculum. You can’t look at it as lessons
it’s a series of experiences, planned and unplanned. I don’t think it’s very clear but I think people might perceive it to be clear.

MP
Do you think that it’s important that it’s clear?

TH
No, but I think there is value just in the curriculum speaks for itself. Like it definitely achieves things, whether there’s value in saying now we specifically want to go down this path and achieve this doesn’t mean that you have to rule out that what we do now is very valuable in its own right. You have all these ad hoc random activities that are good by themselves but they don’t necessarily come together to form that one direction. That’s not necessarily a bad thing but the school has given us direction now.

MP
Sustainability – is that planned or unplanned? Can you give me some examples of say unplanned learning?

TH
With and without staff...teachable moments where they just happen and you pick up on something. In particular, the relationship aspect of the students living together in a house, they have that whole forming storming performing thing and I guess a pattern develops and by week three they fall apart and we actually plan to send them out on expeditions that week and we break them up from their house groups. We plan that into the program. Whereas unplanned, we take advantage of the moment or where students just happens themselves. We don’t need to be there, that recognition of the hierarchy that they have when they see each other when they go and live in. Where they might have had back here a set of relationships and I value this person and she’s the leader because she’s cool or whatever and then they get in that house and after a few weeks they start to realise that although she’s cool and beautiful, she can’t plan, she can’t cook, she’s hopeless and I don’t value her opinion as much because in this new context these other values are coming through. Yet as teachers, we haven’t done anything but put them into the same box.

MP
So you have changed the social order?

TH
Yes. Their environment and their setting has changed and they are learning from their own opinions that they already have, but they are suddenly sharing things in totally different interactions.

MP
How important is the setting of the program to creating planned and unplanned learning?
In terms of Boronia, I would call that a fairly remote campus. I have been at Acacia and I wouldn’t call that remote because it’s so easy to access from town. But I don’t think that it’s the remoteness of Boronia at all. I think you could have a farm just an hour out of Wisteria City and you could achieve pretty much the same thing. It’s more the aspect of the environment that we have changed. So we took away their normal environment and deliberately removed some things, like form of communication and allowed other stuff to filter in. Just so that other things come to the forefront of what’s in front of them and what’s important. Actually, give them moments of ‘I’m bored’ because some kids can’t handle that because they have always been entertained with something. In terms of studying the way that you would do the buildings, the layout would be important because students need their spaces. So at Boronia it’s very different to say Acacia where they are all in one big unit at Acacia and there are sixteen others and they all sleep in beds that are lined up. Whereas at Boronia they have their own little space, their own little room and will share a bathroom with about four instead of sixteen. So that creates all these different dynamics and levels of ownership in the farm setting can be very important because that’s very different for the girls there. Some haven’t ever been able to pat a dog before, or walking around the paddocks, or wearing different clothes, whereas for me, that’s normal life so it doesn’t lose memory for them, they hold on to it because it’s special.

MP
Why is it special?

TH
I think that’s an individual thing. I don’t know, they are just attached to the clothing change, or to being involved with the farm and checking on the cows and the chickens. It’s something different they are attached to that different life style. Totally different to them being home. For some of them it’s probably busier while for others it’s probably less busy. There is no such thing as the Acacia or Boronia experience. They have common shared experiences but their interpretation of those experiences can be quite different – different meanings for each one and they have lots of interactions which all comes together to form that one personal experience.

MP
The setting dimension interests me because the setting here is different to the Wisteria City setting. Does it allow different learning to occur?

TH
Because the setting changes the situation I think that combined with the taking away of things and putting other things there, but the timeframe and allowing those things to emerge. They come under Begonia. They stay there up to a week. That’s totally different than if they went down there for six weeks or even three weeks, because there are these phases that they go through come out. I mean there’s the week three crash and then they have another crash in week five and they are all tired and worn out. Then the timeframe happens more after week seven that we just start to see it at
Boronia. Whereas at Acacia I found that you start to reap it and then as the terms go on and you get towards the end of the year, they have another crash phase with everything. They have changed their perspective, but they are still learning and they look at things differently for that one journey.

MP
Do you think that there’s a big difference between Acacia and Boronia in terms of what the students get out of it?

TH
Not big enough to say that they need a year. I think that most of that happens in that first term which is what you get at Boronia. For sure lots more happens if the have another three terms but the volume of that change happens so much in that first term.

MP
So it’s a case of diminishing returns for the time is it? It gradually levels off?

TH
Yes. So if you wanted to take the key value it’s that first term.

MP
Are there other contrasts for you, having experienced both programs in terms of learning that occurs?

TH
Boronia is becoming more like Acacia, because Neville and I have that influence on it, but Acacia is very set, which works and some people hate that, but it’s very directed and very structured and all the staff are on the same page and all is clear and its been going for a very long time and it is slowly being refined which everyone discusses and agrees on. Whereas when we walked into Boronia its less busy and I use the word ‘soft’. You look at Acacia as very harsh on the kids. Like on the first day you walk into Acacia and they line up for dinner in absolute silence and they have this set structure. Whereas you don’t need that at Boronia because you have got less students and they have a different understanding. It wouldn’t suit to do that at Boronia. At Acacia you sit at your table and no one gets up unless you have permission, whereas at Boronia, the will get up and go to the toilet or get an apple and it works fine.

MP
So how does that affect the learning that occurs do you think?

TH
It would depend on the individual. It doesn’t suit everyone. Acacia would suit certain students and others would prefer Boronia. There is less flexibility at Acacia, but sometimes that less flexibility brings the students up and actually works in their favour and encourages them to go to that next level. Whereas
at Boronia they could potentially not push themselves to that next level. There’s enormous value in both of them.

MP
Why is there enormous value do you think?

TH
The learning that they have about themselves and the journey that they perceive and that satisfaction. So I think at Acacia, if they gave in after the first term (because that term is really hard for them), they wouldn’t reap that benefit that they do if they stay longer. Boronia is not that military sort of style.

MP
If an Acacia student say left at second term, that’s it. What would they have got out of it?

TH
They would get the satisfaction because they had been at that forming stage but they wouldn’t get that same sense of pride. A lot of Acacia speaks for itself. Like, it’s a boarding school but it’s not run as an outdoor education school. It runs as a normal school with a hiking and running program. Students who last the year at Acacia are very proud because they survived. At Boronia there is more stuff which help them reflect and think about their journey.

MP
Is reflection important to you as an educator?

TH
Yes. To figure out their own journey and also the journey of others. It’s the interaction that everything has, so everything is connected, so you need to understand the other people that you are interacting with and how that affects you and how you affect them. I guess reflection is an acknowledgment of learning change and recognition. You always know that they are reflecting and you can do it in a million ways but it’s that unplanned stuff that they just do at whatever stage.

MP
How would a student reflect unconsciously then?

TH
They might write a letter home that says stuff, or they might read that later on when they go home and mum might say here are all your letters and they look back at it and they might see it then. They might go through the whole experience and not realise it until months or years down the track and start to appreciate what they went through.

MP
Have you asked students about this after they have left?
TH
I can't remember a specific example because I have only been in conversations where ex students approach you and relay that it was so meaningful and they really miss it.

MP
What do they miss?

TH
They miss that setting again. It comes back to that setting and that situation that you have put them in and they hang on to the good parts of it and forget all the bits that were hard.

MP
What do you think a Boronia or an Acacia student would find most memorable about their experience?

TH
I think at Boronia it would be slightly more balanced towards the relationships with others and working with others in the way they live. They are in smaller groups and maybe that brings things out and they can't hide back like if they had sixteen in the same room. Boronia probably goes more the relationship staff, whilst at Acacia you would probably get more a personal view on it. They would also get the relationship stuff but personal satisfaction of achievement. I don't know if Acacia students are proud of the hiking and running, but they are proud that they actually got through it.

MP
What do they learn out of that?

TH
I think they adapt their levels of resilience a recognition in that and what's achievable and what's really hard, because their initial perceptions of what's hard are way lower than they are not long afterwards. At the end of the first week they hike up (the mountain at) Acacia and that is an Everest for them and that takes them all day. Yet, ten weeks later at the end of that term they run up it and back in two hours.

MP
So repeating the experience that allows them to see the growth that occurs. Do you do any repetitions like that at Boronia?

TH
The expeditions. The first one, they say they don't enjoy it anywhere near as much as the second one and I guess there are some reasons for that. The
second one they know what it’s about but the first one they come with misconceptions already.

What we did at Boronia is to introduce the physical program at the start of last year and as an expedition person, their resilience on expeditions have changed significantly. So then they head out in week three now, whereas before you would have had at least three kids chucking a tantrum and whinging about the distance or the weight of their pack, but now you don’t hear about it, they say let’s get on with it.

MP
So modifying the program they are using running to support another objective in the program. They are mutually complementary?

But in other ways though, you say that Boronia doesn’t actually build towards that, it doesn’t go in that concerted way?

TH
I don’t think staff would be aware of that. I am because I ran that program before it was introduced and can see that this resilience level just has this huge change and the line up to go and see the nurses and the excuses before an expo. Even the runs themselves. The teachers that run that physical education program have a major impact on how the students approach it. So how it’s introduced and supported out there, really depends on how big the line up is to try and get out of it.

MP
Can students opt of experiences in both places?

TH
It’s harder at Acacia. At Acacia everybody does it and they have their special program and these things are catered for more in the background, but at Boronia its more everybody is different. It’s a bit more individualized. But then again, as I have said that at Acacia it can be good thing for some students because it brings their level up.

MP
Sustainability is now going to become a theme through all of the experiences?

TH
Most of them that would probably link in with what is personal sustainability and you would go through the whole health side and fitness and stuff like that, but it would go into the community side about what is it to be a community? To be supportive and interactions. Like I did a half marathon on the weekend but I wouldn’t have done it if my friend hadn’t come with me.

MP
There appears to be a contrast that I could draw. You talk about the normal education program that goes on at Acacia with the sport and the normal
classroom program. There is not much connection in any way? They are not related?

TH
Not when I was there it was a more let it speak for itself. I was coming from an outdoor education program where we were briefed and debriefed and front load a bit. Whereas, I think nearly all of the staff were in a normal teaching mode and it didn’t happen. Whereas I don’t think the Boronia staff know any differently. Most of them are new teachers and they come in, in a certain way and that’s what they adopt.

MP
So experiential learning, does it occur whether or not you are debriefed?

TH
Debrief would help bring out that reflective process. It would force me to think about it and what I say has an impact on the other people in the group. So it’s that sharing of learning but they would still learn if you don’t debrief. It’s harder to measure.

MP
Measuring the learning?

TH
Yes to know where they are at.

MP
It seems that both at Acacia and Boronia it’s difficult? You mentioned the home group teacher’s report – what is that?

TH
At Acacia you have all your normal classes so you have all your normal types of measurement and you have feedback that comes from another teacher that has had the student. But the actual teacher in charge of that group would spend a lot more time with those students. In an individual term that teacher would spend a lot more time with students to have a far more objective view of where they are at. At Boronia you have more days off and you come and go and there is not a really good way of handing that information on to each other. We have tried to fix that by clustering groups together like Acacia. By clustering that group of staff, if I am not here so and so will step in and narrowing down that bunch of pastoral care people will help with that. We have got that team of people also teaching those subjects.

MP
I am interested in the mode of learning that occurs and we will call it experiential. For you, what’s the place of mistakes?

TH
I like to give them parameters and sit back and let them make mistakes within reason and that often takes time to allow them to make mistakes and going through that whole process of dealing with the consequences and recognizing that they are mistakes and the working through that and the problem solving and then reflecting at the end of it. I think that’s the key way that I do it. Old staff can’t stand that. When we go to Begonia the home group teacher from here goes down to Begonia. For example, the year 6s, for a whole half of the day all they have to do is make their own fire and cook their little bit of damper on it. So I give them a lesson on what the fire needs and advice on how to set up their fire and how to light the match and hold it the right way. So I give them all the information first and then a pack of matches and then go for it and that other teacher from this end I actually have to warn them not to step in because they are so keen to say no you are doing it wrong. The teacher who says do this this and this have lost the point and the teacher might as well just do it for them.

MP
Is there a lot of difference between mainstream learning and experiential learning? Does the level of control move from the teacher to the student more?

TH
Yes. Boundaries and limits. Like when we cut up lunch I am not going to say we cut the carrots like this and my lunch instruction is everyone has to be hygienic and I want everyone to wash their hands with the soap properly and then I want it all to be cut up and I don’t want anyone to eat anything until it’s all laid out beautifully and that’s how I will leave it. But other teachers will say I we need to lay the table, we need to lay a placemat out here and I want the carrots to be cut up on this angle etc and yes they will make some mistakes like the carrots will be cut into huge chunks and the cheese will be wrong and some bits will fall in the dirt and when they cut their lunch up their rubbish will be everywhere and then that night I will always do a reflective session. What did you do really well today and what can you improve on?

MP
If you see a student making a mistake do you approach them?

TH
If there is not going to be a time for it to develop or if it’s not going to be detrimental to them or sometimes if I let them do something a certain way and they become so frustrated with each other or they just give up or there’s a tantrum. You have to judge that and might have to step in and help them out. But then I would be reluctant to tell the whole group to stop. I would be inclined to approach a student and say what do you reckon and say ok well go talk to them and get in there. I would try to do it that way that it’s coming from them but I have set it up.

MP
You need to judge that consequence yourself before you are willing to allow that student to accept that consequence?
TH
Yes. It comes back to how far are you going to let it go.

MP
What does the student learn from that do you think?

TH
I think they recognize that they wouldn’t have paid attention if you didn’t do it. I had a group go in the wrong direction for three hours and they were all happy and it was a perfect sunny day. The mistake was based on one girl saying which way shall we go (I was in a boat with a colleague) and someone said that we go that way, and we both looked at each other because it was totally the wrong direction. The whole group went that way and they didn’t question it and they even had a map GPS there showing them the route and they could see that we were going the wrong way, but until we paddled into this really narrow swamp, where you couldn’t paddle then they said hey we’ve gone the wrong way. But at the end of the day the girls said that they were so glad that you made us do that because we wouldn’t have learnt, we didn’t take any notice. Just willing to make others made the decisions and not become involved. But when it became a consequence on them.

MP
What other new knowledge would an Acacia student or a Boronia student create as a result of being in those programs?

TH
Lots of knowledge about self and capacity and resilience levels, what they were capable of and what they were capable of and they probably find that they actually set their goals too low and as they achieve more and more they need to adjust those goals. They probably learn most about themselves which will link to their community and their part in it and by understanding their own part they will understand why others might benefit in a way.

MP
How important do you think the myths and symbols are?

TH
It’s more like a pre-prepared emphasis on something and it wouldn’t necessarily be adopted by students if they hadn’t been infiltrated with those thoughts. So at Boronia to run up to the (hill) and at Acacia it used to be the…dash was the equivalent and there used to be pressure perhaps from older siblings, did you do it? But now that’s obviously a safety issue. We just take them one night in the middle of the night and go and do it as a group of eight girls and the girls say that’s it? It loses all its cultural pressure. At Boronia it used to be you’re ‘gated’ – it was the discipline thing. Negative reinforcement.
Gated is a boarding house term, isn’t it? To be gated means to be confined to barracks. So you lose the freedom. Doesn’t that get back to never threatening a consequence that you can’t follow through with?

**TH**

It’s just a shift. We are achieving the same thing in a more positive way rather than delivering enforcement.

**MP**

Are there any comments that you would like to make about Boronia program: for example, how satisfying is the learning for you as someone has taught both programs?

**TH**

They are both equal but I am going to put Boronia slightly in front because of the vision and the support from here the principal, Nigel Holt and where it could potentially head in terms of combining that whole setting of experience with a specific curriculum to go with it, rather than an Acacia perfect setting where you have got a captive audience is the thing and just a normal curriculum. At Boronia we are targeting the community and that’s something that we are going to look at, as opposed to, we’ll deal with that when we need to as we have done in the past.

**MP**

How well integrated into the longer courses of study are these two programs?

**TH**

Boronia is totally isolated and it is a build up from year 5 and they just get the concept and I can see that changing as they have come through. This is actually the first year where they have through from year 5 and it has made a difference. You still have to go over a lot of stuff, but they are familiar with it. They get it at resilience level. It’s like a fitness thing. Yes they have lost it but they pick it up and establish it so much quicker and we can get on with new stuff at a much earlier point. Whereas before they were starting from scratch.

**MP**

So are their experiences actively integrated into the learning here at Wisteria City after the Boronia term?

**TH**

So when they hit Begonia they have often done units that link in with what they will do. They go every year from year 5 to year 8. In year 5 they go for four days, year 6 they go for five days. In year 6s they do a water watch theme and they learn about water here before or after. So it’s either a follow up or an intro and they will know how to test pH and why and when they hit the ground with us out there we actually go to silt jetties and we measure the lake and we go upstream and follow that river all the way down and they take backpacks and hike and that’s probably another thing that’s in our program. But that’s not the focus.
What about year 10 11 and 12 here? Is there a conscious integration of the Boronia experience into the following years?

TH
It’s probably planned to have a year 10 thing, but to make it optional. Year 11 and 12 we will get that in one day in terms of yes we could do it but let’s get this other stuff sorted first before we redirect resources and knowledge into year 11 and 12. But in year 9 the other half of the year that they are not at Boronia, the other term is linked closely and that’s part of my role to look at those links. It’s such a small thing that has a big impact.

End of Interview – Tamara Houghton, Boronia
Interview 7

Interview on 20/06/2007
Belinda Islip – (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What do you do here?

BI
My involvement with Boronia is really just for the expeditions, so I don’t have contact with the rest of the program up there.

MP
What is experiential learning about at Boronia?

BI
I haven’t look into that phase as much as outdoor education but I did quite a bit of thinking about it when I was in university. Just from my own thoughts I would say that learning experiential is kind of like learning on the go. It’s like a set of experiences that help to lead to skills that might be useful in the real world.

MP
Does that apply equally to outdoor education? What does outdoor education do as a learning experience?

BI
Yes think of that as being a bit different. I think it can be anything that you want it to be. So it can be the really basic outdoor recreation, or you can get into personal development type outdoor education and then you can go more towards the environmental education and that is the reason for you being outdoors. Rather than personal development.

MP
Is it different to the learning that you have here at School B?

BI
Well we hope so. We hope that there is a reason for going to the outdoors, going bush, going to Boronia.

MP
What do you think is different about Boronia then?

BI
If you are talking about Boronia, you take the students away from their familiar environment and everything that they know and they have to get a new support network while they live there and I think that makes them look more out …..themselves. How they are part of the community and it highlights the connection with the environment too.
What do you mean by support network?

Well they haven’t got their family and they have to develop new connections with people. The students in their houses, the students in their class, teachers.

Are they different relationships to the ones they have here?

Yes I think so, they are more intense. They are more intense because they are there for an extended period of time, twenty four hours a day, away from home and things that they know.

So it’s isolated, it’s unfamiliar, it’s intense, it’s extended and it’s residential. They have to live as well as learn. Do all those things make a difference? And you have thrown this notion about the environment – what does that mean?

I am not sure at Boronia because I am not involved with the program and I am not sure if the environment plays as big a role as the self community type thing, but obviously there is the natural environment there and they are part of that and they are also living on a farm. I think they gain a bit of knowledge about where their food comes from, and then because they see natural environment in its natural state. I think they need that view so that they can see what’s happening in (City XXX).

Ok that’s what others do there. What do you do there?

My job is to take them bush. The idea at the moment is that the first expedition is to have the students working well individually and the second expedition we hope that they are comfortable enough in the outdoors and know how to work with each other on an expedition and I hope to open their eyes to the environment and nature.

How do you do that?

I don’t do it in a really structured way. I kind of know that you come across things on the way and point out different things.
So you encounter something and that is just opportunity?

BI
Yes. Last time we went on a hiking expedition and we went and visited an old tree that we knew was there which is an (unclear).....which is a really old species and the particular tree has been there for 400 years. We really had a look at it and talked about where it grew. Then we saw some different birds, like seagulls and kites and sparrows. I think it’s trying to get them to look around is important for me. To observe.

MP
Do they come into these expeditions with any firm memories of previous similar activities that you need to work with, or tap into, or overcome, in any way?

BI
They remember their expeditions at Begonia (another campus at School B). I don’t know how much detail they remember. It’s quite busy down there, it’s almost a camp program where they are doing something all the time. They might remember that they really enjoyed the days hiking but really didn’t enjoy the camping.

MP
Do you have a sense of what they find is most memorable, from previous outdoor education experiences or from Boronia?

BI
I think it’s a bit vague in years 7 and 8 expeditions. At Boronia they remember the group things that happened and they might remember interesting or funny things that happened.

MP
What would they think is interesting?

BI
Well the last trip I did at (XXXX) we got up really early on the third morning (4.00am) to be on the water at five thirty and we wanted to see the sun rise. It was freezing and we saw some ......luminescence in the water and it was really spectacular. I think they would remember that and we paddled to an island to watch the sun rise and we got our sleeping bags and got together as a group and watched the sun rise. I think they would remember that as being a really nice group time but also quite special because who else would be doing that.

MP
Did they reflect on that or write about it or talk about it?

BI
I guess I will find out a little bit tonight when they do Boronia celebrations. I would be interested to see if that does come up. Because it was on the last day I didn’t here from them about that.
What does Boronia offer you that you can’t do at Begonia?

To get more in depth with nature. To be able to show the students more in terms of environment, kind of opening their eyes more. For example, I heard there was a very big seagull’s nest that we could go and have a look at and I said do you want to go and look at it? We paddled there and yes there it is and got out our bird guide and looked up seagulls and someone read few things about it and then we tried to identify the tree as well. So just be doing little thing like that hopefully they will see the value in nature.

What’s the value?

There’s value in wanting to know about it. It generates curiosity so that they want to understand more and ultimately that will hopefully get them thinking more about the natural environment and our place within the world.

So you hope that will lead to a connection beyond the experience. What kind of changes would you expect to occur as a result of being part of the experience, or series of experiences?

Hopefully they would remember it and go and visit the bush a bit more. Maybe they will get a bit more understanding.

You haven’t seen changes in the students as a result of this experience their behaviour changed later on?

I don’t think one expedition can be a life changing experience, but definitely in the expedition handbooks, they bring up those sorts of things and say that I learnt about all the different types of trees and I didn’t realize there were so many species. I mean how else are they going to know what’s there if they don’t go beyond School B?

Is there a risk that what goes on at Boronia stays at Boronia, so that when they come back to School B then life goes on?

Yes, ultimately. Although I was just reading a School B publication out there and a boarder had written of her memories of her four years at School B and Boronia was one of those highlights. I don’t know how much that kind of environmental stuff that we do at Boronia comes back here and continues.
don’t have a sense of that myself. I don’t know because I don’t see the students.

MP
Are there formal things that you do as an outdoor educator in terms of memory, developing memories and generating things that help you teach or help their learning?

BI
I think so. I think our curriculum at Boronia caters for that with the expeditions. Actually, in the second expedition to debrief it there is a Boronia map and they are asked to do a visual representation of their journey through the two expeditions and maybe some time at Boronia as well. I think that helps them to think about that and I ask them to put that into their visual diary when they get back to Boronia. I hope they do that because I think that would be a good tool for memory.

MP
You work in creating but you don’t use it and draw on it yourself because you don’t have the opportunity to do so after the expedition. I try and get some ideas down in their exhibition handbook. Like get lots on paper and then they can do that when they come back, but they don’t have to.

MP
How directive are you as a natural educator? To what extent do you let experience teach?

BI
Sometimes I am directive, definitely more with year 7 and 8. However, I am looking for a nice balance. I want them to take ownership of the trip so that they have something invested in it and then I create opportunities to teach them along the way. I am not going to do that if I don’t feel it’s appropriate. I mean they are struggling to get through the expedition individually, or as a group, then I won’t push the teaching thing. So it really just depends on the group.

MP
So you are happy to let the students accept the consequences of their mistakes, if they make a mistake?

BI
Not always, sometimes. It depends whether it’s appropriate or not. At Begonia I would definitely let the students walk in the wrong direction because there’s time in the day and they need to know that they are in charge – that it’ been handed to them. But I think that they need to know more then I will help them work it out. I mean you can’t expect them to go off and navigate the trip if you haven’t supported them along the way.

MP
How do you decide when the support is needed?
BI
I think you just get a sense of it and also by observing their little chats between each other, you can see if they are confident or not.

MP
How do you know students learn something in an outdoor setting?

BI
That’s tricky because it’s not clear cut. There’s a whole bunch of ways that we try and assess ratings. So in Boronia expeditions your observations of the group and what they are up to and then there are their responses to different questions, there’s their memory map a visual representation of their journey. That’s a Boronia map to highlight the things they have done along the way. What they remember.

MP
How do they do that?

BI
I just hand them the task creating a visual representation of their journey. I usually give them an example of what I might do. I think the map tells you a lot.

MP
What sorts of things does it tell you?

BI
What they remembered or found important. On the last trip I did the first student started off with a little symbol for each of the members in the group and why they looked like that sort of 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Interview 8

Interview on 20/06/2007
Tamara Urquart (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
Could we just start with an explanation of what you do at Boronia?

TU
I am a home group teacher. So I basically guide the students in their Boronia journey. I am also involved with the farm work (I was program assistant last year). I worked on the farm and helped Jack on the farm and basically ran it when he wasn’t around and I supervised the kids when the home group teachers weren’t there on Sundays.

MP
What’s the farm about?

TU
It’s a working beef farm and we have sheep as well. We produce the beef and the sheep for our meat as well. We sell of it off. The kids help out on the farm and they learn the process of where the meat comes from and what it takes to run a farm. They handle to cows and chickens so that they can get used to them. It’s good experience for them as city kids.

MP
Do you have a farm background yourself?

TU
No, but I come from a rural area near AAAA.

MP
How do you think that the farm learning contributes to the learning that the students do?

TU
I think it’s a really good avenue for them to get outside and explore more. For a lot of them it’s just another thing that takes them out of their comfort zone. Work with animals, or walk through paddocks with cow dung everywhere. It just gives them another avenue to explore. A lot of the kids connect with the animals and spend a lot of time with them.

MP
How hands on do they get with the animals?

TU
They give the cows a hug everyday and pick up the chooks every day. Some houses get to raise chicks. The kids think it’s great if they get to ride Josie (she’s one of our cows).
MP
So it’s the students who decide how much they get involved in that or is it structured.
TU
All students have contact with the animals. They have classes to do with working with them, but it’s actually up to the kids as to how much they get involved. Some just sit back and watch and that’s fine because every kid has different levels.

MP
What do they learn?

TU
I guess the process of where their food comes from. So learning about grass and what’s important for the cows to eat and why we give them extra hay. They often ask questions about how long the cow is pregnant for and things like that. They learn a lot about the vegetable garden and the compost and things like that within the farm as well.

MP
So there is some intellectual knowledge there about the cow and the cow has a certain gestation period. Is there any other learning?

TU
I think just being outside and getting comfortable with that type of environment. So taking advantage of an unfamiliar environment. They learn a lot about with working with each other and being in a house and being comfortable with each other too, especially when we are working with animals. Jack and I say this this and this and they quickly learn and reading other people and knowing when to do things using their initiative.

MP
Do you think they learn to read you?

TU
Yes I think definitely on the farm they do. They get to know how I operate.

MP
Do you prefer to role model? I mean I do it and you follow what I do, or do you get in and have a go and direct if needed?

TU
I think a bit of both. It depends on the kids and it depends on the task really. I think in the vegetable garden and the compost, those daily tasks that they do, I am very much a role model getting them alongside and doing it. Working with the animals, more so. Explaining and let them have a go. However, there is a lot of everyday jobs like feeding cows and sheep and you just let them get in there and have a go and you guide them as they go.
Do you have a sense of which direction I best?

TU
I think it depends on the kids. Some kids say I have no idea what I am doing show me then I’ll know. Whereas other kids want to explore and see if they can figure things out and just do it.

MP
Overall what do you think the students get out of Boronia?

TU
I think a sense of who they are and where they fit within certain groups, so where they fit at Boronia but also where they fit with their families at home. A lot of interdependence community cover learning to accept each others differences and especially, in the houses. Learning to get along and respecting others and I think of an appreciation of the environment where they are and they gain a lot of skills as well sustainable skills.

MP
What sort of skills?

TU
We teach them a lot about sustainability. How to conserve energy and water, how to run their house, how to cook and clean and order their food and things like that as well as interacting with people. A lot of reflection skills I think.

MP
What do you do to get students to reflect?

TU
I think a lot of the classes have time for that. Like they are talking about things that are relevant here and now at Boronia and then from that the students can relate it back and think about it for five minutes and then have a focus session whether they write something down or they talk to you one on one.

MP
How important do you thing reflection is? Do you actively do that with students?

TU
Yes. I think that it’s important towards the end of term more. To kind of reflect on what they have learnt and what they have done. Some up the experience I guess. So they don’t just go back to XXX City and forget about it. They thought about it a bit more while they have the space to.

MP
You think they won’t have space here?
TU
Not necessarily, but it's harder.

MP
When you reflect do you have a particular objective in mind that you are trying to teach to get students to reflect?

TU
For me it is how they are changing as a person and how they are impacting on others.

MP
What sort of changes occur that you see?

TU
It's different for every kid. I had a kid this term. She got a pretty bad rap in her pastoral care about being rather manipulative and bringing others down and negative about school and things like that when she was at Boronia.

MP
Why was that do you think? Do you know?

TU
I think being removed from a lot of the pressures, like friendships and the pressure to do certain things and be a certain way, but also have different students who were different role models and having a different learning environment, and teachers that didn't know her background kind of gave her that fresh start to explore who she was a bit more and realize that she didn't really want to be like that.

MP
So she made a conscious choice to change herself because of the environment?

TU
I know whether initially, she did, but I know now she has.

MP
Did she explain why? Did she know why?

TU
I think the realization that there are other things apart from just seeking out fun for yourself, being more aware of others, and being aware of what you can actually think and do if you are involved in other things. Like all the different aspects of Boronia. Of how many things she could do and what she was capable of. I am not sure what triggered the change. I think it was as a whole. I can't really pin point it and I don't know whether she could either. Not that she was in a negative environment at home, but having a more positive environment here. About always being encouraged to do more.
Tell me about the place, the setting.

I think it is very important because it’s so different to School B. It’s quite a contrast too. There are a lot of things removed, especially a lot of things that are instant and at the house they have to think and plan more about what happens. Like how they are going to contact their parents by writing letters, how are they going to get their food-ordering and planning, how they are going to run their day – we’re not just going to have a bell to tell us. I have to make sure that I am at this place at the right time.

How much input does a student have in running their day?

There are certain structured times but there also times when it’s up to the student about when certain things are done at certain times. How they manage that and how they achieve that.

Is there anything else about the setting that you think is significant?

I think being a farm and being surrounded by the National Park is pretty important. Like I said before, because most kids are just now used to it all. Just to tackle this space to explore. It’s amazing in itself. The houses and the way they are set up to be their own little unit, but also everything is integrated into the whole community (I think the community aspect of it is important). It’s also the fact that we are so isolated.

Could you put Boronia on a property on the edge of XXXX City, where you sort of maintain a buffer zone?

I don’t think that it would be Boronia, although it would still be a residential program. I think that that isolation and that distance help them separate in their minds as well as physically.

Which is more important, the mental separation or the physical separation?

I think initially it’s the physical because it’s so far away and having that realization that they are eight hours away from home. Then I think more so when they are at Boronia its more the mental separation.
Are student aware of that? Do they talk to you about the mental separation?

TU
Not particularly. I think they are aware of it in some senses, but its more small comments like getting used to writing letters and the fact that it takes five days to get there and the fact that you can't just automatically contact people, but you also can, in a sense. I mean they can't contact their family and their friends, yet they have new friends around them that they can instantly talk to because they are there.

MP
What do students learn out of the isolation?

TU
I think definitely at the beginning of term their appreciation of their family. So they appreciate mum and dad more, appreciate their brothers and sisters. They appreciate how packed and how fast their lives are here and how they often fill their lives with so many things. I think they see a different side of life, their life doesn’t have to be the way it is. They can take time out.

MP
Do you have any contact with the students after they leave Boronia?

TU
A couple of kids when they come back here you do see the change.

MP
Do you think the changes stick, or do they revert to type very quickly?

TU
I think a lot of kids do revert back. Like re-integration week they pretty much go back, but I think then (by looking at some of the kids from last year), they have reverted back to XXXX City but there are still some aspects of Boronia that has changed them, that they hold onto.

MP
What do you think they retain?

TU
It’s different for different kids. I can remember two students who have like Boronia, being able to explore and going on expeditions and stuff. That was huge for them and they have retained that love of outdoors and appreciation. They are doing as many outdoor trips as they can – heading off out of XXXX City for the weekend. For other kids it’s very much how they interact with people and how they view their friends and family and how they relate to them and things like that.

MP
Going back to Boronia for a minute. Are their special places, myths, or symbols, in a sense at Boronia? Do they have special importance?
TU
I think for different terms it’s different, but I think when cows and sheep are giving birth, I think, in those terms wherever the paddock is placed is pretty special for the students. Say for example, first term. The cows were giving birth in that far paddock and that was a pretty special place for the kids. You would find them there in the mornings and they knew that paddock off by heart and they knew where the cows would go to give birth and they help the cow giving birth and feed the cows or just hang out with the new borns.

MP
What role do you think that errors mistakes and consequences play in a place like Boronia?

TU
I think they play a big part, especially in the house in terms of consequences because they are right there in you face. If acting a certain way, or not pulling your weight, or not doing your duties and if kids don’t do that its right in their face, the consequences and they will have eight students telling them as well. I think it’s better for them to hear it from their peers rather than us all the time, and to see it as well. Also, to see how someone else is acting a certain way and how it affects them.

MP
Are you a sort of interventionist?

TU
I have been trying not to be an interventionist this term. I know last term I was and that was partly because I was doing home group teaching, but also because of the students I had.

MP
Why are trying to be less interventionist, what the reason?

TU
I think that it’s important for them to learn themselves. Especially, I guess not so much not being an interventionist, but knowing the right time to step in when it’s important. It is important for the kids to learn themselves.

MP
What are you trying to achieve by not intervening?

TU
Because if I stop it they won’t learn from it. Whereas if they do it and see the consequences. I know in this term the students were very good at talking about what was going wrong and could say ok this is what’s happening, or this is what has happened and they can see for themselves and learn from their mistakes.

MP
What if I were a parent and I said but you are failing in your duty of care!

TU
It’s not huge stuff and she maybe upset by it but she has also learnt from it and she’s not upset anymore. I mean if there was something that she was really going to be upset by it I would definitely step in.

MP
So you adjust that according to the student.
When a girl comes back from Boronia what sort of new knowledge do you think she has? However you want to define that.

TU
In terms of intellectual knowledge I think they have a lot more knowledge about sustainability and about water power and conservation.

MP
Are there ways to measure that knowledge? How do you kind of give the student a sense themselves of change? That there are things that they now know that they didn’t know before they went to Boronia.

TU
I don’t think you can as such. I think it’s very different for every kid in terms of what they have learnt, in terms of where they started to what they know now. Going back to that reflection, I think that’s pretty important – the kids actually knowing themselves and giving themselves that time to look back over their experience and ask themselves why am I different?

MP
Rather than you telling them what they have learnt, they are working it out themselves.

TU
Yes. I mean there is certain things like knowledge that I will tell them that this is what you are supposed to have learnt, but a lot of it is about their internal knowledge about the people, about the places, about themselves.

MP
I was wondering if you sat them in classroom and talked about sustainability etc, if they would learn as much in the formal setting?

TU
Boronia is definitely more effective. I think in a classroom they would still learn exactly the same knowledge, but it comes back to having it right there in front of them and they can see the consequences of doing it or not doing it. Especially, last year was a big one in terms of all this talking about the drought. They could actually see that there was no water in the creek and out of how many tanks we only had six of them that were full and we use one of
those over three weeks and if we don’t get rain what’s going to happen? I think being able to see it and being able to do it. I am definitely a doer in terms of learning.

MP
Do you have a sense of what a student would find most memorable in all of that?

TU
I think in terms of that sustainability knowledge, it isn’t as hard as they thought, if they do it and then they get used to it. A lot of kids hear of all these things that they are supposed to be doing but when they actually do it they realize that it’s not all that hard.

MP
Do you talk to the students about what they remember most?

TU
Yes. A lot of the times it’s instances they have in the house. A lot of my kids the thing that they remember the most is the performance that they did at assembly, because they all worked towards it as a house where they did a take off of the Battery Boys…..Working with the animals on the farm and expeditions they are some of the big things that they learn.

MP
What happens next? Is that experience integrated after they leave here or don’t you have much knowledge of it?

TU
I don’t have any knowledge.

MP
Do the students tell you when they come back here, how different it is?

TU
Yes. The kids were talking about school from last year and they loved Boronia because it was so hands on. They got to do things (that I guess were experiential) and they feel that back here learning is irrelevant.

MP
Why do you think that learning is irrelevant?

TU
I don’t know.

MP
Have you had any experience in education outside of the Boronia context?

TU
Not in terms of school. I came from a camping… background as an outdoor educator. I was working with students mostly from high school grade 5 and grade 6. At that age they listen to you more and they can challenge you more in different ways. In grade 5 and 6 it's more that driving and intervening rather than letting them work things out for themselves. You have control it a lot more.

End of Interview – TU
Interview 9

Interview on 19/06/2007
Darcy Osgood (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What's your role at Boronia, what do you do?

DO
I have been at Boronia for eighteen months and my role is a general teacher. I also run the physical program...which we do at the start of the term and this term I will be dormitory leader and will be in charge of teachers and houses.

MP
What does a general teacher do?

DO
Basically, all the teachers are employed on a general basis so we are expected to be able to teach all the classes sustainability (we all teach the same thing effectively).

MP
PEPS?

DO
Peer Education and People Skills.

MP
And dormitory skills. So the dormitories are three houses.

DO
I will be leader of B dormitory next term and also the physical program.

MP
The physical program is what?

DO
I suppose it's the Boronia's equivalent of P.E. Three times a week the students meet and we do different types of physical activity. For example, on a Tuesday they run the same course, so it's about 2.6 kilometres each week. So basically the aim is to improve their own time over the course of the seven weeks. On a Thursday, it's Boronia's games and that happens four times a term and just basically giving them an opportunity to get out and have a run around the paddock informally. Perhaps their leadership skills and a confidence builder as well and more importantly get to play what they want instead of just listening to me (which they enjoy). On a Sunday the Boronia challenge. There will be a course to run and they change in groups, sometimes they will be in pairs or groups or running individually. Before the P.E. weekend it's all on property and after the P.E. weekend it's off property.

MP
The Boronia challenge, what is it?

DO
Again, they are just all different runs but each week it’s a different run. An example is the first one we do which helps with the orientation of the property and is called a couples’ run and they get into pairs, based on their ability and are given a map and on that map there are four to five points marked out and at each of those points there’s a staff member with different coloured paint and basically what the students need to do is they can going in any direction they choose but they need to reach all points around the property, and to prove that they have been there they get a paint mark. I guess it helps with the PE program and it’s fun but they don’t actually realize that they run 3 ½ km. They do it with a friend. It’s definitely orientation of the property and a fine introduction to Phys. Ed.

MP
So Boronia Challenge is different and sometimes in conflicting groups and a social activity.

DO
Yes. David he runs it with me. He does…………so we did it in a group of four and again they have a map and they have to get to different points on the property and depending on the difficulty where the markers are. For example, there was a marker up a creek which gave the students eighty points because that was hard to get to. They had to go through the creek and get their feet wet and prickles. Whereas, there was a marker on a paddock gate which was worth twenty points because that was fairly easy to get to. So with a run like that they have one hour. So I guess it’s a runner’s strategy, whether they go for the easy marker which is in close proximity or they go for the higher points and run further. We are trying next term to use it as part of ……..just to meet our aims. Instead of getting the students to get into groups themselves, we will put them in groups. So I suppose it’s not just the thrill of winning but I like a fast runner will be paired with a less confident runner. Just to give it a different sense of achievement.

MP
The Boronia games that the students run.

DO
At the moment that is probably the area that we need to work on the most. They only have four sessions a term now. More what’s happened in the past is I run the first session and to show them how informal it is they do a warm up and they play a game. And I always say after the session that we have lessons organized so if there’s a group or someone that wants to run a session or a warm up I am happy for the students to do that and the students always like to stick their hands up and like to organize it on the Tuesday before the games on the Thursday. They organize the session themselves based on the limited equipment that we have. But it changes every term and some terms students won’t have a bar of organizing it, whereas last term we
have to have extra games sessions because the kids wanted to do it themselves and they have better ideas than I have

MP
In your view, what’s the purpose of all these activities?

DO
I think a lot of kids have negative view of Phys Ed, especially in a school like this with state of the art facilities and I guess kids are considered elite and very fit. So last year I wanted to just give kids an alternative and actually enjoy it and not see it as a chore and also understand the importance of physical activity. Also, giving them an opportunity to become responsible for the running of the sessions. I think bringing back the fun factor and the PE time that they get is becoming smaller and smaller in schools as the focus is more on skills and I guess the setting as well.

MP
That sense of the students getting out and getting physical, do you talk to them about their physical fitness – the science of it?

DO
Yes. Basically before they come they have a fitness test and at the start of term we do a power point test for two hours which is an introduction to the PE program, but also the different energy systems that are used and how their body is going to react to say going up a hill and why it happens they don’t have any idea about the science of the body and the energy system. So we introduce it to them at Boronia at a very basic level and then we focus on the goals. So in the first couple of weeks we sit them down after the run and ask how did you feel going up the hill, what energy systems do you think were used and how did your body react. The students get it because we make it so basic.

MP
What’s been the response from students about that? Do they seem to learn?

DO
Sometimes. I think it might be beneficial to bring it back throughout the term. I think initially when we do it whether or not it’s the time of the term at the start of Boronia and they have just gone through the boring orientation and then to have a two hour theory PE session on a topic that is probably considered fairly dry and the kids don’t really care, they just want to get out there and play and have fun. I think some of them get it but I think a lot of them probably don’t, to be honest. Maybe after a couple of weeks reintroducing it or giving a more formal class as opposed to doing it straight after orientation week. I think physically they love it. I think it’s one of the highlights but I think the theory part there’s an opportunity I think although some of the kids get it, but I think where it is in the term it could maybe revisited so that more kids could understand it because it’s introduced before they really get into the physical program. It just needs some scaffolding and that sort of thing.

MP
You mentioned that using the setting. How important is the setting at Boronia?

DO
I think it’s one of the most important parts of the physical program, like running through the national park and when they do the games they do it in a paddock. It’s really hard to explain. I think the PE program is suited to I don’t know how to say it.

MP
Well could you for example, achieve the same sorts of things here in School B or a place closer to XXXX City like the AAAA Mountains? Would that be the same?

DO
I think it would be more similar than doing that in School B but at Boronia you won’t see anyone while you do it its just a community and I think combined with the fact that there are sixty students doing PE at once and they are the students that you live with you work with and you socialize with and then you do the PE program which ties in the sense of community I think. Also combined with the natural surroundings you don’t need all the things to do it to make it successful.

MP
So what is the most successful thing that happens at Boronia for you?

DO
I think the sense of community amongst the students and respect for diversity as well. I think towards the end they start to understand the differences in all aspects. Whether it’s living in a house, even just the simple things like delegation of chores and helping each other, or whether to step in when that’s not their allocated chore, is it more important to do their own chore and have free time or is it just important to get the house done as a whole? I think that every single part of it, whether it’s the spiritual program or performing in assembly and one of the most important things that I think covers even the Saturday night social events. For example the bush banquets where you have a dormitory group ultimately responsible for the running of that whole night and I think the processes in which the kids go through to get to that night is one of the most important things in terms of delegation, surveying the community as what they want, organizing it. Whether it be invitations, or creating a music play group. I think there’s something there that every single kid is interested in and so that’s why it’s successful.

MP
What’s the bush banquet?

DO
The bush banquet is basically held on one Saturday night a term for each dormitory. It’s an Australiana type event and the kids go in their houses and
what they need to do basically between 12 noon and 6.00pm to prepare. They need to cook a banquet just for their house. So they an entrée main and dessert with an Australian theme. So there are eight different tables and effectively the kids that eat together will be at one table. The students need to dress up in a theme as well. In the past one team dressed up as the Wiggles, one house dressed up as little Vegemites and a house dressed up as lifesavers or Australian sports stars. In between their three course dinner, the house needs to select a poem (they have like a bush banquet box) and as a house throughout the course of the night they will read a poem or sing a song or act and they do a little skit and they can write poems if they want to.

MP
So the bush banquet is very symbolic?

DO
It’s more the staff before about three years ago that thought that it was very important to do and we have carried it on but I don’t think it’s quite as good as when they were there because they started it and had a passion for it. However, I think it’s the whole Saturday night social event, whether it’s the bush banquet or birthday night or bush dance or trivia night are equally important.

MP
Birthday night?

DO
We had it combined with bush banquet but I think we are bring back a separate night. Basically, it celebrates the birthdays of every kid in that term and depending on what the dormitory wants to do and again they choose a theme which could be anything like the 80s or 90s sport stars or fairytales, they get to choose. Typically they can do what they want to do but ultimately, each house has a cake competition where each house bakes a cake and the kids whose birthday it is that term are the judges. Then depending on the term we can have party games like pass the parcel, musical chairs treasure hunt and then they just have a free dance really that house. Then they have a communal dinner and I think that just a BBQ with sausages and salad and perhaps a free dance and then a fashion parade which works really well. The kids come up with score cards and each house or each person will be nominated and have a fashion parade and the staff get dressed up which I think is really important as well.

MP
There’s a lot of creativity in a lot of these things. Is that something that in your mind, an important part of Boronia? Or is it just something that happens?

DO
I think it’s a bit of both. It really depends on the group as well as to how into it they are. I know initially, when I first started, it was tempting to say oh we should do it like this and like this and this is what was done in the past and this is what you need to do. But I think that loses a lot of appeal for the kids.
because they are told what to do, but if you say that this is roughly what you need to do and you have two hours and what do you think? When you give them more of an opportunity to create the night I think that’s when their creativity takes off and their enthusiasm for it because it’s their night. I think this is just an observation in terms of energy. You see it in their spare time getting decorations organized, choosing the music themselves, or making a score card. They do it off their own bat because they want to do it.

MP
So if you tell them what to do they will follow instructions with little enthusiasm, where as if you create broad expectations, then fill the space, they will be much more enthusiastic.

DO
Definitely and I think that I also give them a lot of time because it’s easy to set it up by me saying you do this and you do that but if you give them extra time and meet with them regularly and see how they are going, they take a sense of ownership on the event and have enormous pride as well. You see it even when we are trying to get organized for Wednesday night. This is what you have to do and we don’t care how you do it. This is for their celebrations evening and again they work in dormitories. Do you know much about the reintegration program?

Basically, what we have found in the past is that kids have gone to Boronia had holidays and gone straight back into school and feel very unsettled. So last year they introduced this integration program. They finish at Boronia and they go back home for the weekend and then they come back to school for three days. The first day which is yesterday, the kids get to wear Boronia dress, and we reintroduce them to their home group teachers, we did some initiative with their team building games yesterday and their timetable is dictated by Boronia times as opposed to the bells here. Whereas today, day 2 the kids wear their school uniform and they spend less time with their Boronia teachers and then day 3 they go by the bells and school uniforms, everything. Basically, a big part of it is in preparation for tomorrow night, Wednesday night, where all the parents come and they do a project while they are at Boronia based on something that they are interested in and three are chosen. One from each dormitory, one that associates with connecting with communities, personal development and environment and sustainability, and basically, the students present their projects to the families. From there the parents move to another area and we have two more presentations within the dormitory level. Basically we need to have a kid from each dormitory, environment and sustainability, unfortunately it’s not a popular topic, it’s more personal growth and connecting with the community. So they have three projects connecting with connecting with the community and then environment and sustainability might fall short of that category, but we have to have all three. Then we go to dormitory levels. For example, we again through it over to the kids say in C dormitory, if you want to showcase two subjects, one from each house, or if you want to do a skit and the kids from C dormitory were more creative, they would sing and dance and be creative as opposed to read portfolios so they decided to do Boronia in eight minutes. So they performed
that to the parents and from there each kid will get a classroom and they get to set it up as their Boronia house. For example, they put tables together and put a doona up there and put pillows and their favourite posters and pictures up and they will have a table with their favourite food that they have cooked over the term and the music playing that they usually have. This is to give parents an idea.

MP
So recreating the environment, in a sense in the classroom.

DO
So that Wednesday night they have been busily preparing for that night. Who is going to be MC, who is going to introduce, who is going to welcome, what’s the speech going to be, how do you want this?

MP
There’s just a final question that I want to put to you. What do you think Boronia students find most memorable about the experience.

DO
I think friendships, confidence in their own abilities, they go to another perspective being in that environment.

MP
So the environment creates another perspective?

DO
Yes. It creates another perspective in a different environment and a new challenge. Giving them the opportunity to take responsibility for their own actions and they probably don’t realize it until they get back and their parents make comment, or we comment.

MP
What are your memories of Boronia as a student versus your memories now as a member of staff?

DO
I went to Boronia about twelve years ago in 1995 and obviously in year 9. I was a new student, a boarder. In terms of experiencing the country life I had a taste of it because I grew up on a property with cattle so I was familiar with that part of the surroundings. So going to Boronia for me, I think was not such a big deal as the city students. I am always asked is how is it to go back? As far as the structure of the place, it hasn’t changed, the houses are still the same, the main facilities are the same. In terms of the program I think it has changed a huge amount.

MP
When I say to you Boronia twelve years ago as a student. What are the memories that come to you, what are the most memorable for you?
DO

Being on the farm, definitely. I used to love working on the farm and getting out with Jack the farmer who was there and is still there now and he taught me when I was there. I guess just general community tasks like helping out building a fence, building a gate preparing a chook pen, those types of things.

MP
Can you see yourself in those situations?

DO
Definitely. I can remember doing those things twelve years ago and I can remember doing them now. I think that it was so much fun but also like feeling that you were helping out the community, or making a difference or making an important contribution.

MP
What was memorable? Was it because it was real and it was making a contribution?

DO
I think actually making a contribution that was physical. I still remember putting in a gate and a post and hammering it all together with the farmer and the gate is still there now. It’s from the house garden to the vegetable patch. I remember have a photo there with Jack the farmer and I still have got it. Its also evidence of helping out. I did this and look what I have done and its there. Which is why then and why now the community days work really well because there was clear evidence that I was able to show as was I able to show my parents when they came to visit PV. I was able to say this is what I have done. Rather than trying to explain interact with people.

Also, on options day when you got to choose whatever you wanted to do and I chose bush stories with a guy that used to work for the state government and he used to come in because he just enjoyed working with us. I remember he took us out in a car and told us stories about the history of the area which was really memorable.

MP
Why was that particularly memorable?

DO
Maybe it had something to do with the fact that we had the whole day in a nice setting where we cooked lunch. We stayed at one place the whole day but we didn’t get bored we were able to explore, it was a new environment, we got to drive the four wheel drive, part cooking, part listening to stories which I think all combined made it a really fun day.
I remember sailing on the BBBB lake, which was probably one of the biggest highlights, just doing it with your friends, jumping in, falling overboard, sailing into Boronia was great.

Solo was also a big highlight for me. A lot of kids enjoyed it and a lot of kids don’t. It was a good highlight building a tarp, protecting yourself from the rain and I guess it showed that you can put into practice the skills that you had learnt and relatively self-sufficient for half a day.

MP
Was the much academic back then?

DO
There was, it was more traditional. We had mathematics, English, language (I did Japanese), so I would have link ups to the main school every two weeks, where we would chat on the phone to teachers. I think that the subjects that they do now are much better and more relevant.

MP
Was any of that stuff particularly relevant or memorable to you?

DO
Doing it at Boronia then, I didn’t enjoy it (I am not an academic person) and we had homework then, which I hated, which was the worst part because I guess an environment like Boronia for such a short time you don’t really want to spend your afternoons doing homework. You want to get out and enjoy the farm or enjoy being outside doing things that you can’t do here.

MP
It felt like wasting time.

DO
Yes that’s what I thought.

MP
Did other students feel the same?

DO
Yes, no one wants to do homework, but especially there. A lot of people wanted to get out and do things there. But because I struggled academically, I would spend a longer time doing homework and that was frustrating.

Now I feel they have more free time, they don’t have many things to hand in, except for the projects that they do. I personally think it’s too much.

MP
Is this the one on personal development, one on community/communication and one being sustainability and environment?
DO
Yes. It’s a pretty in depth program. They spend Saturday afternoons doing it and they do it fairly regularly but it’s a fairly intensive process and they need to show research. I think it’s too much for them and I think they should be able to do what they want to for the short time that they are here.

MP
Do me a comparison between the now and then thing. How does that stack up for you now? Just the experience of Boronia for the students.

DO
Chatting with Stan who has been at Boronia for so long, I feel that it’s become robotic, structured. I think while a lot of aspects have the fun factor and the adventure factor. I guess this year, for example, each teacher here have their own way they bring different things to the program but this year they have decided that the things that the home group teachers can do with their houses will have to be standard across the board. In the past I have had a sleep out in the farmhouse with the kids, before, kids have gone prawning on boats, kids have gone on hikes and walks, and kids have taken the four-wheel drive up to the beach. But now its been decided there are only certain things that you can do with the kids and you can’t do anything else because someone might miss out or other home groups might complain. I guess this is fair enough, but I feel if want to do something with the kids and you have a skill and you have an interest in. I know, I have woken the kids up at one in the morning and taken them for a walk up to the top of the hill because it’s exciting for them and it takes out the need to sneak out at night which we all did back then (yes I did also). There are so many rules now. If you take the kids bike riding along the tracks you need two class members for ten kids and you need to book it in advance, rather than just do it. I mean if you are passionate about something it’s really good for the kids and get them excited about something.

MP
What happened post-Boronia for you and for your friends?

DO
Well you knew that you were going to come back here. I think the integration program is a waste of time really. The kids slip back into school routine, it’s just a matter of time. But for me, I wanted to go back but it wasn’t a big roller coaster. I had come back to City XXXX for eight weeks and wanted to go back to Boronia. It wasn’t that I couldn’t function if I didn’t go back. I just enjoyed the lifestyle and the learning opportunities there.

DO
You eluded that they struggled a bit with the learning at Boronia back then. Did you struggle back at School B, learning?

DO
Yes I am not an academic person in the traditional sense.
MP
And yet here you are?

DO
I know and that’s the funny thing! I think that the environment that I learnt best in is the environment that I teach best in as well. I don’t have any interest in going back and teaching the traditional way as yet. I think that I have the most to offer in that environment.

MP
What about in the year or years, following Boronia? Did you have memories that would pop up and assist in some way or distract you?

DO
I didn’t feel that I was ever distracted. I guess in a sporting sense mainly like working as a team and understanding everybody’s strengths and weaknesses. In that sense I was able to apply it and think back to Boronia living in a house – in a team or social setting. I mean in a social you are with people that you like and it’s only for a short period of time anyway, where as in a sports setting you might be thrown into a team that you don’t particularly like. So I found in a sporting setting that’s where I drew upon my Boronia experiences. I don’t know if I was immature, or missed the importance of the community but I think ultimately kids do learn and in that environment it works very well in terms of the community and sense of teamwork.

I see at every reintegration you think wow what a great job was done at Boronia and you come back to here in this environment and I was complaining yesterday that I felt that the kids were disengaged, not helping out and being sluggish and lazy and I think my goodness they have only been back for four days, is it the environment or is it because they slipped back into their ways with the makeup and the hair and the fashion and the attitudes and the tardiness. You feel that you get to 80% or 90% of them through classes but I don’t know if it’s because they are only in year 9 and have the capacity to apply it back here. It’s the way they are interacting. Maybe it’s because they don’t want to be here or they can’t apply it in this environment.

MP
Were there any other moments in your years after Boronia where you had a sense of the Boronia experience guiding you in some way academically?

DO
I think understanding and I guess it’s going to a school like this as well. Understanding that you don’t need to be a traditionally academically person to succeed in things.

MP
So you define your own definition of success?

DO
Definitely. I think that’s a more subconscious thing rather than studying law or business or being considered successful and I think that you can still have good job and still make a difference without the skills that a lot of people and kids here consider to be successful.

MP
What about your friends? Do you think there response to post-Boronia was much the same as yours?

DO
I think that the people that I went to Boronia with because I was only in year 9. They were friends at the time but I don’t catch up with any of them now. However, I would probably say much of a muchness. I know in the past Boronia has grouped different kids in different teams. They have changed it this year so the academic kids will go in term three and the less mature kids would go in term four because it would give them a chance to mature throughout the year. But I was in term four, but whether that was combination of being new or learning difficulties, we never discussed it as a group but I presume the students would have felt similar to me but been there done that.

MP
So on balance of probability, what’s the thing that Boronia creates more than anything else?

DO
I have probably painted a really bad picture, because as a staff member you do Boronia and the integration and that’s it. So when they settle back into school I don’t see if they are applying it. Because it’s kind of sad because I would love to see some of the kids that I had a very special bond with and know how they are getting on.

MP
Just the balance of probability. What has Boronia created for those students?

DO
I think it’s an environment that obviously provides the kids with an opportunity of a different learning environment. So also understanding how you measure success. Is it being the most academic person, or is it just to get out there and try new things and do new things and learn and teach in a really different unique setting.

MP
How does it feel now as a teacher?

DO
Great. I absolutely love it.

MP
Will you stay here?
DO
I haven’t decided. I haven’t taught in a school setting. I have been here for eighteen months and will definitely see out the year, but I would like to travel and do a few things and maybe work in an international school or something like that or maybe come back here and work. But it’s a place that I love but it’s also a place, as a staff member, where things are magnified so that you are having a good time, it’s the most wonderful thing in the world, but if you are having a hard time, it’s the worst place to be because everyone’s around you and everybody knows your business. I go out with David from there and we run a physical program together and everything is so intense.

MP
I refer to it as living in a goldfish bowl.

DO
I love it but maybe like Stan, I will go and do a few things and come back fresh. Because my strength is just spending time with the kids and getting out on the field and playing soccer with them or going for a drive with them, or marking out the main parts of things that I enjoy doing and making sure that I am still passionate and excited and energetic because if your not, for me I really don’t have anything to offer.

End of Interview – DO
Interview 10

Interview on 20/06/2007
Nathan Redmond (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What's your role here Nathan?

NR
My title is something like Director, so basically it's looking after our Begonia and Boronia sites. I am providing the link between those sites and School B campus. Initially I started purely with Begonia and only a little with Boronia but it seems to have evolved over the last four years.

MP
So you would become the link person between Boronia and the school community, in its broader sense, parents other teachers?

NR
Yes. If a School B staff here had a query the chances are I'd get an email, if they were unsure of where to direct that they just ask Nathan. Parent information evening, student preparation that we do for both sides (I look after here), we put the integration programs - this is the first time that I have actually handed that over much more to Boronia staff.

MP
There's been a bit of a buzz down here about it and I think a number of them are really looking forward to it because it's a different context being with the students a few days after.

NR
Yes. I'll go back eighteen months. We did a big review at Boronia. Asked the big questions. It's a pretty challenging environment and asked do you really want to keep Boronia going and thrashed that out? Fundamentally, Boronia is a part of the School B culture. I think if you turned around and said we are not doing Boronia again, I think there would be uproar from students, parents and the School B community would really struggle with that. Part of it is actually, I think, its location and I think it is its greatest asset and its greatest challenge on so many levels. There are so many things that students get out of that remoteness experience that is unique to residential programs run elsewhere, but we inherently have other issues particularly in the area of staffing, that makes it challenging to keep the program up and running. One of the biggest challenges is the continuity. When you start talking about the curriculum and when you start talking about a staff member and the amount of time it takes that staff member to become comfortable in that environment, it's really a short time when that staff member starts to feel comfortable and starts to get their head around other things, that their time seems to come up for a whole lot of other reasons. I find that particularly challenging. As a result, in all honesty, the curriculum at Boronia had stayed static for fifteen years and it
wasn't until eighteen months ago when we had this big meeting and looked at structures in terms of how Boronia was structured daily. It used to be a fifty-six day program. Whoever did the timetable would have fifty-six day timetable on the board and slotted bits and pieces and staff in. We have gone from a fifty-six day structure to what is now a weekly structure. That's been a plus because it has given staff continuity, put them on par more with the rest of the world and students' continuity, because they know every Friday is community day. So we have dealt with structures and now we are dealing with curriculum/infrastructure.

MP
I'll come back to that. You mentioned the notion because there would be uproar because of the culture of School B really embraced Boronia and if you take that away and you would have a lot of resistance from mums who have been past students. What is it do you think that they all see in the Boronia experience?

NR
I think for the majority of students who go to Boronia initially it's such a – Say student who comes in, in year 5 or year 6 the word Boronia is around for a long time and it builds up to be this super fantastic thing which we actually try to cut down, because it's not the most fantastic thing for every student. So they build up to a crescendo where when year 9 starts and they say oh my goodness we are going to Boronia. If I go back to five years ago that was a very big deal because Begonia didn't exist. So we had students who would go to Boronia having never had a significant camping experience. There was 2 ½ and 3 ½ days but it was pretty wishy-washy stuff. So then you had this big jump to go from that environment to Boronia. So that whole build up of what Boronia is meant to be, then you have got the experience and then you have the reflective component afterwards. So students either go to Boronia (and I am talking around the renegotiating program now) and say it's a most wonderful experience. Others are not saying that, but they may say that in a month's time, or they may say that in a year's time. Some of them never say that it's been a marvelous experience, but can identify that they have got a lot of really valuable stuff out of that experience. Lots of them have made connections and I think that's a pretty powerful word to use. Both Begonia and Boronia, its such a big school and it's easy to get lost as a year 7 student. You have 100s of students coming into this environment every year, with 2,100 other students and it is easy to feel as though you are a very little fish in a very big pond. That's why our Begonia experience is deliberately home based. So we go in a group of twenty-five. At Boronia you have sixty students starting on a level – I was talking to some students in term three (I have just come from there) about the concept that Boronia is a leveler. I mean you have in this environment here all sorts of hierarchy and all sorts of politics and all sorts of issues that students grapple with in their relationship with one another. You have students that have more money than others, you have students whose mum and dad are working flat chat just so they can send their daughter here, you have got the students who take over the gazebo because they the gang of year 9s. It's the whole power play stuff. However, when you go to Boronia, because very few have had that
experience and it is so remote. I call it a leveler because everyone pretty much get down to the same level and you look around to see what connections can I make and what support am I going to get down here and we find that students start working together, students start problem solving together, students start making connections that they otherwise wouldn’t have. So Boronia is about taking students out of this environment and exposing them to another environment knowing full well that different learning happens in different environments and at our end I think, different types of connections.

MP
And these are the sorts of things that you hear back from students after they leave Boronia and after they leave School B.

NR
Yes and to get back to your question why do we get such a response is because you have students who can understand what that experience has been and feel very strongly that every School B student should at least have the opportunity to do Boronia or not.

MP
You made that comment that in fifteen years not much had change and then you sat down and started to reflect on the curriculum and structure and the infrastructure. Were there things that altered that process that said, oh no we really can’t keep doing that because its too hard?

NR
One of the things that we identified. We basically broke it down into those four areas and looked at curriculum plus student wellbeing, we looked at infrastructure, we looked at structure (roster type) and we looked at all the issues that we had dealt with over a little while and where they fitted and how they all linked together and decided that they were all pretty much interrelated. Great where do we start? We decided to tackle structures first because part of the issue definitely, was staff retention and student routine. We had had the union in playing games. Boronia used to exist on a ten week ten day setup. Funnily enough, I think a staff member went to the union over public holidays.

MP
So in ten weeks they gave people basically a day off a week for ten weeks.

NR
Yes. So for an eight-week program they would ten days off and then they would have outside of program time and their actual holiday break was ten weeks and that was originally based on the premise that Boronia staff didn’t have a whole lot of bits and pieces that a mainstream school teacher would have, that was the theory. They didn’t have the marking or the assessment and report writing numbers and all those sorts of things.

MP
Just the 24-hour day intense residential experience that you have to deal with, is that right?

NR
It’s been pretty challenging in terms of trying to drive change here because the current principal used to be head of another program and the current head of middle school was head of another experiential program. It’s a bit of a breath of fresh air for me to deal with a vice principal who knows nothing about Boronia and every meeting we have had has been just like a debrief session. She says I love it because I don’t know anything about Boronia and I am learning heaps! So it has worked quite well.

That’s an ongoing big picture issue and continues to be a bit of a battleground.

NR
We took a trip down to Boronia the week before. We flew down with architects and so forth. So we got down there pretty quickly and you don’t usually look through staff houses but we got a chance to walk through a two-bedroom unit and actually talked to the staff. It was such an insight just to look at how those staff are living. There were two males in the house and both have their televisions in their bedrooms – their only escape space – and asking staff to eat in that environment and living their long term, you have got to be joking!

I often talk in terms of redundancy. There’s no redundancy, no slack at Boronia, and yet Boronia by far is our greatest risk. If anything is going to go wrong its going to go wrong down there. It is a pretty lean mean ship down there at times. Part of me says, if I could I’d have more staff down there as it’s pretty light on. I would argue that Eucalypt is the same. The last head of campus at Eucalypt Campus was down there for three years (Mike Nelson). At Eucalypt Campus you have your own accommodation and its close to AAAA.

The previous principal left School B and gone what’s wrong with Boronia and said well part of it is that we have stuck it so let’s change that straight away and go completely the opposite and stick it in a town and they have some issues there in doing that. My niece just came back from Ferntree last term and it was a real insight. Famously, on of the first of a group of twenty four students who got kicked out in the last couple of days having a slumber party in a male house. So two female houses decided to join the boys for a bit of a slumber session outside hours. They have strict rules there and they can do that because they are only a 1½ hours drive from XXXX City.

MP
At another school, the same rule applied: if you were in an opposite sex area, (it didn’t matter) when where how or why, you were sent home and that was it.

NR
It’s fascinating because I don’t give any thought to the gender because I don’t have to deal with it and I think oh my God what a complexity to have to deal with!

I am sure when Acacia went co-ed, the students they would have wondered how they were going to deal with that. I have to say it’s nice not to have to deal with it but it would be interesting to experience it.

MP
But some might say though (and I am leading up to a question about the design principle), that theoretically is good to have. Not having the boys having the students in that focused dedicated way, what impact has that in the learning? Some people reflect back saying because of the living and the social dimensions of the programs (plural) are so profound and challenging and interesting. Removing that natural element of society where you don’t have the other gender there, whilst it gives you a benefit in terms of lack of complexity, it then might slightly undermine the learning because its not reflective of society beyond the campus or the school. So I make that observation, do you have a comment?

NR
It’s interesting to debate. I mean if I look at a fifteen year old student who is expected to go and live for eight weeks in a Boronia environment and the complexities associated with that, I would probably make the comment that I think there are enough complexities that they have to deal with as a fourteen or fifteen year old girl and am quite comfortable that that added complexity is not there at that point in time. If they had been a different age group I might have another view, but part of my struggle with that for whatever reason, I seem to be going down the students school path. It has just happened that way and I think that our program would be vastly different if we had boys, there is no doubt about that. I would have to think about that some more, but my initial reaction is I think its complicated enough. I think there are more areas that we can explore as a single sex school because we don’t have the complexity of the two genders.

MP
Getting back to that really intensive period of reflection on what was occurring at Boronia. Are there sort of general principles that you now have in your head that you would say if you were going to design a Boronia? That you would say must have must have and nice to have?

NR
Yes there are definitely some ‘must haves’. For us the farm is fantastic. The fact that it’s a farm and surrounded by National Park, allows us opportunities. I would argue probably and get that remoteness in a location that is closer to XXXX City though and I am quite envious of the Eucalypt and Acacia models.
in that sense. I have no envy whatsoever with Grevillea Campus because that’s even going potentially, further. However, the ‘must haves’ would be that I would like it to be remote, I would like it to be close and to be on a farm. That’s just an area that our students just don’t get and would not experience and it continues to be so valuable, such an insight with the experiences that they students get and will never get it anywhere else.

I think there is a core number of staff that you need to work with. I would definitely be factoring in a redundancy. I do worry about the risk side of it from time to time. I would set up a house again where you have students in individual houses and I think there is some very powerful learning that takes place and I will call it experiential learning because its largely problem solving learning and students are responsible for their house. In terms of the role the students have to play in that house. They are learning by living concept. I think that that is something that differentiates us from everybody else. That was never intentional and that’s just an accident that it happens that way and we do deal and grapple with some of the issues surrounding that because the kitchens were never designed to be big enough to have students several nights a week cooking meals for eight kids.

The ‘must haves’ I think to have continuity in you program and to have evolution in your program, you need to have staff that are prepared to stay there for a period of time. Which is something that we lack. Our turnover rate for teaching staff is 1.9 years, its probably a little bit higher, but I don’t think you can get evolution of curriculum. Even trying to get Boronia’s location. In order to get the residential programs, the pool of people that you can rely on to manage and lead that team and the complexities of what you need to know and have to do. There are a very small group of people who are able to do that. So purely on a competitive basis. If we take that pool of people who are prepared to do residential education and those willing or able to manage it and we are the furthest away with conditions that are not necessarily on part with the other residentials. That’s pretty challenging.

Certainly from a curriculum point of view. One of the easier things that I have found with Begonia now. With Begonia we started from scratch. Begonia was a clean plate and so having the time to spend on big picture thinking for what those programs are going to be and how they are going to link in curriculum up here has been great and I think its worked because before things even started you could go to science, you could go to junior school, you could go to art. One of the things that we want to do here is closely link what students do down there with what happens up here and it can be so simple in some ways, yet so powerful. It hasn’t happened yet but in the admin area in the foyer where all the paintings are there are meant to be little captions to describe what the paintings are and the ideas behind it, but they are all by year 7 students who have been to Begonia. It’s such a simple thing really because in art the students always just brought a picture of a landscape like a postcard and copied it. Whereas now they take a close up of whatever they like and that’s what they use. But to read some of those captions about what was going on that mind of the student who took the picture and decided to us whatever paints and whatever style they wanted to do. It’s amazing to watch
what they do. I mean in year 7 they do astronomy, so we have been able to manipulate it so that their first lesson on astronomy is at Begonia. Because that's where it appropriate. It's an appropriate venue and the light and so forth and then that experience is brought back and their first session here is a follow up on what happened at Begonia. So to set up Boronia I would actually have started from here and I would start it with heads of departments. I would start it by getting those ideas together so that we can either frontload from a curriculum perspective before they go to Boronia, what can we do down at Boronia in terms of data collection and research and so forth and what can be brought back and followed up with. We do that very poorly, in fact, I will go as far as to say, I don’t know any residential school in Australia that does that well. It's a big challenge and if I had might time again I would have started with that.

It was funny really. When I first started here the setup was bizarre there were no head of departments from junior school, junior secondary, middle school to senior school. They would have a science coordinator, like their own little unit and did their own thing and wouldn’t necessarily talk to the people below them. There was very little dialogue that actually happened. I mean that’s all gone now but that’s relatively new it’s only started this year. So for me to go in and talk to head of departments about Boronia middle school and we are reviewing the whole thing and how would you like it in an ideal world, to set it up so that we could have some sort of engagement on an ongoing basis. Whether its looking at data, being able to jump on the internet and look directly at ….data and energy data and all that sort of stuff that’s down there any time or whether or not I teach these students in term one in science and I would like to do this thing with them and go down to Boronia and have that experience and be able to follow that up in term three. I love the simplicity of being able to explain that compared with the complexity of actually being able to put it in place.

MP
So another issue that you have and no doubt that you are aware of this. Boronia is a journey, it has a preparation that may occur as early as year 5, there’s anticipation, you have your Boronia experience and then there is something that occurs after that and so long as you have a term for Boronia, its problematic because necessarily, the first term of year 10 should be the time that’s their unpacking and debriefing and integration and of course as soon as you get into that territory it becomes very problematic.

NR
That’s exactly where this whole middle school review is going. Year 9 and 10 are still middle school. I mean the home group teachers here actually follow students through year 9 and year 10 so the home group stays the same, but generally what happens here is that students will go down to Boronia and then find that they disconnect with their home group teacher here. We don’t do pastoral care particularly well here. There’s not enough time and most schools will say the same I think, grappling with this day and age what do we need to be doing? Things are changing, shifting sands all the time, but definitely the reintegration program had partly been put in place to try and
reengage students with their home group teachers. Allowing School B run teachers to get a bit of a glimpse of what they have been doing in Boronia. Before that we used to have some huge issues. The students would just shut School B out. It was like a grieving process for Boronia and that created a lot of complexities for those students.

MP
One of the approaches that was adopted at School D was the idea that because of the notion of journey having some teachers going along with you on that journey would give you some sense of integration. Preparation beforehand, do the journey, and then come back with you and with your experience to somehow be bridge between the strange experience that they have had and the experience they have in School D.

NR
It’s similar to our first term home group teachers here, they have it pretty tough simply because they have never met their home group before. They haven’t even had the benefit of say term two where ok I am home group teacher for term one and go down with the students and have got a bit of an idea about the kids in my home group and then again at the end. But I think it’s a very tough gig back here.

MP
To what extent is Boronia a learning experience for parents?

NR
Absolutely. I have no hesitation in saying that, a huge learning experience for parents on a number of levels. Because we don’t have email I think what it does is gives students time to reflect on (and I keep coming back to this word connections). A year 9 student might say that they are connected to their family, but if you actually take them out of their family environment, in a sense you are disconnecting them from their family. I think it allows them to reflect more on the connections that they actually have and need, with their family. I think it’s a very powerful tool for families to work through in a preparation phase and we talk a lot to parents about that you do not send your daughter to Boronia without having resolved ongoing family issues. We have had parents that have separated in that time or have gone overseas for two months and that’s very interesting too because this journey is very much about the family as well and the interaction that takes place when the parents go down for the visiting weekend and that’s a huge ordeal emotionally, for both students and parents. In some ways it’s an absolute pain in the arse. If the students are traveling along and have this huge emotional experience that they generally fall apart on all of the next week. But for the parents you can’t get around the fact that the parents provide – it links everything together. They have had lots of photos from me they have had lots of mail, talking about the different things they have done and places that they have seen and. The parents can see where they are living and they can see the places that are special to their child. So the next four weeks is really interesting. One, students tend not to write home so much. I think what students say to
themselves that I am only here for a few more weeks, so time to get busy and make the most of my Boronia experience. So the parents fall by the wayside a little bit. Some parents have this stupid idea that we should have a website and photos up and parents can see pictures of their daughter. This is the most ridiculous thing because let me give you an example, a parent rings up and says I want to see some photos, what’s going on, are you just ignoring them or what are you doing? There is a learning journey for parents to go through as well and it’s not something that you can just talk about it, they have to experience it as well.

Tonight is a really interesting night because parents will come together after they have seen the presentation and talk and reflect and it’s interesting to have those conversations about how it has been for you as a parent. However I do think that it’s a learning journey because their daughter has come back different. There was a parent who said, in a joking way, I am so cross with you guys because you have given me back a daughter who is just angry. She is angry that she has to be back here and had to leave the Boronia environment and the grieving process that that students going through. She won’t talk to me, she is in her room and I can’t touch her clothes. I am not allowed to wash her clothes. That can take six to twelve months before that letting go can happen.

For us to say the journey for your daughter has been from here to here, but where do you take it? The ball is in your court and that’s they way we’ll frame it tonight. In a lot of sense the journey has only just begun because your daughter has a lot of ideas all about what here values are and where she wants to go and what she wants to do. She has a lot of skills related to domestic organization and so forth and you are either to engage with those or you are going to choose to let them fall away. If you choose to let them fall away, that’s fine but recognize what you are doing and then start asking yourself well why did I send my daughter to Boronia in the first place. What did you think your daughter was going to get out of this?

MP
Do you still have a non-Boronia program?

NR
We do for the students who don’t go in term four and last year we might have had twelve students out of 280 who choose to do that for a variety of reasons.

MP
Some who are not allowed to go because of pastoral behaviour?

NR
Well that’s another very interesting area and an area that we have worked hard this term in particular, because we had the year 8 night over two nights and we say to the parents you have to make a decision if you want you daughter to go or not and if you do want her to go is there a term that you would like her to go in? Because there are different activities in terms 1, 2, and 3. Essentially, instead of students is a gift, an opportunity, families think
it’s their right and I don’t think this college has pushed that hard enough to say, just hold on a minute here, we ultimately will decide whether your daughter goes to Boronia or not, not you, based on pastoral care and whatever issues and we have spent a lot of time sitting down and mapping out how we are going to present this. The aims are the same, it’s just that Boronia suits some students and a XXXX City term suits others. We had a parent association night where we had a panel of parents talk on their experiences and we had one parent talking about the XXXX City term talking about the positives if that experience. We have got some more work to do there. That’s my battle ground at the moment because if I am going to be an advocate for Boronia I need to feel comfortable in myself that we are sending students down that are ready for Boronia and that’s a battle because ultimately I don’t have the final say, I can only recommend.

End of Interview – NR
Interview 11

Interview on 20/06/2007
Bev Avenell (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What do you do at Boronia?

BA
Currently I am education outdoors teacher at Begonia campus (another campus of School B). My main focus at that campus is teaching short programs which range from five days to seven days and taught across year levels 5 to year 8. Most of the focus at that campus is upon hard skills, canoeing kayaking sailing and hiking with navigation, orientation, some rudimentary weather and marine philosophies and environmental education for each program has a different focus. They range from an understanding of bats and night life all the way through to expeditions that incorporate sustainability and environmental messages and water quality testing etc. It’s the precursor to the Boronia experience. It’s fundamentally ingrained in the formal curriculum back at School B.

MP
So as an outdoor educator at Begonia do you travel to Boronia and have involvement there?

BA
Yes I travel to Boronia twice a term in week three and six of Boronia tern to lead the three-day expedition and that’s either hiking or sea….hiking and I also have two periods across the course of the year where I am engaged with the phys. ed. Students which usually is year 10 but can be year 11 and 12. We take them on expeditions across Victoria.

MP
That’s just part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award and that type of thing?

BA
That’s right. The Begonia staff are utilized in that sense to deliver the hard skill programs under that education outdoors banner.

MP
What is the essence of education outdoors?

BA
Two fold. To try and get or receive some understanding of harmony for students about the wider environment and that would be to make a connection with nature and also let nature nurture them. The second focus is for students outdoors to make them aware of their responsibility to the environment and their role as caretakers. I think its primary concern is to form that relationship.
So you have two main purposes, the understanding or harmony element and the students responsibility. How do you go about achieving those outcomes?

Well first of all I think you have to break them into the environment. You have two campuses assisting that but also there are other programs where kids are able to get out and about at various locations that are not considered suburban or even rural in that sense, and to enable them to have fun and develop skills that will help them survive in the outdoors whether it be for a two hour lesson or a longer period of time. Within that context to open their eyes and make them aware sensorially of what's around them. Then to just deliver some fundamental things like science or technology.

Is that more didactic?

No it's experiential. Often kids are curious and if they haven't ever been to an environment like the ones at Boronia, then they naturally ask questions about animals or trees or those little micro environment and that's the platform of which you would do things to teach them about that. It's a bit ad hoc for school where you set up an experience and hopefully those sorts of questions come out of that experience but if not, you can be more prescriptive and point things out and take them through that journey.

How would you help a student gain appreciation of their responsibility for the environment?

I think if you first of all set that relationship up where they talk about the inter-connective-ness of us to our planet or to a wider consciousness. You could do it in a spiritual way, or in an ecological way whichever ruminates with the child or the group. If you set up that, then I think it natural to give birth to that understanding that we have an affect on the environment sustaining us or that we are living within and it's not a one way relationship.

I am trying to get sense of how you do that? Where does that connection develop with the student?

I think it's from their journey. We don't talk that theory to them. It's a little bit more subtle than that. In the Begonia program we talk about concepts like an ecological footprint and they make the connection from there. So we talk about the principles, or getting them to discuss or comprehend what does leading only footprints mean. If we give them that sort of concept, saying or ecological philosophy but maybe a little bit beyond their comprehension, or a
discussion of that nature and usually they will come back to talking about the fundamentals of what that means to them and put it in their own language.

MP
Do they have an experience of seeing or measuring their footprint?

BA
Yes because they are involved in things like every time they eat a communal dinner they take it in turns for being responsible for getting rid of what they have eaten. Every time we go on expeditions they have to figure out how to best carry their rubbish in, they have to understand where the water comes from and they are responsible for carrying that to their campfire and dealing with those water tubs. In the year 8 program they canoe through a manmade marina and we talk about how you move about in this water village. What does it take to build a marina like this. Is it something that’s sustainable. In first instance in grade 5 when this subject is introduced to them its very much taking one element, say, water or one thing such as housing and then each year its built upon within the programs until they get to Boronia where there are many prongs influencing what they see as a sustainable living or a sustainable community. Not only the physical things like housing and water, but what is a sustainable community, how do you live sustainably together, how are your relationships sustainable? I suppose what you are asking is how the student understands what their responsibility is, its just something that you give them – a seed or a thought and you see where they take it to a degree. Then some of the curriculum their ideas and some are more prescriptive.

MP
So the weeding part of it is that intentional or does it just happen?

BA
I think its personal to the teacher in that sense.

MP
So the prescriptive stuff might be planned but the other elements are unintended and the teacher may take advantage of a discussion or opportunity or question?

BA
Or even I am finding having been a Boronia teacher and working for two years in that environment that different teachers had had different strengths and passions and now I am in the Begonia environment the same things occurs within the teaching populous. I am now working with two people who have come through a nature tourism type tertiary education, where as at Boronia I was working quite closely with an expert teacher who was also a child psychologist. So what they bring and what their focuses are and their passions are is probably where that weaving takes place.
MP
Given that you have got experience across year 5 to year 9. What sort of growth do you see as a result of your programs?

BA
I have actually taught year 8 or year 5 yet because this is my first year, but I can speak of looking at year 8 to year 9 and year 10 in the Duke of Edinburgh program. Actually, I am going to draw in not just the cross-campus stuff between Boronia and Begonia, but also what I see is the ethos of School B, which is their civic responsibility and the citizenship has blossomed and is now encapturing their attitudes to a global community and also to an environmental sustainable future. Because I am always amazed as to how much learning goes on within the Boronia program. I am delighted to see when I take years 10 and 11 on their Duke of Edinburgh experience I am completely led by them and this learning has been absorbed and is utilized by them.

MP
How do you know its been absorbed?

BA
I see them repeating practices, I see them talking (as opposed to when I first saw them at the beginnings of Boronia), they have a passion, hence why they choose the Duke of Edinburgh’s subjects and just their enjoyment.

MP
What practices do they repeat?

BA
Those of conserving the environment, those of minimizing their impact and the camp craft that’s set up to be kind with people that they are traveling with, their organizational skills. All the programs teach them how to be organized, organizations within groups. These are the things that I see repeating, their hard skills seems to have evolved, the camp craft and learning navigational skills and to some extent, because I have also been a home group teacher I also find that the solidarity that they found within their home group at Boronia is sustained for many years after. It’s probably a generalized statement that I am making at the moment, but I have a friend who is an ex teacher at Boronia and that’s now four years ago and she still meets with her home group outside of the school. They would be year 12 and I have been invited to home groups. It’s obviously a very unique environment.

MP
They’re talking differently. How do they talk differently after Boronia?

BA
I was probably speaking more about the language that they use in a relationship environment. Words like conservation ecology sustainability, those sorts of concepts. They are familiar with the language and speak it quite confidently. I think also they grow up a lot at Boronia, individually and
amongst their peer group. They have their own stories and develop their own language, almost, within that concept.

MP
In what ways do they grow up do you think?

BA
I think they learn to be independent of their parents. I think they learn just the basic life skills. I mean I have always said, as my background is in hospitality, I think they need to be given a medal to produce a meal just about every single night of the week for eight people or more sometimes, on a domestic stove in a domestic kitchen. They have to shop and I know what it’s like trying to collate nine menus a week. So for the to actually think about the volume of food they will be eating that week and planning the meals seven days ahead, that’s home economics. So those living skills. They have major and minor inspections so they have to be organized. They have to have to have roles, they have to play their roles, they have to make sure that they are a working part of that team, they have to resolve conflicts. They are given a lot tools that they actually have to nut out and find how it fits with their different personalities. Then there is the house group, the cluster and one community and the whole of the Boronia community and then they get thrown out into a remote community such as AAAA town and sometimes they have been doing jobs for older people or the go out and do some local radio programs. They are going from this micro world to this macro world and they grow up with that experience.

MP
Are those things done deliberately with a lot of scaffolding and direction, or more or less you have got some needs and you are going to have to meet them?

BA
They do a lot of scaffolding direction at Boronia. I mean that whole pastoral care and being a home group teacher who is the sounding board or the counselor or the conduit for information are the tools that these students will utilize to get through any one of those processes.

MP
Are you directive or let them go?

BA
Again it’s a little bit to do with the personality of the home group teacher. I always remember the story of a teacher that used to be very strong with his home group for the first year of getting them to be organized and getting them to be on task or helping them through that orientation process. At the beginning he was edged in ‘please give me strength to help me through the next seven weeks with these girls and I hope they will have capacity to learn’.

MP
So the dialogue with God, he used that as a way to get his message across.

BA
Some teachers still have that old edict of being really hard and strict in the first couple of weeks and then allow a different form to take place but it is quite scary how some home groups kind of reflect the personality of the home group teacher. It’s almost, if you have been here long enough, you kind of know what you are going to get from each home group. Having said that middle school here has a great influence on the package of kids they send you. In Begonia it’s a little bit different, in so far as they come with their home group teacher and is responsible for the pastoral care issues but that’s a shorter program so you don’t see that with kids emotionally you get a lot of homesickness from the small kids. The program is very busy, in fact both programs are very busy.

MP
In which kind of education? I mean where for you is the balance between direction and intervention and allowing things to unfold?

BA
That’s something I picked up on your question there because there are two things that stood out for me trying to put in order the most important and the least important things. Isolation and risk stood out for me. Risk is a difficult one. Kids of middle school age group, I feel, need to be able to tackle risks and risks for each one of those children could be different. I feel you need to frame that in a safe way.

So back to that question that you asked me. Probably intervention is closer to that safety side because I feel that this education isn’t about me at all. I am a facilitator or a guide for things that the kids have a desire to know, or may be useful. Anytime that you say things of that nature I realize that is my interpretation of what I think they need to know. So refer to back to curriculum and refer back to my belief in this form of education and also my life that I have with the school. The two things that would cause me to intervene would be the obvious mix of kids the mixability group, where I always find problematic teaching in any environment. Kids that need support obviously need extension. You probably be an interventionist if there was no obvious learning happening at all, that I could measure or find through various feedback mechanisms becoming tangible even to the kids. I mean if you are trying things out constantly and nothing is working. The problem I think is to keep including that mechanism in everything that you are doing, just to see where they want to go or how they are revaluating things in their head and what do they already know. In a way, I think our form of education without the bells and the timeslots in a very rudimentary way that we are able to do that a lot better. But then again you have other pressures where ability of the group, these things direct your concept to where you want to go, to a degree. It’s very kind of esoteric to put yourself on a continuum there. I think its guided by the kids a lot. Then with all of these campuses you have these little sub-groups, like the home group the cluster group and even in the smaller programs where we are only looking at twenty four kids they are still split up.
into small home groups and when you come back and you need to do a
debrief or a reflective on the six-day experience that they have had there has
to be some shared experiences or some sort of talking point that they all have
had a go at.

MP
What sort of coverage? You said that there are some things that you have to
cover and you don’t have a choice.

BA
Hard skills. Navigation, they can’t go out and explore unless they know how
to read a map.

MP
Is that more rather than done in a period of structure that you might do here?
Is it something that’s done differently at Boronia? Because of the setting and
the way you go about doing things?

BA
Yes. Navigation, just taking that aspect of the program, we would do indoors
and get out a series of maps and do some work where we have some graphic
representation on the whiteboard and we’d have a quiz and awards. Then we
have a row game on orientation that they complete within twenty minutes and
partnership. They have to do their own representation of what they think the
campus looks like. So they figure out their legend and their geographical
components of that navigation lesson within a draw and exercise and then we
have just introduced the ……….technology, so we get them to kind of get a
concept of where the basic….is and where they want to go with that. We do
that in astronomy as well, like get onto a NASA site and ask them what you
want to know about. The experiential learning is on expo….we give them
clues, we don’t tell them where they are going, they have to figure it out in a
group, they have roles and responsibility that change. They all have to have a
go at being a navigation leader, a leader, a welfare officer, a restaurant
manager. So when it comes to year 8 and year 9 there are shorter bursts in
the classroom.

MP
Do they have clear memories of being in those positions in the past?

BA
The one thing that I am looking for now that I have joined the Begonia campus
is that most kids that come to year 9 are quite fearful of their first expedition
because they hated Begonia in year 8, so much. I have done a year 7
program which they loved, so I am now trying to look for why they hate the
year 8 program. The distance has increased, the responsibility of the
students has increased and they are sea kayaking for the first time, so it can
be challenging to tie all those things together. Some of the kids hated the
expeditions and mostly they weren’t physically adventurous. Don’t like dirt,
don’t like mosquitoes, wary of camp food, don’t like exercise, hate the water –
just out of their comfort zone. Perhaps its because with the year 8 program it is a longer program and they miss their parents.

MP
In experiential programs do you use memory?

BA
Yes at the moment we are trying to set up a visual program, along the lines of Boronia and we set up a mini version of that. They start it in year 7 and encouraged to keep a journal and they are encouraged to keep that same book back in year 8 to show that they can be responsible for their belongings and do some reflections in it. In year 7 we started to introduce a mini solo, which in year 9 is a whole day but in year 7 its like just twenty minutes on the beach just to spend some time in a sensory moment, writing a poem or choosing something that they have seen or have heard to write about and the personal journey the whole way through. I think the teachers back in School B use that personal journey within their homework scheme and we started the concept also in year 7 and year 8 of using those books to record their community goal and their personal goals. By the time you get to Boronia that’s repeated with the bead system and it’s a very powerful tool for them to reach and challenging.

MP
How do you use the memories say within a Boronia program?

BA
I can only talk about being an expedition teacher now. We encourage them to share their experiences, to talk about it, with their permission, with the group, to try and find their own parallels and their own differences. They take out their own little expo book and within that there are packages that they use as reflective tools as well. The continuity between their years 7 and 8 experience and their Boronia experience is really not something that you have to push because its something that they always talk about themselves. Statements like, this is so much better, or it’s so much different. They are making those parallels themselves.

MP
Can you tell me about the setting of Boronia as a function of the learning?

BA
Yes that was the other thing that stood out for me was that isolation because within the questionnaire and having to rate it, there’s isolation. I feel isolation means two things. At Begonia and Boronia which are isolated from the XXXX City that we know, now you are in a rural setting, or it’s an opportunity for a solo time or getting a sense of yourself in isolation to others, and it’s so funny, its one thing that people say about the Boronia campus. Even it was mentioned today in the founding idea by (Principal, School B), when he took what he learned about (one campus and built a second experiential campus). It’s obviously something about its isolation up there. Maybe it was a problem or it didn’t match or it could be from the staff point of view, or it could be
something completely different. Having worked out and thought about the curriculum in the environment/sustainability component, we finished in that component at Boronia and you are asking kids to find your global impact which is incredibly hard in a place like Boronia, to start making that connection. It’s something that kind of needs to happen back here. In one sense it gives you that spiritual solitude to think about all those really large questions, but you are in that sort of numbing area out there where everything is possible and then you have to come back here. The first thing they do is say hey mum and dad we need compost and you have the wrong showerhead. The Ferntree program is trying to bridge that and knock down some of the kids’ enthusiasm. It kind of doesn’t work for me in a way because of its location, but it kind of does because it gives the kids a chance to absorb on a micro scale without other influences.

MP
So setting and isolation for you in the sense of community and solo is important.

BA
It’s really important. I mean talking about mind over spirit, its important for everybody to find that, but its also hard when you say how do you know the kids have absorbed the learning, how do you know, what is your evidence or how do you measure that? You can’t really until you have been a witness to how they are in this environment. There used to be a XXXX City term and a Boronia term. The XXXX City term was looking at things like storage and usage and Boronia and let’s see how the City does it and they go out to the BBBB Town plant and do all that and they would start to relate the concepts of those in that remote community amalgamated into this one. They called it a mirror term actually. I don’t think that happens now. The School B term seems to be more about them catching up on their scholastic stuff.

MP
You mentioned the word ‘spiritual’ a couple of times. What does that mean to you?

BA
I believe to get in touch with yourself you have to be put in an environment that’s conducive to doing that. I am a big proponent of sanctuary and having a sense of isolation in order to be able to listen to yourself. Just making sure that you have a practice at experiencing that, especially for certain moments in your life. If you can find a rhythm to do that all through your life and I think that’s of extreme benefit to a person.

MP
And that doesn’t happen here? Can’t happen here?

BA
Well I think as students they are very busy at this school. I think that even the rhythm of the day. I was just commenting to……that in Begonia there are only two elements to the day which is framed by meals breakfast lunch and
dinner. Oh three elements, there is the morning program breakfast to lunchtime and then the afternoon program from lunchtime to dinner and then there is an evening program and when you have that amount of time you are able to explore. I don’t know. There’s some quiet achievers that happen in Chapel services and that happens in certain subjects like art subjects. You can find pockets of it, but.

End of Interview - BA
Interview 12

Interview on 14/06/2007
Dennis Neylon (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What sort of things do you do here?

DN
The first thing that I am kind of responsible for I see as the care of the students that are in my house teaching them and facilitating their experience here at Boronia and also being a kind of family support as they have their family support in XXXX City.

MP
What is the ‘house’?

DN
Each team has a home group teacher and I have eight to nine students that I am responsible for and I am responsible for their house. They live in one house where they cook clean and so forth and take care of themselves.

MP
And a ‘home group’? What does that mean?

DN
Eight students get put into one house by School B campus in XXXX City and they basically experience everything from cooking cleaning, they experience as a group classes, they experience a session called focus which at the moment we have four focus sessions per term which looks at any pastoral care issues that’s in the house. Are they getting along and other issues such as do they have any personal issues and conflicts. So we have four two-hour sessions focused on whatever the problems are in the house.

MP
What does that mean, focus?

DN
Because it allows the students to address or you facilitate the students to address what issues they are having in the house, bringing it out into the open and depending on what those issues are, we kind of lead them through the skills that they need to address them. If there is conflict between some students and one of the students hasn’t got the ability to address it or to confront it, then we try and pull that out and try and mediate that argument or whatever it is.

MP
So what would you say is the main business here at Boronia?

DN
For me is giving these students experiences that they might not have the opportunity, or might not want to back in XXXX City. All these experiences help them to develop personally. Things like leadership, communication, they develop personal skills that can be taken back to XXXX City and allow them to improve their sociability.

MP
It's sort of like a time out from XXXX City where you can do some engineering of personality, do you think?

DN
It's not a time out. I see it more of an opportunity for the students to be exposed to maybe a little more of normality really because I see from what I have seen, their life back in XXXX City (it does vary) certainly from a higher socioeconomic level and therefore they may take things for granted, they might not need the opportunity to work, or the opportunity to take care of themselves. I mean quite a few of the students are very sociable and therefore their focus is truly about themselves and their friends and not a lot of responsibility.

MP
Use two words that are interesting. ‘Experience’ – where the students come here for the experience and you used the work ‘exposure’. What do these mean?

DN
Certainly different to them. Their exposure to living on their own, having to make choices and the experiences that I am saying is increasing their comfort zone and allowing them to practice good judgment, practice good decision making, practice communication, practice leadership and it's all in an environment, a community, that's giving and safe and secure.

MP
And exposure. Is there an element of risk in exposure do you think?

DN
Oh yes. I mean it might not be exposure to harmful things, but exposure to living with people as opposed to being upset and dealing with things that they don’t want to deal with. I have a student at the moment who is very withdrawn and she is at the moment exposed to lots of opportunities to get her out of her comfort zone and she has chosen to work on that. We have identified it, that she does have issues with talking in front of people and therefore, the more exposure she get to actually feeling that way, out of her comfort zone, she feels she becoming a little bit more comfortable with that. She uses words like, I can do it here because I feel safe because they are all my friends I know that they are not going to have a go at me. I feel a bit more comfortable doing it here. I suppose a program like this the eight weeks the students are together, they do feel a community and they do feel that they can actually step passed that boundary that they might have and expose their fears a little bit.
MP
You said to adhere…, is the place very important then?

DN
Certainly. I think they all experience kind of the same thing so they will feel a kind of comradery and therefore they start feeling comfortable with themselves and each other. That’s because they are living together, they do everything together, they work together and cook together. It might not always be in their home groups, it might be in a bigger village sense and they get mixed up and they know each other. I don’t know if they know their limits and they kind of have the opportunity to push them a little more. I suppose that’s one good role of a teacher, it that I can get to know my students and get to know what’s their challenge and also how far we can push them and just a little more outside of their comfort zone.

MP
I am interested that we are here at Boronia and School B is based in School B, unyet here we are. Why here, why not in School B where they can go home each night?

DN
Certainly they can’t go anywhere, they can’t ring their parents and say I have had enough. We are separated by distance, the ability to get easily into here and we are separated by communications (very, very quick communications). The students have time to reflect on what they are doing, they have time to be counseled, to get on the horse if they have issues. I mean (not for every student) they certainly have their dark times here and at times they may find the challenge a bit overwhelming and their will either choose to stay back in their homes or breakdown emotionally and it’s our role to get them talking about it and get them using their own thought processes to try again, try and to achieve their goal. If they fail that one thing, well let’s put some things in place in order to be successful at it. What a lot of students struggle with, especially from the City is going on their expeditions and certainly in living with other students and taking care of themselves. Because in most of their family unit back in XXXX City, their parents will be kind of open armed and let things go. They struggle because a lot of them are strong personalities and they work out their natural pecking order but still struggle.

MP
You mentioned the words ‘fail’ and ‘succeed’ in two different sentences. What would be a failure in your view?

DN
I wouldn’t say failure but let’s say in their running program a student that enjoys running, or is working towards a goal may either have an asthma attack or they have twisted their ankle and they can’t achieve their goal on the day. Therefore they are not successful at that attempt and we need to put things in place to allow them to try again. We have…. awards which are awarded for certain categories in our program and one of them is personal
challenge and we sit down and work with them on what they want to set as a personal challenge. So as teachers we work around who they are what they strive for and is their something they can improve and as teachers we kind of work on them in an area that they wouldn’t do back in XXXX City. That might be focused on physical education, an environment project, it might be personal challenge that a student is not well organized in, or not communicating or have different fears and we set challenges for them to achieve over the time they are here and then they are awarded a personal challenge. We don’t set the challenges for the students but we guide them and depending on the students, some will set challenges that are unrealistic and some will set challenges that are too easy, so we try and get a good medium for them to at least develop in that area.

MP
Are there ways that students here interact with the environment that they are in as part of their learning? Is it an active player in their education?

DN
Yes certainly. It’s probably one of the large areas in the curriculum. It’s an area called “Environment Sustainability” and that covers, I suppose, about how they live. They are taught about sustainability, about using electricity, water, what do we do with our rubbish, do we compost, do we recycle and so forth. We try to eliminate their use of landfill and that’s part of their everyday living. The other part is how they interact with their environment and so that’s the national park that’s around them and I suppose that is also part of classes on site. So we expose them to two areas like the rainforest and let them identify and so forth and experience that area and then kind of debrief it afterwards. We expose them to things like logging which is done in (another state), we expose them to expeditions where they get to see a little bit more of the flora and fauna of the environment, not only here, but up in (another state) as well.

MP
When you say you don’t teach them. How does the learning transaction occur at Boronia between you an educator and the student?

DN
Certainly, obviously the curriculum we have objectives that need to be met and therefore for me, the way I do it, is using a lot of front loading, a lot of interactions with what we are actually doing, so physically we are doing tasks and getting out there and experiencing and then debriefing and getting a lot more participation from the students.

MP
The term front loading, what does that mean to you?

DN
I suppose bringing what we are going to learn about in context and try and make it a bit more of a connection to the individual students. A lot of it is about knowing what the student is about and getting them excited and getting
them to start thinking about what they are going to learn before they are actually getting in there and start experiencing.

MP
So you seek to create a feeling of anticipation.

DN
Yes to create a little bit more of an open mind and also making connections with what they have already experienced. Making a foundation and then once you have that foundation of where they come from and depending on what the lessons about, it might be the environment, how they live, how they process things like their rubbish and then bring back the lesson, the scaffold of learning for them to make more of a connection back home.

MP
Do you have any sense as to how this different to a conventional classroom?

DN
I don’t think it should be. I have just finished my degree so I think it’s a really good strategy to get the............I think you can do it in mainstream school just as easy as you can do it in an experiential learning type environment like this. But I suppose it’s the strategy that you use that you fit in when you need it so if it’s appropriate then you use it and if it’s not appropriate then you use another strategy.

MP
Could you do what’s done here in the mainstream schools?

Co
I suppose it depends on what the objectives are. If the objectives are living skills and think you could but I don’t have enough experience to say yes or no. I suppose we are getting these students and we are keeping them out of their comfort zone for a longer period of time. Whereas back in a conventional school they go home and they fall back into their own lives and they are back into their comfort zone. Whereas here they are kind of out of their comfort zone all of the time.

MP
So your sense is that you’re not sure whether that could be done in suburban XXXX City.

DN
Certainly the strategy that I use here could be implemented in mainstream schools. Whether that’s successful or not I suppose it depends on if it’s followed right through or students see it as just a fad and it goes in and out. Like here you are fairly supported by the teachers around you in that we try to provide a similar type of experience and therefore the students are exposed to similar methods and therefore they are comfortable with that. I could see if you went into another school and you used this type of method, then if it was me, I would feel a bit confused to be going into a class that allowed me to
learn by my own experiencing and then went to another class that was more controlled that didn’t allow me to experience my learning.

MP
Is there an essential difference do you think between learning by experience and learning by what you described as chalk and cheese?

DN
For me there is because if someone lectured to me it doesn’t really go in. For me to learn I need to actually do it.

MP
So you need to do to learn rather than do the alternative and that’s not a satisfactory way of learning?

DN
That’s the way I learnt and I suppose as I was saying before, there are times for strategies. Depending on the student, if you use it there and then if the contents supported that type of strategy I would use it and it’s more that they to be informed and they need to know and they need to write it down, then you would choose another one.

MP
Is experiential learning that sense of writing it down?

DN
I suppose what we do here is we don’t write stuff down. Although we get the students to write things down, their reflections or use whatever they feel more comfortable with, like poems, we get them to use that type of medium, but we don’t get them to write down loads of information about the environment, about sustainability about all those types of various curriculum that we cover.

MP
You mentioned the word ‘reflect’ what does that mean?

DN
To me reflection means looking back on your experience and the way you do that is you think about what you have done and what it means to you.

MP
You were talking about students not writing things down and there was an emphasis on doing and perhaps there are different ways of reflecting. Is there any form of assessment of learning? Mainstream learning you might say is characterized by examinations and tests.

DN
No there’s no formal assessment. I don’t see formal assessment here. The assessments that we do have is I can look at an environmental activity where they create a board game. A snakes and ladders board game, that they put in information of sustainability, of what’s positive sustainability and negative
action for sustainability. So I suppose up that activity everything they learn would be evidenced on the latest board game. The other activity that we do is we look at the independent learning project that can cover anything that they do for personal development type project, it might be an environmental and sustainability project, it may be something in the home economics side of things and at the moment, because it’s in its infancy, we look at their ability to conduct independent learning projects, how they plan, how they reference, how they look, how they decipher whether it’s good information or not and their conclusion and I suppose their finished product is the most important part as it is the process they use.

MP
So that’s more of a formal project. Is that more like mainstream learning do you think?

DN
Yes I see it as it is.

MP
Does that sit well with the doing side of things?

DN
I like the independent project because it allows them to go out on their own and experience what they are researching in. So they can go out on the farm and work out things about crops, they can look at the compost and kind of be in there and do it and work out how it works. So in respect to an independent learning project, its fantastic. Because they have the ability to experience a bit more, or get to know a bit more.

Snakes and ladders. I suppose it’s just a fun way of searching for understanding until they get it, especially it only covers environmental and sustainability side of it and there are the only formal type work that they do really.

MP
You mentioned the independent learning project allows students to be there and be part of what they are researching. I mean that would be a significant part of being here in this place wouldn’t it?

DN
Yes.

MP
You couldn’t that at School B campus?

DN
It would be easier for a student to search the web, look at reference texts and gather their information that way rather than going to do it. But it’s easier for the students here to actually go and do it. Here, the experiencing just give the students a little bit more on the explanation and then they will reflect on it and
put it down on paper. So it’s three times that they have processed it through their brain. I suppose it caters for every one’s learning style because people that are better at doing things they are doing it, if the students better at writing it down and practicing it that way well it’s there and then those people that reflect well.

MP
How do you go about teaching experiential?

DN
Basically it’s getting out there and doing it and for understanding what my objectives are then getting the students involved in that experience and certainly debriefing and reflecting is a major part of it as well. Reflecting on what they have done and what it means to them.

MP
You said understanding their objectives are they your objectives or the students objectives?

DN
Certainly if it’s part of curriculum, it will be objectives of the curriculum, if part of the objectives of the curriculum is to use the students goals, then I would use that as well.

MP
So you might use students’ own goals to be part of your objective as well?

DN
Exactly right. I mean if we are covering something that’s more of a personal nature, it’s more looking at their personal abilities they are told to look at their goals and decide what they want to achieve as well.

MP
How would you know that something has been learned in an experiential learning transaction?

DN
Certainly at how successful they are at doing that activity, also by discussion and talking to the students throughout the process, reflection. Certainly, feedback from students is a big one, because they get to talk about it and they talk about it in a manner that they understand it and to me that is a positive example of them learning something new.

MP
So if they express it back in their own language that’s part of the reflection that indicates that they have learned?

DN
Yes, especially in other key areas of what we are learning, or of what we are teaching.
MP
Do you see learning as individual or as a group?

DN
I think I have seen it in both. Certainly individually. Sometimes students do well away from the group and they show an interest and you can take it a little bit further. As a group you do see the group move forward and they kind of all understand (not simultaneously) at the same level.

MP
Do you think, on balance learning is a social activity or an individual activity? I mean is it something they do with others or do they just do it on their own?

DN
At the start of the program they tend to work as a group and whether it’s a comfort zone where they are more comfortable if they are in an environment that they are not sure of they kind of know each other so therefore they work as a unit and learn as a unit. As they are exposed and become more comfortable with the village, they tend to go out on their own and some students that will show an interest in areas and because I suppose the village is set up no matter what you do here you are learning something – whether your doing composting or something with the physical program, students who are interested in those areas feel more comfortable to go out and explore them on their own.

MP
Do you see that there are peer structures within the unit? Do they form their own groups that you can actually identify?

DN
It depends on the students. Some students come in and they are part of a friendship group back at School B and they will tend to stay in that friendship group here, but then you have students who come here who are a bit more on their own and they tend to make their own new friendship groups. Certainly the house is a big one where they tend to work very close and you see some houses are very close because they sit together during meals, they will do activities on their free time together, but then you see the other side of it where friendship groups come from School B and the house thing won’t make a difference. They will choose to hang around their friends.

MP
How do students interact with staff here?

DN
I think it depends on the staff member. You do see it socially and when I teach. I would maybe different to another teacher. It’s very individual.

MP
Does that affect the learning of the kids?
I suppose because we come from different backgrounds, from different specialties we all bring something different to our clusters and our classes. I am not quite sure that as a result it is a positive or a negative thing.

Does the student memory play any part in your teaching?

I certainly take from the students when I teach. So if there’s a student that has an experience and that will help the class or the group understand I would use that.

I was thinking more of a student who has taken part in an experience here, is that used in any way, beyond that?

If there was a need at goal setting or achieving or motivation, I would use it. I would use the students’ reflection of time, the feelings and what it meant to them to do it. Certainly in expeditions do use that process every evening because they are taught how to debrief for the day and talk about what they have done, what roles they play, because in expeditions they actually play roles throughout the day. So it might be a leader role, a navigation role and so forth. We try and pull from those experiences to make connections and talk about what is the concept of communication or what is communication or whatever and where have they shown it through the day.

How does the student recall from memory?

I suppose people remember hard times and good times and I am assuming that’s how they would report them. The feeling of success and the feeling of failure are two key points of remembering.

What do you think that the students find most memorable about Boronia?

I think achieving goals that they would never have done back in School B. I think that they soon forget all the hard times they have here and they go away and all they can remember is living with eight students and how much fun it was and don’t remember the fights they used to have or frustrations they would have with students that didn’t pull their weight. They remember the activities they did as a group.

Do you think there are connections between those memories and the kind of learning that they achieve?
DN
Well I think that again they have experienced it and they have done it therefore, they are going to keep it in the back of their mind and going to appreciate it more because they can say they have done it and they have achieved something that’s very different from everyone else’s experience back in School B.

MP
So there is no one Boronia experience.

DN
Totally not. I experienced a group last year and although they thought the challenge would be like expedition or their experiences were going to evolve around running etc, their experiences were really on the focus with each other in the house. They were a group that had a lot of big personalities and that made it challenging for them to get on. It was quite funny. The focus that we did have with those students, they kind of eluded to the fact that my experience at Boronia has been spoilt because of this and this. Over the term we discussed it. Was your Boronia experience ruined by it or have you gained skills because of it? Are you able to communicate better, are you able to feel empowered to say something to someone that is a stronger personality? Things like that. Overtime they understood that they developed in that area and the fact that there was only a couple of personalities within that house and that changed their Boronia experience to focus on that

MP
How is the physical terrain here used to achieve things?

DN
Certainly, to set goals physically. To set goals whether it be through the physical program, it’s a challenging terrain and environment (rain, cold and hot weather). They all play a part. It is certainly used to allow students to mix what they are learning about. So if they are learning about say, the environment, there is also a physical component to it because we are getting out there and doing heights and so forth. So it quite a cross learning.

MP
What is the longest the students stay out of their village environment?

DN
Three days and they go on to the next expedition and that’s three days. For me, it gives students enough time to get away from the village at tea times, gives them a break from living in a house of eight, gets them outside of a standard routine and it’s almost again getting them out of their comfort zone and moving them away from what they start calling home.

MP
As a result of that change of setting and the environment do they interact differently when they come back?

DN
It diffuses a lot of issues when we get them out on expedition, gives them a time to get to know other students outside of their house and I would say that it doesn’t change them it gives them a break.

MP
As a result of these activities, let’s say out there the students encounter a problem that they can’t solve. How would you move on from that?

DN
I suppose if they can’t personally address it you would help them to address it. You put things in place. You give them skills if they needed skills to achieve a positive outcome, you would help them maybe reflect on the choices, or even look at the choices that they have and facilitate them to overcome that barrier. I mean not telling them exactly what to do but using what tools they have themselves and provide them with some new tools and allowing them to make their choices.

MP
What if they make the wrong choice in your view?

DN
I think that the important part is to guide them in an appropriate direction if you see that it would be beneficial for them to move in that way and learn that way, well then, maybe you would let them go that way. But for me, if there was any concerns about safety or any ramifications from then I would go ahead and steer them in an appropriate direction.

MP
Steer. Would that be outright intervention, stop, you can’t do this?

DN
No. You would talk them through the process. Certainly it’s about decision making, ask questions why and what are the outcomes if you do choose that path? Everything that they should be doing mentally, I would be trying to do that, always questioning.

MP
What about balancing the level of participation? You have always got a large number of students here. Do they all participate equally?

DN
No. I suppose the beauty of our program is that we are broken up into home groups and broken up into a cluster group and so in essence the most students that we have to run classes or activities, are probably about 25 or 28 students.
MP
Is there any strategy you have to try and even up the participation level?

DN
I certainly give consideration to the students themselves. What they are like, what are their interests and when will it apply to address most students? They all come in ready for Boronia and it depends on whether they are comfortable with getting involved. So you might have student that isn’t comfortable so I look at an activity and question how can I modify that activity to have those students feel more comfortable to participate?

MP
Do you feel that the problems that you said graduate in terms of difficulty, or some are easier and some are hard?

DN
Certainly they graduate from when they get here because they are dealing with being away from their home and dealing with a new regime and an uncertain program (they don’t know what they are up for). So they have baby steps at the start and then as they need to experience a bit more and feel a bit more challenged, then you increase those challenges.

MP
What do you think that most students would say is the hardest challenge?

DN
There’s a couple. Living with other students. There are quite a number that struggle living away from home and certainly at the start of term they find it an issue.

MP
What sort of risks do you think that students take here?

DN
I think a lot of students risk being themselves, and not conforming to what they conformed to in School B. There’s a big push to be a certain type of person back in School B. Whether it be a sporting person or a social person. A lot of students that I have spoken to feel pressured back in School B – to be something else other than themselves.

MP
How does that tie into the risk here?

DN
I suppose there’s less risk here. The risk is when they go back and how much they choose to modify the way they live down there, whether it be in their home life or back in their social life.

MP
Would you say that risk taking is an important part of what students do here?

DN
Calculated risk, yes certainly. Because a lot of students are used to this type or environment, or being in the bush and physical activity, they are not used to dealing with others. So if risk taking is going out of their comfort zone, they are doing it all the time.

MP
What sort of mistakes do you think the students make here all the time, associated with that?

DN
You are making the wrong decision, I think is the biggest mistake that they make. Because any other mistake that they make they learn from it and sometimes the decision that they make, whether it be their own free time, whether it be playing practical jokes or something like that. You often see that they don’t learn from it.

MP
Do they learn from their mistakes in a way that’s part of the program do you think?

DN
Well it’s identified that certain parts of the program, you can bet on the fact that this is going to happen throughout the village. Yes, that’s part of the program, it’s there and is identified as part of the program. What I see is that as they experience so much here they to live independently and they are experiencing more opportunities to make decisions. They understand a little more and respect others not only just themselves.

MP
They have had these experiences and they have done things and worked on decision making. Is there any new knowledge that they create as a result of their experience?

DN
Well if you say that having an awareness of others, being able to take care of themselves and being independent in that respect. It’s certainly a new concept for them and a new knowledge for them because most of them don’t. Environmentally, they go away with knowledge of the issues that stem from the way that they live in XXXX City. So they go away with that knowledge as well.

MP
Is it knowledge that you have given them as a teacher, or that they have created themselves?

DN
Certainly, we have given them some knowledge but they have been able to obtain their own knowledge throughout the program through their experience by doing that.

MP
How do they use that new knowledge?

DN
I don’t have a good grasp as how successful the program is in regards to students going away and using their new found skills back in XXXX City, but I hope they would because it has become second nature here for them to take care of themselves and to clean up after themselves. To wash and to become culpable in a routine that is based on their own organization. So I hope because it’s second nature here, they back and they begin to just comfortably do these things back home. Therefore, the more they use it the more independent they become. I suppose it’s like a crash course of living away from home and becoming more self sufficient. It’s an eight week crash course of what you need to know and the skills you need internally, to live in society, to live in XXXX City away from your parents, really.

End of Interview – DN
Interview 13

Interview on 19/06/2007
Scott Devlin (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
If you could just start with a description of your role at Boronia.

SD
At this point in time my role is a home group teacher. I also teach classes and am involved in expeditions. I have somewhat of a role in promoting the sustainability focus at Boronia.

MP
As a home group teacher you look after a house pastoral care and management of the house group. What is the expedition teacher responsibility?

SD
Certainly the two expeditions that are run over the time that they are there and I will be involved in one or the other of those in order to facilitate students being out on expedition. Obviously a number of areas that I am looking at such as being safe out there, gaining something from the natural environment, whether that’s enjoyable being out there or something more of an understanding of the environment that they are walking through. I am also interested in seeing them develop together as a group of students. So in an environment with a small number of kids gives them an opportunity to let them work through some skills such as communication, teamwork, navigation.

MP
Sustainability. What does that mean to you?

SD
Boronia is certainly looking at a program that is based on environmental awareness and there has always been that focus in the past. I guess my interest is in work sustainability and in the past there may have been water type competitions where students have striven to be able to use the least amount of power and the least amount of water. In my opinion that has led to students not having showers or not doing things that they can take back to XXXX City with them. So sustainability for me, is being able to manage our time, our resources over the long term and students to live comfortably at Boronia but realize that they can do it with minimal resources. Consequently, a three minute shower which means the students can’t wash if their hair if they have long hair, they can be clean after three minutes and that’s something they can continue to do down here rather than coming from a situation where they had very long showers and then coming down here and hearing about environmental sensitivity and deciding they won’t have a show.
at all. Rather than saying what changes can I make in my life to reduce the use of resources but at the same time live comfortably.

MP
So you’re not after the short term to meet with the program you are thinking of the longer term in change of mindset?

SD
Yes. I definitely drop any notion of competition out of the use of reduction of water usage and power wattage and clearly trying to install in the students’ minds that they do need to conserve those resources for the bigger picture reasons. One of my other concerns with presentation is that it needs to be relevant to the students. I want to know exactly what they learnt in class so that it isn’t just a graph on a power point because it needs to be something they can understand and relate to their learning.

MP
Getting down to that base philosophy that you have about education and particularly the learning that you can facilitate at a place like Boronia. What are the terms that you would describe it?

SD
I am pretty much into expression learning in areas that they are learning and then able to take that further then they would in the four walls of the classroom. I often say that Boronia offers the opportunity to learn outside the four walls. A prime example of that is in the past we ran an excursion where the students went into NSW to the logging coup, they went to the chip mill, they spoke to a conservationist and the different perceptions and the different understandings that was put forward to them when people have very strong opinions as to why they were doing what they were doing and what impact it was having on the environment and in that particular instance, my goal wasn’t to drive home a point about logging as such, but for the students to be aware that the issue exists and that they need to formulate their own ideas and opinions on something. So prior to going out on an excursion I would over time throw ideas at them. So if we say what’s bad, what’s the alternatives? Let’s look at our alternatives because they may be resource that can’t be reproduced such as oil. So for example a plastic clothes peg or a wooden clothes peg. What is the worst of these two alternatives? I was quite glad when the students got to the point when they were frustrated with me because they wanted to know what my view was so that they could then introduce their written piece of work with the intention of me marking it and I felt that I had done my job because they couldn’t find out what my opinion was but they were able to go and formulate their own and deliver that to me. I wasn’t going to be judgmental of that because it was about them learning the process of being able to identify the issue, discuss it with someone, find out what was the contrary opinion, way that information up and then put that forward in their own mind.

MP
Experiential learning. Experience what they learn, how does that happen?
What I am conscious of is that one of the things you are looking at is one of the thing you are after is can we take this somewhere else? Take this learning and take it to another location. Previously I have students walk through the rain forest up into the sclerophyll forest and be able to identify the difference between the two. So that actually going out there and being able to hold the soil in their hand, be able to see the trees move from being quite dark green and wet to a more open forest and then go away and work with the data that they had picked up and then go away using that data and write up on why they thought those two things were where they were. Being able to walk up from the gully through the fir line up onto the ridge and one of things happening there is that water is falling down below and consequently we are seeing a different kind of forest. For me to get out there and see what they are learning is something that I find very rewarding.

As you say I am interested in setting. What is significant do you think about the Boronia setting?

The Boronia setting is significant, the ………..is significant, the distance from home is significant and the lack of contact, being surrounded by National Park. We are taking students out of a XXXX City comfort zone and perception is very interesting. So while students here are quite to walk down the street to the train station as it get dark, if you said to them in the first week or two here that I want you to walk from the dining room to the farmhouse. They would have the perception that that wasn’t something that was safe potentially. I know I am getting off track, but its interesting that students here perceive things here as norm and comfort and Boronia is outside of the comfort zone, so consequently they are opening their eyes and being able to learn about the environment.

It always interests me that my parents for example, are concerned about their children down there and be far more concerned than when they are coming back here from basketball.

The sense of distance, isolation, is that used in someway to shape perception?

Certainly used in the way for students to open up and not being able to have contact with parents is interesting because students are in a position where they need to be able to solve problems on their own, or in the very least, draw on external help which they not have otherwise have been used to normally. It’s very easy for the students in the normal school environment to go home, either break away from a problem that had happened at school that day by
having her own space, or getting on to mum and her say I will get on to the phone and deal with it. But then at Boronia there is going to be a week potentially between them writing home and the parent ringing up. Often problems have been solved in that time and it’s meant that kids have learnt some skills which they may not have otherwise learnt.

MP
Lack of instant gratification?

SD
Yes. For a long time I didn’t have rosters in my house and I like to let the situation evolve to the point where students realize that they had a problem and they needed something to fix it. Then I discussed that with them and then I was able to move them into that. Of late it seems that Boronia houses start with rosters, but I am very conscious of explaining to the students this is one way of doing something, but if we find that doesn’t work for us then how do we create the situation with this particular group of individuals? At the end of the day they are involved in the process if there is a difficulty here, I’ve identified that, how do I draw on solving that without going to the model that I have always used? So at Boronia there isn’t a release valve so they need to identify problems and work on them.

MP
Tell me, is the error of consequence different at Boronia?

SD
I haven’t worked at School B proper but I have worked at other schools in the classroom and something that I found was quite challenging was the I couldn’t ring a student at 5.00 in the afternoon and say well you have this piece of work due, what are you going to do about it, how are we going to solve that problem? So I also have to get used to the conventional class where I haven’t got access to the students twenty four hours a day. But to the extent that the students managing the day to day tasks. So if there was a couple of students who decide that they are going to head off and go for a run in the afternoon and their friends expected them to cook dinner that night, then they get back at 6.00 and it hasn’t happened, there’s a real consequence. The meals are not on the table, we need to get up and 7.15 for the evening session. Yes we can get dinner on the table, but we might not get the dishes washed which means that when we get back we have to get those done before bed, which means we are going to be late to bed. So consequently there’s a potential snowball affect. So an action leads to a consequence leads to how we are going to deal with it

MP
From your comment about being predisposed of not using rosters and not to put instructors, you are not in favour of the interventions then unless they are absolutely necessary?

SD
No. I definitely move more towards putting rosters up in the first place, but for a long time I would allow that to develop overtime and that to assist in
direction rather than as soon as they walk through the door pin a roster on the wall. I am interested in them to get to foster an understanding of the need to understand the situation and develop processes to be able to solve that.

MP
So why the change?

SD
As I see society change around me (I have been working residential settings of ten years now), there seems to be a more instant gratification where society needs things to be working tip top. I think the parents contact has exploded wanting to know why things are done this way or that. I get parents contact that I simply did not have to deal with over five years ago. So I'm more interested in getting something into the house that the student can initially work with and then discuss the reasons for it.

MP
What sort of parent contact?

SD
I have had a letter from home saying this is what's happening, how are we going to solve that and what's happened? In the past as I said it would take a week to get things through and issues have been dealt with. I definitely feel, that either I have become more aware of taking place, or society has changed. There’s just something that’s very different for me from ten years ago when I first started doing this.

MP
What programs have you worked on?

SD
I have worked with Acacia (on for six months), I have worked with Grevillea Campus, with Begonia and I have worked at Boronia off and on since 1996. This term was my twenty first term at Boronia.

Grevillea is a fantastic program. There’s a small number of kids and one of the benefits of that is that, say there’s twenty five students and we were able to develop quite a close community with them and we would get them to community meetings once a week or so where they would identify things that could be improved, or changed within the community. So with the inspection system, we would start with a very rigid system of twice a day and certain expectations of that and after a period of time the kids might say to us that we think we are doing well, we would like to put forward this as options to make it more suited to what we want to see or what we want to achieve and if they were able to put good suggestions toward this we were happy to change. We were happy to have any discussion raised, like visiting rights and say well these are our thoughts and these are what our concerns are can you address those? This was a fantastic learning opportunity for those kids. To actually allow the kids to negotiate and be able to discuss their ideas and actually
orientate the program in a way that meant they had control over them that community. It was a very impressive part of Grevillea.

MP
You feel that there is less opportunity for students to negotiate at Boronia?

SD
I think that at this stage there is and I have been thinking of ways that we could improve on that, but one of the problems is that we have over sixty students and you have effectively got a community which is double in size. How do you actually get each student to be involved in that process and feel as though they can contribute in a community meeting in a much larger group? I also think that the clientele that comes to Grevillea is subtly different to the clientele that we have here. They are more a country kind of kid who maybe more likely to get involved with stuff at home, or on the farm. The other part of the Grevillea program that is fantastic, is that kids actually go down to the store and buy their own groceries with a $10 budget and the learning that takes there is amazing.

MP
Would you say though philosophically, the learning is much the same?

SD
The learning is much the same. A slightly program but at the end of the day kids are developing a greater understanding of themselves and others. The understanding of the need to help others, works skills, self dependency, independence. All those kinds of things. Yes I would say that regardless of the different ways of approaching that, they are similar in the outcomes.

MP
Would you say that the setting of the two programs has a big impact on what can be achieved there?

SD
Yes very much so. The equivalent to our farm is probably the harbour and so there would be a lot of water based activities. So again similar outcomes but different environments in which to create those outcomes.

MP
So in a sense the setting is shaping the specific mechanism that you use to achieve the learning, but at the end of the process you are ending up with a similar outcome. I understand that the Grevillea students can quite freely phone home because there is a public telephone. So in a sense they do have that instant gratification with an electronic application available on a daily basis.

SD
I didn’t initially know how that was going to work and at the finish it certainly didn’t prove to be a problem. One thing it did mean was that parents were aware of what was taking place and able to review the child rather than
getting anxious after getting a letter and they had no avenue to work out what was happening other than to phone Boronia.
I did have one student down there who was particularly homesick and he was spending a lot of time heading down to the phone and his father was quite conscious that it wasn’t necessarily a good thing for him and between the two of us we were trying to move him away from that without actually cutting him off. Dad said we don’t talk about homesickness with him. At the end of the day he got through. But at Boronia they don’t have opportunity to ring home.

MP
What do think that has on the impact of learning?

SD
Interestingly there is a public phone in town and this student was making use of that but the other students just made the one phone call a week, which was sponsored by Grevillea. The one thing about that phone is that there will probably be other kids around at the time of the phone call so the conversation will be a little bit tempered.

MP
What about the learning that the parent dose as the result of this?

SD
I think there is a lot of learning that takes place there as well. Over the ten years I have had parents who are very quiet and anxious about their child being away, to the point where I have been pulled aside say ten years ago by a mother that was very concerned about having a child away and the child was very homesick and my thoughts were that the child was homesick because the mother was homesick, and was aware of how the mother was feeling. Consequently the child has an opportunity to learn and also the parent has an opportunity to learn the child will ok away from home and they have an opportunity to learn and in doing so be more self assured that the child is safe, being looked after, their learning that I can let go that little bit.

MP
Do you think that’s an intentional part of these learning programs? That there’s a parent education process, or is it just a bi-product that most people are just unaware of?

SD
I would hazard a guess that it’s a bi-product that’s worthwhile looking into. I am not aware of it being considered other than what’s considered from a day to day basis. How do we actually work with the parents to have them realize that there child is safe, but not actually think what learning does take place there.

MP
Just getting back to setting again. We explored in the very broad sense and you gave a couple of really good examples from a program perspective of a setting being used in an experiential sense. Are there ways in which you see
setting as significant (I am thinking here about the myths and symbols and legends that seem to attach to certain places) and whether that’s something that you work with in your teaching? Like CCCC Hill.

SD

I haven’t thought about that before. Most of the myths that I have had to deal with are what I have had to break down. So ticks and leeches and those kinds of things that have been built up over time in the students’ minds that suddenly become potentially bigger, or more concerning than they really are. One of the things that’s interesting, it that obviously when Boronia first started students that were going didn’t know much about it, necessarily and they were discovering as they went along. A change that has taken place is that students may now look forward to Boronia from the time they are in prep, or from the time they got to School B and consequently it’s building in the minds of the students as to what it actually is and that’s on a small scale, each year level. So the first term students come down and they are quite young and don’t know much about Boronia. They would discover a few things go back and pass that onto their friends. To the point where by fourth term the students coming down (a) with their mind set on it’s a holiday because they haven’t got any more school and (b) they have heard a whole lot of things about the program and the will be waiting for the Boronia experience to happen in a certain way and there have been times when we have had to call the community together and say you have come down with certain expectations and what you need to do it put those aside and grab the experience for what it is and how it is right now. For an example, as me as a staff member a student may come down and make the off the cuff comment that I thought you were supposed to be funny. Where in actual fact what you have heard is only a part of me and you need to let go of it and let’s just move on to what the experience is now. So I think with the bigger picture over years, again students come down with this expectation that they are going to grab this eight weeks and going to do certain things with it and (a) the program may have changed (b) they will spend so long waiting for it to happen that they actually don’t realize that its been happening, but not what they expected to happen in their mind.

I wonder if that’s partially the change that I have seen over the years with the response from parents to these programs perhaps. They have gone from not really knowing what’s happening through to understanding that this is what the program is about and this what it’s going to achieve, and this is what’s happened and also being wondering what’s happening and looking at the website, getting phone calls and email which never happened. I think that has strengths and advantages but it has been a big adjustment for me.

MP

What does the parent visiting weekend achieve do you think?

SD

It achieves a couple of things. Firstly, the parents get to see what the students are actually doing. They then have a mental picture in their mind when the letters come home of say CCCC Hill the rainforest the jetty and the
houses. I think they are in a better position to put into place what their children are actually saying. Secondly, it’s a bit of an assurance that their child is ok. It’s halfway through so they have got through a physical hurdle that has been jumped.

For students it’s an interesting one because it’s also a hinge point. So they are looking forward to their parents visiting and that can be an anxious time leading up to it for some students for a variety of reasons and it can be a fantastic weekend or it can be a hard one. After that, again, they realize that it’s hinge point and my time is running out, or I had a fantastic with my parents and I am now feeling my homesickness again, or they may have been reminded of things from home that they hadn’t been thinking about for the last few weeks.

MP
You are not painting a strong justification educationally for the parent for visiting weekend? Are there any learning outcomes do you think for parent visiting?

SD
Certainly for some students it is an opportunity to break the term into two. So they come down potentially quite anxious, but they know in x number of weeks they will get to see their family and once they have seen their parents they can refocus. So that’s a reassurance for students.

MP
Is there in a sense, that the parent visitation may offer the student, metaphorically, a vantage point, like CCCC Hill?

SD
Yes. I feel that that could be the case and it’s something that a friend worked on Grevillea had a chat with the kids and it is something that I have worked towards in the last couple of terms at Boronia and increasingly, also I want to be able to make use of that time. Here’s your first four weeks, here’s your introduction, here’s what you have achieved, now what do we do to now push on for that next four weeks and grab hold of those experiences that we may have talked about in the first few days that you haven’t quite got to.

MP
The extent to which the experience is memorable. Would you like to comment on that?

SD
It’s certainly a memorable experience for the students. They themselves would say it’s been an opportunity to live with friends, they have done things they haven’t done before and they are going back to what was their previous life. So it’s been quite a change in their norm and they will often try to hold on to that for various reasons. Some of them love the experiences and the community that’s been built, which they are conscious they don’t have back in XXXX City. So some of the less academic might have got on to the farm and
simply run with that stuff, success with their hands, success with things they haven’t been exposed to before and felt that increasing confidence. And then take back to the norm and how do you take that learning and allow them to be that person back here and what do you actually create so that you can continue to do that?

MP
Do you actively construct opportunities for memories to be accessed and used as part of the experience?

SD
Going up to CCCC Hill at night is a memorable thing. I am interested in them having memorable experiences for different reasons. They may not have the opportunity to do these things on a day to day basis. So when we are on an expedition why not get up early and be there when the sun rises, why not go up to CCCC Hill of an evening and being able to see the stars and being able to be immersed in that environment. It’s part of that creating an experience among a group of individuals, also gives them something to share. So as a home group I am also interested to see students being able to share activities and experiences because at the end of the day they are living together and they may have come from different friendships. So what can we do to sponsor involvement with those students with a memorable period like going up to the hill, or something as simple as playing a game, like scrabble or something like that which is also a shared experience.

MP
In what ways do you use the memories in an ongoing sense? Do you use those memories? Say, in week 5 for instance, would you draw their minds back to something that might have occurred earlier on?

SD
Occasionally I will have a sitcom moment so (we have all seen sitcoms where the person suddenly goes off into the distance and gets thrown back to something that has happened in a previous time), so are the things that you guys remember and reflect on that has happened earlier in the term? At this point in time I can’t give you bang bang bang situation but yes there are times when I reflect on some learning that has taken place, or an activity that took place. Expeditions, are a fantastic example of that. I was one of the first teaching staff at Begonia and I have seen a development of the skills of the students over the years before they get through to Boronia. And then it’s interesting to see that come together. The students will often be anxious on that first trip, but by the second one they are more in their comfort zone and then they are in a position to move forward in the environment because they are more comfortable within that environment themselves. So building on what the student had previously learnt and taking that learning further.

MP
Thinking then on the memories of the expedition or these other activities, the home group and the sitcom moments. Are they incorporated or integrated into the learning that goes on after, beyond the integration program?
There is something called a semester at six months and then there’s School B term which is flip side to Boronia. I don’t know much about School B term. I would ideally like to see that as an opportunity to extend Boronia learning. So for example, we do the independent learning project down at Boronia and I would argue that there is place to do something like that here and be able to continue the learning that has taken place down there, whether it be on sustainability, and come back here and make use of that data down there and how do we now extend the personal learning down there and consolidate stuff?

MP
Which is fine if you go to Boronia first.

SD
That is and that’s a big problem. The second term students will be that little bit older and more skillful and I think that in XXXX City term they may do some home economics. So the idea would be that I hoped that there would have been a bit of preparation for Boronia, for the second term students in first term. But it has always been a predicament of mine as to how you actually make it work. I guess ideally you would create the situation where semester wasn’t sequentially but maybe first term is one half a semester and the fourth term is one half a semester and the second term students can have the second term at Boronia and the third term at School B term, building on Boronia and then first fourth would be what’s traditionally known as a back to back semester. But it’s always tough for the students that go to Boronia in fourth term because they won’t have any real integration of their experience and then they are in year 10.

MP
Does year 10 in any way draw on the skills of Boronia?

SD
Two interesting things immediately come to mind. One, I can’t speak from personal experience (I have seen the program here) but both I have heard in the back of my mind that School B noticed an improvement in the VCE results after the first year of graduating who had been at Boronia.

School G again, they weren’t saying that that was the reason for it, but noted that there had been a spike in the year 12 results at the end of the first graduating class at Grevillea. Whether there is any particular use of that or whether there actually is learning that’s coming out in regards to the students organizational skills and so on, which has contributed to an increased academic performance, simply through having better life skills, so to speak.

We then flow to Acacia, which is very interesting because of its intense program and the academic learning that takes place there, I would argue that some of the skills they learn there is independence, and knowing that I can do something, I can run 20 km and it maybe that there is less focus on the
everyday academic classes, where it occurs to me is that some of those skills that they learnt in year 9, when they get back to a residential setting in year 10. I guess what I am saying, rather than commenting on any particular program but I would argue that the slight drop perhaps in the time that Boronia doesn’t have French German Maths and all those kind of things. The skills that they actually learn will perhaps allow the students to be more effective when they do get back here. So the skills of analysis, they can learn by going up to the EEEE Logging group and being able to identify an issue and discuss it and debate it, may accelerate an understanding that would take a lot longer in the classroom.

MP
It’s an interesting idea isn’t it?

What is it that the student walks away with that ten years hence they would remember about a Boronia program?

SD
Initially, living with their friends, living in a different environment. (I was thinking about Acacia and the exposure to the high country and being out hiking each weekend).

With Grevillea, the students would walk away with (well the Island is quite amazing on its own). The effectively get to do a lap of the Island, four days into the southern journey and …..the northern journey. That’s quite amazing because while I have worked at certain times trips varying from two days and 3 ½ days at Grevillea and School D….. for ten days and the northern journey I did some outdoor education with year 9 at School J as well, they introduced ten day trips down there as well to try to get students out, but they didn’t have a campus. They wanted to get students to learn about the (Victorian) Grampians in the classroom then go and check out the Grampians through their outdoor experiences, or be studying painting and go on painting camp to Canberra and go to the galleries. The northern journey was fantastic because again, it was that thing of getting the kids outside of their comfort zone. So coming to a place initially like Boronia or Grevillea gets the kids out of their comfort zone and then and find their comfort zone there then they are out of it with a four day trip around Grevillea and a three day trip at Boronia. They then come back to known. They then go out again for the last time on Grevillea for this eight day trip. Where to achieve the circumnavigation of this top half and it was quite interesting to see with the top journeys that I took because they had no choice but to work together as a group, to put up with the rain and it might rain for three days but at the end of the day we are warm and we are dry and no problem we have to keep going.

MP
Was that all on foot?

SD
No we did one day of cycling (think 60 km of cycling) and that was a nice way to break up the northern journey. There was one day that we did about
twenty kilometers and there was one group of boys that I pushed through from the last stop the day before and we pretty much did all of that twenty kilometers in the one day. And then camped short of our next campsite and there was this degree of the boys being able to make the journey as well. They had a rest day and came together and went surfing.

MP
Again more negotiated structures rather than the sense of there being an orchestrated time line that they really couldn’t influence.

SD
Yes and I think the more one becomes running the outdoor trips and so on the more I am in a position that I can do that sort of thing. The more experience running outdoor trip the more concrete understanding that I gain and can hand over to the students when I think they are ready because the more comfortable with the situation.

MP
What is your biggest disappointment from perspective of someone delivering an experiential program?

SD
The first thing that immediately comes to mind is that notion. It has to be when students feel that they have some say and some experience in what actually takes place. So there will be certain things that are not going to be negotiable. So for example, I have to make sure that the activity is safe. I will climb without a harness and that’s never going to happen, but if you guys want to get up at 6.30 in the morning and be able to do XY and Z. I will be there with you because that’s something you have decided on and we can do that. One of the things that I have been weighing as possibility in Grevillea, we having blocks of time. So I would be part of a curriculum team that we would have the next week, for example, that we would be responsible for. We would sit down with the students and say right these are the things that we have to do for your fitness session. We have to do this and that and when is it going to be best to do those things? Like there is a big low coming in what’s the ramification of that? Oh we might get our boats blown over, sir. So how about we get up early in the morning and go then that sounds good. What about the fitness session? Normally we go for a run but how about we go to the pool because after sailing that might be a good idea. So we can work with time and give the students their say, but achieving the same goals at the end of the day.

The disappointment would be if a program was one to a point where the students couldn’t actually feel as though they were able to do those things that meant so much to them. So I can’t be bothered doing XY and Z, so you miss out kids. If I got to that point where I didn’t want to allow students to be involved in those kind of things then it would be time for me to walk away.

MP
Implicit in what you are saying there is that it’s all very well to have a great setting and students to take part, but unless you have staff who are up to the experience themselves it may not happen.

SD
Last year I worked with a school that was developing a school based year 9 program and the kids there loved the program and it was school based. They had one.....trip but the rest of the time was at school and it was more about being for them to be able to interact in a more open learning environment, where the classes were more integrated and there was more opportunity to learn in a more open way and to see the kids and what they felt and gained from that experience there was that it doesn’t necessarily mean location. The application is applied to what you want to achieve.

MP
Yet without the reinforcement of the residential setting and other things. You wouldn’t like to speculate what sort of outcomes would arise?

SD
I couldn’t speculate because I was only able to watch a school based program from a distance. However, the students really felt that it was an amazing thing for them to be involved in. Wow this is fantastic we have learnt so much this year and haven’t been behind a desk.

MP
Because it was experiential and hands on?

SD
Again, I didn’t see much of the program, but the classroom was set up where students have only one day a week have community service and they did one day a week which I think was more XXXX City based, they did their classes, well lets look at the fashion industry and lets produce something and use our sewing skills. So that process again in learning in a far more hands on with staff that they perceived as being able to foster their learning, perhaps rather than taking that step backwards. Here I am. The impression I got with the kids was that they felt this great rapport with their teachers and felt an interest in what they were learning.

End of Interview – SD
Interview on 19/06/2007
Lena Kirk (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What do you do at Boronia?

LK
At Boronia I am a teacher and purchasing new equipment and a Christian youth worker.

MP
A Christian youth worker.

LK
A Chaplain. As a Christian youth worker, I run the spiritual program which looks at running five chapels a term and …..Boronia is like a short devotional type morning with the students. The students run it but I oversee that process. We look at things like how to get on with people, interaction that sort of thing from a biblical perspective I suppose.

MP
I am interested in the program having a spiritual dimension. Are you able to perhaps describe to me what a spiritual dimension of Boronia learning is?

LK
The students that come to Boronia come from various backgrounds and bringing with them a whole range of beliefs and values and things. I guess the spiritual program just aims to get the students thinking about the spiritual side of them and how that affects their relationships with others and the environment. Especially, because the students have such a busy life here in XXXX City and it gives them a chance to stop think about those sorts of things in terms of what they have now and what they would like in the future.

MP
So is that something that you can experience? I am making an assumption here. It’s the premise that the Boronia program is about experiential learning. Is there a spiritual experience at Boronia?

LK
Trying to incorporate spiritual experience at the moment is a combination with the expedition program. After the expeditions we have a short reflection and basically the students on one specific expedition will take time out to give the students some guidelines to write about and they sit in the sand dunes, or wherever and think about where they are and putting a more spiritual bent on it I guess. So the students go home and write about where they have been and count that as a kind of spiritual experience because it’s not really between them and another person, it’s about the natural world, which is something that
we really don’t understand. One chapel is regards to that at the Amphitheatre at night and watch the stars and have some candles out in the night and sitting out by themselves just watching the stars is really a great experience for them.

MP
What would be a spiritual experience?

LK
I suppose for some people a spiritual experience would be sitting under a tree and experiencing the natural world in a way that they hadn’t before. For some people it might be that the world isn’t just about them, it’s about you having to love people around you if you want relationships. Maybe one decides that the world is too complex for it to have just occurred and maybe there is a God.

MP
But are those things consciously and intentionally built into the Boronia program?

LK
I would say that those sorts of things are happening all the time but the staff and students are not always aware of it. But there are specific in a class or a chapel or a session in the home group, where we try and create those experiences.

MP
So you are saying both. Does that mean that these types of programs, by their very nature, have a spiritual dimension? Or are you saying that the entire experience has a spiritual dimension that can’t be ignored?

LK
I would say that it’s part of our culture I suppose but unless you actually bring up the spiritual aspect of it, it will get another name. It could be a whole range of things but if you look at it from a spiritual perspective, these experiences lend themselves to that as well. As I said it could be a whole range of things depending on what you want to call it. Like student experiences, bonding out in the bush.

MP
As a school chaplain you would be aware of the spiritual dimension of school life here at School B. In your experience is the spiritual element of Boronia more powerful, more real, more effective in creating a spiritual response, or encouraging, rather than creating it, a spiritual response from the students, or do you see much the same sort of spiritual awareness or activity at say here in a 9 to 3 day at School B?

LK
I think that the Boronia program is potentially a lot more powerful in terms of spirituality because I guess it’s the bias that the students come down here
with. At Boronia they have chapel five times and before the first chapel the students say they don’t want to go to chapel blah blah and just how their attitude changes towards that over the term. My impression is that I suppose the RA program at the main school is far more about religion than getting to know God. So I can see my role at Boronia is getting rid of the religious aspect of God and allowing the students to experience chapel, or to know that you can talk about God and pray and you can do that anytime anywhere, it doesn’t have to be in a church and singing songs can be enjoyable and don’t have to be the old hymns but songs that the students find enjoying. A different experience to what the students are used to. I don’t know if the students leave Boronia thinking about God or thinking differently, or whether they think that chapel is more fun at Boronia.

MP
Do they like chapel at Boronia more than they do here and if so why?

LK
Yes. I think it’s because it’s more relaxed. I try and make it more relevant to them at Boronia. The topics that we cover at each chapel hopefully relate to their Boronia experiences as they go along. About a day in the community, creation and what can they do to improve the world, if that’s what they choose to do. So I use Boronia experience for those sort of things but also try to incorporate non-Boronia stuff without being too conceptual. I want something that they can take away with them.

MP
Thinking then about the overall experience of the students being at Boronia. Overall, what does and a School B student get out of Boronia? In a purely behaviourist approach?

LK
I think the students are more aware of what they are capable of that if they challenge themselves they can achieve things that they didn’t otherwise think that they could have previously, perhaps more confidence. I think the students are more aware of their impact on others – that the world isn’t just about them and hopefully it’s not just them interpreting others but also the community like the natural world sustainability type thing.

MP
Do you see evidence of that, that they are more aware of the affect on others?

LK
I do at Boronia but I don’t see them much here at School B. I don’t know what they are like either before or after Boronia. Certainly at Boronia you see that happen but whether they take that back I cannot answer because of my limited experience with the program.

MP
How important is the setting?
LK
I think it is important, especially not having easy communication methods, email or mobile phones and no phones at all. I think geographically, I think it’s important as well and they really feel that they are miles away from home as well and not just down the road and it’s an environment that they are not familiar with.

MP
How do you know that?

LK
I guess that I am making assumptions that learning that occurs are accelerated because they don’t have the support structures that they used to. So the students are only there for eight weeks and they see this growth in them and I assume that happens so fast because they are in a new environment and having to adapt and the usual support structures aren’t there.

MP
What’s the accelerated change? I mean you talked about the sense of self confidence and being more aware. Is that something that’s said to you? Is it something that you perceive with your own eyes and senses and how do you perceive that change?

LK
Probably a bit of both. There’s a great little window as to where the students are at when they are leaving. You see those changes with their interaction with others. They walk into Boronia and they are all in little friendship groups and very focused on themselves and how they are uncomfortable and how they are missing home and those sorts of things and as the program goes on and they begin to feel more comfortable with where they are at I can see them open up to new experiences and also with their interaction with others that I don’t think that they would have ever chosen back at the main school. Like just taking time to out people out with a boring task, helping to sweep floors with students that they don’t know, or they could be on expedition are willing to step out of themselves and help others.

MP
So because of repetition of the activity in a sense, you get a chance to measure one against the other.

LK
Yes I think it’s also the program they are up to new challenges, like putting up a tent and some of them have never carried a pack, but I think by that stage they are embracing challenges more rather then just having to endure them. Also in the house you see it. You see their relationships building. Although I had a classic one this term. Students that just didn’t like each other. For the first six weeks they were just able to get the job done despite disliking each other, but on the final week of term (I don’t know what clicked) but they
actually started spending more time together. Maybe enjoying each others company, but they certainly weren’t as mean as they had been in the past.

MP
So it’s a change that has occurred in the house isn’t it?

LK
I think so, but there are a whole lot of differences in this environment. It could be just the house.

MP
What I mean is they are not hanging out in an expedition group or a cluster group that you observed in the common area but actually spending more time in their house group. Which seems to suggest that it’s house that is significant.

What do the students find at being memorable at Boronia?

LK
A lot of them enjoy being on a farm and the animals, moving cows and watching chickens hatch and feeding calves and that’s one of the biggest parts of Boronia is discovering that side of life.

Memorable moments I would say there are lots of different things like going up to the hill, watch the sunrise, or getting up at night and looking at the stars.

MP
Do the students tell you what they find memorable?

LK
Self evaluations. The idea is learning from those experiences but a lot of them don’t do that and write down what they have liked.

MP
Do you as a staff member use their experiences to structure things.

LK
It depends a bit. To me I do. I try and see what they enjoyed the most. For example, this term I took my students for a walk in the creek. We went down to the jetty and walked off the end of the landing and walked back to Boronia in the creek. They weren’t very keen on that but they did it and had a ball and a lot of them reflected that was one the highlights of Boronia and that was also handy because a lot of them weren’t look forward to the second expedition, or going on solo. So I used that experience saying that you didn’t want to get into the creek but you had a great time. So don’t dismiss an opportunity before you have a go.

MP
So with walking in the creek, you didn’t know the outcomes but you just did it.
I thought that there would be a few outcomes. From my experience the students enjoy doing something that they have never done before and that they have never tried on their own because it's too messy wet dirty or uncomfortable (like walking in the creek) and if I encouragement to do it they have a ball doing it. Things like Boronia survivor.

What's Boronia survivor?

I haven't experienced it myself, but basically with a group of two teams they go do all sorts of silly things like treasure hunting through cow pads, eating yucky food. All sorts of crazy little things but the students love it. I don't know why they love it but they say they enjoy it. My impression is that kids love to do it because they don't get to do it in the City. I did that as a kid when I was on the farm, jumping in mud and stuff.

You didn't have any experiential learning in your background?

No but I did go on a hike in year 9 for ten days.

That then gets back to the setting again doesn't it really. Because you don't have a creek here I don't think! So that's something that you could do there and you couldn't do here.

What about the symbols and the myths and particular values that seem to attach to places and things? I will give you an example. That morning when we went up to CCCC Hill. I have heard a few members of staff talk about CCCC Hill to have this significance for the students that goes well beyond the fact that it's just a lump in the paddock with a wooden cross. I mean it could be anywhere. You could pull the cross up one year and place it in another place and it wouldn't make any difference would it. Or would it?

You might be right. I think location of CCCC Hill makes it what it is because it's somewhere away from the village where they can go and it's a specific place where they can go and meet and hang out, I suppose, but you could do it anywhere on the property. They do it in the rainforest, which is a little rainforest walk at one corner of the property by the creek but they can't walk anymore but the rainforest paddock is a beautiful spot on the property. The students can go and have picnics there on rest days and things. CCCC Hill I think has an appeal because it overlooks the village. So they can remove themselves from the intensity of the houses and sit back. It's away but not too far away. It's a peaceful place for them and I suppose it's their space. You're not going to run into teachers and staff up there.
MP
How much student space is there? How much non-staff space is there?

LK
Once the boundaries get opened up, a fair bit, depending on how adventurous they are.

MP
When are the boundaries opened up?

LK
By the end of week two, generally, sometimes earlier sometimes later, depending on.

MP
That means that they can go beyond the immediate paddock in free time?

LK
Yes. They do a boundary walk in orientation week two. So they know where the boundaries are and once they are traveling ok then they can go out. Spending time the first week in the house is important to start building relationships in the house. Otherwise if they are can go too quickly they will go to their friends in other houses. So I suppose that's a bonding process I suppose.

MP
Are houses seen to be havens or can staff wonder in at any time?

LK
It really depends on the house, the group of students. I would say generally it is their space, but there are certain times when they expect teachers to be around. The morning staff will often pop in and around dinner time will often pop in, but apart from that.

MP
They usually have a staff member for dinner, don't they?

LK
Yes, more often than not. So I guess in the afternoons that's really their space.

MP
The issue of gender. Do you think that there is an element either pro or contrary to the notion of femininity? Is it a place that’s trying to generate an image of the feminine, or is that irrelevant?

LK
I think it’s quite neutral. They had a trial last year but it got quashed, we don’t have that night anymore. I don’t think it was conceived as particularly constructive use of time. I don’t what the arguments were for culling it.

MP
How well integrated do you think the experience of Boronia is of the study that precedes and follows it?
LK
I really don’t know.

MP
As a chaplain do you do any of the follow up?

LK
Not really. We have a chapel tomorrow morning with Bob, a welcome back chapel and we are involved with that and that’s that.

End of Interview – LK
Interview 15

Interview on 19/06/2007
Nelson Turner (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What do you do at Boronia?

NT
I am (program manager) of the School B Boronia site. I look after the operations of the site. Everything from daily operations logistical, rostering the staff, response to situations that develop on a day to day basis with logistical concerns. I also have responsibility for program assistance, a responsibility for the process in regards to the end of term report that’s written for each student and I currently responsibility for the solo program, responsibility for the self evaluation program. I take and active role in the establishment of procedures and processes in regards to the operation of the campus.

MP
Is there someway that you can capture the experience of what Boronia is all about?

NT
My personal thoughts on the Boronia program is that it’s an excellent opportunity for the students of the school to be removed completely from their normal operating environment and be immersed in a place where they are on a journey. A journey of self discovery. Also the impact upon them in the world that they live in with more focus on solutions for the future.

MP
You used the word ‘removed’. Is there a process of separation?

NT
Absolutely. They are separated from home and most of them it’s their first time in boarding and I consider it a boarding campus (or site) and they have been away from their parents for a significant period of time. In addition to that they are removed from a lot of their key aspects of their life as they see it. Removal from the majority of technology, removal from the access to mass media, a reverting, if you will, to a simpler lifestyle. Where the focus is more on who am I, who am I existing with in my community and how do I have an impact on them and therefore the outside world?

MP
Do you think community is one of the strong, if not the strongest, focal point at Boronia?

NT
For me as a deputy that is probably the word I say more often on it’s own than any other is ‘community’. I see it as a pivotal role as a personal influence on the program. To me community is a place where people respect each other, or live in an environment of respect. Where there is trust. Particularly, now in our unique setting there has to be a situation of trust. As I have said to the students many times in a boarding setting we simply couldn’t afford to staff it if we didn’t trust the students. So by then choosing to come to Boronia (which is a significant thing to emphasize) to live in a community that has standards and expectations of them. So for me, it’s a situation of respect and understanding that everyone has a role to play in that community for it to be a surviving and thriving community.

MP
Would you say that it’s the essential learning mechanism?

NT
I wouldn’t say the community is essential but it is significant. I think because there is a couple of things that cross over. There is the emphasis on community, but there’s also the removal or the separation from all that they relied upon to that point in their life up until they came here and also there is an understanding of how do I have a role in that in my life? That ties into the concept of sustainable living, which is a significant aspect of the program.

MP
So sustainable living is main philosophical theme?

NT
For School B, yes. The school has endorsed their view that they want the Boronia program to be a cornerstone of their sustainable living education of the school. They can’t retrofit a main campus down here because they can’t afford it without sending the school broke. So what they learn at Boronia about sustainable living we are trying to get them to apply in their own lives and raise their awareness of the situation. That has emerged in the life down here because the school has made a significant push.

MP
What does the word sustainable mean to you?

NT
Sustainable means that it’s something that you can carry on into the future. You are not exploiting resources. So it can be revisited and maintained into the future. It certainly has an aspect of an undercurrent timeframe on it – beyond the life cycle of the current time but not just the environment. A sustainable community is a community that relies on each other. The students live in a large city and it’s probably not a sustainable environment.

MP
You mentioned a unique setting in the sense of School B using Boronia as a place to do something that they couldn’t do here. A vehicle or a setting. What role does setting play at Boronia?
I think that the setting is pivotal in the role of the education of students who attend Boronia, because whilst we could remove the students from their normal living environment, I think that the Boronia site, in particular, removes them to a very unique location where we are not pretending that things aren’t possible, we are not on the power grid. Another example of the unique theme is on the water, near a forest, in a really remote location. The removal from the trappings of life, mobile phones. So I think the setting is important, but a lot of the locational specific stuff could be transferred to other places.

So the campus could be removed somewhere equally remote and you get pretty much the same outcome but probably not exactly the same outcome. I think it now has something to do with the tradition of that particular site more than anything else. I think you could rip the site out and rebuild it somewhere else and pretty achieve a lot of the same things, but some of the traditions at that site and unique to that site.

The traditions of the program I see include the walking around the campus at the start of term, symbolic of leaving the comforts of XXXX City behind. Having to walk into a place where you will get your meal and accommodation. You will get your daily needs met. Other traditions are similar routines and instructions that we have got built into the program and left in the program. I suppose the tradition of the students living in houses, unaccompanied by staff and having to learn living skills and having to learn to live by the skills of existence. Like looking after yourself, washing and eating and cooking and maintaining your room etc. There’s some really good traditions about the way the place has been built. Although it is by accident not intentional.

Are there things about the micro setting within that particular location that create opportunities to learn?

There are things about that location that creates opportunities to learn. I think the way that we have the program structured, the way that we built the program from now and beyond that will be our thinking in the way that it has happened. So could you transfer the whole program and location to somewhere else and get the same outcome? I think so, but it’s also specifically designed so in regards to our relationships to our neighbours that is very unique to that site. Because, for example we have built the community day program and whilst its service per se is not an aim under our program….methodology to actually deliver some of our key aims – a sense of community. So moving the students into and out of different groups at a time, on a weekly basis, mixing them up causing them to have to acquire new skills. But then if you take that out it’s also our relationship with our neighbours so do we go over to AAAA …a mutual situation. Are we doing something for others in our community because we rely on them? Yes we are. The same with BBBB Creek we have worked very hard working with them to establish a very good relationship with them for that reason. Now they are giving us more
freedom to go around to other areas around the inlet to help them and at the end of the day we contribute something back to that community because they don’t have the funds to be able to do what they would like to achieve. A quick pro quo is that they give us camp sites around the inlet and no one else gets that access. So we help them and they help us. The same with the State forests. One would assume that if you take the environmentalists’ bent then logging in the State forests is a bad thing. However, the other side of it is if you look at it that the forest is a farm of trees, well part of it is really quite sustainable and we are helping as research for part of those programs and at the same time helping the students be exposed to looking at a different way for forestry. They need to understand that they live in houses built of timber so why not go out and understand where it all comes from.

MP
Are those things what you explore with those students? Do you take advantage of the setting and the political context?

NT
Sometimes and sometimes not. The limitations to that is always going to be dependent on the staff that you have on. Their understanding of those issues, the mood of the day, the ability of outside providers of State forests and their staff and what staff they have on the day and what their concerns are, whether they have to get the job done quickly or slowly. Some of our staff have a good understanding while others don’t.

MP
Given your role across a whole range of things, solo expeditions, the recording of the accountability at the end of it and logistics of some of the operations and timetabling. Do you have a sense of the program being more of an organic whole rather than a discreet set of experiences and activities?

NT
Absolutely. They do learn from day one and I am very overt to what I say to the students in regards to them learning, the way I conduct myself in assemblies, to realistically their Boronia journey really starts when they decide to come to the school and know they may well be going to Boronia. They really start to learn it when they start the briefings and debriefings and then when they are actually on the bus – they are definitely learning all the fifty-one days. A book I would like to write would be titled “Fifty One Sunrises” and that would be a term at Boronia. They are really learning all the time. From they get on the bus and think about the people they leave behind to stepping of the bus and meet the staff at Boronia. They have to actually walk down to the school and they learn right through and everything has a purpose and everything is interrelated.

MP
What do they remember most when they leave Boronia?

NT
In speaking to the students I understand from them at the most superficial level they remember living in a house and the experiences and challenges that that brought to them. The remember the community and a sense of belonging to that community and depending on the individual student, what they got out of the program. Whether it be the farm aspect of the program, the freedom (is a word that often comes up), freedom to use their time (which is an irony because they are not that free at all a lot of the time). To the expeditions and largely over the last eighteen months, the physical education program has been significant in their memories. There were some students from last year running a 5 km run in the City with then thousand other people. I spoke to one of the students the other day and I said I kind of hoped your inspiration has something to do with the physical program and they will try and keep fit. Maybe they will take that sense into their future life.

MP
So some of those experiences would be fairly memorable, I mean they would probably leave a very deep impression. Do you take advantage of those memories as you are building them in the program?

NT
My personal perspective is that I am really passionate in regards to interrelating everything, particularly the emphasis on community. If we are not surviving as a community then we really are struggling because the place just won’t operate. The benefits of living in a community and the rewards, far outweigh that. From perspective that’s something I build upon day by day week by week.

MP
Building on that sense of community, but do you build on the memories that they are constructing of particular incidents in construction of the community, or is it just a sense of obligation and respect for the community?

NT
I guess in my role I am lucky to be able to see what’s going on and I take an active interest in seeing what’s going on and then I guess on that anecdotal narrative would be my…………style. Therefore, I use that information to foster that sense of community and I will come back and refer to is, even at assembly level to an individual or a group doing something specifically and then that’ the next stepping stone for the next level. That’s how I do it in regards to the community.

In regards to the farming I am not actively involved but as a staff member I am involved in that program and I get to see that and again with my discussions with students I can refer to that sort of learning and say how can you use that and refer to what they are doing and managing it in different parts.

MP
Is there a lot of reflection and debriefing in what you do?

NT
There is reflection but not so much debriefing because of the way the program is structured, in the true sitting down and processing the experience. Simon Priest wrote about six levels of participation in physical education and outer education, if you will and he is talking about the experience through metaphors and that sort of stuff. A lot of my stuff is speaking through the experience and I would like to think that we keep to timetables and that sort of stuff, but we never do. Having said that, I am sure that I can think of some times that we do, like when I am running an expedition for instance and then I would be looking at level 3 and level 4 of the dissertation of the experience, but when I am in assembly it’s one way conversations. Rarely can I have an interacting conversation and that’s level 1.

MP

Does the air of consequence equation figure in your own teaching? You not intervening to prevent a mistake or error and consequences being allowed to flow on from that.

NT

It depends on what it is, depends on what affect it will have on the community. So it’s situational based, so if I know that something is coming up it really does depend on what I think is a likely outcome and then what’s a likely benefit. So if it’s chaos in the community then I would probably intervene. Whereas if it’s individual learning, then it’s probably better to let it slide. In my role I can’t afford to let things slide because as soon as I let things slide once then opens up inconsistency and I don’t believe the students benefit from an inconsistent approach in their education. The feedback from students which I ask for regularly that is something that they do appreciate. They understand that I am doing something because it would be inconsistent for me not to do that. I am only acting for the good of the community or that particular student. It’s more along the lines that it’s not them that I am upset with its their actions. We all make choices some are good and some are bad and we have to face up to that if it’s a bad one and then you cop it sweet.

MP

What are the things at your disposal, apart from the obvious removal from the program?

NT

I have negotiated different outcomes for different students. The most recent one was a student who made a choice of breaking the understood time curfew and there was no impact on the community and discussions with the student we both felt that realistically there wasn’t a need for any sort of punitive task to make recompense to the community because nobody had been affected bar her needing to understand from my perspective that I wanted her to be consistent but that I was only concerned about her welfare. Going on the jetty. Another example was a student was with her house out of bounds when she broke her arm and that wasn’t the best resolution for her. So realistically it does come down to basic safety. We talked about it and agreed that perhaps a presentation to the community on an apology just on if I want to be somewhere else and I am not able to do it, what are some solutions to that?
So she was able to build a power point. She was able to be humorous as to what are the solutions to this problem, because it’s a problem that they all face. So I can do that sort of thing or make them clean cars, scrub floors, remove them from the community at social times, I can get them up early, I can remove them from their house. It’s fairly open as to what I can and can’t do. There are things that I can and can’t do compared to my last school – Acacia. So I adapted significantly to a different system and it works for me.

MP
In your sense you would understand the difference in the learning between the Boronia experience and the Acacia experience. I know the parameters are different in terms of time and different school coeds. Setting aside those things for a moment.

NT
Those parameters plus more. I mean there are so many ways they are different and many ways they are similar. In a lot of ways the learning outcome is the same. I have often reflected that if you weren’t to offer these types of programs to students given in year 9, they are grown up anyway and I think in the main my answer to that would be yes. It’s just the time of life when you are going to grow up. If per chance that you can grow up in an environment that challenges you significantly on a day to day sense and you can be immersed in an environment where people do care for you, obviously the outcomes are going to be better. In lots of ways they are the same. I would say that the students learn a lot about themselves and resilience, their ability to overcome hardship is probably the most significant factor that the two programs have together. Hardship can be expressed in many ways. Like living away from home, undertaking physical activity that challenges you, learning new skills in a different environment.

School A will indicate that there is a high level of independence that is developed at Acacia. As a precursor to that independence as a boarder, independence from the family. In follow up talks with students who have left Acacia I would say are largely dependent because they haven’t learnt the skills of living (cleaning, cooking and stuff). Things that we would ordinarily relate to independence, but they are independent in thought, when they are challenged a bit, they are independent in their ability to relate to their peer and I think the majority of students can relate to their peers because they are put in a situation where they have to. I think the program diverges there. They are very different cultures, very different client groups, very different structural settings. One is a day school operating in a remote environment where students are incredibly busy, whereas the other one is where students are not used to boarding who are very challenged by that whole concept and parents who are challenged by that concept of having to release their children to somebody they don’t know.

Coed and students only are very different. Acacia has to be incredibly structured I think because of that coed ness and because of that year group. The freedom that you have to have unfortunately is given away to hard and
fast boy student relationships. I have no problem as to what they do at Acacia.

MP
Does the structure getting in the way of experiential learning in your view at Acacia?

NT
Absolutely. Because the school is under pressure to tick off the boxes. The school at the end of the day needs to deliver an outcome in that regard and unfortunately, it all comes down to examination results.

MP
That happens at School B as well doesn’t it?

NT
Yes. But at Acacia you are taking the students away from a normal day school environment for a year. Whereas, School B has made a conscious choice but it is only for one term and then when they go back, or before they come, they have done an intensive term of study, to make up for the loss. Make no mistake about that School B is tough on the students. Then they get into semester from there. Whereas at Acacia they have to maintain a normal academic program in an environment that is based on philosophy or physical rigour, removed from the trappings of an elite lifestyle and basically getting on with living with each other. It’s a fairly harsh environment and then they went to coed in 1976 and that changed things remarkably. So they have to deliver an academic result and that will always impinge upon it because the kids need to be doing lots of lesson tasks to be doing A grade at this stage. From there you have to look at how are they occupying the kids time. I think a lot of the stuff up there is fantastic. So the exhibition program for all the people who don’t like the exhibition program up there, there is some really good stuff that comes out of that. The same with their service program. There’s really good stuff that comes out of that. You have to give the kids some enjoyment and that where term three downhill skiing comes in and there are lots of good things going on there’s just pressure on the time, therefore the structures that make all those things go on and then the learning program is laid on top of that again. So you have lots of competing interests in a limited space of time. Unfortunately, they are experience rich but time poor.

They have just spent $3.5m on a music centre but you can still only do two practice sessions a week, plus one or two lessons. They are spending a lot of money to build a fantastic music facility, but in reality the music program is only a small part of Acacia. However, the school is proud of its history in regards to the music and in regards to the type of kid they are turning out and in regards to the boarding program. I think the boarding structure is good is intrinsic with a good structure. I think that as a head of unit at Acacia its really hard to provide the pastoral care that you might want, because you are time poor, but everyone copes and gets through it in that way.
MP
Too many things happening there at once do you think?

NT
It's funny. I would go back there in a flash, but I would get divorced. There are so many great opportunities there.

MP
Your wife was there?

NT
Yes she was there when I was there. She came half a year after me because of contractual obligations and in all honesty, for my first six months there I was asking myself do I really want to be here? Because it is an ultimate baptism of fire. I was in my two years of my Dip Ed so I wasn't even a qualified teacher when I started teaching there and two years after that I became head of a unit. You get into the groove of things and you know when the busy times are and the capacity to work is easy to develop there in the culture where everyone is doing the same thing. Relaxing in the community there, the staff community is very strong there.

MP
...much the same do you think, in terms of their outlook on life? I have just spoken to people last week and many of you have worked in more than one program.

NT
I would say yes and no. I would say the critical mass of pre-disposition but I don't think that we have got a situation where we have everyone. That's a challenge. I think there needs to be a developing consistency.

MP
Consistency in what sense?

NT
Approach to outcomes I guess and develops its own problems. So if you are inconsistent with one of the most basic levels, inspections then that breeds issues in regards as to how everyone is interacting with each other. It's the end of the wedge, I really believe. It's a very committing working environment. Residential education A remote boarding...I call it is a very committing lifestyle and no matter the working conditions, there's always that level of commitment and if you are only committed to the bare minimum in an absence of a perfect structure which, I am aware exists, and there will be inconsistencies in approach and that will unravel itself in time. If it's not right for you then don't do it because of the commitment needed. However, I understand that I have a different personal philosophy on the level of commitment.
MP
What about the learning that the parents do as a part of these programs of Acacia and Boronia?

NT
Very different. At Acacia you are talking largely about a group of people who are committed to boarding as a style of education. I think it’s the second biggest boarding school in Australia where 60% of students are boarders. Then many of the parents at School A have a tradition…so they are committed to that school. They are actually committed to Acacia and they know its discipline and they know it’s hard and know it’s a seven day program. They know that their kids will be tired, they know their kids will have to run for punishment and also run for pleasure. Understanding all that they see it as a building phase in their children’s lives. That’s an essential ingredient as far as they are concerned to a well rounded education. They really do focus on the whole person. The staff will also teach sport and also have boarding duties and academic duties and the students can see that the staff are not just teachers, they are real people and out of that shared experience breeds understanding. Because it really does. If you have had a hard time together whether its you and the staff or a student, or you as a house, or you as a unit at Acacia then you all have an understanding. The adventure and the hard time, you have overcome it and you use that as something to rely on now how can we build on that for future success?

Boronia, however, the parents are city folk, in a way, who are committed to that as an element on that for their daughter’s education. They have obviously not chosen boarding in a way of life or style of education that they want for their child the whole time. They are used to a regular contact with the teaching staff from a day school environment, they expect nothing and more than the Acacia parents, but the Acacia parents are more understanding of the situation and the challenge that the students are confronting. Whereas Boronia parents, probably in fifteen years time will be great. Because they will have mothers who have been through. They will say that’s ok and it will be hard but you will be fine and I think in the main, we are seeing a turning point in that and I don’t see it as an issue. In my meetings with the parents I always mention teamwork because it’s a partnership. School A, I guess, it is still a partnership, but as a …………have a lot more autonomy with the student, you still have contact with the parents but at Boronia I see it very much as a team environment. As a former home group teacher I used to send emails to the parents saying this is exactly what we’re doing. Thank you for your support of the program and you daughter. Not to me. It’s all to do with developing relationships they are our clients and they have to feel valued in the process and also their concerns have got to be understood.

MP
Now you mentioned the School B term and how tough that was. Do you have a sense of the Boronia experience resonating in the learning of the students in years after? So that in year 10, 11 and 12, there is a conscious, or intentional, practice of drawing on the Boronia experience for the purposes of learning physics chemistry or French.
NT
As a pipe dream I would say yes. As a realist I would say that the school is still coming to grips with that, because there are people who don’t understand our program, you have people who know the program the way it was, not what it is now and therefore it’s a real challenge in communicating what we do in creating those links. I don’t think it’s out of the realms of possibility, but it’s a longer journey.

End of Interview – NT
Interview 16

Interview on 14/06/2007
Darren Thomas (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What happens here at Boronia?

DT
The way as I see it Boronia is a 7 ½ week program. We have approximately sixty students come to here on a two monthly basis and they start learning from the time they get off the bus and stop the educational process of Boronia when they get back on that bus and to me it’s a definitely twenty four ongoing learning cycle. I consider myself as a facilitator rather than strictly an educator.

MP
What does that mean, a facilitator?

DT
We do have the core Monday to Thursday of two hour block lessons where, yes, you are a conventional educator but it’s those other areas outside class where facilitating a program for the students and helping. I mean to me my idea of facilitating in my house, for example. We are giving them alternatives, giving them a number of possibilities for them to take to be implementers or deciders in the program and education. So if you are having a dispute in the house you are able to facilitate a number of possibilities in order to tackle that problem but holistically giving them the opportunity to do it because that’s how they are learning. For me to walk into that house and say ok you have a problem so student A you apologize to student B and student C you need to be changing your ways with student D. To me isn’t giving the quality of what we should be doing if we give those students the outcome. Now the students will have a one sided approach if we are telling them how to fix their problems rather than giving them a number of outcomes and letting them learn by their own mistakes.

MP
You said there are deciders and implementers. So they decide on their learning and they implement it?

DT
Yes. In the Boronia process, as I outlined before, the four walls are very much designed and considered as a classroom. I am a very big advocate of that they learn by their mistakes and have taught in a lot of different areas and you make those mistakes and quite often we only make that mistake once because you are learning about it and that’s self education process and I feel
that’s a very important part and whilst that process is happening a number of the students are not very fond of it but then talking over the eight weeks and you sit down and read their evaluations and they finally click in and so oh we have learnt by deciding to do that that way rather than the other way and we tried to tackle this problem five or six different ways before it worked. To me reading evaluation by giving the students the opportunities to learn that way they are achieving a whole lot more and they are finding it themselves.

MP
Just lead me through how you learnt from a mistake. You’re the educator and how a facilitation in a learning transaction that student A or student AB&C would learn from a mistake?

DT
A typical one would be navigation on expedition. To me obviously you have risk management which you need to keep. Tell the students that you have to be guided by the compass bearing. To me that’s not the students learning to navigate. To learn to navigate you are saying here’s the map, here’s the compass and the coordinate that we need to end up at because of where we are starting from. You lead us. We did that in group 6 and they all considered the possibilities and it’s very interesting to sit back and watch them because they are not only learning to navigate but learning how to work with a team about strategy and people management skills. They may go the wrong way and they might say we think we have gone the wrong way and I will talk to them about it and analyze the issue asking where do you think you went wrong and where do you think that we are on the map, did you consider these contour lines, elevations, the possibility of non-march tracks. The students might say oh we didn’t think about it and to me that very communicative for the students and they learn by their mistakes.

MP
You would let them realize that they had made a mistake?

DT
It’s going to be very dependent on the group. I mean if I think the students are going to make a massive mistake I will ask the students where they think they are on the map and then give them a chance to find out where they are. I mean you may have a group of eight students who are very unskilled at map reading or you might have two or three students that are extremely confident and you stand back and let them go for it.

MP
So you would modify the level of intervention depending on the skill level?

DT
Yes. I think it’s one of those situations where it‘ very hard to have a written indicator of where you step in. There’s so many varying possibilities of the styles of teaching intervention.

MP
How is the teaching different here at Boronia to that of the standard mold?

DT
To me, the environment in which we are teaching here is very hands on. To say there’s little theory is probably an incorrect term but to say that the application of theories practical skills is very high in the ratio of practical learning that they do, do in relation to the theory that they do. Could be possibly 25% theory and 75% practical, but it’s the applications of that knowledge in a real setting and it’s talking about production of greenhouse gases for the first forty minutes of two hours and going out and looking at the generators and the factory room, playing with a miniature model of a coal power station and going down to our house and exploring the hot water systems and fire backup systems and even reading the body language of those students for the forty minutes that you are in there. I know that in my class this year I had to intellectually challenge students but in my eyes they would be without having a quantifiable assessment. In my eyes they are the students that are probably switched on the most because intellectually they don’t like sitting they because they want to be out there doing it. Some students cause a lot of trouble at the School B campus and they come down here and I think it’s that setting that promotes education for them without them knowing that they are being educated.

MP
That’s an interesting way of putting it, educating them without them knowing that they are being educated. So for them it’s invisible?

DT
Yes. For me the situation would be like, I have had a pretty good group this term, but the other night they were in a funny mood and I was an invited guest down at dinner with them and they were just smart and rude. I said to the students that I am an invited guest to your house and the way you are treating me is not enjoyable for me so I am going and the next day I received an apology and to me that was an education that they didn’t know they were having. Of learning life skills and how to deal with certain situations. But I am sure what I did fits into the education program. I delivered that in a rudimentary way that you wouldn’t normally do but to me, at that time, it felt right to respond to that situation like that. So the students apologized and even some of the students said that they have learnt about people’s feelings, even teachers have feelings. Which goes along with their expeditions of being outside the comfort zone. Expecting the unexpected and you see way the students change from their first expedition to their second expedition such as the nervousness of the first expedition and their second expedition was so much more laid back and they really enjoyed the second time. They had learnt from that experience.

MP
So you are saying they are expecting the unexpected and they grow from one activity to another and become more lay back as a result of what they have
learnt from their earlier experience. So what is this sense then of experience? How does that play a part in the learning process?

DT
I think again the physical outcome. I know what we call a physical education program we run up here the students would have no idea that it’s an education program but know that it’s a physical program evidently without education, but we do and we have a very set …..for the program and every challenge that they do and every part of that study is working from the easiest to the hardest over the eight weeks. Obviously, from the physiological program but also the educational values of the team and of the strategy. One activity there is they pick their groups activity that’s particularly close to the groups to see how they work through the teamwork and personality issues.

To me the experience is, and there is a little difference in this program from people who haven’t experienced a physical education program of this nature, or school sport in a rudimentary school setting. Like a private school rowing program or something like that where there is a lot of pressure released for the students and we bring them up here and implement them into a physical education program where they don’t have pressures of parents, they don’t have pressures of competing against other schools. They have the pressure of challenging themselves and learning from that experience. I know if a student has an asthmatic attack on hill on the first run and learns from that, learning how to control their breathing, to learns the level that they can push their body and then by the end of eight weeks is just a totally different person.

We have had a few issues this term where there have been few doubters of the program where they have said that we are pushing the students too hard but directors back us. The students need to learn to push their body. For students who don’t do much physical activity, for them to push themselves to a level outside their comfort zone, is going to teach them something about themselves and how they react to that situation. I mean they may use that experience say twenty years down the track when they may be in a work or social situation and know how to handle themselves. They have learnt from quite different experiences but will stick to them forever. If I put my mind to something I can do it because I did fifteen years ago.

MP
They will come here with existing experiences and boundaries and you want to take them outside of those boundaries in some way, so that they can learn how to respond when they reach something that they haven’t experienced before.

DT
Very much so. It’s trying to facilitate the experience in another field. It maybe pushing those academic students who have never pushed themselves hard on a run, or the student that doesn’t have the confidence to play and get them up in front of the community and the athlete who comes up here may experience academia for instance which she has never experienced before and what it’s like to achieve.

MP
What do you find here in terms of learning that you wouldn’t find in the classroom at School B?

DT
I think the first thing is the support of the school and of course the school is supportive of a different sort of learning and that’s why we have the program up here. I have worked in many different schools but I have only taught in one and that was last year and this is the only school that has been supportive of teaching beyond educational norms.

MP
There’s learning that goes on in School B and then there’s learning that goes on here. So what do you have here that doesn’t happen there? What’s different?

DT
To me a perfect example happened in last term with the Head of School B and trying to get some flow on what was being taught in XXXX City and we were sitting and talking about what was taught up here and he said the students won’t get that. We tried teaching them in year 9 here in School B and the students aren’t interested and they don’t understand it and we have nothing success here, even from students who don’t traditionally enjoy physical activity. And the reason why this works so well up here is because we apply so practically to a physical program. That we do a lesson at the start of the program is where we teach students fairly advanced notions of energy systems and how their body reacts in different situations, whether it’s sprinting, whether it’s a jog or an energetic walk. Then there we get the students out and get them in groups and one person does each of the different activities of the energy system. We ask the students when they run across hills for instance, we ask what energy system are you using and progressively do that through out the program. And also introduce and talk about the concepts too and the aerobic system too because you are mainly walking and the key for the staff running with the students is to discuss the energy system that they are using. It’s a constant referral and the Head of School B, still couldn’t understand by the end of my meeting with him, how the students pick this up and understand it and I explained that you don’t have a run every Tuesday, you don’t have the community where you have the spirit and the teamwork and you don’t have typical Boronia meets on Sundays. I said these notions of educating the students is far more holistic than them coming to a place and learning about it and then forget it when they go to their maths lesson. This is teaching three different subject areas where you are incorporating into many different areas, there’s one program teaching as to what food they will eat when they are doing one particular physical activity for example, if you are doing aerobics you need to eat more fats and carbohydrates. So by the end they know what you need to eat, what energy system does what and how you feel etc.

MP
So is it setting that makes it different as opposed to where you are, here instead of School B?
DT
I think the setting has a practical application and the interrelationship with the holistic program, I think and by that I mean the ability to be able to apply within the broader subject. Taking a standard school term into curricular education teaching. The notion of cross curricular is starting to raise its head in a lot of schools. But here whether it’s planned or unplanned, it works very well.

MP
So they areas are interrelated in some way. In an unintentional way?

DT
Yes. I think as the program develops it’s starting to intentionally linked and the ideas that we come up with. Last term we introduced a few......in the program and unintentionally linked it into a few areas and it worked so well that we have linked it into other areas and that has worked even better. We say to the students the presentation of their program on the second night that they are here at assembly, and that introduced a whole notion of physical fitness and teamwork, strategy, a sense of community and no one leaves until they have finished. We did that last term in an intentional way. We didn’t show them a presentation and talked to them about a sense of community.

MP
It was certainly a strong reaction from the students. Is there something that students find particularly hard or challenging about the learning here as opposed to the learning that happens in School B?

DT
I think there are so many different extra linked forces here. The fact that you have your home sequence, but you also have got the eviction forces......sharing bathrooms with people that you don’t know, with a roommate that they possibly might know, and they have issues in their houses. There’s those forces and you see them over the first couple of weeks and the level of which they become settled into the program and they get a routine and the quicker we get them into that routine the quicker that we get rid of those intrinsic forces. I think it’s also the lack of distractions too. There are no emails, no television. The students have to do it because there are no other distractions to take their mind off it.

MP
So you are touching on now. The fact that the setting that you have got here seems to give you something different. There’s isolation, the setting enables you to remove distractions, it enables you to have a physical way out where you can do things like your village run, which I am assuming is not available in School B. How important is setting in a kind of place like Boronia?

DT
Definitely. Very, very important and I think it’s the pride of setting too that the students have. It’s their house, their home. It very quickly changes from their house to their home. It’s the pride of going up (site). It’s pride within their setting because in a small community it becomes very important to them and especially when you are coming from a school of almost three thousand students, where setting becomes very busy and little personal space. The setting here is because they can take ownership of it, I think.

MP
Do you, personally, as a teacher here find that you use the setting intentionally or unintentionally?

DT
Yes. It just makes it very easy for the students to relate to what you are trying to facilitate or teach them if you can use that source as an educational tool. For example, one of my focus activities in a two hour class is to focus on whatever you want with your house for whatever you think is an important think to teach within a timetable. You might do a teamwork session in respect of crime. I felt earlier on that a few of them were having a little bit of trouble in their house relating to nature. So we did a session at the jetty where we did a lot of personal learning activity where I had them lying around with their eyes shut or blindfolded and relating their feeling as to what they could here and using their senses apart from sight, to relate to feelings that they be having currently, or feelings they have had in the past and try and get them to understand the importance of nature. You had the water lapping under the jetty, the boat lapping at the wharf, the birds singing and the fish jumping – how can you do that in your bathroom?

Another one was they were battling for respect for each other. So the simplest was taking them out on a boat and had a picnic off site and taking them away from the pressures of what possibly might have been in the house and getting them out into a neutral environment and I gave everyone the right of their opinion on the topic that we were discussing and it ended up clearing two major issues that the house was having at that time. Again it was definitely the setting.

MP
Do you find that the students grow in their ability to interact with the setting itself?

DT
I do and it’s very evident because normally by week six or seven they will give you a list and say here’s what we want to do by the end of the program. Go the wharf, go to the (site) and have a bike ride, go and have a class down at the jetty – there was a setting somewhere that had become special to them. Like the (site), which is a small hill with some pine trees on it, but as a setting it’s very important.

MP
So it has assumed an importance well beyond what it actually is physically?
DT
Yes. In the physical sense and the emotional sense.

MP
Do you think they distinguish that in their own mind between physical and emotional?

DT
I don’t know. I think definitely some students would. Whether all students do, I doubt it, it’s a personal thing. I mean some students will talk about the physical and emotional side and others will have difficulty defining between the two. They do experience that in Chapel and a lot of Chapel experience will talk about the physical and emotional experience. That encompasses the physical, spiritual and emotional side, I think to a place.

MP
What do you think the students want to get across at night? What are they wanting to get out of that? What interaction are they hoping to achieve?

DT
I think it probably goes back to what we talked about earlier. The experience of being at a place that is meaningful to them and has helped them learn what they know has the learning and educational process here has made that place special for them. Whether they know it or not.

MP
So does that mean that it could be any place, provided that you have empowered it in some way that created this special dimension?

DT
Yes. I think it is, for example, (site) is an interesting one. I have thought about this and asked myself why is (site) so special to them? Is it because she runs up and down it during the term, is it because it gives a bird’s eye view over the village and the setting of Boronia…is it because a student who came three years ago told her about it and the infamy that has come from (site). There are probably quite a few reasons and for different students it’s going to differ.

MP
Do you find the setting plays a different role in different seasons?

DT
There is to a certain extent, especially in the first term the whole place was brown and after 180ml of rain and everything was green again, a lot of reflecting was done by the students in even in the first term. I know that especially a drought driven look is going to have a very negative vibes.

MP
How different would Boronia be if you picked it up and put it somewhere else?
I think it depends on what you are trying to do with it. If you are trying to do a personal development program where you tell them about themselves and you are doing it in a strict curriculum, you could pick it up and put it anywhere else. I think a successful Boronia program needs to embrace where it is and why we are here and I really like the last point as to what we are looking to achieve, which is a strong sustainability focus. I think because living in a remote environment like this we need to take advantage of the education possibilities and embrace them. I think the success of the program does relate to its setting and how you aim the educational process based on the available resources of that setting.

MP
Do you see learning here as being a one to object transaction, or a collective to object for activity transaction?

DT
Well the key words we use here’s the village community plus the house. I don’t think I have ever heard the words personal individual at Boronia and probably 95% of the reflections that I get from the students, they comment on the lack of personal space that they have and the lack of ability that they have to be by themselves and do things by themselves. They are not allowed out of the village by themselves and the village is a very small place. And even to go to the phone to be alone, often you will run into a few other students down there. Most of the students see it as a negative. They refer to the friendships as positive. I have said we definitely focus on community cluster house and although our pastoral care is very strong I don’t think we focus as individuals in the educational side of things.

MP
Do you think that learning here occurs at that individual learning, or is it something that almost invariably involves others?

DT
The students do their private work, so they do their program by themselves, which is research thing and they can involve others, like for a presentation, they can interview others in their research, in their investigative process. They have to do a totem themselves, they need to make a board game which they do themselves and another class we do what is called behind the mask which teaches them why people in history have worn masks and masks obviously hide their inner feelings and personalities. They also have to do a reflective session where they write about themselves on the inside of that mask and what they think about themselves etc. So for me that is focused on personal learning and there are a number of things that we do that focus on personal learning, but we do it in groups, whether it’s in a house, a cluster or a community.

MP
So whilst there’s the individual, it keeps coming back to the individual’s part of the collective.

DT
Inevitably, every class, the intention of the program is to bring it together as a cluster somehow.

MP
In contrast then to the learning that occurs in a classroom. Do you see that as more individual?

DT
I think it comes down to the focus of that particular teacher. Yes I would say there is a lot more personal education driven in a standard classroom. I mean you do some teamwork and read in groups occasionally, but the teaching straight down the line the students are taught as individuals. Home Economic and Phys Ed are a little more in groups but mainly the standard classroom approach is a lot more individual.

MP
I just want to explore from the nature of experience and what experience is in a learning setting and how that goes on to things like problem solving and encountering problems. What is it that starts the learning process in an experiential setting?

DT
My interpretation of the Boronia program would be that learning starts the moment the student knows that they are coming. The anticipation, the eagerness, the excitement, how am I going to handle that situation, how am I going handle not seeing my family for eight weeks? To me that’s where the learning starts, not necessarily where the education starts and that style of learning is very different for each individual. I mean the individual that goes with the flow and everything is sweet, as it turns out is probably not going to learn as much as the one who is in every night and not sleeping until 2.00am because they don’t want to go to Boronia.

MP
The learning starts as soon as there is anticipation of something that’s different. Something that they have never experienced before and that’s where you think the learning starts.

DT
Yes and the program too. I suppose the learning process is renewed the entire time they are here and is changing for them.

MP
Is that because of the perceived risk, do you think?
DT
I think the whole notion of this place, the unfamiliarity with it, the unknown.

MP
So experiential might be about encountering the unknown.  
Ok, problems, clearly from the moment they arrive they encounter problems.  
Do you feel that you actively put problems in their way?

DT
I think there are problems that naturally occur at Boronia to keep them occupied.  I think the program is designed in such a way to let them encounter problems.  The very strategic nature of what they will be encountering, almost down to the minute, I think does make problems for them.  We think them educational opportunities but the students see them as problems and how they overcome those problems.  Just to keep them on their toes to pose that problem that they have to deal with.  When the parents come up I say I don’t give them problems, but the program does yes.  It gives them educational opportunities.

MP
If you were faced with the situation, if you had a personal choice as an educator, doing it the easy way or doing it the hard way which way would you choose?

DT
Doing it the hard way because they would learn more from that.  I did that coming back from.............the other night.  Everyone else went the easy way but I said come on students this ways shorter and it took them around a big dam and up the back of (location)….and the students said this isn’t easier!  I said no but when we get to the end we can say that we did it and the other group didn’t.

MP
So there’s an element therefore of being a little bit provocative and maybe making life a little harder.  When do you reach the limit when they say the problem is just so hard to get around it?  What do you do then?

DT
Over the two terms that I have been here, I feel that I haven’t knowing faced that issue yet.  Whether I have and it’s been solved behind my back by a (leader) or someone else, I am not sure.  I feel that’s a hard one to answer because I just haven’t experienced that.

MP
You have done navigation haven’t you?  Well, say that they are going along using a navigational exercise and you suddenly realize that they have made a big mistake.  The group’s tired, they are not interacting well.

DT
Yes I suppose when we first introduce the program, the students are out there for half an hour and a lot of them are in big trouble and navigationally a few groups struggled. I know towards the end of the year again, a couple of groups were having all sorts of trouble and I helped them orientate their map and I said see those lines there and that was enough for them to understand. That to me was more of a facilitation of I’ll just help them a little by drawing a pretty broad hint and see if they run with it.

MP
As a person would you have some point where you would automatically bend?

DT
Probably pastoral care issues within the house if there is any major conflict issue. Yes I definitely would. I would be jumping in if it was an extenuating circumstance. I think risking strong psychological outcomes for education is probably one thing you have to watch in an environment like this and drawing a line and after that you stop.

MP
One thing that I read in a lot of blurbs about Boronia and other programs is how they are highly memorable. What’s memorable?

DT
I think it’s going back to that word again ‘experience’ and being at a tender developmental stage in their lives socially emotionally and physically. I think for these students it is memorable because the majority of them come from a typical upper middle class setting where they haven’t experienced a great deal of things like this like, farming and the isolation. Yes, Boronia is memorable of these students because it’s so different from what they do in their normal lives. I think definitely the age in which we deliver in terms of year 9 students. I think they are in a very influential stage of their life and part of their life where it all seems to gel and fits quite well together.

MP
Part of what you have said seems to come back to setting of when and where for them. Do you use the memories of students of what they have done here as part of your teaching in subsequent weeks for that group?

DT
Oh definitely. We get them to reflect on things that they have done and they have their visual diary which they do throughout the time they are here and we get them to flick back to a past memory of where they have been, who your first house mate was, they a very powerful tools to use. I might say remember what I said the first day and you said rubbish that’s not going to happen.

MP
What’s a visual diary?
DT
It's a scrapbook as such in that we encourage the students to follow their journey. Ideally, we want to put an entry of at least a page each day they are here. Some students will do an amazing job and others, whether it's through laziness or disinterest or artistic ability will probably not put as much care into it as they should. I tell the students that the diary will give them memories of their stay here for years and years to come.

MP
How often do you hold a reflection?

DT
Reflection takes place in a number of different amenities. I know the chapel program does it to a degree that instead of having six chapels they have three chapels and three reflections and within the house, I will use it as objective as part of the focus, but also on needs basis as well. If there is an issue in the house, or something's not going well with a particular individual. I can reflect how someone who at the beginning of the term had no confidence and felt isolated and look how confident and happy they are now. Reflection is used in a number of ways and is a powerful tool. And also used on the spur of the moment.

MP
Do you have a regular reflection on a daily basis?

DT
The students have between 8.30 pm and 9.00pm they have a quiet time and that's when they know they to be quiet and that's giving them the opportunity to have a daily reflection and that's when we encourage them to do their journal entries for the day.

MP
You mentioned earlier about being the right time and particularly most susceptible time for experience. How does a student measure their growth during the program?

DT
There is an evaluation process and it's quite strong and they get a list criteria that we like them to comment upon and they get given almost a full day to write themselves an evaluation which is giving themselves an assessment criteria and it becomes a document between them and their teacher and obviously passed on to their parents. I think it's great to read those because you can really pick up on the students' ability in themselves and how they have grown and their experience of what they have done. To teach something, it's a very positive thing to read in your term. It gives you a bit of a kick up as a teacher.

MP
So the evaluation is not what you judge but what the students judge themselves?

DT
We also evaluate it in a qualitative method through reports. Not in a quantitative excess way although, the students think it is and it’s not. I say to the students that we don’t do that at Boronia because to us the process of watching you research something and going through the process of all those dangers is far more important and at the end of the day I want the end result and that how we do things in Boronia, we don’t look at the outcome, we like to go through the stages and see the outcome. It’s the journey that we are interested in. I look at their qualitative growth, their special relationship in the community, their practical skill development over time, their qualitative assessment for the journal that they do and then a general comment at the end. We need to see an incremental increase in the rubric from that level she has come in at to prove to us that she has developed those skills over the year and I think that’s very important.

MP
Just as an observation, do you see the students creating new knowledge for themselves here? I guess that you could tell me something that I didn’t know, or I might discover something myself, or it might be something that’s sort of shared. There’s a whole lot of ways I can come away with something different. Are the students leaving with changed attitudes or are there some new thoughts?

DT
I do as part of the experience and that’s whether it’s facilitated by someone or is part of the experience in creating new knowledge. Most of the students reflect on what we are doing to our world and those sorts of things and the majority say that they are going to go home and make a difference. I mean if the eight students in my house go back home and each make a difference, the world will be a better place.

MP
Do you think that whatever they learn here does link well as to what happens after? You are speculating I know.

DT
I think that the majority want to see how they can improve when they get home. Unfortunately, many will probably go back to their old ways but I think there will be a percentage that will really carry strong experiences into their future lives, whether it’s drawn upon in the short or long term.

MP
What will a Boronia student remember twenty years from now about their time here?

DT
I think it’s a personal thing. Like I really hate going to the toilet in the bush, right through to whatever I put my mind to I can do. It’s definitely an individual thing and relates to the experience and the level of the experience while they are here.

MP

Thank you.

End of Interview - DT
Interview 17

Interview on 20/06/2007
Bethany Tam (School B) Boronia Campus

MP
What do you do at Boronia?

BT
I am program assistant. It involves background work, how to get over crises which can be important for teachers who do the curriculum. It involves a variety of tasks.

MP
What does that mean, background work?

BT
For example, not organizing, but having an involvement in the planning of the expeditions and the running of the expeditions, organizing activities that the students will participate in, so I might organize the activities so that the teachers can to the activity with the students. I might write something up or plan (not a lesson) but for example they would have a day of solo to reflect from their time at Boronia and I organize that and set it up. I suppose I run that day, just to be with farming, to help out on the farm with the farm manager, sometimes I may help with classes or be responsible for getting (although the students may not have particular classes) on to say composting (or the vegetable garden) for instance, but I need to try and get that learning across. So they take that back home, although its not a class.

MP
You mentioned solo reflection and that you set that up. What does that entail?

BT
In the past (I have only been here this year) last year they got a GPS.... Who marked the site of where each student was to sit and he went around to check those sites for trees (he used to be a logger) to that they were suitable and not under any dead hanging branches. Then I go around with my GPS and try a get the right spot and I have had a few inaccuracies and it changes from term to term so I go in there check the trees and check the tarp if its raining and not too far from the road but not right next to the road either and then they hammer all these little markers just in case something goes wrong so we can get in contact with staff and organize the staff what staff are responsible for students and then we need to check on them.

MP
What sorts of things happen on solo reflection?

BT
The night before the presentation they are encouraged to think about their
time at Boronia and they are given this little booklet and they can either
choose to read or not to read and it has some quotes and a couple of
examples of things to think about. Like they highlights and the lowlights, their
biggest challenge. They also get a letter back which they wrote at the start of
term and they can open it up and that talks about goals.

MP
And the other thing that you do is composting. What’s the learning around
composting?

BT
I think it’s a simple task that the students understand and they can easily take
it back home. So whereas their parents might not have a compost, the
students can run the compost by themselves. So that is a base level
environment awareness that they can do for themselves to help the
environment and hopefully that will encourage them to take that on and if they
want to do it further than base level.

MP
How do you teach composting?

BT
They have at the start of term, they have one classroom, but I’m not sure how
much is involved but they are introduced to the concept of composting and
what it involves and then for the second part of that class they go down and
have a look at the compost and have a look at the vegetable garden and the
theory behind composting explained or shown to them and then they are
responsible each morning what is called (composting activity) where they take
their recycling and their landfill and their compost down and add it to the
respective piles and then have one assembly a week for seven weeks, three
of them might be a bit of a slide show presentation One was to rehash the
benefits of composting and how to compost and the second was on a little
more interactive on how each house is doing with their composting and we
took photos and have them guessing what house owned each compost bin.
To encourage them to take ownership of their compost and take pride in doing
a good job.

MP
What do students learn about composting do you think?

BT
Hopefully, they learn that they can give back so giving back to the
environment in a small way. I think also this year having the individual house
compost (before it was just three compost bins and you through your compost
in one of them and they had no ownership of it) gives a bit of environmental
responsibility. Also, although it’s smelly I think it’s good for them to do
something that is easy but it is also disgusting but they can see the benefits.
In other words some things aren’t that great, they understand why they are
doing it.
MP
What’s an overall picture? I don’t know, have you had an involvement in any other programs like Boronia or is this the first time you have had any involvement in experiential learning?

BT
I worked for Outward Bound for about four years in total. Two years fulltime and two part time. I have never worked directly for a school never in a residential setting.

MP
Although you could argue that Outward Bound is a bit residential?

BT
Yes when you go out and sleep for ten days.

MP
So what sort of learning happens in this kind of program?

BT
I will start with Boronia where I think the main learning would be an awareness of the environment, the sustainability, the concept I suppose, group living skills. What do I mean by that? Living with others, looking after each other, community living and also group living skills in terms of looking after themselves, how to cook, how to clean, how to compromise and independence. Being responsible for themselves away from their parents. I think the community aspect is the most important out of all of them. Working together living with each other, not necessarily harmoniously but being able to go through the processes of living with each other.

MP
What about Outward Bound?

BT
Very different to Boronia in fact in terms of challenge. Like these students have elements of challenge but nowhere near to the extent. More real action consequence and although they have that at Boronia as well they can go home whereas at Outward Bound you can’t. You sleep on the side of a hill. I think from my perspective the environmental concept isn’t as large as Outward Bound.

MP
So you have talked about community living about the living skills living with others compromising independence. You talk about real action consequence and I think that you are suggesting that both programs have elements of that and perhaps Outward Bound having some edge to consequences. Different clientele, same age group or older?

BT
I think with Outward Bound Australia there is 70% between the years 7 to 11. Either students or boys and a variety of schools. The majority would probably
be private schools but also community based projects where students are sponsored and there are a couple of private schools where its not compulsory but their parents can choose. The 30% are for example, the Blind Society might send a group so it's a lot more varied.

MP
Just go back to that action consequence. I sort of see that as error consequence perhaps. How does that figure in your own philosophy of learning?

BT
I suppose I agree with it but probably not suffer the consequences but they realize that no one else is going to do it. If they can understand what the consequence is then they can choose to act whatever way they wish in terms of experiential learning. Not only do they learn by what they do or what actually have poor consequences, but also the good actions that have ideal consequences so to speak.

MP
Do you find it hard to know when to intervene?

BT
Yes. In terms of the safety issue I think the line is pretty straight. But I suppose one example that I can think of one that was a person with an acquired brain injury where the guy had fairly recently had an incident and was struggling with the fact that he had to live his life with an acquired brain injury and they had solo and I suppose it was knowing when to step in on that actions going to be the thought process or when its going to be harmful as opposed to beneficial. That line is pretty close because you want them to experience that but if you leave it too long then there could be consequences to that.

MP
What about the students themselves at Boronia?

BT
I think it's a little different because the consequences are more teacher orientated. Like if a student does something wrong they might have to clean up, so it's not directly related necessarily. There isn't a punishment or a consequences although some things might regret action consequences is defined I suppose. So some things that might be hard to find or might not be a real consequence to a negative action.

MP
What are some of the consequences that a student might encounter?

BT
In group interactions like they don't treat someone well then there is a consequence then. Like other students might gang up on them or if they can't be bothered to eat breakfast in the morning the consequences might be that
they get hungry later and they can’t go and eat something because they are in class.

MP
I want to ask about the single gender environment: how does that perhaps shapes the learning?

BT
I think in a longer residential program I think it’s beneficial for these students and just into the fact that they can let their guard down. I think a lot of them would be a lot more concerned if there were boys there. There would be a lot more stress there for them to maintain the ideal communication with boys, but then in terms of transfer of learning I think yes. So if it’s not in the real world its not a gender segregated society. I think overall it’s a benefit for these students to be without boys here. Maybe more so not the classes that they have but in terms of the living. Because I think these students have the confidence (or intelligence) to be able to take the learnings from the classes and I don’t think it would make a huge difference if it’s all students in a class or boys and students. Whereas in a physical program it might be a little bit different. If they were working on the farm I would say a lot of the students would stand back from the farming program because there’s a whole lot of guys there. They might not want to get themselves dirty.

MP
Tell me about the setting at Boronia and how that shapes the learning?

BT
Boronia is maybe seven hours from where the boarders have grown up and I think the fact that it’s remote from XXXX City, it’s hard to get access to the local community or town or whatever and the fact that they are so far from their parents has impact on the fact that they know that they can’t get out of here easily, so while they are here they might as well make the most of it. Whereas I think if they were at a program an hour from XXXX City I don’t think that it would have such a huge impact on them. In terms of why that is, is hard to say. Even though the students wouldn’t have access to XXXX City, I think the remoteness makes difference.

MP
I distance symbolic for you?

BT
Yes. In terms of the fact that it’s a farm and learning being responsible for the animals, knowing that they can eat the produce that they produce and linked with sustainability. I suppose relating that to outdoor expeditions as well. Also where they can paddle and sea kayak hike and it’s a wilderness area and an appreciation for the environment and appreciation for having a quiet area and time for reflection.

MP
What about Outward Bound setting? Do you think Outward Bound is shaped by the City?

BT
Yes. I think it does have an impact and I would say largely because of the action consequences. They know that to persevere and be determined and if they have get up early or it's raining, big deal, how they perceive things and how they react to the environment that they are in.

MP
If you moved the campus to, say, a desert setting, with no water around, would it achieve similar things?

BT
I think so. Like if there were no animals they wouldn't have the responsibility but they would have the responsibility for say water collection or monitoring the water would be very beneficial and get similar learnings.

MP
I am curious about what students find is memorable at Boronia?

BT
Their expeditions, there time away and what’s memorable about that is something different – it’s unique – they haven’t done before and won’t necessarily do again. They tend to exaggerate, like the heavy pack or the night it rains or the rat was in their tent. I think the will remember the hiking side of things and again that’s different and they are not used to that and they really enjoy that side of the program.

MP
Do you ask students about their memories?

BT
I am supposing although there are a few, like self-reflection, but I don’t get to read them the home teacher group reads them and then it’s passed on. It’s about their time here and what they learnt and a lot of them put in what their most memorable experiences are and then like some of the experiences when they are back in XXXX City. There was a chaplain talking about their most memorable things and the stuff that came out was on expo, summarize the sunset, the funny moments and the interactions in their house. I am calling it from what I have heard.

MP
In your own interaction and the teaching that you do. Do you use their memories?

BT
During solo and they are reflecting on what’s happened and also when they come back from inspiration we get them to reflect upon their experiences that they have had. For example, we had a session the other day which was called play back theatre where actors came and different students mentioned
whether it was a funny or a sad or a happy moment and then they had to describe and then the actors acted it out. The actors were the XXXX City Theatre Company.

MP
So the students would share what happened and the actors would act it out.

BT
Yes the main thing is the actors want to share their feelings so after a situation they would ask the students, “How are you feeling?” The actors act our happy or sad or confused.

MP
What’s the purpose of that?

BT
This is my assumption again, would be for them to reflect on these experiences and feelings that they had.

MP
Isn’t it someone else acting on their experiences?

BT
I think it’s their encouragement. There was this guy who was facilitating and he was out the front asking the students of their experiences, the students are doing the thinking and reflecting on the experiences that they had. Or the facilitator might say try and think of the times that you were really sad and ask for a volunteer to share her feelings.

MP
What are the formal ways that the students are encouraged to record their memories at Boronia?

BT
A visual diary was the main thing. They can put anything that they want into the visual diary and I think they take it to classes sometimes and I am not sure how the teachers use it in the classes. I think that sometimes they may be asked to look into their visual diary to reflect upon something. The diary is a journal but mainly through pictures and generally, it's a chronological thing. Then at the end there is an evaluation type thing where they have to write a page long evaluation. It doesn’t really have a structure. They are given examples of a particular structure, but then they are encouraged to be creative, so if they want to do a poem to start with they can, or if they are struggling they can just start off with my most challenging moment was this. I suppose there could be other things as well but I haven’t been here long and have not been a home group teacher, so I don’t know what happens in regards to what the students do in their spare time.

End of Interview – BT
Interview 18

Interview on 28/6/2007
Beryl Adams (School C) Callistemon Campus

MP
Let’s just start off gently. What’s your impression of the kind of learning that occurs here?

BA
A lot of people ask me that when I tell them that I am working at School C in the City things like Boronia and Acacia and year 9 often having alternative programs for all kinds of reasons some of which are losing interest in mainstream learning type schools are being completely emotional and changes in their understandings of the world and they work a lot more on their relationships and with their peers than they do with relationships with their parents or teachers. So put them in a new place or give them different opportunities is to hopefully revamp them a bit. So if you bring a group of year 9s into the City they will want to go shopping and a whole of these you know before they come down here have never been into the City and certainly not on their own. I mean that's not the case for everyone but to come from the country or from the outer suburbs every day they are confronted with advertising, so many choice all of those kinds of things. I think the thing is to get a balance between not just for them seeing those types of things and wanting them to consume them in a superficial way but whatever it’s meant to be part of the City and I think that’s kind of what we are trying to do here. I mean what does it mean to be in XXXX City and not in School C, to be part of XXXX City where a million people are working.

MP
So you are really looking then to set up the starkest contrast that you can with their existing.

BA
Yes, I suppose when you are looking at somewhere like School B. Like it’s in XXXX City and sort of suburban and they go to Boronia, they go to the country and our students come from the country to something different, something new, it's the city.

MP
Do you think they like this contrast? Do you think they come here and find it confronting?

BA
Yes I think for some students more than other students. I mean we have students who live in (suburb) and whose parents work at XXXX City University and they obviously already have an understanding of how the City works and
what it means and public transport and there are a whole lot of students who
have never been to the City before. I had a talk with one of the student’s grandparents when they came to an
open night. I asked what do you think he’s been getting out of it and the
grandfather said he is just so much independent, he is already showing
independence from coming into the City. Now that’s not something that I had
noticed about that particular student but he would come home and told his
grandpa about getting on the train and doing all that stuff and out in threes
and checking out the City and was already showing independence and
maturity that was starting to be shown just from coming in here

MP
Are the students confronted, or are they excited, stimulated, I mean what is
there reaction?

BA
They are really tired because they get up a lot earlier and get home a lot later
and a lot more time on public transport but they are also stimulated (especially
at the beginning), which by the end of the year become a little bit more blasé
about. Having not been here for a whole year, I have met up with a lot at the
end of last year and that’s what I am basing that on. There is one
international student who has lived in Singapore and Beijing and every time
we go out he compares the cities and that’s quite an interesting way for his
understanding making that comparison between other cities. A whole lot of
our students haven’t been to another city yet anywhere.

MP
Does other students listen to him or is that just sharing with the staff?

BA
He shares that more with the staff but we share it with the students. He is
quite a specific type of person and because he is an international student. His
English is very good, it’s not a problem but his behavioral pattern is slightly
different.

MP
You mentioned going out in threes. What does that mean?

BA
Part of the students adventure into the City and instead of going out on their
own which is not particularly safe, the parents sign a consent form so that the
students can come into the City as part of their experience of the City. So if
they are not going out with teachers they must go out in groups of three and I
believe is that if one person get hurt, one person can stay with him while the
other comes back for help, or ring or whatever.

MP
Now you use the word harm. Does that mean that the student comes here
and believes it more dangerous?
BA
Yes I think for sure and where we are situated in the City makes a difference as well. I mean we are right near the major train station means that a very broad range of people come around here and along the river there are a lot of homeless people and through the little back lanes of this area of the City. There are lots of people and I would say the students that come here are very closeted, I would say. Now I don’t know if that’s because it’s me saying that because I come from quite a different background, different upbringing. I think is the first time that they are able to start to understand all kinds of things about the world. This is about that there are lots of different people and different backgrounds of people and they wouldn’t see it necessarily, in the School C campus.

MP
So this is important in a sense. So the students are risking something by coming here.

BA
Yes I think so. It’s a risk and that’s what makes it exciting and it also means that they are willing to put themselves out there a little bit more and people who tend to do that, get a lot more back.

MP
There are two elements that really jump out at me by what you have just said. One is the setting of the campus and the other is the social dimension. In all of those descriptions you mentioned the types of people – there’s the homeless, the passengers and commuters coming out of the station, just the people in the City being a different demographic to School C. Do you think consciously that social dimension of what you are doing here is important and obvious to the students?

BA
I think it probably is to the students. It’s not necessarily exclusive as to how we might teach them or support them in going out to learn. I think we try and, as I was saying varied relationships oriented or conscious. That is something sort of physiologically or emotionally happening to them. I find I have more one on one conversations with students about such things as their life, without getting too deep into it, but that you build connections and therefore when you do try to impart other information like learning or explanations or whatever, is much more successful.

MP
So do you use those social interactions in a sense, to imbed perhaps some learning that you would like to impart?

BA
Yes.

MP
Do you do that deliberately, or when you have the opportunity to do it?
BA
I think when I have the opportunity to do it, but I think that’s really how I work. That’s more my natural way of doing things and that’s because I really haven’t spent a lot of time in a classroom in front of whiteboard or blackboard.

MP
Can you give me an example that you might package in one of those social moments?

BA
We have a project called ‘…..’ which is a six week project based subject where they have to pick something that they want to know about XXXX City, or they want to know more about and if it relates to XXXX City then that’s great and some of the kids get involved in homeless people because they see them a lot more and they have that building empathy and emotion in year 9 that makes them start to feel that (some can feel it earlier or later), and so I have had quite a lot of discussions with one or two kids about what it means to be homeless or not and I have tried to use my connections with people, which are not school connections. I have psychiatrist friend who worked on a homeless program in the City, so I have hooked up the students to have interviews directly with her and me having these kind of relationships I can bring into the school gives the students much more in depth information about what it means to be homeless than they originally had. So when you see people in the street when you are walking or whatever, at the very beginning of the year they are inclined to put people into stereo-typical groups. But over the year what they say and what they understand about those people changes toward a more broadening understanding of people.

MP
How might their language change?

BA
I think that they speak more empathically (and that’s probably part of a general growing up), I mean you say certain things, you stick to it and then someone changes their mind and the more that that happens the more you understand and therefore the more you can probably explain it back.

MP
Do you think they start to see them more as individuals?

BA
Yes I do. To learn research projects is really individual...

MP
How long does that take?

BA
It’s a six week project but in the afternoons only and they have group project that happens, well this year at the same time but next year we’re going to change it a bit. Some people looked at public transport, improving it, some the environment, sport, a mass of people looking at footy teams and soccer players and comparing sport. So some of the projects were much more superficial, or basic. Our idea is how do we encourage them to get a more deeper learning, something that is really more import rather than comparing something with the city sports ground.

MP
How did you encourage them?

BA
Conversation and suggestions. We probably need to spend more time next year really but we were understaffed as there were only three of us working with 125 kids, not at all of the same time, but that’s a lot of having to sit down and really nut out the preferred point that they want to investigate. We also had a lot of successful discussions with students for feedback sessions, where you sat down and asked are you really interested in this, why are you interested in this? By asking more probing questions they were really able to hone down what became a more successful project. Whereas if there are kids who won’t ask questions or who tune out when you are trying to explain why they need to continue or draw on something then it’s much harder.

MP
What about the setting? …the middle of the CBD. What do you think about this?

BA
In itself it’s the access point, it’s central, food and shopping and galleries and museums and the water. Because it’s the City, like cities around the world it’s at the focal point for resources and information and it’s accessible and close by. If you only have a certain time in the day and you want kids to go out and do things and come back and reflect on or have information in within an hour.

MP
If you put this campus say up around XXXX City Uni. or around East XXXX City or in AAAA.

BA
Effectively, you probably could. University area one was availability and proximity and I suppose with AAAA in terms of proximity and School C – it’s a long way to travel.

MP
So the logistics of the commute would have an impact on how far away you went?

BA
I would have thought so, especially because it’s a day school because it’s central to public transport. Almost all kids can find it relatively easy to get here from their homes within about an hour.

MP
Do you think that distance is important?

BA
Yes and no. I think what’s good about the distance is because of the distance it’s quite a different situation. It’s good to be quite removed from the other school, in a way, because we can do our own thing but also they really have a chance to be…but on Thursday they often go to School C to do research programs because we don’t have the facilities to offer every type of program here. So in the afternoons on Thursday they have interschool sport and they do a program called........in the morning which is in the middle session which is animation and food technology, very science type things which require very specific equipment.

MP
So do you find that Thursday out of Callistemon interferes with what you are trying to achieve here?

BA
It can. I work four days a week, I don’t work on Monday. So if you miss a session on a Tuesday a Wednesday or a Friday and you are out on Thursday at School C campus, in terms of what you might have planned for that week, it may get squashed or pushed to next week and that mucks up your timetable. However, I think it’s really good for the students to go out and do sport. I think boys in year 9 in particular, need to exert their energy and that is lacking in a way here.

MP
But do you get a sense at all that students working here Monday Tuesday and Friday in a particular mode a sort of social interaction and they then disappear for a day, do they sort of revert to type?

BA
No. I don’t think they have a problem coming back here but I think they really feel isolated out at School C. There’s no locker rooms, there’s no year 9 area. I mean they go out there and they kind of like separated.

MP
Do they talk about that?

BA
Yes. Also it means that the teachers out there don’t know them or their names and there all kinds of behavioral management issues relating to that.
You have already stressed how important that is with that age group as well as the context here and that's very important and the students themselves think that's important and put a lot of weight on what you say.

BA
I think they do. I mean I saw that last year when I was out there as a teacher and I understand that from the students.

MP
Getting back to the commute. Do students ever talk about that hour, or whatever it is. Do you get a sense that there's a process that they use as they move from there to here each day?

BA
They treat it as a social occasion because they can talk.

MP
Do they have to go in groups?

BA
Yes the have to go in two groups that's train one group and train two group and I think the main reason for that is that if you 125 students getting into one train it's pretty hectic on that train. So we have one lot of students that come in about 8.40am and another group coming in about 8.50am and then train one leaves a little earlier at the end of the day and train two leaves another ten or fifteen minutes earlier.

Kids often come in talking about being tired and I think the travel is a factor of that. I don’t think they are consciously and you have to constantly remind them that when they go out in bigger groups that it's not just your place. Because they do have a sense of ownership that sometimes gets them into trouble. I mean it’s not nasty trouble, it’s things like people not being able to go out onto the sidewalk. Then they get huffy or gruffy and they have to go on to the road – it’s just not being considerate. We expect them to be considerate to us as they expect us to be considerate to them and I think that’s how we work here.

MP
Do you think they get better at that? I mean do think that they develop an awareness of the other, or is it just head down and don't worry about the public?

BA
The bigger the group there is, the less they are aware of it and that's safety in number phenomenon.

MP
Are you aware of this program having any influence on those cliques? Because it’s a different setting and there are different rules here, different
skills. Do you sense that those cliques change? Particularly, the leader who stands out?

BA
I think it does give opportunities for some. I think it does give people the opportunity to move around a bit. One because the way groups are set up or you have to pick a partner, at least with one friend, if not two but other people in your group that you didn’t pick.
I don’t think the leaders change and I don’t think the groups change much but I think there is an opportunity for people in some cases who are not the leaders and not the bottom to move across between things if they feel able to.

MP
It’s a realistic observation. You have said that social networks and structures come through as a phenomenon this year, not that it was supposed to happen, it just did. Therefore, is there any change in that social structure, I think is a very interesting thing to focus on.

BA
Yes. We have five mentor groups, who form each other and there is a form leader they do a kind of signing in the morning and get messages and sign out in the afternoon and get messages type situation. Monday afternoon, when I am not here, they have about 1½ hour mentor session where they go and do things with their mentor groups. It’s up to the mentor in the class to work out what they want to do.

MP
So a mentor is a teacher?

BA
Yes

MP
What about student leaders?

BA
Yes student leaders are voted for early in the year. I think there is at least one in each mentor group but some groups have two and they help run activities. Say tomorrow afternoon which is the last day of term, they have student run activities and the student leaders organize that and informing the kids about it and finding out the best way to run it. There will be game session etc. So they also help run other types of programs. So we have got external programs that got competitions and debating and all of that and our students leaders are helping to organize that.

MP
The relationship between what happens in the classroom. I was shown the timetable yesterday. I mean there are things that you expect to find here such
as English maths. Communications. So there would be some standards lessons there. What's the interaction between that standard schoolwork and the opportunities being afforded by being here in Callistemon?

BA
Well, being not an English teacher or maths. teacher. I know in English they try and make a very specific program, one on age group in terms of checks or values or music, or they can use historical fiction for English. So they are trying to use the places in the City deliberately, to inform on their more basic English/maths. Program. Students go out and do external maths type excursions that they find in school, but much less though.

MP
What's your sense of the difference that happens in the classroom and what happens out, in your own experience?

BA
….not a huge amount of white board didactic talking. A lot of good work, individual work, a lot of movement between the statements, a lot of opportunities. We would like to think that if it's fairly successful that students can cope with any task that they are given, if they have a real interest, or about a real understanding about what they are wanting to pursue, everyone here would be pretty flexible in trying to help them. For instance, if a student wants to go to the museum or the State Library etc, there will be no problem but they to go in a group of three and have to negotiate with some people to go with.

MP
You said moving between the statements.

BA
So we have got specifically and unusually two big places upstairs and downstairs we have a big computer room and three small spaces. We often use more than one space per group. The groups are not always in their mentor classes, often either in bigger groups or smaller groups. So we might use the computer lab. and then break up into smaller spaces downstairs or students will do private study, private work in maths, if they are ahead or behind and that’s logistics as well as it's good to be able to do that and sometimes frustrating.

MP
So the ABCDE are the mentor groups are they?

BA
Yes. They do maths. And English in their mentor groups and sometimes logistics sometimes in the afternoon experiential program.

MP
That's where the mentor groups dissolve and then it's basically a case then of (small groups)?
BA
Yes. Sometimes it's alphabetical, sometimes it's (indistinct). It depends on what the (indistinct) is. Have you heard of the program called ‘…….work’ which is on the timetable. It's a little bit like a job application simulation and that has been done in mentor groups, but normally the afternoon groups are split in a random way.

MP

What's the reasoning behind that?

BA
I think it's because kids get stuck in that group because of kids' mentality, sometimes more kids and sometimes it's good to give students and opportunity to not be with their mates because they work differently and will meet new people and understand things in a different way. They are sometimes more likely to risk take without their friends there. In terms of what they want to investigate or what they might say.

MP
What are the risks that a student takes here? I am thinking about them having to out on a limb in some way; the sense that if I do this wrong I might be hurt?

BA
Well the health program is a lot about risk taking, that's about their own decision taking. There are lots of extra curricular activities outside of school that we try and bring in. We have had recently a bunch of students wrote plays, directed them and acted in them and they were performed at (theatre). One of the students who directed the play was basically responsible for other students to come to rehearsals and be part of their group and know their lines. The contents of some of the plays. One was about homelessness and the girl that wrote that was the one I mention to you before, she managed to broaden her horizons for that. Another girl wrote a play about romance but not a light fluffy romance it was about personal important things. They had to go on and perform them and have a kind of in real life experience about that. This was risk taking. I mean they are not professional actors and they don’t want to be but they wanted to support their friends or something new or something different and that kind of opportunity.

MP
Do you think the student then has a clear sense of the switch that occurred between the morning classes like doing maths algebra and trigonometry and then in the afternoon a different mode, or do they think that it's all pretty much the same?

BA
I think that they do think that it's a different mode. The school tried having the standard lessons in the afternoon and the different mode classes in the
morning but they couldn’t get the kids back. So by the afternoon you can give them more freedom, more flexibility, more your own time to work on stuff and that’s probably something about being tired, about being the end of the day. About the way they think in the morning and the way they think in the afternoon.

**MP**
So the students focus in the afternoon or is it hard to?

**BA**
The nature of the work allows them to be a bit less focused. The best thing is to get them on to something that they really want to do so that they will be focused and where they are going to be more interested then they will put more time into it. So the people who didn’t really care about the project very much were much more easily distracted or slack or whatever.

**MP**
Do students comment to you on the mornings being hard work and the afternoons being slack and not much happening?

**BA**
I think they work harder sometimes because it’s really independent. They do these independent programs starting in years 7 and 8 so when they come here they are a little bit aware of how the afternoon sessions run and there is always going to be times when it’s alright that one has a flat session because you worked really hard last session. We are trying to make them understand that and we are able to be flexible like that and if you are working well with them and they are working well with you then you know that kind of thing is happening.

**MP**
Would you have a lot of people out of the campus in the afternoon?

**BA**
It depends what projects have been going on. So with the world work project we have not had hardly any people out because they are working on job applications and we have had a lot of parents come in and executive members come in and do interviews for jobs which was excellent and students took it really very well.

**MO**
You haven’t tried it before?

**BA**
Before they had done the interviews in mentor groups and the mentor interviewed them. This time there was a whole lot of people that we didn’t know and it was really effective and also they weren’t timetabled before or after their friends, it was just random people who went for those jobs and that’s why you worked for that panel. I was running the reception desk making sure that they were running on time. I mean that was fine for me
because they had taken it seriously. And a whole lot of kids came up to me and informed me that they had got a job, so that inspired them to get a part time job. So that's a really great indicator that that's having some effect.

**MP**
That’s getting back to that risk behaviour that I was talking about before. So that sense of risk of doing something different and that sense of behaviour with doing something outside of school that was different.

**BA**
Yes that’s was really good. Sometimes you get a feedback from say one student that they enjoy something or whatever but it doesn’t happen on quite a big scale as it happened the other day.

**MP**
What do you think a student would find most memorable about this year?

**BA**
I think opportunities. The different opportunities in here. It’s not that they couldn’t have them out there but because of logistics or because of timetable or because of programming they don’t have them out there.

**MP**
What opportunities?

**BA**
I mean to be able to go out and go the Art Gallery, I mean if you are talking about are you can actually go out and see it and even go an talk to someone at the Art Gallery about it, or that you go and get to be part of a play festival that is only the first year out or you can get to run a debating workshop program here. Those kinds of things.

**MP**
Do you actively build on the students memories of the program as it’s progressing? I mean you say ok well back in that week when we went to this place or do students reflect on their own?

**BA**
Yes they have a journal that they write in. It’s sort of managed through English class but it’s not in English writing in general and they do hand it in and I mark them. It’s a kind of log of what they might have done, where they might have gone, what they might have learnt or, entry timetable. All those kinds of things or drawings and things like that. At the end of each year we do do reflection for students and can talk about what was expected at the beginning and talk about work and what was successful for them have they changed and improved. Those kind of things.

**MP**
What do you mean by unit?
‘World at Work’ is one of them.

Typically how long would a module or unit last?

Four to six weeks depending on the content of them is or how long they think its going to take.

So you do reflect on it in the end.

Yes. At the end of the year last year when the year 8s came in for their orientation for year 9s give them the orientation. So it’s from that student’s perspective, what is it about being India? They have to come up with a tour of the City in small groups and take the year 8s out on a tour about things that they used or knew about the City and talk about it. So that is one of the ways of remembering a whole year’s sort of staff and try to impart it to the next year coming through.

What sort of things do they impart?

They take them to food places and malls. They take them to the City Libraries like the....Library and the State Library. They talk a lot about the social things like lunch times and the risk programs which was started by....who was a footballer and it’s a lot about personal health risk and getting out of your shell type thing and the students do quite intensive three or four sessions during year 9 with that. So they talk about that. They talk about taking public transport. They trying to tell them what makes the City different in a really obvious way.

After the experience, is it integrated into what they do next?

In year 10 they have a really broad range of subject choices so they here they come in and within a subject can do a broad range of several things, when they get out from year 9 they have to do English and maths. And they have four to choose from and then there are all kinds of other subjects. It’s kind of the opposite in a way. You have to take specific things that you are shown or produced for you to work through and those subject choices are your options and that is counseled quite intensively. We work with every student individually working out their programs called ‘Life Work’
Interview 19

Interview on 28/6/2007
Neil Oldham (School C) Callistemon Campus

MP
Neil, would you just start by telling me what it is that you do here?

NO
I started at the middle of the year last year and since I have been here I have taught an integrated program, drafting work to do with mainly English material Personal Humanities History. This year I have been class mentor with a class of 27 students, monitoring their personal growth, behaviour and the issue would be teaching English, working as a member of the English team, drafting a curriculum and revising that and also working in mainly in the History integrated module.

MP
What do you mean integrated program?

NO
Last year particularly, the integrate program was where you take English Art and Humanities and combine them all into a joint undertaking. For example, last year we did a unit called “Belonging” which I taught where you had to write a draft story about someone working through a particular issue and they had to create an artistic piece of work that expressed what was at the core of that story. So I worked with them on drafting their pieces, constructing ideas for their pieces both written and expressive. I work with students on graphic art and sound object art and drawing which is something that I am interested myself.

MP
I have the sense that there are two fairly stronger contrasting parts of what happens here. I mean you…put them here in the mornings in classrooms so they learn English and Maths and whilst we could probably say that the structure may be modified somewhat by the place that that’s delivered, it’s essentially what you deliver in the classroom at AAAA if you have the (lessons) there. Is that right?

NO
Well I think that with the English there is a sense of trying to get some of those things in which they don’t get because they don’t do regular other subjects in a strict fashion so for example, in English, mid term, we’ve been doing historical fiction, certain areas of history and English skills and their expression of a piece of historical fiction also includes artistic expression and dramatic expressions, more so than what you would usually do in English. Use of monologues graphic models and things like that. So trying to bring in a few of those areas. I would agree that to a large extent it’s basically class room based teaching.
MP
So it’s essentially didactic mode. Students are in a classroom with a teacher. Then you have this other part of the program that I’ll use the term experiential which could mean anything, that’s why I am interested in exploring with you. What is your sense of the difference between what happens in the classroom in that full structured program and then the other part of what happens here?

NO
I think it’s interesting, it’s an unclear question to answer because in fact I think we’re in a period of flux at the moment. If I looked at this year as the example. I think, particularly this term where we have been using the integrated modules and we’re rotating to a new group in term 3 and a new group in term 4, this term has been similar in a sense to what we do in the morning. I know from my history…there has still been a lot of history in-class instruction, while there been an opportunity to go out and experience the City and experience the history in action, a large amount of that unit has been confined to classroom documentary footage internet use and things like that. Things that I wouldn’t hesitate doing in another setting.

In response to student feedback in sort of self analysis of what that units involved, next term will be quite different. Next term it will be more experiential differential curriculum line, where students where instead of doing five lessons on indigenous issues and five lessons on say Australia at war, students will do two lessons on indigenous issues, two lessons on Australia at war, two lessons on either crime or crime fighters, or another topic that the other teaching unit will develop, two lessons on art history, or artistic expression in XXXX City and again another topic, probably around science/maths. Out of ten units they will complete five which all cover a core module of where have we been, where are we now, where are we going. So looking at the idea of yourself being an active participant in constructing history, so students will be able to choose from those selections areas of history that interest them and represent where they see their needs, what they want to learn about. So I guess that is a lot more self directed or differentiated curriculum, although each of those two lesson units includes an experiential lesson. For example in the crime and crime writers they will do a tour of the City where they will experience five or six sites of crime. They will do a treasure hunt for artistic expressions looking at artistic expression from the 1950s, before the 50s to the late 80s and beyond. I know the other teacher is intending on doing ‘in the pipes’ is the term being used where he takes students down to the AAAA Sewerage Treatment Plant. Another unit that we were looking at doing was about building design. Looking at going to the XXXX City Council environmentally friendly building. So every unit would include one of those opportunities and then at the end of having done those five units the students will have to do an extension on one of them and will very much direct what that is themselves, with a range of outcomes being explained to them. So they have to demonstrate certain skills and knowledge and understanding and they have to define..unfolding, how they do that and that for many of them I guess, will involve them being out and about going places, depending on what they do.
MP
You said that this is largely a response of the student demand?

NO
Well not so much saying that we want to be out more or we want more choice more being a bit uninterested in how it was done in the first term and I would say almost 50/50 so their guide was while they liked the content, while they got something out of it, they would have been more engaged had they been more variety and that was very much my feeling as well. I wanted to cover more topics in less detail and then allow them to choose the topic that they wanted to. Explore in more depth. I want to encourage that sense of engagement and also to encourage them to think about it. Saying ok if I am interested how much are they going to explore a little bit further.

MP
What’s the essence to the program then? Couldn’t you do those things in School C?

NO
Well I think the limitation would be the resource of the City. What we have done this term, in terms of what I have done in history, yes it could have been done in School C. I think what I will be doing next term in history, no, you couldn’t do it unless you are in the City because every second lesson will be out in the City and when the students then choose their own topic the nature of the resources that they will need will be so varied that they will need the library in the City to go see things and observe and interview people and follow up in that sense. I think the same for English – observation going to the museums to learn about peoples’ stories and things like that I think is much the same. That sort of approach as to how we are doing things, to a large extent, would have to be somewhat different at a standard classroom setting school.

MP
Do you know if there is a single unifying idea underpinning why, do you know what it is? I mean, why not have the entire school here or, part of the school here?

NO
My personal view but I am still in the process of defining it (I have been here for just on 12 months), is that here I get a real sense of individual success from being here. I think because we only view those students for a year. They come in here with a fresh start, so they have new people that they have never met who they are working with and likewise are viewed as sort of people that don’t come with a whole lot of baggage and they have a chance to really explore themselves within the context of a very differentiated curriculum.

MP
What do you mean by that?
A curriculum that can meet their own needs to that particular individual, to a certain extent.

What do you think their needs are?

I think it’s different for every person. In my class of 27 I have students who are perfectionists that need to learn to take risks, I have students who have learning difficulties that need to learn coping mechanisms, I have students who are very self-conscious where they need to learn that people aren’t making judgments about them. Within my group of 27 students there are probably about five sets that are very different in that group.

Does this program here allow them to take risks do you think?

Yes, I think much more, although I can only speak from my own point of view and my own experience, I feel like the students boundaries are pushed much more here than I have ever pushed boundaries before. It’s not just being in the City it’s about just having to do with one year level, it’s about just having to deal with perhaps two different subjects, whether it be English and the integrated module that I teach, or whether it be for someone else like maths and the integrated module that they teach. I think that not having to have such a wide variety that you have to think about on a daily basis actually allows you to think more through those individual sort of issues that happen and to push more.

You said push more here. Can you give me an example of how that happens?

For myself, I think because you able to identify what the students needs are more accurately, I am actually able to target strategies at those people. I will give you an example, in the passed where I worked at I was an English teacher and coordinator and I knew in my class there was a range of young boys who had no engagement in English, weren’t interested in reading and had very poor language skills but I simply didn’t have the opportunity to deal with them in a small group context and address those problems because I had a curriculum that was prescribed for me by the school body. I had targets that I had to push them through each term. Whereas here, because and the other person that teach English control what we teach we can say well that’s not appropriate for this group, that text isn’t going to work. We need to do fewer things and do them in more detail. So one of the things that I have done this year is again identify that are five or six boys in my class, in particular, that
need to read more widely, improve their vocabulary, grammar or punctuation or whatever it might be and simply getting them to do exercise 1b from the grammar textbook is not going to work because they are going to hate that. Whereas, if gave them a novel to read that is very interesting they will read that.

The success story so far has been a student who is constantly in trouble, poor expression, poor grammar, writes in a very clumsy manner. Has read four books of a series by the end of term 3 when I set him the challenge to read the first book. He is really loving it and the engagement is actually carrying through to the work that he is doing in English. Even though the books that he has read have not been assessed and it’s just something I said might be a good idea.

The difference here (coming back to more of the question), is that I have had the opportunity to build a relationship with a student so that they actually have the sense that I am giving them this challenge realistically in their own interest. That I care about where they are going to end up at the end of the year and I care about where they are going and I think, for whatever reason that it might have been in the school that I was at, despite my best effort that the sense wasn’t there, wasn’t working in the best interest of the students. Whereas here (I am not saying that we are best friends), but they respect us who we are, they understand that we are different from each other and they were actually legitimately interested in how we are going.

MP
How important is the setting?

NO
I think not having classrooms and not having a separate staff area where we are locked away and not having discrete breaks away from the students, at times, very frustrating because you don’t get that breathing space but, at the same time, great because you are always accessible (whether you want to be or not) and the students really know you. I get a sense from a recent survey, my students know that they can approach me at any time – lunchtime, recess, after school, before school, in sessions when I am not teaching. I think that’s something that you wouldn’t get in a regular setting because the students couldn’t do that. In fact I often go out to lunch with my students in my mentor group. So I think that could be different, the fact that you are always together. It really gives that sense of congeniality because you are all working together. I think that they know that you have roles to perform and are not always available at that very moment. I think that is definitely unique in this environment.

MP
The street address, does that lend anything unique? You did mention before access to a number of things.

NO
Is that opposed to other locations in the City?
MP
Yes we could be in other suburbs of the City, couldn’t you?
NO
I think the central CBD is very important. I think other inner suburbs would be fine as long as you were close to the CBD. I mean if we wanted to go down to Site I which is just two blocks away, we could fit that experience into our regular English program in the hour and a half, whereas if I was at School N for instance, I would feel that would be a half day excursion. I mean we send groups of students out of three four or five into the CBD but I would feel more hesitant if I felt that they had to catch a tram or train, even for ten minutes to get into the city because they weren’t so close that if they got into trouble in the City they could get back to the school base quickly.

Last year we had students doing a health project and students saying oh I need to get some information on teenage counseling services and literally would duck out for twenty minutes and come back and work on it. Another example, in my history unit the concept of actually going down to the memorial, which was only down on BBBB Road, they wondered if they had time to do that or have I got time to go to the Museum.

MP
What about the mental emotional physical journey that they take each day? Where they are coming from somewhere that’s quite different, I suspect somewhere like School C and the School C area where they live and the City. Do you think that’s significant for the students?
NO
One of the things that I noticed as soon as I got here was that I come from a school that is very multi-cultural – Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Anglo, Asian population and one of the things that I noticed immediately was that they were very Anglo centric community and didn’t have an understanding of the differences that existed between School C and other communities like the Western suburbs where I had been working and there was a lack of empathy for people who didn’t come from a relatively affluent background. There was a lack of understanding of what it would be like to come to a new place. There was a lack of understanding people had to work two jobs to survive. Those sorts of things but I think that City exposes those students to such a range of people, particularly, where we are here right near the central station. I mean like EEEE Street where they will walk down everyday often with a lot of homeless people and where public transport runs. So you have a different demographic of society in their face everyday.

In fact, the group that we are teaching now, it has only taken them perhaps two or three weeks to realize how many different sorts of people that are vastly different to themselves, are out there and they start to feel empathy to those that didn’t have as much as they have, or people that haven’t had a really stable home life, or people that were victimized because of the way they were dressed or the way they looked.

End of Interview of NO
Interview 20

Interview on 28/6/2007

Eric Anderson (School C) Callistemon Campus

MP
I really appreciate the chat we had yesterday and the things that we started to get into and in a sense I would like to wind back the tape and go back to some of those ideas. Let’s just start with your sense of the ‘so what’ at Callistemon. Like here I am in the middle of City XXXX. What’s the program about? I mean they could be sitting quite happily in RRRR doing English and maths, but here they are, why?

EA
What’s really important that adds to our conversation is that they are learning about themselves and their identity and how they actually relate to the wider world around them, beyond the English and maths and those basic traditional type studies and obviously, part of integrated learning is that we are using those subjects in those subject areas to help them get the tools to help them understand themselves and their relationships and obviously the City is a personal environment for that. It has lots to offer. It has got institutions that are important for them to interact with and it’s obviously got the diversity. I think that one of the reasons that it works from the type of school we are in terms of School C is because it’s such a contrasting environment and I think that putting them out of their comfort zone extracts elements of their personality and elements of their whole journey in life at this age. It actually highlights and brings it to the fore so that they can start to deal with some of the apprehensions and fears and questions and various issues that they are dealing with as teenagers. Probably a good example is that you get involved with people from all sorts of levels. They have to deal with homeless people they have to deal with druggy people who come in the City. They are confronted with these things and they have to find a way of dealing with it and as teachers we have to help them through those decision making processes and what they do when they are confronted with these situations and I think that that is a huge part of the learning process.

MP
You said decision making. What sort of decisions do they make?

EA
Well, like a homeless person asking for money, what do they do? A lot of them when they first come in here say why don’t they cut their hair and get a job, I’m not giving them a cent, I want to go and spend it on McDonalds, even though many of them are given huge amounts of money to spend on what they like. Certainly after they have had conversations with the staff and certainly when they have done a few projects, and after they have heard a few guest speakers, in other words given a bit of information about the homeless and they start to learn that sometimes these homeless people come from
families just like themselves. Sometimes these homeless people have been
abused themselves, or whatever reason that they are there, the get a bit of an
insight and then next time they are confronted with that they are far more
likely to be a bit more polite about it. Whether they give money or not, it’s up
to them. We say perhaps some people out there who ask for money are drug
addicts and it probably best to just walk away, but we are not going to get
aggressive and if you choose to give money it’s up to you.

I had one girl last year in our mentor group. She was so taken with the
homeless situation she was so shocked by it and had no understanding to
begin with that she suddenly wanted to have an out-of-uniform day to raise
money to give to the homeless. She helped in the soup kitchen with the
homeless people, in here own time. She then actually started to write stories
based on the homeless person’s perspective and she just got so engaged
throughout the year that the journey that she started at the beginning of the
year with no knowledge, just thinking that this is really wrong. To the
understanding she had at the end of where she could talk from that age group
to the next group about statistics, about the research that she had done,
about interviews that she had had with homeless organizations and homeless
people. She grew as a person because of that project and she used that as a
tool to explore her own relationship with the world around it and herself. She
still keeps in touch with me and emails me and tells me how she is going and
has won awards. She was a special needs kid as well. She wasn’t a high
achiever. That is a good example of what we really try and do here.

MP
So the Callistemon, in one sense, using the word a bit provocatively here, is
that it’s intended to confront? I mean a bit confrontational?

EA
I think that in the past it has. At this moment I would suggest that it’s probably
at its most safest level in terms of how challenging it is. We used to very
much focus on World issues. Everything was done in getting them to expand
their thinking process outside of their comfort zone and more challenging and
confronting. It was almost designed like that but at the moment there’s a lot
more English and maths and a more formal timetable to the programming and
everything is a lot more constrained. Maybe there are barriers in the way to
actually let them open up and I think the reason for that is management. Also,
as we discussed yesterday, it’s partly the way the world has changed in terms
of everything being a little bit safer and people are less inclined to push things
and go against their comfort zone.

MP
People could become more risk adverse, do you think?

EA
Yes I think so and that’s certainly from parents students and teachers
perspective.
But with education needs would you say the risky model is more or less effective?

EA

When you are looking at parents students and teachers there are obviously things that work some and not for others. If you transported the students from eight years ago to this model you would have probably some of them that were struggling back then would really flourish now and visa versa but I think also the other way around. I think it the students of today were thrown back into that more self directed, much more loose environment, they would actually really do well, particularly the group of students that we have at the moment. They would really love and really come up with some amazing work, because it seems to me that that age group they really want to know about what’s going on in the world and they really want to know about human rights issues in China. They really want to know about child labour in Thailand. We don’t tackle those big issues anymore. It seems that they are not on the agenda but I think that kids love that and want that. As a teacher you are not pushing any particular persuasion or philosophy, what you are doing is posing a question and a set of circumstances and saying what have you shared about that? Something that I have been pushing a lot in here is that I am aware that Australia hasn’t a Bill of Rights and for a long time I have wanted to put into the program the students thinking about what that means for everybody, for themselves, for everyone in Australia and looking at other Bills of Rights and things like that and I think it’s a really great vehicle for opening them up but, as such, it’s very difficult to slot that into the program when we have got that prescriptive things that we have to do and where do we put it? There just never seems enough time. I mean I don’t think that’s specific to this school but just as a teacher there is so much that you want to do and so little time to do it because you have to get through 120 kids. You have to meet some outcomes and criteria. I mean I personally having three kids and a home etc, I have taken a step back pushing what I believe it should be, the fight that I would have to have, at this stage I am not willing to fight. I have fought in the past because there was a very scary moment about three years ago when we had two new staff come in. One of whom had been given........position of leadership but wasn’t given it in the end. So we had two leaders banging heads and both leaders wanted very much to turn this place into a far more structured, very ultra-conservative, almost business like situation and I actually had to put my hand on the table and sort of have a yelling fit and say that this is not what this campus is about and if they do that they are going to destroy the program. Because a lot these kids come from that wealthy business background. They don’t need more of that, they will all go off and be quite wealthy and do lots of things. What they need is to learn to be socially responsible. They need to learn about the issues that they need to be confronting. They need to learn about themselves and furthering themselves as people rather than how business operated etc and I really strongly believe that. Not that there is anything wrong with that but not what they need at this age.

MP
Then is it about distance and contrast from their current setting to something that’s going to really shake them up because it is strongly divergent from what you expect to be their course in later life?

EA
Absolutely.

MP
I just want to contrast the two examples there. You talked about The Bill of Rights and then there was the protest that was held here in the City that you decided to use as an example of direct experiential learning. Not to take part in the protest but to go and observe it. To look at it as a social phenomena rather than seeing it on the news or reading in the newspapers. I mean would you accept the argument that any year 9 sitting in a classroom could deal with a Bill of Rights as a construct, as a concept?

EA
Absolutely, but when you pair it with stuff like experiential learning, I suppose it’s a richer experience and I suppose when you are looking at the Bill of Rights in the environment that we’re in, looking at the multiculturalism outside, having interviews, having access to interviewing different types of people, have you heard about the Bill of Rights? What do you personally think of the Bill of Rights? Things like when we go to our breakfast club scenario. Where they actually go to the flats and help the kids. A lot of those kids were born in refugee camps in other countries and so the kids participate in that. Sure, there might be other things around in outer suburbs, but really, it’s a direct urban environment and those sort of experiences would certainly help them in terms of thinking about something like the Bill of Rights. So I think that in the City in this environment you really do have to do a project. You have to think (as have said), what is it about doing this project which is unique here that they can’t do anywhere else? And the culture program then is a good example. Through that cultural project within a very small environment, we are able to get to a number of cultural institutions. We are able to say well we want you to go and visit this and they can do it on their own, in groups of three, very quickly and it’s very accessible and you can pull those resources and give them a richer clearer picture of what you are trying to teach them and explain to them.

I think it’s all the backing up of things and the more things that you give them like going to Remembrance Day….seeing the grand final parade. For all of these kids coming into the City and seeing all of this stuff, it’s a huge thing. I mean they have to get permission from their parents to organize things, but when they are in a school environment they can just nip out and see this stuff. Even to the point where, it’s not perhaps as educational, but we had the Olympians they came here in a parade and we as a school went up there and were represented and we had the students there and they were excited we turned it into a bit of a what do you think is the feeling? What’ going on here? Why is there such hysteria about the Olympians? We made it into a Commonwealth subject. I mean you just see what’s going on in the City to
support what you are trying to teach them in that sense. As Ethan Ballard said “The City is our Classroom”. That doesn’t always happen and sometimes they have to sit in front of the computer and do research and they are not getting out. There are some teachers, in the years that I have been here, that find this difficult where they have had a project where they haven’t gone out anywhere and they haven’t had a guest speaker in and they haven’t done anything that they couldn’t have done in the school in a world environment and I question had they really understood what we are supposed to be all about.

MP
What’s your sense then of the difference in the learning that occurs, the classroom model versus the experiential model?

EA
I think there has to be a good balance between them. There has to be a little bit of both and obviously when it comes to reflection and valuation of an experience, the classroom model lends itself to a bit more of that. It’s almost as though they do need sometimes to settle and be quiet and consider whatever they have just experienced.

One of the things that we have a lot of at the moment in here is booklets. These booklets encompass everything in the given project or program and the students fill in the booklets and there’s a lot of reflection and questions and evaluation of each experience that they do. When they go to the gallery, when they go to the church, when they go and visit, or have a talk like a multicultural representative coming in. Rather than just sitting there and experiencing it and then walking away. They evaluate it. Sometimes they don’t have to do a project on it, they don’t have to actually answer questions but they have to give their own opinion and have to think about and reflect on it because otherwise (although I think it sinks in), as a school or as a parent, we need to have evidence of that understanding. I suppose how you actually get students to do that will determine whether it’s either a positive or negative experience, because sometimes if they perceive too much, or they are somehow being analyzed and judged they give you what you want to hear, or are negative about it. That’s a really fine line and that comes back to what we were talking about the other day about the type of teacher that is required for this sort of program. If you are a teacher who demands power and structure and has to have one over the students, which many teachers are. It’s not going to work very well. However, if you are a teacher who wants to work with them and sit down with them and exchange with them and give your own opinion as well as listening to their opinion and converse with them and interact with them as a social or teaching student relationship then you are going to do far better and survive a lot longer and be more effective.

MP
You said, “Evidence of learning”. You said you have to have some evidence of learning. You talked about reflection. What do you think the evidence is of learning that has occurred and that is experiential?
EA
Well, going back to that girl. Where she decided on her own that that's what she is interested in and did focus on it a lot throughout the year, but in the end her being able to talk about it. Change in behaviour, change in attitude, being able to talk about scenarios. A good example is a boy that we have just had recently, who had all sorts of learning attitudes, being disengaged from the program. He has just conducted an interview with the parents who came in and did the interview with him and he just got a glowing report. I mean what happened to him? Somehow, at some point along the way, over the last two terms. Is it things that the teacher has said, or how they dealt with him, he has actually understood for the first time in his life is the reward that he gets out of it is what he puts in. Obviously, each student has a different level of understanding about what’s going on at different learning points and the switch has just turned on for him and I can see for the rest of the year, just from that one experience, it’s going to change him. Now if you have a teacher in a school that you can turn that switch on at some point through the year to turn on the learning process and to see the value of that learning process, then you have done your job and that’s really the best you can hope for I think. Beyond all the English and maths getting As or Bs or whatever. Some of the students come and you are just enhancing it but there are a lot of students at this age that really don’t get it. They are not mature enough to get it, or they are maturing into it. It’s almost like windows popping up in the students, you can almost see it when the penny drops, you can see this moment and for each of them it’s different where they just get it and suddenly they are interested and suddenly.

MP
What do you mean by windows?

EA
It’s where suddenly everything has opened up and they are interested and as a teacher you can go right in and put in some tools and you can help them to help themselves. I think there are a lot teachers out there don’t want to put that effort into it and often that window can close up again.

I had a student who had pretty much done nothing the whole year – we had all sorts of issues with him. He couldn’t decide on the topic, he couldn’t decide on anything else and we started to talk about art because he was vaguely interested in art. Have you ever heard of a surrealist? He had no idea. So I started talking about the theories that they use in their art and what they whole thing is based on and said what? What’s that? So when I sat down and explained it to him, he became vaguely interested in it. So I said ok this is your project (sometimes you have to modify the program) and he went off and started looking at surrealist art and he had never seen it in his life and he came back telling me all about it and then he started to ask me about who my favourite artist is and I was able to engage in a discussion about it and he has since, something is turning in his head. It’s like there are other people out there who think a little bit the way I think (just outside the square). It’s really a way of letting the student understand he is not alone, there are others out there. I think that students at that age think that they are the only people in
the world and that they are different and that no one else thinks like them. So if you can switch them onto something to give them that bit of confidence then they will actually do the rest themselves. Admittedly, he hasn’t handed anything in and I have been extending and extending because I don’t want to draw the bridge on him I want him to do it in his own time but it’s the last day of term tomorrow and I am really hoping he is going to come in. I know he has been doing the research because he has been discussing it with me but whether he can actually be able to produce something is another thing. No matter whether he hands something in or not, we will probably have to do a lot of work with him before the end of the year, but it’s a beginning.

MP
So is there an experiential factor to that particular scenario that you can see, or has it really arisen out of your relationship with the student?

EA
Part of it is the relationship but I think that experiential thing, he has never been to a gallery and when we can get him into the gallery and he can start seeing some of this stuff in real life, that will be the next big step for him probably because it seems that’s the area that he’s very interested in. As a teacher it is one of the toughest challenges is to engage students, whether you are in an environment like this or in a school classroom environment.

MP
What do you think your advantage is here?

EA
Having everything on your doorstep. Being able to literally to use the resources all around is really advantageous. I mean we often study the urban environment and being able to go down to the City Council and being able to access information such as looking at the way the City has developed, look at the history of City XXXX. In history City XXXX was the first port of call apart from AAAA Town. We go to AAAA Town. We show them where the turning circle was, we can physically show them these things like the golden mile walk and explain the history right there and then. You couldn’t have a better example of experiential learning. Of retracing the footsteps of something. Also because a lot of the people who work in the City are experts that we can call on.

Going back to what we were talking about before. We used to have a guy who was an ex-prisoner of twenty years in prison for murdering someone and he has since rehabilitated himself and we used to get this guy and he used to talk to the students and the students would be sitting on the edge of their seats because it was real life discussion with a person who has lived that whole world and come through and it was very confronting and challenging. However, now that would not happen, the conservatives have taken over and would not allow that real life thing. I mean the students would walk out to the City after they had heard this person and see thousands of people and would say wow anyone of those people could have been that person or something like that. It really sets them a life in terms of their thinking process. Its part of
the learning process they have to learn how to relate to the rest of the world because they are not just exclusive, they are not just the only people in the world and that's a teenage thing as well as a school thing.

MP
How important is that social interaction to the experiential learning that occurs?

EA
Absolutely fundamental. As part of forming their identity and maturing and becoming responsible teenager and then adult, we do a lot of work with them explaining the etiquette and the expectations. They actually do a project because we have term basically an introduction to this whole year. It takes a whole term to get them used to the trains and all the etiquette and we get them to do projects on what they believe is the right way to behave and how they should treat each other as well as behave with people out there. We run through examples of what may happen scenario. How would you react to this how would you react to that? They create posters or things about the expectations that are upon them such as on the trains, out on excursions, when they are in the City, when they are interacting with the homeless etc, when they are interacting with each other on campus, the respect to their teachers. This is one of the good things about the school. Things that David has tried to implement them way down to the level in primary school. It's the relationships that they have with the teachers. So the kids are coming in with a little bit of prior knowledge and the experience of some of the expectations that we have of them because essentially, we are a pretty good example of what he's trying to achieve anyway. Sometimes it doesn't work, but that's essentially the theory that David is trying to push.

MP
You mentioned the breakfast club what does that mean?

EA
Basically that's ....Salvation Army because actually many years ago one of the things that I used to do was get a couple of speakers from the Salvation Army in various social homeless groups and used to come to do a project at CCCC, which was part of it as well, where we had them looking at those sort of social aspects and they would interview a group who dealt with the disadvantaged and they would have to do a project, research, a presentation based around it and from that we eventually got in contact with a woman who ran what's called the breakfast club and now the students twice a year in groups go to the apartment blocks in BBBB Street and it's very early in the morning and some of them complain about the time that they have to get up because they have to be there by 7.00am and they help out with the students, they are all primary school kids and a lot of them are African and Middle Eastern and Asian students and most of them have been borne overseas in refugee camps and come from very hard upbringings and of course this is a Salvation Army's theory is that they at least get one good meal in a day at breakfast and they provide them with fruit orange juice and toast and eggs. Everything is donated and there is a whole lot of other people with lots of
businesses who get involved as well they are volunteers to help. They help them with their breakfast, they play games with them and help with their homework if need by and they walk them over to the school. There are two primary schools almost within two minutes of the place.

In my experience of doing it, nearly every student is quite negative beforehand – what are we doing here, it’s boring and some are apprehensive, oh it’s apartment blocks in FFFF! Then we go for a coffee afterwards and debrief. Without exception, I have never had a student who hasn’t turned around and said I want to go back. When are we going back? They just love the experience so much and I think the reason that I love it is that it’s experiential. There’s no written work involved. There is no reflection involved, beyond the conversation. Its purely an experience and that is one of the reasons that it works so well and because its very confronting. Many of them haven’t met an African person and the children are a great access point to culture.

MP
How big is the School C group?

EA
About five, so it’s quite personal as well. We take them from all over. We spread them out from each mentor group. Occasionally a kid won’t show up and all the other kids tell them that they are losers and they missed out on something really good and usually, the next time they show up. It’s just a great thing for them to interact with other cultures and they get it, they really get it. I think that at that age the social mindedness is very pure.

MP
Do they have a sense of journey?

EA
That’s something that we are looking at very strongly at the moment. We are trying to put in place far more clear……of that journey and we are in the process of implementing some new ideas about them constructing their own learning journey as well as their own personal journey. I think that’s something that is probably better than I have ever seen before. Even from the start of year 8 to the start of year 10, of being part of your journey of your schooling. It’s always been in the back of our minds and I suppose what we have always done is look at the journey through a project, the journey through a few projects that relate to each other rather than the whole bigger picture journey. Certainly when I have an interview with a parent its about the journey. So its there but I think we can do it better and think we are putting in place things that will help us do that.

MP
So you would say that an important element of the experience is connecting it in someway that makes sense as a whole?

EA
Yes. I think that every year, the students from the previous year tell all the
other kids that it’s a breeze, its fun. That is very much what they get from
year 10 when they look back at it and when the year 9s come in they say
there’s always homework to do everyone told us it was easy and this happens
every year. But by the time they get to year 11 and 12, they reflect back on
that time and often say oh I learnt that when I was at the Callistemon and
didn’t realize that I was learning it. That’s part of the experiential learning
concept, but if there’s a little bit more signposting as to what they are actually
learning from their experience and how that fits into the process, I think we
need to work on that a bit more.

MP
Do you have a sense of what the students find memorable?

EA
Yes. I think once again going back to that window, is a good example, where
if there are different students there will be different things and I would say that
there are probably very few students who go through a whole year of being in
here, or a whole experience here, whether it be a year, a term or half a
semester, that not something that really grabs them and where that window
appeared for a short period of time, whether they utilize it or their teacher can
utilize it. Whether they will grow from that and whether that little light is
switched on is another thing. Yes, certainly it happens.

MP
Are conscious efforts made during the year to use the memories that the
students are building up in an on going sense?

EA
I think once again we are working on that. I think naturally as teachers you do
do that and the teachers who have been here for some time, certainly do that.
I know myself when I am with my mentor, I often reflect on something that
someone said or and action that took place.

I will give you a good example of a student who didn’t learn in terms of his
journey and his selection process. But when he got to year 10 he flourished
and changed and made the decision that being at school was not the best
thing for him. He went to a TAFE and is doing an apprenticeship type thing.
This was good because he learnt that was better for him through that process.

MP
He really saw that there was a connection otherwise he would be here today.

EA
Oh yes. Very few students walk away from the campus having had a
negative experience. I can’t recall one who would say that it’s terrible and I
never learnt a thing. We have students coming back here all the time. Part of
that is the relationship we have with the students. I get emails sent to me and
that’s part of the luxuries of being in this environment.
MP
Is your relationship with the students different here?

EA
It is very different and part of it is what we had mentioned before about bringing them out of their comfort zone, confronting them with certain issues therefore they are raw and their emotions are far more out there and as a teacher you have to deal with that so that further cements the relationships you have. You become almost like a surrogate parent for them while they are in here. They look at you not only as a friend, but a parent, as a counselor, as a police person and a teacher as well. And I think there have been a lot of teachers who have not survived here and had to leave because they don’t like to have that line blurred or crossed of the power of teacher/student formal structure and really you can’t survive here without a little of that structure. They don’t have to like you but they have to respect you and sometimes you do have to draw the line, which I have had to do.

MP
Do you have a sense of the social structure of the peer group changing as a result of being here?

EA
Yes because when they come in here one of the things that we talk about (even though we do know often), we say to them this is a chance for you to start again. If you are a naughty kid you don’t have to be anymore. We focus on trying to say that this is separate from everything else in terms of what you want to make it for yourself and everything but to you. What you learn and what you get out of this will be up to you and some of them really respond to that, they just see that as a way to completely change and you can see that in them. Often naughty kids who have been suspended or who have constant teacher altercation, swearing yelling throwing things. They come in here and they are angels with us and we say what on earth was everyone complaining about this student for because they are great. Because what they actually want is responsibility and respect. With the history that they have built up and the name they have built up themselves, they can’t escape that label while they are in that environment. Some of them have complained when they have gone back because their teachers are still treating them the way they were before in year 7 and year 8 and the only people that they ever got along with were the people in the Callistemon and it’s not us as people but the environment and the decisions that they chose to make while they are in here. Although, they don’t often see that. However, it can work the other way. There are some kids who have been brilliant in year 7 & 8 and they come in here and they are destructive and they have got other things going on. They lose focus of getting that A and B and we get the parents saying (and I had one this year) that he is not doing the sort of work that he was doing last year. Not achieve the results that he was getting and I have to say hang on. This is a kid who has joined the student council, he has become a leader in lots of things. He is taking Thai students on tours. He is actually doing really well and has done a whole lot of things that he had never done before. He is showing real leadership and is growing as a person and that is what we are
focusing on. That satisfied his parents in the short term but I did have to have a meeting with him and what it came down to was that he was becoming a little different from his parents. He wasn't talking to them and explaining things to them so they were thinking what's wrong, it must be the school. So what we discussed about alleviating this situation was to talk to his parents more and it seems to have worked.

MP
Do you see different peer group leaders emerging here?

EA
It’s a little bit the same but because we do quite a lot of group projects there’s chances for other students to take the lead and we try and divide the roles and try and mix it up a bit so that the same students are not doing the same thing. But, at the same time, we give opportunities for those original leaders to actually take that another step up where they actually consult with us and they take on stuff to do with the programs and consult with the students in a far more structured formal way. It’s not just that kids doing that and we are going to follow him. We try to create as many leadership positions as possible.

MP
One thing that I am a bit curious about is and we have touched on it before. You do some didactic teaching and you some that is imbedded in experience. Do you think that some of that didactic learning ends up with much the same result or is it a better result with a more focused classroom, or with the experiential?

EA
I think definitely with the scaffolding experience because, of the age group. I reckon if it was year 12 or year 7 it would a whole other ballgame. That whole coming into teenage hood, the hormones, the changes. The relationship with the parents is a huge one. I mean, if I had a dollar for every single parent that has said to me, this kids changing at home, I don’t know how to connect with him, I don’t know what to do. Can you help me? It’s a phenomenon that happens and seems to happen mostly in year 9. So you have a huge opportunity as a teacher to be able to teach them all sorts of things. If they don’t get it in year 9 they are going to struggle in year 10. Really year 9 is a crucial year and it makes or breaks some students I think. So they are so thirsty for the experiential thing – that type of knowledge and that type of experience. I really believe in this although I didn’t as strongly when I first started here but now I do. You need to have very clear signposts and give them certain skills, but there’s a fine line in giving them too much and controlling it too much you must let them control it and we as teachers have to grapple with that. We as a whole staff group grapple with that at school and parents grapple with that and it’s very difficult to manage and it’s an ever evolving scenario too, because then you have got every group is different. You know the different levels that you have to understand in those processes is a mess but certainly I believe personally it’s the best way.

End of Interview EA
Interview 21

Interview on 28/06/2007
Louise Nunan (School C) Callistemon Campus

MP
What do you do at School C?

LN
My role at School C is Director of Learning Development and I also case manage years 9 to 12 which is a sort of an overseeing role. It’s about (and the way I have described to other people) ensuring the communication between parents students and staff is effective as possible. So trying to make sure that everybody is understanding each other.

My role is primarily about learning and about looking at our programs and picking out ways to enhance the learning of individuals and make sure that our programs have coherency and some sort of value and the case management side of it comes into play, not so much in organization, because our teams drive themselves, but more about if the team has an issue that they want to raise and they are not sure what to do and they want feedback then I am the critical into that process and they might bring that to me and we all work out a process, a way forward and sometimes this pans out, just because of the cohort that we had last year when I started working with year. Sometimes that means that I will work with individual students. So if we think that we see a pattern of behaviours that’s not very helpful in terms of the child’s learning, or their interaction with others and the teams have tried a lot of different strategies and it’s not really working, then I might start working with that student as a sort of one person removed from the daily. We have found that to be quite a useful way with working with individuals.

MP
You have said ‘team’, what do you mean?

LN
Our school is broken into sections and we have the early learning and junior school, the middle years, which is years 5 to 8, year 9 which is Callistemon Campus and our senior school which is years 10 to 12. So the teams manage themselves within those areas. For example, in the middle years we have…. years 5 and 6 and so that is a team of 5 and 6 teams. We have a year 7 team a year 8 team and they are all parts of the middle years team. In the senior years it’s actually more subject based and discipline based teams in the senior years. So you look at your maths team you English team and they are all part of the senior college teams. The year 9 team work with the year 9 students obviously and in our junior years it is broken up pretty much into the prep work by itself and then years 1,2,3, and 4 etc. The programs are sometimes worked around that. For example years 5 and 6 cohort are multi age as I have said, and their program is actually a two yearly program. The year 3 and 4s do parts of their program that are a two yearly program.
MP
The thing in specialization in what you have just explained to me, particularly, in the middle years where perhaps years 5 and 6 being combined with years 7 and 8 have a specific team focus on their needs. In year 9 what's reasonable to have it managed as this discrete entity?

LN
It's an interesting one. My understanding of the history of the school, because this program in year 9 has been going about twelve years now. It originated out of that idea that at our customer base the kids were very rural/semi rural in their outlook, they were tending to come from properties, or close to, the environment of the school at AAAA and so it was our idea that our kids don't really know the City, they don’t know it as a resource, they don’t know it as place you go to, it’s not a familiar space for them, so it would be good for them to learn more about the City. So it would seem very much as an additional learning experience, I guess and then over time the program grew and grew, partly through the popularity of working in the City not just for the kids and they really enjoyed it, but also that idea of once you change the program from a short term thing from three weeks or a terms, the nature of it changes also. So instead of learning about the City you move on to working in the City as part of that population and that community and also using the City’s resources as part of learning. So it’s interesting though because philosophically, one tends to look a little bit outside middle years and also outside senior college and it’s really not seen as separate.

MP
What do you think underlined that popularity when it first started?

LN
The kids really liked that whole diversity. They could come in and learn about this place that was very alien and also the parents that didn’t know the City either, but I think we have seen a change over time. I guess the population is a bit more cosmopolitan. Also, it’s a big thing when they come but they can eat wherever they like, they can go anywhere they like and agreements are made for safety reasons that you have to be in a cohort of a group of at least three, you have to be back by a certain time, you have to sign in and sign out – all those practical things. But they often talk about the freedom of being in the City. They love the idea that you can be doing research and you can sit down with your team and work out a plan of action and then take yourself out into the City to go out and do research.

MP
So year 9 is the target year level. Is there some wisdom in your own thinking? I am not now really thinking about Callistemon but your own thinking. Is it that year 9 is really the time that you need to take students out of the structures and put them in something like this?

LN
Again going back as to how the program evolved. Initially, a couple of years ago, kids were doing a term in the City a term back out at campus, a term in
the City and a term back out campus, but when they were out at campus two years ago they were doing what they called a community program. Where they weren’t even on site, they were very close to it on a property owned by the school but it was a separate house that they went to. They did activities around in the community to do with the art focus of the area and also to do with some of the industries in the area. They did a combination of sustainability and permaculture and so it was very much about things that were very real in that community. This is the first year that we dropped that out. That part of the program was narrowed down. Last year it ran for three weeks instead of a semester which was run the year before and that was in response from the feedback from the students. They found a lot of that repetitive, or they knew about the activities and didn’t need to go back there and revisit. So last year the program was made smaller and was three weeks intensive on permaculture with the aim that the students would also cover enough contingencies to be granted a certificate on permaculture. Again, the feedback from the students told us that while many were interested in sustainability they didn’t feel that they needed to know the ins and outs of whales and complementary planting of a…so program was adapted to be more of an urban community this year and in the City instead of based out at BBBB. So it has become more about what is community? Community can happen anywhere around a shared interest or need and they experience different versions of that I guess.

I am interested in the whole idea about why year 9? And more and more as we move to more personalized and customized programs for students, I am seeing that we will see the movement across the students coming in and out of the City, depending on where they are at in programs or in learning needs. I would love to see for example, and I was talking to someone in year 7 and 8 the other day, about they could identify twenty students who they think could benefit from doing a small project based program later in this year, even though they are currently in year 8 and not year 9. I certainly could identify a small cohort of students who came into campus at the start of this year that I think would have benefited maybe, a term or to continue in this program in the City in some way shape or form. Maybe in a sort of mentoring role for the incoming students which gave them a sense of responsibility and ownership and not about sort of keeping them back, but also gave them a chance to grow up a little bit. A bit of emotional maturity because they struggled for the first term, some of them in the senior campus. The senior campus has its own mode of operation which tends to be a very self direction, self management. There are a lot of choices as to how you use your time, where you are when and some find this difficult at first.

MP
Are there discrete and dedicated parts of this program to prepare students for that part of learning?

LN
I would say certainly, the fact that they can go out to the City to do research or whatever and there’s often lots of different groups doing lots of different things but there’s still quite a high level of accountability back you must be back
when you said you would be at a certain time and you work on what you are working on and there’s not a choice as to whether you go ahead and take part in that lesson or not, it’s still expected that you do. In the senior campus it becomes, well if you for example, decide that you are not going to go the maths because there’s other work that you want to continue in the arts area and you don’t want to leave it. You might go to your maths teacher and ask what are we covering today and say ok I’ll make sure that I catch up with that before I see you again but I want to finish what I am doing in the arts area and that’s an expected mode of operation. So it’s very different and it’s one of those things where you have a huge range in cohort of people who love that and people who don’t. It’s a learning thing for them, but our Principal would say well that’s what year 10 is all about learning in an adult way of doing things.

MP
How do the parents respond and what about your duty of care?

LN
Our parents are pretty much brought into the way things work. You will find parents who on the one hand talk intelligently about knowledge of the 21st Century of schooling and all the benefits of having their child at the school and then they say why don’t you make them wear the uniform better?

MP
What then is the essence of the learning that’s different that occurs here? I am really trying to draw a distinction now between what we can do sitting in a classroom in School C and there’s a little bit of that I know as I have spoken to staff there are some core subjects done. It’s quite traditional in a sense that they follow a program pretty well indistinguishable from a standard program. Now what happens here that’s different?

LN
I’d say that it’s a lot about just the level of the other stuff that happens. Yes we run what I would consider school based training. There are also a lot of explicit skills teaching, totally connected to and deliberate about the skills you are going to need to do the project based learning that you are going to be involved with which maybe about how do you work as a team, how do you make sure that everybody is doing their fare share, how do you share the roles and tasks connected with the briefs. I’d say that its different because it’s the resources of the City itself and also the evolution of the program through the year.
So we have been talking a lot this year about how do we not only change the content and structures of what we do in the year in a particular area of study as different students move through that area of study, but also how do we respond to the growing maturity of the students and the growing capabilities of the students. So that in term 4 if I am teaching the unit that is issued, not only would I expect to be teaching different issues, because its very much linked to what is current, but also I would be expecting to be teaching it in a very different way with the cohort then than in term one when the cohort was new to the City. So trying to make sure that we are responding to student need
but also that we are linking back out all the time into the City where it is a City of people and working daily in the City.

MP
I asked one of the other staff members whether there was a sense of journey and I think that was really what you were getting at there. There’s a sense of growth and you need to adjust in accordance with that growth as you move through – would you agree?

LN
Yes. And also inspiration. So it’s not about well we know what we are going to be doing in term 4 because we expect that they will be here here here and here. It’s more about that sort of allowing there to be change and evolution and be a false start that doesn’t work out and you debrief that and move into another area.

MP
What are the formal markers that a student might be aware of that demonstrate growth?

LN
Some of that is about freedom. So when they first come in, for example, they are very careful about ensuring their safety, for a start. They have to learn a lot of explicit things about being safe in this environment because they are not used to it and then over time you know that they have picked certain amounts of knowledge and you can trust them to behave appropriately, or take appropriate measures, or whatever, given the circumstances. I also do these interviews with the kids from the start of the year and then go with the individual as the year goes on. I talk to them about how are you finding the program, what worked for you what didn’t and what would have made that better? That feedback to the team and again being one step removed from the day actually helps with that because students don’t feel worried to tell that a particular task didn’t work or whatever and we use that in our other work that we are doing and I think that the students would say themselves that they do heaps of reflective work as they go along and they start to see where they have progressed – where they have made more mature decisions, or where they created a piece of work that is either a higher standard or is a more sophisticated way of thinking has been demonstrated. I mean you might start out thinking that a PowerPoint presentation to a group of parents is a really big deal and you might end up in a project, for instance they have one at the moment, that they are work with a few of the other schools who are also running City based programs creating a plan for the City. That’s a much bigger task but not considered now too big.

MP
What sort of reflective work do they do?

LN
They do formalized feedback sheets on subject areas or projects that they have done. From the student to the teacher. There is a new thing that has
been implemented which is feedback on the teaching itself, to give feedback so that the teachers know where they are going. They are asked to do self-reflections on their own learning, living particular modules. That’s often built-in to the assessment. General writing is often being used on particular pieces or work or modules.

MP
Do they have a year journal that they are expected to keep?

LN
None.

MP
How would the student be aware formally of progress? You gave the example of PowerPoint and then the City program done with other schools. Is it implied progress? Would that be pointed out or would the student have to make those connections themselves?

LN
I am probably not the best person to answer that because I think the teachers do the work with the students on a daily basis. But my impression of it is that because of the very close relationship between the students and the staff because the students do work with a range of staff all the time that it’s a very open relationship I think.

MP
How does it compare with year 10 or year 8 in this relationship?

LN
I can certainly say that my team a very aware of the emotional growth that goes on at this age level and I think they really do adapt the way they interact with the kids a lot during the year, having gone through one…. of it last year and also half way through this year. You really do see them being more directive during the start of the year. They are far more formal in the way they set things up and then you see them relax as the year goes on. Part of that is really knowing….as well as knowing the individuals and the other is also very deliberate. You know it’s ok for me to say well that incident that happened, we need to go to the police station and make an report about that and know that you can send three kids down to do that and not actually worry because they are capable of doing that for themselves.

MP
What are the relationships between the students? They come to Callistemon at the start of the year with some new students, but also a ready made peer group and power relations within that peer group. Have they changed do you think as a result of the particular conditions here?

LN
I’d say at this year, probably not as you might expect. This is what have been talking about for next year. About the balance between the comfort of working with people that you know well and you get to know over a period of time, with the benefit of mixing things around a bit so that you do actually get to know more people, or you get to see them in different ways. I think it’s interesting because at year 10 that is very much what happens. In year 10 you are with people who have chosen the same subjects as you. It’s only dependent on your subject choices.

Talking to one of the boys the other week. We were doing a small activity to do with relationships and I said to him write down six words that other students in the year level might say about you and then I said you write down six words that you might think of students at your level and he said if they are not in my group of friends I don’t have anything to say about them, I just don’t care because they are not important to me. We had a bit of a chat about that because given then he has been in the school 2½ years now, how can you have that complete lack of connection with people that you have known for that length of time? I actually think this kid attitude is quite common at this year level. The sense that your group of friends are very important. You might have a knowledge or an acquaintance with a wider group but really there are people that are almost invisible to you. I wonder if that’s just the level of maturity of this age group, or not.

MP
So the people that they do interact with in that time then interact very intensively?

LN
Yes and it’s not just here I have seen it in other schools. You sort of have this desperation about being in the team with their friend, but to them it’s almost that divide. I mean you could say ok we will shuffle them around a lot more and that way they will get used to working with people that they might not choose to work with, which is a healthy thing. But do you then make things too difficult and uncomfortable for learning?

MP
Within the setting? I mean in different ways, from the design of the building and the classrooms through to BBBB Lane and CCCC CBD?

LN
I love the fact that the kids can have the opportunity to see the City and see lots of different parts of the City and the way that the City is used and the way society is demonstrated in the City. I think that’s a huge benefit. I think it’s something that a lot of adults don’t know and certainly when you talk to parents they see that as a huge benefit.

When the kids first come in, what always amazes me is just the variety of types of people. They come from School C in an area where there are not a lot of migrants or different types of people around and they come in the City.
and see homeless people on the street, different nationalities, different socio-economic backgrounds.

I find it amazing when they go out they decide a way of gathering information would be to survey people and they get told I am not interested, I haven’t got time for this. That’s the first because usually in their own community they would be treated with quite a lot of support and generosity.

I think the two floors in this campus are good. It’s been set up to be as open ended as it can be bringing together big groups and allowing smaller groups to work.

MP
But still it’s a fairly confronting, the picture that you are painting. The racial diversity, the socio-economic diversity and they come from a fairly homogeneous society. Is it not necessarily a very comfortable or pleasant realization that they come to although it maybe a challenging and confronting one?

LN
It is certainly very challenging for them when they first start. What’s interesting is that by halfway through the year they have a sense of place, they feel like they belong. They have things that they have made their own. We do a classic that at the end of last year they had two kids from the cohort take out a group of the incoming kids on a personalized tour so they had to base the tour around what they thought was interesting. They had to create a map, they had to create brochure about where they were going and why they were going there and they had to run the tour. And I went out with them leading this little bunch of year 8s and it was fascinating the places that they thought were interesting or important. They kept us out for about 2-3 hours and showed me places in the City that I didn’t know. They explain things in different ways. Like they showed us where a little playground was because this was a fun place to come, they took to someplace to eat where the guy would give you free drinks if you bought food. You had a real sense of identity and ownership. I thought that was fascinating.

MP
Are there any big places that have acquired a sense of importance for the students?

LN
Again talking to the staff working here they have a much closer knowledge of that. There is a graffiti wall in one of the alleyways just near here that the kids feel is like a secret but they know and often they talk a lot about eating places where they can do the best deals. They love going into a shop and call the shop owner by their name.

MP
Are these places do you think to which students tend to have a strong connection?

LN
Like I said they feel like it's their secrets in a way. A knowledge that not everyone has and they have got it. I haven't had anyone whose told me the State Library is just an amazing secret that they know but they can tell you what you can and can't do there and are very conscious about those sorts of things.

MP
Are there any rites of passage here that mark the journey?

LN
I think that there’s a huge one at the start of the year when they first come in and in the first couple of weeks the mentor will take the kids out and will show them certain eating places, for example, certain places if you just want to run around and get rid of some energy in the middle of the day and certainly for the kids when they start to actually go out and make choices about where they go, how they want to spend their lunchtime. I think that’s a huge right of passage. That sense of control over their time and they love it when they are really conversant, how the trams and trains work, knowing that you can get off the train at certain places and there are some good places to stop on the way home. So it’s just that knowledge.

MP
I am interested in memorability for young teenagers and things that they find memorable because I think a lot of these sort of experiences seem to be a kind of a mix of undifferentiated experiences that kind of blend into one. I mean often students can’t tell you who taught them geography or English in year 10. I wonder what a School C student might find truly memorable about the year here?

LN
The things that they talk about and I have been to two year 12 valedictory nights now where they tend to talk about each of the sections of the school and they will say year 9 was great, it was fun and they will talk about relationships with the staff and the feeling that it’s a more equal relationship in the City, but I have to admit that I haven’t had anyone say that I saw a lot of history in my investigation of the museum. The kids in here keep talking about how much they think that they have grown, how much they feel that they are standing on their own two feet, they have matured.

MP
What causes them to feel that, do you think?

LN
I just think that they have a greater sense of choice. I think the programming here was always set up around student individuality than perhaps more traditional kind of schooling. So that idea of, yes this is what we are exploring at the moment but if you have a particular interest or something that you want to pursue at a particular level, sit down and negotiate it and we’ll work something out.

Now I think that can be misunderstood. There was an incident last year where one of the girls had rung up a competition on the radio and won and to win she had to go to the radio station which is in the City and shave one of her eyebrows and she won a prize and a teacher had taken her down to do that and they said to me when they got back. Oh that’s what its like when you are in here anything can happen and you never know and it’s really exciting. To me that’s not what it’s about at all, it seemed to me totally tokenistic, there was nothing real to be gained from that. Whereas, what is real is that sense that the students know that they can sit down and say I know when this novel or this book when we are looking at these different areas that relate to the narrative or the writer or whatever, but actually I am really interested in this other stuff and follow that through and here is how I plan to do it. That is real.

MP
What else do you see that are truly experiential?

LN
In the way that leads to pure learning do you mean? I think just the connection. They do a lot of connecting out to other organizations resources in the City, in terms of the places and also the people that run those places. They might have visiting artists come in and work with them, or they might have journalists come in. They go out and they are involved in running a public radio station at a certain time of the week every week and they are involved in community breakfast programs. So they are all experiences that could be an excursion or they could be part of an understanding of the program and what that program leads to as a whole. This is one of the things that I have been working on with the staff because when I came in that’s what I felt at the start of last year. Yes the kids were very busy and very much engaged in what they were doing but I didn’t see a purpose to a lot of it. All the things good in their own right but not a lot of their own reflections, not enough of knitting those bits together to make sense of it. So there has to be more of that understanding of what makes the program not just a range of experiences.

MP
What would you to make the experience better? How would you include it to make it more effective?

LN
I am still very curious about the mixture between a program with a range of three decided bits that students pick and choose between and what I would say is a truly individualized program where the combination of things is
decided for you. We have the State curriculum, for example, but also you negotiate aspects of the program. I am interested as to how you balance that and am still working on ideas in that area. There’s a program or module being taught at the moment in the City campus and there’s a couple of kids in year 8 and a couple in year 10, and they should be part of that because it would be really relevant for them. Also, there is a school in New Zealand that our principal is visiting now and he is very interested in and they offer a few things and some of them are parent led activities and things like that, and to me I just question whether it’s not just a busy program. I mean it’s individualized, there’s two children doing exactly the same in range of activities but, to what purpose? How do you say this and this is valuable and how you say I am making this into something worthwhile?

MP
So you are talking about the busy program, but are you wondering whether busy equals productivity?

LN
Well you actually getting engagement out of it but you not getting learning out of it in the real sense. What I am serious about is how we can build more fluid programs, and yet not have the predetermined bits that you are just dropping kids in and out of. How do you start to ensure that there is layers of learning and depth of learning also?

MP
Do you see any scaffold connection between experiential and didactic or semantic learning?

LN
I think that there should be varieties of methodology in learning. I certainly think that, for example, in my line there’s like training and there is often training within learning so when people say how do kids work in a team? Then I think you need to teach them as to how to work in a team, you need to practice at it, you need to debrief them and discuss it with them and make explicit about what you are trying to get them to learn. On the other hand, there are those certain things about having the experience and then try and actually be constructive and make meaning out of it. To me it’s about experiential learning. In that situation I don’t necessarily say to them we are going to the museum and I expect you to learn this this and this. I want them to make sense of what you are doing but also come back and say what did you gather from what we just did? What were the things that made sense to you? Where does that fit and make sense to the learning of the culture that we have today?

MP
So is there a deliberate attempt in the model here to say embed semantic learning in an experience? Where you do go on with might be a maths lesson but you go into an experiential setting with a quite deliberate maths focus to come out of it at the other end? Do you use the experience to put it in another
context that makes the connection between the experience and the thing to be learned?

LN
Yes. You might do that. They did a unit last year where I know when they were looking at trigonometry for example, and I mean you can do the basic thing with angles and things like that but trying to make that a little bit deeper and a bit more sophisticated and they actually taught some things about trigonometry and they did go out and do a series of activities and then had to come back and say where does that link to what we learned before? How does that fit?

MP
But that's not a strong component of what's done currently?

LN
Certainly not in mathematics. That's a tough one.

MP
It is largely (I heard a mathematician say this) about certain skills and procedures rather than actual content. Is that so?

LN
I had a maths teacher explain to me recently that it's not about understanding what you are learning, it's just about knowing how to do it and that scared the hell out me because I don't know anywhere else in the curriculum that any teacher would say that, but as long as they can do it.

MP
Thank you.

End of Interview LN
Interview 22

Interview on 01/07/2007
Wendy Evans (School D) Darwinia Campus

MP
Just for the record Wendy. Could you give me a summary of your association with the learning program in Darwinia please?

WE
Ok. I will start from when I was student in year 9. I was part of the first group...forty-four students I think. It was a similar time period, five weeks...it was my first introduction to Darwinia Campus and then based on the experience that I had there, I went back for the year 11 study tour in 2000 and that was a two week study tour where we spent five days in Darwinia and quite a lot of time in BBBB and after that and based on both those experiences...I applied for a traineeship for students once they graduate from School D and I completed that in 2002 and then came back as replacement trainee in 2003 for about six weeks. The next year I came back for six months as replacement activity teacher and two years later (last year) I went back as an activity teacher for one group.

MP
When's your next appearance in Darwinia?

WE
Unplanned as were those too.

MP
One of the things that comes through from this is that you have been part of the program as a student and a teachers spanning say eight or nine years. Just initially, globally, could you please give me your sense of what kind of learning occurs in Darwinia?

WE
Could I just say a lot would put a disclaimer on. However, in light of having seen it from the start as a student without realizing it, I guess I have tried to replicate a lot of the learning that I felt that I was undertaking, when it originally started and of course it has changed. There are different staff members and the program has advanced in a lot of ways.

What kind of learning takes place? In my sense the word experimental occurs a lot. It's not really the kind of learning that the generation before us would have had. It's a different kind of learning in the sense that it's not sitting down in a classroom and being taught A B C D, or this is the way something is. To me so much of it is about the interpretation and perception of the students how they perceive what information they are seeing. Whether it's something taught to them (because there are history lessons and things involved in the program), but to me it's about the students learning about their own capabilities, how the handle responsibilities and whether they are being
responsible to staff members or certain authority figures that they have to live with as well as study with over the five weeks, or whether they be responsible to their room mates and somehow maintain a responsible relationship with them if they want to get through the time in the five weeks. I think it’s more in a holistic sense. It’s not just learning in a classroom sense and I think that’s what attracted me to it. It’s so different to everyone who comes through there as well as the staff members, if they are open to it. I guess having been there over a few different time periods I have seen a range of staff members there and for me I guess it was never just a job and when I came to see some people say it’s just “another day, another dollar”. That kind of thing you get in an office job. That really struck me as strange and bizarre, and something that did not equate with the Darwinia program at all.

MP
So if that attitude struck you. What do you equate with the Darwinia program then?

WE
I don’t understand that you can put a time period to it. I know I have mentioned the five week period but that’s a pretty inadequate way of describing the ‘experience’ or the students coming there and for whatever reasons they come there and they intend to put into it I would equate it to being a learning experience. That the staff members are there just to facilitate that. However, they maybe capable of doing that whether in a holistic sense or they maybe more academic, or they might be more of a mentoring role for students. I will equate it more to a holistic sense and don’t understand how you can fit it into day seven or day eight. I really struggle with the time aspect as well which is why I could never equate with getting paid to do the job. Because to me I guess I felt that it was part of being part of something a bit bigger than that. I guess I felt that that belittled it. Perhaps that’s because I held it on some kind of pedestal but that’s because I felt it was worthy of it.

MP
You come across as though you don’t want to belittle it. Why is that?

WE
I think it definitely has something to do with the impact that it had on me as a student….Most of the memories that I had from the year 9 group my activity teacher, having fun with my activity group…things like that you could never really do and you are put in situations that you might not otherwise be in. A lot of what I remember had to do with the staff members. I don’t remember a lot of the historical aspects of what I learned about XXXX at that time but more the cultural things that I could equate with. What I was seeing every day….I was able to sketch that so I was able to take that back with me and look back at it and say that’s right I remember learning about that. I think that equates to what we were talking about before, about what kind of learning it was. Its difficult to describe because there’s no point that has to be reached and what they learn is determined very much about what they are capable of, or what they are open to and how the experience might guide that.
MP
If I ask you to think back to when you were in year 9. What are the memories that come to you most readily, the things that are most clear to you?

WE
Something that triggered my memory I guess was me being in a reverse position and putting the students in the position that I was and then remembering how scared I was at being in the reverse position as a student...I couldn’t believe that I had been entrusted in getting the whole group home! I remember saying what if I get lost? (I understood) that it’s alright, it’s just going to take longer to get home. I just couldn’t believe it. It was so beyond my understanding that kids were to be entrusted with what I thought as being so important that it should be in the hands of adults. It’s often that sense of achievement and I thought well if someone thinks I can do it there’s something in me that says I am able to do it as well. By experimenting and working out with people around you and students and if you don’t know enough, someone will find it out or someone else is bound to know it so you work around it and it all comes together. Instead of being led by the teachers who’ve done it a million times before. It becomes a huge learning curve and I had that with my activity teacher as well and I was a bit of a bimbo at time and turned right instead of left and left instead of right and got...mixed up and we got there in the end. I guess it was that sense of belief and trust that I felt from the teachers and thinking how do they know that I am capable of this?

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MP
You feel that you entered a world that you didn’t think existed or you weren’t sure about, is that right?

WE
Well I guess I knew it existed but on the kind of level that we were interacting with it I never though that would be presented to us...Whereas, here we were interacting a lot more. I don’t want to use the word mixing but I guess that was what we were doing and that’s quite something for fourteen/fifteen year olds. I didn’t expect that world when I went to XXXX.

MP
So you had a sense that it was risky going?

WE
I didn’t, but my parents did, yes. Perhaps that little rebel in me said I wanted to go more when they were so worried. I thought if it’s worth all this fuss...I hoped where I was in a situation...I would be able to pick up much more than I would in the classroom setting. I felt quite stagnant and wasn’t motivated at so I think that was something that came out of the trip...Then I realized that what I was learning in the classroom a means to an end and it was just a
matter of getting the tools. I mean if I didn’t learn the tools…in the classroom I wouldn’t have that structure it would be a lot harder for me to build on that when I come back to XXXX.

MP
You also mentioned your activities teacher. What are your memories of the activities teacher?

WE
Being really easy going and saying, “yes, yes, we can do that”…I guess because it was the first program there was more room like rearranging the schedule a little bit, or how the students reacted to certain experiences. I remember in the decision making we were all involved…That’s something that I tried to incorporate into my teaching while I was there. I guess there’s a real battle because you had to be secure within yourself as well as how you are teaching to be able to do that.

MP
What do you mean that you had to be secure?

WE
I guess it’s because of planning. If you strictly follow a plan and then you say ok we’ll have a…lesson in the morning and have a briefing and the leaders know what is expected of them for the day we’ll go to the site, come back and do the debriefing and the task if we didn’t finish that at the site we will finish that off. If you try to plan things that accurately during the day, then for some people that gives them a sense of control or a sense of security and knowing hopefully, things will follow accordingly. Whereas, if you say oh sure, if we finish the task earlier enough then we might be able to go to join in (another activity). You have to be secure enough in yourself. I mean if you yourself are not sure of the route and knowing that the students will be leaving it. There’s a certain amount of trust as well that have to have as a staff member.

MP
What do you think produces, in your view, the best learning?

WE
I think you have to be flexible. The more flexible you are the better for everyone, because when you are feeling more secure and open to it there’s a bit more incentive. It’s not only the students, it’s how is the day going, whether it’s the right time to introduce them to something that might be difficult for them, or a new challenge. I think you are able to expand your focus rather than just following a plan. But then if we have to get them back at 4.00 pm because we have a class in the afternoon, or rehearsals for their final concert. We have to balance everything else that required of you and make it fair within the activity groups so that they are all doing a similar amount of work.

MP
So you had in the back of your mind the sense that students were comparing you to other?
I think it was the kind of student that I was. You see the rapport between student and teacher and it’s interesting as to how different that can be.

Was that different to the rapport you had seen between staff and students here in City AAAA?

Yes, very different. There was a far greater distance between students and teachers here in City AAAA and not just because they only saw them once a day. I think that often teaching can just be seen as another 9 to 5 job and in the Darwinia would it was definitely 9 to 5. It was not just a standard job where you could get up and leave. You are thinking about students and there’s all the pastoral care that you have to think about to. You’re not just working together but living together.

You also mentioned you activity group. What can you remember about your activity group in year 9?

I remember the element of excitement, because no matter how tired we were, we were used to this go, go, go and we were up late at night talking. There was always an element of excitement. What’s going to happen next? I don’t remember as much academic set work then as I have seen in the last few years. Things were a lot different. A lot more hands on learning.

What do you mean hands on learning?

Like every time I asked the teacher how to (do something), He might say well why don’t you wait…There was never that direct answer. He (in hindsight) wanted me to learn and find out for myself instead of him just giving me the answer.

You also used another word just before and you said that you would use it quite a bit ‘holistic’. What do you mean by holistic?

I guess in terms of learning it’s not just learning about XXXX. It’s about learning your capabilities, who you are responsible to, why you are responsible to them, how to act responsibly, about your behaviour in a community setting. I guess there’s a spiritual element of it because it’s such a demanding role of the student and the staff member and there’s the physical. Its quite difficult I think for a fourteen year old student to be walking up a thousand or more steps, like for a student that’s a little over weight, that can
be a really daunting task. Learning how to deal with that learning about your feelings and the limits that you place on yourself. I think that's where the holistic comes into it. Whereas in a classroom you wouldn't have to climb it it's just there. It's a very different learning.

MP
What do you remember now that you learned in XXXX? I am asking you to differentiate between your memories and do you have a sense of actually achieving or learning.

WE
I would be quoting quite a lot of the year 9 program where as in year 11 I think that was probably a turning point...And committing it to memory rather than just hoping you will pick it up along the way. I remember that wasn't an easy thing to do but once you had committed it to memory it was in there.

MP
As a teacher then do you have a sense that the students in your care learned much the same things as you learned?

WE
At the same time I hope so and I hope not. Because if they were it wouldn’t be true to their experience. It should be different for everyone.

MP
Do you think maybe students had that break through?

WE
I think the ones that wanted to did but there were students who didn’t. They acted like they didn’t particularly care, but if it happened accidentally, then they were really pleased and often quite surprised. If there were students there who were just passengers, in any way I could I would try and get them to actively participate. That might have been by inciting them, by advocating them to try and stir them up to get them thinking, or it might have been just a matter of coaxing them out because they were a little bit shy. Students would come up at the end when reflecting and say that I never thought that I could to that, or I could never be this open person, or I never thought I could lead a group. I think it’s these kind of achievements that are most important but invaluable. I mean how do you learn that anywhere?

MP
What do you think that students felt were their biggest achievements in XXXX?
Or were they all different?

WE
They were all reasonably different but then they had some commonalities. I think it really comes back to what I said before its about expectation. Like I never I talk to a group of strangers and turn into something amazing and I never that I thought I could make something out of everyday here, and that’s daunting for some students, because by week three they are pretty tired depending on what season they are coming across in. They are struggling because they are physically tired, but to make the most of it is huge. A lot of them come with their own predisposed idea of XXXX and a lot of them have a turn around in thinking that I actually I didn’t realize before that I was quite closed to other cultures or I just never thought that I would be interested seeing how other people live. In terms of what they are most scared of. They would often say that they were able to get through the weekend, they were able to put their fear aside and just enjoy it, or there were able to just try the food if they were people who were really fussy worried about embarrassing themselves.

MP
How do students mark their achievements? How do they become aware that they have achieved something?

WE
I think that’s where the debriefing can be quite important. When you are an activity teacher you aim to have (depending on what activity was on that day) twenty or thirty minutes debriefing and that might be wrapping up what you did in the task that day, or, or reflecting on the work that the leaders did or reflecting on the group for that particular day. In terms of my group I didn’t really like lowlights. We had things we did well and we didn’t do so well. I would have student write that down and that would be entirely dictated by the students like we could all improve on that, or I got really angry by a person on a bike because they were slow but when we got to the site I realized what was the rush. So I think reflection at the end of the day is important and it is important to write in their journals at night. If I realized that students were just doing it to get the word limit or to please us well then I would sit them down. You know the interview we have with them at the two week point? Or I will just pull them aside during the day and say I am not the one who will be looking back at your journal and if you forget the day to day things here that’s what’s going to remind you of it. It shouldn’t be just we did A B and C. I want it to be more about your feelings and add more of what was going on in the day than just what we did.

MP
Were you conscious of using memories of students in this process of what they had done in XXXX?

WE
I might say I am not sure what you guys see us as an activity group but (this would often happen around a week and a half to two week point in the program) you guys don’t realize how we cooperating now and we are not only getting to know each other more but you rely on peoples strengths to get up in the day and you are also being quite sensitive as to how people are feeling on
that particular day. That’s something that I really commend you for and I found if a group were working harmoniously that was why they were. They were reading each better. They were more sensitive to peoples’ needs.

**MP**  
What were the most common changes then that you saw in students during your time there?

**WE**  
Positive and Negative. Positively it was that sense of awareness. That there are other people that matter other than just myself. Like in the community setting the boys are quite me me. The are often going through growth spurts and are often taller and bigger than the girls and that makes them think that they have a right above other people and I guess seeing them become a little bit more humble and other opinions count as well. That was the emphasis that I was constantly talking about within the group. About the changes of awareness. There are other people to think of and that was something that was overwhelming across the board.

I don’t know about negative changes. I can honestly say that I never saw students get more selfish. I use selfish in the self centred term in an adolescent. I never saw that.

**MP**  
Are you aware of social structures changing?

**WE**  
Yes I guess so. That’s part of what activity teachers try to do challenge the order of the social aspects that might have been predetermined before they came, but there’s also something that teachers take into account when teachers are creating activity groups and it definitely does that. We are also quite informed in terms of students’ background, whether it be behavioural issues, or academic background before they come over. Also you can just tell by their behavioural attitude by the way they dress, the way they shove other out of their way, the way they give you attitude. You can see who are the more arrogant top dog popular kids and the ones that are a little more nerdy or might interact with you on quite a mature level, you can see perhaps they might be overshadowed a little by the other ones.

**MP**  
Did you see some of these lesser lights come up and if so, why did it happen?

**WE**  
Yes. I think that the environment was conducive to it happening, but at the same time, I remember with one particular activity group there was quite a strong personality who was also a tall intimidating athletic type student and every time a couple of the other students would voice their opinion, he would refer to times back in City AAAA and say “Oh you always say that and you always use that kind of derogatory remarks”. I would try and put him back in
his box and I would often pull up this particular student and shed light on the fact that it may be hard for this other student to say things in front of him if he is always pulling him down and just make him realize that perhaps he is making him feel unsafe in his environment. Making him unsure of himself and chipping away at his confidence. So I guess that once there’s less of that carrying over from City AAAA then it gives rise for other students to be able to challenge their social position.

MP
So you felt that you engineered that.

WE
I wouldn’t use the word engineered. I facilitated that.

MP
There’s no other reason why you thought that might have changed?

WE
I think without me it could have changed as well, but it was just me saying that I think you should give this person a bit of a chance to start voicing their opinions more and start challenging a bit more.

MP
Were you aware of any changes in your peer group when you went over in year 9?

WE
From what I can remember, yes there were. There were a lot of changes among friendship groups, but because we had activity groups but we also had pastoral groups where we discussed pastoral issues or more social reflective kind of issues and there were interactions with so many different people, it helped break down the hierarchy.

MP
What sort of changes occurred?

WE
I guess for example, for me, I was fairly quiet and not as outspoken as I would have liked to have been, but I wasn’t intimidated by the cool kids anymore. Now I am not sure that I was more confident in myself, or whether I was less intimidated.

MP
After leaving XXXX and coming back to City AAAA. Were there any changes were you aware of, either in your behaviour or the behaviour of other members of the group that seemed to have arisen from the Darwinia experience? I mean perhaps years later.

WE
I guess there’s always going to be a common bond. I mean even now, ten years on, I am still in contact with them and there’s that familiarity with them because you have gone through a very similar experience together and there’s that kind of bond or a sense of solidarity. Having said that in coming back to some of the other friends that stayed behind or just in a different group, it was hard to re-negotiate where you both were. Because automatically you just wanted to be around the same group of people that had been for the last five weeks. I wanted to hold on to that experience as much as I could.

As a group we only changed for the positive. If there were fights between the groups we just didn’t discuss it. We perhaps romanticized a little more and reminiscing. Not just because it made us feel warm and fuzzy, but we weren’t sure what we had been through and how life was going to change when we got back here.

MP
Did life change?

WE
I think it did and probably the biggest way was sense of perspective. I know School D (I say this lightly) might try and aim for some of the results of this program to be thinking on a global scale…Although I think it uses the student as more of an object but I think that comes out of it incidentally because you have been beneath the surface of another culture for over a month. I think that changes your perspective and its not just me and my family, me and Australia, or me in the Western world. It broadens your perspective.

MP
What did you do personally when you came back from XXXX?

WE
The first thing that springs to mind but its difficult to give you a specific example, but I felt more productive and perhaps that was because of the debriefing, or perhaps that was because I was trying to constantly be reflecting on what I was doing. Not as I was doing it, but in hindsight. Perhaps saying well did I get the best out of that subject, or is that the best that I could be doing? I guess coming back after being a staff member I noticed the change. I also noticed that I was much more proactive than a lot of my peers. Proactive in the sense of taking up silver smithing because I was interested in making jewellery. Whereas perhaps for some people that would have been too big or too abstract.

MP
So you were motivated to do that.
Do you think that going to XXXX in that residential setting had an impact on the gender issues?

WE
I think it de-mystified it a little bit. Because you were living with guys and girls and seeing them all hours of the day. The boys would sometimes be very sweet and offer the breakfast cereal to us first.

MP
Did that distract or detract, in any way, from your learning? I mean if the boys hadn’t been there you would have had a better time.

WE
No. There was that understanding. Especially because, for an example, I had said before I was quite good at getting my left and right mixed up and I would hand the map over to the other leader who would ideally, a boy and ask him to help me figure it out. I found that it helped us to work together. Allowed you to cooperate a lot better. I think it spurred the girls. When riding, like a bike chain might have come off a bike and a boy might say I can do that for you, but the girl could be spurred on and say thanks but I can do it myself and then have a go and see if she really could. I think that there’s a cooperation as well as boys and girls motivating each other.

MP
How did they motivate each other?

WE
Partly the example I just gave of the girls perhaps being afraid of being weaker or a little bit subordinate. I think also, traditionally, perhaps conventionally, girls were a bit quicker in the academic sense. Boys adhered a little to the stereotype of being a slower than girls and wanting to prove that they can do that writing stuff just as well as the girls. Also at times we asked them to empathize (with different gender roles); I am not sure that that would happen in a single sex setting as much.

MP
What roles did mistakes play?

WE
Huge. A huge role in learning. Often because I think that mistakes carry that fear of that’s it. I mean if you make a mistake then that’s over. It was like when we were on the bus and I got my right and lefts mixed up and you said we’ll get there in the end. To me mistakes show you that you can carry on through adversity and it will give you a richer understanding of the importance of the decisions you make and also with what information that you make them with. Obviously, when (and this often happens at the start of a group), if you have a strong headed leader they believe that they what is right and they don’t have to consult the other leader or anyone else, because they don’t want to look like they need the help. Then that’s often when they make the most mistakes and it is difficult for them to accept that perhaps its better to ask people and get as much information as you can to make a better informed decision. I think that’s the best way for students, through experience.
How do you think mistakes are managed in XXXX? Do staff let students make mistakes or do they intervene?

There is a balance and different staff feel very differently I think and I always try to model myself on a few staff members that are probably more often than not, in management roles. When I saw with the kids would almost entirely hand over the reigns to them, unless there was some kind of monumental mistake, then they might say well what would you do this situation, would you ask someone? That’s is something that we try to instill quite early, even by word association. We would try and gently guide them. Not from avoiding mistakes, but from making the best decisions they can as an activity group without us going well if you want to get from point A to point B... How can they learn from that? So not providing answers but perhaps giving them the tools to get the answers themselves... Also on judging that we have to watch whether the dynamics of that will send the group into an argument or send the group into a disheartened state.

If you had the opportunity of changing anything in the program what would it be?

I think I would like the activity teachers to be a little more autonomous, but at the same time, more in tune with what the other activity teachers are teaching. I find it often depends on the personality when they are in that position. I mean they might say well if she’s going to do it that way I come from a very different background and I am going to do it this way. As I have said before, that often ends up with the students being resentful of their activity teacher because they have to do more work, or grumbling because they have to do more language work. I think it just ends up being a little bit too unbalanced. Ideally the activity teachers should be working on the same wave-length. So I think consistency among the staff.

Would you change the year level?

No I think that’s ok. But them coming in March and November, its very different and you are going to get that with any year, but at the beginning of the year they may seem quite young and you get very different results than you have at the end of the year. I guess it’s a formative part of your life and it’s perfect when you are going to be entering senior school where things start to get more serious in terms of study and its time to leave all the attitude and a little more lighter education that was in year 7 and 8.
I would change the time, if anything, I change the time to six weeks and perhaps take them to a more rural part of XXXX.

MP
A have final question about the setting of the program. In what ways do you think the setting contributes to the learning?

WE
I think it being removed from School D yet still part of it. None of us as teachers would be people they would recognize from their campuses back in City AAAAA. I think that is a positive thing because it allows them to carry ....of their baggage from in City AAAAA. I think that it’s still important for them to have the comforts that they are used to back home. For example doonas and wardrobes and their study space. I think that’s quite important in terms of their living arrangements. I think that setting is something that gives them that sense of grounding and security. The design of their actual living space. It’s crucial with students who really have trouble with homesickness. Its also important for them to learn respect in community setting.

The setting of somewhere ‘foreign’; whether it be XXXX or other (places) that we might be operating in. I think its fairly important for them to be removed from their comfort zone so that they feel challenged but to have people around to make them feel comfortable enough to take part in the experience in an open and kind of thirsty kind of manner (a thirst for knowledge)... Which is also why I place a lot of importance on the kind of staff that we have facilitating these programs. I really struggled when the second term became more of what it was like in the City AAAAA school because the fact is that its not one of the campuses in City AAAAA. I strongly disagree. It should not be run like one.

MP
Why is it run like that now?

WE
I think because a lot of the staff have been brought from campuses here in City AAAAA and rather than bringing their own sense of values and beliefs about how the program should be run, they have brought more of the institutional School D sense of how it should be run. I think the beauty of before was that it had no values and reasons for learning the way that we tried to conduct it based on the world that we had there and the program that is there doesn’t need to be conducted so closely to the program conducted here. That’s bound to be an ongoing issue with it and that’s what the kids are really going to react to once they see that it’s being conducted even to the uniform. They will say oh well its school and will detract so rapidly from the experiences that they could be having.

End of Interview - WE
Interview 23

Interview with David Carson (School D) Darwinia Campus 29th June 2007

MP
So David if you could start just by giving me a sense of your own understanding of the learning that occurred on the program that we worked together on when we were in Darwinia Campus.

DC
My own understanding of the learning

MP
Yes what sort of learning was it?

DC
Well it was, I used to call it total immersion, I don’t know where I got that phrase from. It was learning about the fact that you in yourself, are only, as a student in themselves a product of your own culture and all human beings are completely determined by the world that they are in. and therefore that has a linguistic aspect, it has a social aspect, a legal aspect. All of those things and the confrontations that occur when someone from one culture is brought into another, which is the inevitable confrontation so cultural immersion/cultural clashing, learning about yourself by seeing this very different world that other people live in, with all it’s idiosyncrasies which are so different from your own The other aspect of it is of course you know, navigating the sort of independence that, having the safety net removed enough to be forced to make your own decisions in a very alien environment and that’s a thing that really stood out for me about the program it was the thing that made it really exciting for me. Without it, the safety net not being taken away so much that they were actually weren’t safe, so it was like an illusion of genuine risk taking. I think the reason that we were there was so they weren’t really taking as large risks as they would if they were in a different setting. So a combination of those two things Mal, cultural immersion and risk taking, controlled risk taking.

MP
OK So in terms of the program being then of cultural immersion with some independent risk taking, the mode of learning compared to say what happens in a classroom, how is it different?

DC
The word that jumps out of me is obviously experiential learning, the idea that.

MP
I guess I’m not wanting to fish for that word, I’m trying to get a sense of what you think it is?
DC
Well the word jumped into my head anyway, that's why I said it. Experiential learning means to me, rather the opposite of what the classroom is. The classroom teaches you theories, which you are then supposed to. At some undefined point of time in a real world apply. You know you learn partial fractions in year ten in the hope that maybe some day in your mid thirties you'll be on a building site or something and be able to use them. I don't know, I never use maths for anything. The part of learning that we used in Darwinia was the opposite, we actually saw the stuff, sometimes quite confronting stuff and you then had to do the learning afterwards, preferably on scene, as it was happening in front of you. The teacher could remove the kids and say do you see this, let me explain to you what is going on.

MP
So you are distinguishing between, the learning afterwards follows the experience, so there's no learning in the experience itself or is it a different kind of learning that occurs afterwards?

DC
Well, I mean that's a good question. I think the reason we were there as teachers was that we had to debrief the experiences, that was a word we used a lot in Darwinia debriefing. Debriefing homestay, debriefing lots and lots of those and at first I was a bit confused, I thought it seemed all a bit of a waste of time actually. I thought, why all this debriefing, until I had been there for a while and I understood and I am probably going to go off on a tangent here, so forgive me, but kids in particular tend to qualify an experience in one sentence, so that you will have been on a camp with a kid and the kid's had a ball I'm not talking about Darwinia now, I'm talking about camps I've done since and I have had a note from his mother saying how much he hated camp and how unhappy he was and you say, well I was with the kid for a whole week and he always had a smile on his face, he never complained and every time I asked him how he was going, he only said it was good and has come home and has turned it into a sentence. You know and maybe there was just something at that moment, maybe he didn't feel like talking, to you, maybe he was in a bad mood, maybe he was tired and he just said he hated it. From that the whole experience has been coloured by his own recording of the experience, so in a sense, an experience in itself only teaches for the second that that experience lasts and what stays with kids is the way that they have been directed to understand the experience afterwards and the way that they have turned the experience into a story or into a lesson or into whatever it's turned into. Without that process, the debriefing, the role of the teacher, the experience in itself can be lost. Yeah. Have I answered your question or not?

MP
Yes, well you used the word confronted twice in our opening couple of minutes. Do I take from that, that part of the experience of that program for those students was one that really confronted, that was a shock in some way or a sharp discontinuity?
DC
Yeah, I think, if there were students who weren’t confronted by Darwinia, then they didn’t really have their eyes open and there were some who didn’t, some who didn’t take anything in, but those who really saw what was going on were always confronted on some level from the very cool boy in my second group who got acute diarrhea, which only lasted for four or five hours, but I had to sit in with him and he cried for his mother, in such a way as I am sure he never would have wanted me or any teacher to see. I think it must have been horrific for him just to lose face in that way I mean that was hugely confronting.

…..OK I am thinking of one particular boy….I had to talk to him a little bit about perhaps his own preconceptions and maybe be was being judgemental but even he was confronted…..I don’t think anyone really came away from here, except for a couple, there were very few students who came away without being confronted.

MP
So how did that confrontation lead to learning anything?

DC
Any confrontation will stay in your memory, the things that we remember about our childhood or our earlier life, The things that stand are those points of concept, I mean confrontation is change and it changes you, it changes the way you see things, it upsets you and obviously it is going to stay in your mind, if your values are challenged, whether or not you believe what the teacher says afterwards, the fact is that you have been forced to see life from someone else’s perspective that’s caused discomfort and I think that it’s just a fact that it remains in the memory and that is where the learning is. You are not going to forget it.

MP
OK so what role then does the memory of these sharp contrasts or confrontational situations play in the learning?

DC
What role does the memory play?

MP
Oh sorry, perhaps I could put it in these terms – is that residual memory or sensory matrix, for want of a better word, something that you deliberately used as a teacher or was it sort of hit and miss that it was used occasionally and not others or perhaps not used at all?

DC
Well I guess that touches on another issue, which is how the school made use of the program how the school fed back post-program,, which is a totally separate issue. I’ve been at two schools, which have run programs at the same age group although they are totally different and I don’t think in either case, the school as a whole has embraced the learning experiences of the students, who have been in these non-traditional more experiential programs
at all and while I don’t know you can’t recreate that environment, you can’t pretend you saw it in Darwinia, it’s ridiculous to even try, but I think both this program and one that I was at previously, it was almost the opposite, that there was very little, it was as if you just walked back in life went on so the way I would have used it and the way I felt the students using it was in an anecdotal sense when later on in secondary school and particularly as a humanities teacher you come across texts that refer to particular themes, issues, cultural things that come up, students would frequently say, that reminds me of when I was (on activity) that reminds of when I was at Darwinia and I saw xyz. So, I would say that, the word I would use Mal is incidental, there is a lot of incidental learning that goes on, I don’t think it can be systematized because experiential learning just like life, doesn’t happen in a prescribed order, it just happens and so the way that the learning is used by the student is equally probably random, I don’t think it can be planned, but I don’t think there are any students who would have come out at the end of year 12 at School D except for as I said before, I should always have the corollary there is always probably two or three, there would be very few who didn’t remember something that happened there and were able to relate it to something that they learned later on.

MP
What do they remember? Have you had any feedback from the students who have been through the program?

DC
They remembered, well I spent another three years I think, at the school after I came back from Darwinia, they remembered the things that confronted them, they remembered the things that were completely left of centre…

…they are the two things that really stand out and maybe that’s because they were so different from what they were used to. Then there is also the more, dare say I say cliché things like (activity site), but that’s a different sort of thing.

MP
Is there any particular learning that would attach itself to a visit to (activity site)?

DC
The thing that strikes me about having had so many conversations with kids about going to (activity site), I’ve only been, like yourself, fifteen times, you’ve probably been thirty, is that the comment they always make is how it’s different from what they expected and I find this is the same with so many things with teenagers when they see movies, when they read novels, no matter what they do they are fascinated by the contrast between their expectation and the reality. I thought (activity site) was going to be bigger, I thought it was going to be smaller, I thought it was going to be this, this and this. I never imagined that I would be standing on it, it’s all about their own mental picture and how that contrasts with the reality and I think that’s interesting because obviously teenagers are by definition egocentric and they
are very much about themselves and about you know, look at me Mum I’m on (activity site), but there’s that other really interesting thing, the dynamic about what I thought was going to happen, what I thought it was going to be like and how different it was. I mean that’s a different experience for every teenager and that’s the thing, that’s part of the learning themselves. I also think that you know, the good part about say going to a place like (activity site), which must be like an American teacher taking a kid to the Grand Canyon is that you don’t have to explain what it is, everyone knows what (activity site) is so you are actually able to do some real teaching because you are able to get past that initial, oh my god where are we?

….like they don’t know what they are doing, whereas at (activity site) it is like, ok I know what this is, I’ve learned a bit about it, that means that you can really get through on that second level, it’s like the second time you read a novel you get a lot more because this is in a sense, this is you know a secondary experience, because they’ve already learned about it from whatever, tv or their parents or whatever.

MP
It’s not a mystery?

DC
Yeah, that’s right, so they really absorb a lot more of it. I think the history and the sort of cultural information, they are not so overwhelmed by the newness of where they are, because they’ve all seen it, they all know where it is.

MP
OK Well you’ve mentioned a couple of sites, you’ve had experience with two different experiential programs and we will use that term. How important is the setting for an experiential learning?

DC
I think it is the setting, I think it is huge, I think it is massive and very important. Can I say what my first experiential program was.

MP
Yes, sure.

DC
The first one was Eucalypt Campus.

MP
I’ve visited there, and I’ve interviewed a number of the staff from there.
Yes and I mean, it's just like Darwinia, what are people going to see when they look out of window, how's it going to make them feel, you know for Eucalypt looking out the same window every day for the whole year, but fortunately they were in like paradise. It was absolutely stunning where they were. For Darwinia, for a kid I mean, they weren’t going for a year, so it didn’t matter that they were looking out of the window at a whole lot of apartments and a lot of pollution, but that has to be taken into account. I think the setting is massively important because it's got to, it’s their world, it's a new world, it's very different from the old one and I mean the first impression of that world is going to have a deeply entrenched impact on the kid.

MP
Is it that important? The sense that it’s going to be different from their existing known world?

DC
Yes, it's vital because if it wasn’t different, why would you do it? It would be, let's go on a residential program to AAAA. What are you going to do, you are going to do all the same things as you do in XXXX City and it would be a waste of time, I think part of the function of school generally, is to expose students to things that they wouldn’t be exposed to otherwise. I could use an analogy of I don’t think we should teach Harry Potter in Schools, not because I have a problem with witchcraft but because the kids are all going to read it anyway, so why make them read it in school, it's like doubling up. Get them Lord of the Flies, because I can guarantee they are not going to be reading Lord of the Flies for fun at home and yet when they have read it, it’s going to have a profound impact on them. I think the experiential programs are the same. A kid’s not going to go to Darwinia. They might, if they go to Darwinia Campus with their parents, they might go to BBBB, they might go to CCCC, they might go to DDDD but they are not going to go to Darwinia…....so yeah I think it’s got to be different, I think it’s got to be different to the point of being fascinating or uncomfortable, otherwise I think you’ve lost an opportunity.

MP
So then how does the setting influence the learning?

DC
Well, obviously in both Eucalypt and Darwinia, one of the great parts about it in totally different ways, the teachers are able to walk ten metres and say here we are having a learning experience. I mean Eucalypt and I didn’t have any part of things that happened at Eucalypt I’ve heard and gathered from the other staff that were there, it might be that they go down to the dam or they are looking at trees or, I'm showing my ignorance here, they are taking soil samples, they are doing biology stuff with plants, but in Darwinia it was you know, we walked out the front gate, you took a left and you were in the middle of a lesson about economics, you know, there were people bargaining, there were people buying you know, you are looking at the way people run their shops, which is totally different and it's that very proximity, the fact that you
are right in the middle of it, you can’t get away from it even on their rest times …they are having these amazing sort of experiences that are different from what they are used to. If, again, if you took students to a residential program and then had to take them 30 k’s every time they were going to have an experience, I think it would be a waste, they would get sick ad tired of being on buses, but the setting is the key in the sense that they are being dropped right in the middle of the experience, they don’t have to go and get it, particularly when they are able, like in Darwinia to work out the way they go on bikes and plan their route and that in itself is going to entail a whole lot of experiences just in a single day. Again challenging, highly challenging sometimes very frightening, confronting.

MP
Are there common elements you think in an experiential program that you can see with a Eucalypt, with a Darwinia, with a Ferntree?

DC
And an Acacia: Common elements

MP
Or is there only going to be a difference with a different setting so if you pulled Acacia out of its current setting, popped it down in another mountain you are going to get a different set of learning experiences because it’s changed it’s setting.

DC
No I think in the end I mean, education seems to me from the perspective of someone who isn’t really educated in education per say to have gone through all the skills and (?) content and similarly I think it, I really don’t think it matters where the thing is you are employing certain skills, by being away from home you are employing your own coping strategies, by being asked to take in an enormous amount of information you are being asked to employ sort of what you may call filtering strategies, deciding what’s important, what you need to know by being put in a situation where you will make a lot of mistakes, that’s another set of strategies that you are being asked to display, obviously there are some very fundamental differences between being in one of these country retreat type settings like Eucalypt and being in Darwinia, which is huge, there are some huge differences between them, but I think there are a certain set of core skills, perhaps the ones that I just said that would remain the same.

MP
What’s the social dimension of these programs? You have mentioned that teenagers are egocentric. They don’t undergo these experiences in isolation eventually interacting with locals and we assume with each other, how important is that?

DC
Yeah, I think it is very important because most, I mean both of those settings that we talk about are private schools and certainly I’ve been involved with
private schools all through my teaching career, so the kids that I have dealt with come from privileged backgrounds and one thing that seems to go hand in hand with a privileged background is the need not to share, you can have your own tv in your room, you can have your own phone in your own room, of course now that we have got mobile phones but certainly when I first went to Darwinia not every kid had a mobile phone, it was different, you know you could have your own stereo. You were able to live a very isolated lifestyle within the comfort of your own home, if you wanted to, relationships with siblings were often not really valued, because they are not all in together they are not sort a big group and not always but often these kids had tv dinners and they had dinner when they get home from whatever they do, so their lives are more perhaps disjointed than families once were and any kind of residential situation requires teamwork by necessity otherwise if there was no teamwork, forty, fifty or sixty kids in one place can’t possibly work, so it forces kids to stop being selfish and to make sacrifices and to think about the group as an organic whole as opposed to me, me, My own needs being met and I think that’s incredibly important. Even if they never do it again, it’s important that they have done it… I think

MP
And can that only be achieved through a residential program?

DC
Yes, I wrestled with this a little after I came back from Darwinia because I had spent a lot of time wishing I was still in Darwinia, wondering how this job of teaching could be as magic outside of a setting like Darwinia as it was when I was there. One of the big problems, and I don’t have a solution to this is that every time you try and recreate that type of setting in a non residential program or non experiential program it just doesn’t look as if it is real and I think it is because the classroom is basically a fake environment, kids know that they get to leave after forty five minutes, there’s no connection there, they know it’s a place that they are going to be leaving, they don’t have to stay and so they don’t feel, I mean that if you try and do those things is just going to be like a slightly interesting tv show that they will take part in for twenty minutes and if they have to share, if they have to do group work, they might find it a bit uncomfortable for twenty minutes but then it’s over and they are able perhaps to go at lunchtime with a different group of people and bag the teacher or the kid they were working with, so it’s not an all-embracing experience and that’s an experience that can be shut off after the period ends and therefore it loses an enormous amount of it’s validity if not all of it’s validity, so it will only really work with certain groups of kids who get along pretty well anyway, which defeats the purpose of doing it.

MP
Were you aware of peer groups structures changing in residential settings, in experiential residential settings. Students who came to Darwinia. Came to Eucalypt, would have largely, except for the new arrivals, but largely been part of a pre-existing peer structure. Do you have a sense that those structures changed in any way as a result?
DC
Definitely, definitely.

MP
How did they change?

DC
Certainly at Eucalypt I remember the first group at Eucalypt, the first ever group returning after one term, which was only double the time that they spent in Darwinia and the kids themselves getting up on stage for the presentation and the nature of the presentation was about how the cool kids had come being cool and the dorks had come being dorks and they came back and they were friends with each other and they all mixed and this hadn’t been forced on them by the school, this was something they had come up with themselves. A reflection that they had come up with themselves. I thing with the case of Eucalypt from my perspective on it, that change did remain, I think a term was probably just long enough, even though the kids had the same friends, it was certainly a greater sense of tolerance. I don’t think Darwinia was quite long enough to achieve that. I think while they were there they were able to deconstruct their social groups and actually relate really well with others and in a sense for some kids who were probably trapped in an uncomfortable social milieu it was probably a great relief but five weeks isn’t very long and they would come back and I, (Teacher A) said this as well, that there were kids who had been really badly behaved in XXXX City, who were winners in Darwinia, who really made it and had a successful experience within three weeks of being back were renegades in the classroom, hanging round with the same bums, making the same mistakes and I think that it is, unfortunately, a corollary of it being a short program, but during the course of the residential experience definitely, and I think the kids enjoyed that, although some times it made them uncomfortable, I think it was enjoyable.

MP
What was the main mechanism driving the change in your opinion?

DC
I think it was the structure of both programs forcing students to spend time with other kids and I think it’s such a simple thing to do and it’s a classic paradox for teenagers that students will remain in their comfort zones with the same people if they get the choice but they don’t really want to, what they actually want to do is to get to know new people but you can’t possibly stand forward and say I want to hang round with some different people, because then your friends will get grumpy at you and think that you are being a try harder, they’ll label you, so that paradox is well managed by depriving the students of a choice of the people that they get to spend time with. It’s one thing that I should do in my teaching and I just don’t and I don’t really know why, it’s probably that I forget, it’s to sit students with a different one every lesson. You know, if you are having discussions and if you are going to be having group work, even at year 12 you know, they are talking about (?) why can’t you just start the lesson by re-arranging the kids so that their conversations that they have with the person next to the is really different from
the ones that they had yesterday. You know that’s something and I think it is a fact that the school in both cases at Eucalypt and Darwinia took control at points and said no, your hiking group or your activity group is going to be different from your friendship group and that’s the way it is, you don’t get to choose so get over it. Here it is. I think that was vitally important because if students themselves acknowledge that they wouldn’t have made those choices, if they had got to choose the person they hang around with, they always would have chosen the same people and they wouldn’t have grown. Which reminds me of the one time that we ever did allow kids to choose their own groups in Darwinia which was the race around Darwinia and you were there, in my first group in my second year when we ended up with a group of misfits, who you know, who went round on the race around Darwinia with a gentleman who left the school afterwards and went to a different school and he described it as the worst day he had had in twenty five years of teaching and he had otherwise been incredibly positive about the program and so I think that was a real sign and he said never let the kids, never let them choose their groups again and I mean I had had a great day because I was with a different group who loved each other. And that was all fine, you know, but I think that was a fair comment. I mean he was stuck with a really difficult group of kids because no-one else wanted them.

MP
OK then, the question of the changes that occur in the structure, the cool kids presumably go to Darwinia Campus, they are already cool, they are already seen as leaders so they are not necessarily going to be seeking ways of emerging as they already are. Do those kids remain on top, do they remain the top dogs in these programs, or do other students emerge as the leading lights in different ways?

DC
That’s a good question and I think it’s definitely it’s the second. I remember one girl at School E in year 8 who was unquestionably the queen of the hill, a very, very powerful character and had a whole group, of maybe even as many as a dozen kids running round at her beck and call in what was quite at times a scary little dynamic outfit, going around calling themselves the Academy and she was the leader of the Academy. She didn’t last a term at Eucalypt, she came back within the first term, she just couldn’t deal with the fact that well she couldn’t deal with a whole lot of things but it was really about the fact that she was just like one of the other kids, she’d been put on a pedestal, she’d been given a sort of a role by her peers that she couldn’t maintain and she, her whole school experience after that was extremely different and she wasn’t you know, she never showed any of the leadership that perhaps she would have been expected to show, I mean that everyone would have thought that she would have been a real leader in that environment.

MP
So she’s been in a position where she was clearly very socially adept prior to Eucalypt and Eucalypt has demonstrated for a range of reasons that she wasn’t socially adept in that setting. What about the unexpected kids who do
emerge as leaders, the ones that you wouldn’t pick, you wouldn’t anticipate
given peer structures going in. What is it that thrusts those kids forward?

DC
I think it's the side that you don't normally see at school, which is probably to
do with their family dynamic. I am thinking of one kid who I taught, I had the
experience of teaching in year 10 the year after I had her in Darwinia and my
impression of her in Darwinia was within I reckon a day and half I thought this
kid is an absolute winner, she is school captain material. She was positive,
she was assertive, she was firm but fair with the others, she knew how to get
what she wanted, she was sensible, she made good decisions, she made
sure everyone else was alright and in year 10, I discovered that she was
below average academically, she was under-achieving, she was lazy, she
didn't do her homework, she didn’t come to school on time and she was
generally regarded as a discipline problem and I never would have picked it
and she wasn’t the only one, but she stands out in my mind, because she was
in my group and I had a huge amount to do with her and as I said she was
stunning in Darwinia. I think it’s a reminder that school, as much as society’s
changed since a hundred years ago, school hasn’t. It's still a fundamentally
academic institution and what we do in classrooms is still fundamentally
academic, so we are not appealing to all nine or ten or how ever many
intelligences there are, you know we are not allowing the development of all
those different intelligences, whereas in a place like Darwinia, you are, for a
short period of time you are actually looking at the whole person. Now this kid
probably had all sorts of stuff, maybe they had a really important role in their
family lives. Some of these kids that don’t do their homework, aren’t doing
their homework because they had to cook, or perhaps they are staying up late
with a troubled sibling or anything like that. You’d never see that from the
other side of the desk, but in Darwinia she was just outstanding and I think in
fact, some of the really bright kids, I mean academically bright, really didn’t
cope with Darwinia at all because they’d lost the hill that they were king of, so
we’re not talking about the cools any more, we are talking about the smarts,
you know, for whom school was good because they were always getting A’s
and that meant that they were up, they felt comfortable, Darwinia took them
out of their comfort zone and they became negative, often because kids like
that are very quiet, you know, smartly quiet and generally they weren’t the
success stories in Darwinia because they needed to be assertive and say
what they thought and they had never been pushed by the schools of either
and so suddenly they were out of their comfort zone and they ended up being
quite, I remember a couple like that as well, quite negative about their
experience.

MP
Who were the successful stories, for either of those programs?

DC
You mean like names?
MP
No, no. What was it specifically, in your own experience, that made them
successful?
DC
The word that comes to mind is open-mindedness. People whom come to things without prejudice but with a general willingness to participate, because, for no other reason than the fact that life is to be participated in, there’s no agenda, there’s no job training, there’s no, it’s just I’m going to do this because it’s there, I’m going to climb a mountain because it’s there. They were the ones, I think because they were one’s who pushed themselves to do everything. Every time kids get up, year 12’s get up after they leave school or when they are about to leave school and they address the school, I don’t know if you have noticed it that, they always say to the years 9, 10 and 11, do everything, don’t miss out on any opportunity and sometimes they say because they, themselves didn’t, they thought they were too cool to play hockey or to do this or that and they came to realise that this was what made school valuable, it was just a number of different things that you do, the opportunities and I think it is kids like that who do take opportunities that benefit the most and I don’t think it has anything to do with academic ability or even athletic ability, physical ability, I think residential programs are helped by being physically adept and being reasonably fit but I don’t think that someone who wasn’t either of those things couldn’t still have a good experience, I think it’s about attitude, Open-mindedness, as I said.

MP
You mentioned that both of the programs weren’t well integrated with schools, so that at the end of the programs, students came back to normal programming. What did the students hang onto? You did mention some of those other experiences as against old things, as being memorable, but were there new skills, new knowledge that they have created as a part of the program that stayed with them? Did the experience have an impact on their studies or their lives or otherwise post program?

DC
To be honest, it would be very difficult for me to say, because all of the experiences I had with kids in both programs after they returned, were all classroom experiences I reckon if I’d been on an outdoor ed experience with them, I might perhaps see more directly the benefits because you are then again in a residential situation. I couldn’t say for certain that there was any genuine discernible difference in study habits. I think in both cases again, the kids were probably a little bit too young.

MP
You felt the experience occurred a bit too early?

DC
I’ve thought about this a lot, because sometimes I was frustrated by kids who treated Darwinia as a, like there were some kids who seemed to think that whether or not you got a swearing fine was more important than, you know…you know, all those kinds of things, I am sure you had the same kinds of feelings when you think, you just don’t get it, but I guess the (?) I had to answer that question was there any other time that you could take it.
I mean the way our school system is structured. Year 11 is, I think year 11 would be the perfect age but it’s just too hard. The kids are doing unit 3 and 4 studies and their priorities are different, you need a time when students aren’t going to be so pre-occupied with other things. They have to have a little bit of freedom before and in terms of the way that schools are set up, that freedom of thought is their year 9 because they really don’t have anything else. I mean they are not going to be in Darwinia worrying about missing out on study for something else. Whereas, even in year 10, they might be. So I think that if, the way that school was structured, I mean if there was some kind of compulsory two months camp period in year 11 for everyone and it was part of their curriculum then Darwinia would fit in perfectly there. I think you would get kids who really responded on a much deeper level there, but we don’t have that so within the current structure I don’t think we’re going to anyway. I think year 10 would be probably absolutely worse, I think you would have more discipline problems, I think that kids would try and go out at night and all that sort of stuff more, I think it would make it harder without their being sort of an equivalent gain in maturity. I don’t know why, I tend to be a big fan of odd years of schooling, I think years 7, 9 and 11 are fantastic, whereas I think years 8, 10 and 12 are much harder work, so I think year 11 would probably be the perfect one.

MP
You’ve worked on both single sex and co-ed program. How did the gender structure affect the learning in the program?

DC
That’s a good question. Both had their disadvantages, Eucalypt was, for some kids a very destructive environment, particularly those who were gregarious and had good relationships with boys and I don’t mean boy friend, girl friend, I just mean kids who had a whole lot of friends who were boys or went to parties, or went to movies on the week-ends I think they really struggled with it and I think also, there’s something about a single sex environment in residential which can bring out some really nasty behaviours.

MP
How do you mean?

DC
Oh I think bullying in single sex environments is a lot more intense and I think it’s because it is an artificial environment, a single sex environment is, by nature, artificial because it’s not really normal to be in a single sex environment and I just know you know, kids getting other kids swapping their toothpaste for deodorant or swapping their shampoo for toothpaste and then just standing around and laughing at them when they come out of the shower. That sort of, I mean it sounds funny on one level but there’s a genuine cruelty about that, which doesn’t happen as often in a combined gender situation. I think it’s because the genders balance each other. I think if blokes did what guys did to people when I was at XXXX City, I mean I know one guy who went off to cadet camp and he got tied to a tree and had his clothes urinated
on and got ribbed by the other boys. Now you can imagine if there were girls in a tent round the corner, they wouldn’t be doing it because they would know that the girls would be so disgusted that they would never talk to them again and they would take the kid that did that, the ringleader and they would make sure that nobody ever, ever spoke to that person again. You know, I mean, so, for people to have done that in a single sex environment I think shows the rather unnaturality environment of a single sex environment and there was a little…..? On the other side of the coin I mean, you know, Darwinia was a good balance because the kids were basically in their rooms at night-time. They were with their own gender so they had a sort of a, they had space to be with their own gender if they wanted to be, which I thought was really important, particularly at the personal times of the day, you know the end of the day. There’s a certain time when it stops being gender together time and goes to being single gender time and I actually do that here with five kids (?) I think there’s a point at which the(?????????) Yes, there’s a good balance, but obviously with year 9 kids there was a fair bit of boy friend, girl friend stuff, I like him, he likes me and that sort of thing which probably took away a little bit from the experience but I don’t think, I think on the whole a combined gender program like Darwinia was a more real experience than Eucalypt.

MP
Mm, What would you change in either of the programs if you had the opportunity?

DC
What would I change?

MP
To make the learning more effective?

DC
Mm. There’s very little that I would have changed about Darwinia, A testament, I suppose to that is that all these years later, I mean, it’s six years ago and I’m still basically doing the same thing which I think is an absolute tribute to everyone, including most of us, mostly you, who put the program together. I suppose I would change, I would really look at changing what happened after the kids got back. I don’t know how, but there must be a way that experiential learning can be adopted. There are, for instance, IB programs with CAS, Creativity, Action, Service. I’m sure that there could be a link, I’m sure that kids could have it working within a half an hour when they are doing something that isn’t in the classroom.

MP
School D tried that in Darwinia didn’t they?

DC
Mm

MP
And I understand that there are significant concerns about the effectiveness of
that?

DC
The main concern, the main problem is that you are still in the classroom and
you are still in school uniform, it’s just that you’ve got, so the kids see learning
journeys as a poor relation to the academic program, particularly as they don’t
get marks for it and they don’t understand, they don’t understand what an
opportunity they have been given, some of them do but I have found,
particularly, again particularly bright kids, meaning genius its too hard, too
confronting, they are being asked to put in a lot of effort and not being given
any reward and for them, being at school is all about reward, you know the
number on the report, telling the kids they are not going to get marks, they say
well why should I care and you say well because it’s real life, in real life you
don’t get marks, but deep down inside your bone you’re thinking but it’s not
real life because you’re sitting there in School D uniform and I know that
other programs such as School G, run a year 9 program where they had units
and one unit they called moving out where they got kids to simulate renting a
flat and buying furniture and all that sort of stuff and they actually had kids off
campus running round in School G, you could probably do that in School G,
running round and getting quotes and doing all that sort of thing. And I think
that might be a bit more real. I think if you are going to do it, then you really
have to do it with everything and I know that the original groups were learning
journeys. It was a lot less traditional than it ended up being and a lot of people
kicked up a fuss. They didn’t want to lose curriculum time value. You know,
they were enormous concerned about what would happen if students were
taken out of a lot of the normal year 9 program, so as a result the learning
journey was shrunk and probably not available. That was my impression
anyway when it started, but I don’t know what’s happening about it now. I’m
probably not the best person to answer your question as to what I would you
do differently at Eucalypt, but I always did have the feeling that the year was
too long I rather like the semester, I don’t know why, I just think if you are
unhappy, a year is a really long time to be away. There have been enormous
amounts of change and I feel that I think that probably a semester at Eucalypt
and a semester back at School E would have been the right model and I felt
that a lot of people at the school felt that at the time. It did go to a semester for
a couple of years, it started with a term, then it went to a semester and then
everyone went for a full year and I think, I always thought that a semester
would have probably been better. You know, if the kids were older in
Darwinia I reckon you could give them a term, I think you could pad it out to a
term and I think you could involve other aspects of travelling in Darwinia
Campus but it would be exhausting for the people who ran it. I only say if the
kids were older because they would be able to handle leisure time, I mean I
always got the impression that Darwinia really didn’t give the kids much
leisure time, because there was no evidence that you knew the kids would do
anything positive with more leisure time. They could have as much leisure
time as they want back in Australia. So, it was five weeks that was full on
from the second you got off the plane to the second you got back home. I
think that works, and for kids that age I don’t it could be any longer.
The other thing you’ve drawn attention to is the relationship between the student and the staff member, in different, in an experiential setting. Are there things that you think are significant there, I mean in both a positive and a negative sense?

I think that in some ways being a classroom teacher is quite easy for the teacher because you really get to sell your product for forty-five minutes as a staffer and you probably don’t have to worry about some aspects of the kid’s life and that’s being really honest and I think that before Darwinia I think that yeah, I didn’t really need to worry, I mean a kid’s had problems outside class and they didn’t choose to talk to me about it and so they weren’t my problem, so I was able to be pretty free from the pastoral care side of things and I think it’s harder in an experiential setting where you realise oh that safety net’s gone, I can’t just leave at the end of a lesson, I am stuck with this kid and I’m thinking of one particular kid, who I was stuck with for whole of the five weeks and he was just, he was really difficult and I had to cope with him and as a teacher that made an enormous difference to me and I learned a lot. He said he learned a lot from me, I don’t know if he really did but he said he did at the end when it was all over, so I think that it’s a very growing experience for both the teacher and the kid to have this constant contact and see you in a very different light from they way they see other teachers but it doesn’t mean that it’s always easier, I think it’s probably a lot harder because I think that when you first see, I remember seeing the X family who ran Eucalypt and thinking I couldn’t stand their life you know, they’ve got kids coming in at 8.30 at night and they are trying to have a glass of wine and watch the tv and kids coming in and asking for this and that, you know, and I just felt, I could never stand it, but here I am now, I am actually doing that as a job so, probably there was something in that I think it is a much more holistic and positive relationship that exists between kids and teachers in a residential program, but as I said it’s not as easy and certainly not for the teachers.

Extent of contact, I mean do you think that the level of normality between the teacher in a residential experiential setting is different to the classroom teaching?

I’ve got to be honest, I’ve always thought that if you need to be wearing a tie or to be called mister to have authority then you are probably in the wrong job. Like, the kids at the boarding house call me David but it doesn’t change the relationship that exists between me and them and most of the time they see me in track suit pants and tee-shirt and slippers and it doesn’t change like what happens between them and me and I think I learned that in Darwinia. You know, you are going out and about, you are wearing a tee-shirt, you are wearing shorts and you still have to be the person who can say to a student you are not going to the supermarket because you did this and this. I think in many ways respect is about something different from that and it’s a combination of your personal qualities but also the structure which you are
working within so I don’t think in that sense, I don’t think that it matters that there is less formality and I think a lot of problems with this issue of whether or there is formality comes because there are certain teachers who perhaps in certain settings that they are not used to, lose control and it’s all part of the same picture. You know, all of a sudden the kids are trying to call me by my first name and I really don’t know what to do about it, it’s affecting me and I don’t know how to handle it and that being rolled into everything else that they do. I don’t know the kids can talk to me anyway they want and I think what matters is there is a structure It doesn’t matter what the structure says, it doesn’t matter whether the structure says, ok no-one is called by their first name or everyone is called by their first name as long as the structure is there and is seen that there are some boundaries around the outside and it’s not left to individual teachers to make those decisions. I think that’s really important. You know, like one teacher will say to you, yeah you can call me David and someone else will say no, I want to be Mr. Pritchard, well that’s not fair and the staff who run the program shouldn’t allow that differential.

MP
Yes, consistency is pretty important, isn’t it?

DC
Absolutely, in everything, in everything, no matter how tight or slack the rules are, as long as everybody is consistent, I think that is what matters.

MP
Yes. ok. Thank you.

End of Interview DC
Interview 24

Interview on 26/06/2007
Kathleen Carter (School D) Darwinia

MP
Kath, can you just start of with sharing with me your understanding of what experiential learning is, from your experience? I understand that you will be speaking of both a parent and a teacher.

KC
Experiential learning is immersing the students in a program where formal instruction might be limited to and initial outline of what the program could be about and the students learn the material through direct contact with either the people or the experiences, the places, the culture. Whatever it is that they are involved in and whatever the program is focused on.

MP
You have how many years experience as a teacher?

KC
About twenty nine years.

MP
With all that experience, and again your own experience in experiential and mainstream learning. Do you sense a significant difference?

KC
There is a significant difference and both of them, I think, are necessary for most kids to do well. And by most kids I mean for most kids to get the most out of their education. By most kids I mean there are some kids that are at the end of the spectrum and I believe are suited much more to a formal education and get nothing out of experiential learning in their head and there at the other end of the spectrum that can’t handle physical performance.

MP
Now you said direct contact. What does that mean? With what?

KC
With the experience of being able to either see or to hear and smell the experience. Some kids you can tell them until you are blue in the face and it has absolutely no relevance to them whatsoever.

MP
So its exposure through sensory input is it?

KC
My experience is that it gets to be called something different, but really what it means is the way that you process information you have to be engaged in
more than one way and in my experience is that formal education only exposes a few of the senses, or learning styles. Most kids more than that it seems to me.

MP
What do you think that students get out of experiential learning?

KC
A hell of a lot more than they think they do actually. They just think they are having a good time. In terms of my experience I have been involved in managing programs, I am just amazed every time I am involved with it is how much they are learning throughout the whole experience without them realizing they are. So the way in which they can talk about the experience, the way in which they link ideas together, the way in which they listen to other people, taking in information around them, just quite different really.

MP
Different to your experience in a classroom?

KC
Yes.

MP
Is that something that you can explain that difference, that you can pin point exactly why it happens in your classroom?

KC
I think it comes down to, for kids if they are enjoying it and engaged in it they are not really interested in whether they are learning or not although they are learning about something, but they don’t actually see it in terms of learning. In a formal classroom they know that’s the purpose of it and if they are not engaged in it they won’t take anything in. I guess if they are not engaged in experiential learning, they won’t take anything in either, but for the most parts it’s easier. Because you have a much (almost invariably) smaller group, you have a one on one contact with the learners in that situation. First because you can move around amongst them and whilst you can do that in a classroom it’s limited, because they are sitting and you are standing. It’s more fluid and so you have ability to engage a student whose attention might be wandering of is easier. Those sorts of things are not easy to put into classroom practice and believe me I have tried. Because I did get an enormous amount out of watching kids on the Darwinia program but trying to put that in place in a classroom is extraordinary difficult. Particularly, for older kids where there has become an expectation that it’s all geared towards Year 12 marks and they are doing subjects that they don’t want to do or for whatever reasons. It always takes a long time to get the kids on task if you do something that’s out of the ordinary in a classroom. I teach subjects that have a fair bit of that in it because you have got field work related aspects. I teach geography and biology.

MP
So do you see things that happen on a field trip that happens on an experiential program?

KC
Yes I do, but its not quite as powerful because it’s a one day thing and you haven’t got camps to really shed that waiting to be directed to do every other thing which seems to be the case in the bathroom situations and I could talk about that for ages. The expectation that kids have to do anything in a classroom has just eroded which is terrible, I think. So on field trips the kids wait for me to tell them what they do next and that takes quite a time to undo that.

If I do something about coasts, they will learn an enormous amount more if I take them out and explain it to them while they are watching.

MP
Is there a time pressure that affects field trips that isn’t in a residential program?

KC
No not really because for any particular activity that you would be doing in that residential program you are going to do that in an afternoon or that day. It would only be in a particular timeframe there wouldn’t be much difference. It’s more like losing your expectation from the teacher and experiencing something in a day and then going back to your normal classroom. That sort of constraint on the way you approach things is different than if you were in a residential environment, so that makes a big difference.

MP
So it’s reinforced because you don’t get the chance to go back to type each night.
You used the fluid. Just unpack that to me in terms of what you mean.

KC
Because I am wondering about within the group you are more aware of body language and you use more eye contact. I think it comes down to silly things like using a bit of humour or an offbeat example. While the formality of a classroom system just doesn’t operate the same way. I think the teacher can be much more responsive to students and watching teachers on the managing program I think the activity teachers were better at that than a lot of the visiting teachers. Probably just better at responding in that group to a situation. I think that generally speaking, teachers have a program in their head that they think they have to get through and more rigid. Whereas in that experiential thing you have to have a concept of where you want to go but you don’t have the pathway mapped out and being much more fluid as to how you get to the end point which can be much more responsive to the input you put in from the kids of what happens on a day.

MP
So there’s a lot more freedom to chart a different course each time to achieve an objective?

KC
Yes the way in which you get to the end point is not nearly as important as to getting to whatever you want to do in getting to the end.

MP
How is the learning outcome different to you comparing an experiential lesson and a classroom lesson?

KC
Almost invariably it comes down to a different process and content. Obviously the formal lesson, particularly, at the top end of the school is geared to what the end point is going to be, which is invariably external exams so you are building content that somebody thinks the kids need to know and because it’s easy to quantify there seems to be a lot of content based assessment, whereas with experiential stuff it’s much more about processing. How you link ideas together or how you might develop an understanding, and I might be about content to, but how you go about finding the information, how you link that to other experiences in the broader world is much more content orientated. Most people have a problem with that that its too airy fairy and it’s not easy to quantify and to a certain degree, you obviously have to have content because you have no factual information or no knowledge base to hand your ideas on. You can’t really talk about them very seriously or you can’t explain them because you lack an understanding of the basic biology or geography and you might have to have an understanding of some factual information. But then to understand how that might apply to a different sort of situation, it really doesn’t matter how you do that, you can learn about whatever you like.

MP
So in a sense what you are saying that in a classroom content maybe the end content in itself and that’s demonstrated that they understood the content and you don’t need to go any further. Whereas in experiential learning the content, the knowledge they are kind of like guide markers or road signs but you use them as part of the journey but it’s not the end on

KC
Yes it might be how you explain the journey, or it might be your starting point and then you build up a ‘tree of knowledge’ if you like because you have something that you can relate it to and you are just making connection halfway because you have nothing to connect it to in the first place. It’s a bit harder to quantify, or I guess even talk about, but you can understand. I mean you can talk about the need to have a transport system in your body, but if you don’t actually have the name of the vessels etc then it can’t make any sense to anyone. You can talk about concepts to get from one place to another but it’s much easier if you have a background knowledge to hang all that on.
There are some subjects, like I teach psychology as well and that’s entirely concentrated and it drives me nuts! I can’t believe that a senior subject can be down to knowing itty bitty facts. I really thought education was past that and there’s no expansion of that into other subjects.

MP
So I was going to ask then, in your experience, are you able to draw a comparison between the performance through examinations. Are students who learn something through the classroom, where the focus is content, going to be more proficient at managing that content, or if that content is taught through an experiential mode (say your doing the coastline). You teach the classroom with one class and you teach a field trip with another class and you give them a test. Will the results be much the same, or will content driven people do better because they are focused on the content?

KC
It depends almost entirely on the test. The kids that choose psychology because they are good at it are almost always content driven kids. If I have some of those kids in a biology course which is almost entirely concept driven and right through to the final exam, there’s almost nothing that is directed factual, it’s all examples I have never heard of before and the kids that do psychology really struggle. So you give them a concept orientated test and they can’t handle it.

MP
What I am trying to get rather than concentrating on specific learning styles but looking at a broad range lets call it a statistically valid sample of the sorts of students that you might be dealing with.

KC
Generally speaking the experiential thing has much more impact in terms of them remembering for a longer term.

MP
So do you think that there’s a strong memory association with experiential learning?

KC
It’s like it’s locked into their experience rather than a formal classroom. School learning doesn’t really impact on anything they do and you can recall and link things very much better. If you move the things or went to the place, it’s much more important as actually hearing about it all. Giving my experience in biology. I can do a demonstration out the front building a D & A molecule using lollies. It’s like them sitting down with a group and building the self same thing themselves. As I said before they are touching senses. That seems to have a stronger residual memory.

MP
Generally speaking what sorts of memories do you think students retain from an extended experiential program in Darwinia?
KC
I think it’s a very visual thing, the visual thoughts of kids. It depends on what you are talking about by memories. If it’s things that are pinned into their heads, or the ways in which they think the program affected them.

MP
No that’s at a different level. Perhaps you could give me a call then talk about it later. If you just say without any rehearsal or preparation what’s the thing that pops into your head that you remember most strongly about Darwinia if you think back then? Have you ever had that discussion though with your own students?

KC
Yes mostly it’ll be things like the…interaction of the people. Like an interesting crowd accumulates whenever there’s something out of the ordinary. They talk about the numbers of people and then they talk about specific things that they did…It will be doing something in particular with their friends in a setting, almost invariably, that didn’t involve the campus type setting. Kids listen to say year 12 when they are reminiscing it will be a combination of a particular place and their friends.

MP
So there’s a strong social dimension to what occurs. What I am interested in is that the students go to Darwinia with a strong peer group that has been established back in XXXX City and there will be people in the group that are deemed as ‘cool’, the powerful kids, the ones who get to determine the social gender and that really arises because many of them have been together for many years. Generally speaking is there a pretty well formed peer group structure from the campus going to Darwinia?

KC
They get to pick their groups and they have got a bit clever at that. They can go with one or two friends and being a bit clever they can get a larger number of their friends ending up in their group than you might think.

MP
So we go into the program with a very strong sense, even through the selection process of peer structure, of links with their own peer group. Does the Darwinia experience change that in any way?

KC
It can do. My experience is that sometimes out of both of the groups that I with, there would be at least one group either a bedroom group or kids for a variety of reasons show different characteristics than their peers had realized. There were a couple of kids who were under some pressure to behave and they ended up quite surprising the staff because they did not behave like that in the normal school situation. It was like they had made a decision to make the trip mean something to them. Sometimes it can be like (student), he went
with a group of friends and learnt that when you are with your friends for long period of time (not just in school hours) and he found it quiet powerful the way you had to approach and interact with people in your friendship group and the tolerance you had to learn and those sorts of changes. Sometime there was a bit of a structural change within the groups but I would have thought that they might have been a bigger chance in the breakdown of the groups. They became friendly but they didn’t become close. They do retain those friendships or acquaintances for quite a long time afterwards.

MP
Because it’s not reinforced. Would you say that the leading students going into those groups would not necessarily be the leading students by the end of the experience?

KC
Yes I would say that and sometimes kids that are considered leading students end up being weaker. So their leadership isn’t in a sense a real sort of leadership when they are in that extended twenty four hours a day seven days a week environment. Kids will pop up with stronger characteristics than you would expect and particularly the second group I took. I remember a boy that I took from School D and he was on the fringe try hard group, but he just took on leadership and making things happen and he was outstanding and you wouldn’t have guessed that he would be able to get that happening. It was an interesting thing that within the school, he is one of those kids that I talked about before that maybe isn’t well suited to a very formal school setting, but with the experiential type thing he was able to put forward ideas in a more fluid way, he didn’t come across as the kids would like to call a ‘try hard’ as much it was just what was needed at the time. His voice and manner was suited to what was happening at the time. It’s interesting though that didn’t stay in place when they came back.

MP
Do you have a sense of why that was the case?

KC
The type of talents that he was doing. I mean he had the skills to do it, he was musical. Everybody knew that they had to do the task and didn’t want to get involved in it so you needed someone with enthusiasm and in that environment the enthusiasm wasn’t misplaced whereas in a classroom in a smaller environment. But in that five weeks he was a hell of a lot more popular with the kids than I ever saw him be at school.

MP
I am interested in you as a parent as well. You had two students go through as well, your son and daughter. I wonder if you have any sustained impressions as a parent, as to the impact in both negative and positive senses?

KC
For Ricky he went back first year so it was a new program. He saw it as a new situation. He was a little bit like the kid I have been describing. He tended to be a bit of a fringe dweller at school being in a sense not the cool top group but the middle type of group and was not able to match his behaviour to the expectations always in school. He came back from that trip and I was amazed for a fifteen year old that he was able to explain how he felt so clearly. Explanation was something that he didn’t do well, normally. Two things in particular stand out in my mind. One was he came back from the home stay and he said that he had really learnt that families in the world are just families. Families are families are families. His particular home stay he said it almost looked like they lived in bomb site mum, but inside it was just another home – mum dad the kids and TV. I think that’s a pretty powerful think for a fifteen year old to come to grips with. He also came back quite independent. This new experience gave him this personal independence which has never left him. He came back and said as soon as I am independent I want to move out of home and be in charge of my own space. I like to be in charge of my decisions and if it went wrong then I will have to wear it, if it went right then I could be pleased because they were my decisions. He has been like that ever since and I have no doubt in my mind that it came out of that program. He took responsibility for cooking his own meals if I wasn’t home, for doing his washing. He didn’t expect anyone to look after him and put himself through university on a student allowance. He is very experiential and struggles with written stuff. He came back with all these pictures of light and sounds and his photographs were amazing.

The other one however! It wasn’t such a positive experience perhaps for (student B). She had a great time with her friends. The (activity) was a disaster and had an effect on her confidence that I didn’t really appreciate until she was going back for the year 11 trip. If I had stopped and thought about it I would have said that seeing it did impact on social things back here. She was not able to stay overnight with really close friends at times, if she wasn’t on top of things. She would ring me and ask me to come and get her. I don’t know what the cause and effect was there but it was something totally outside of the program and when she came back from that experience there was a change and that lasted for a number of years. When she came back after the second trip. People in charge of the program had put in place that position for her but she still found it difficult. She was enormously proud of herself that she was able to overcome that difficulty and at least stay one night but couldn’t manage the second night. In fact that was a very positive thing and she bounced along from there. I think if you asked her she would say that going back a second time gave her a chance to address the difficulties that the first experience had had.

That always bothers me I must say because you don’t know. If you ask teachers that she had gone on that first trip with, they don’t know she had those difficulties. She appeared a most confident individual and she wasn’t and that concerns me. You just wonder if there are other kids who struggle internally. She went through in year 9 in 2002 and year 11 2004.

MP
What would your sense be of (student B) memories and recollections of that time the first time?

KC
I think it would be very mixed. She had some really fun times with her friends and she had a birthday there but that was tinged with. For her it was a much more personal thing, a social thing. She didn’t talk much about the program itself, nearly as much as Ricky it. So for her it seemed to me more about personal relationships and personal learning. I mean her birthday was quite a big thing but it was tinged with either connection or not connection, with her father at that time. Either he didn’t contact her or contacted her at the wrong time at some point. So nothing to do with the trip.

MP
In terms of experiential learning then what do you think are the markers, the things that measure change? How does a student have a sense of outcomes or change?

KC
That question worries me a little bit. Because of the type of experiential type of thing they are trying to do with learning journeys at school because there aren’t markers. There’s a lot of experiencing but no sense of progressing that worries me a little, in the sense that you can experience something and you can sense something and you can build that into how you feel about something and you have a more and more detailed and in depth thought about an appreciation of a topic or concept and that’s not happening. You do a piece of work on a particular thing and you write up a project it’s not like you are expected to get more depth or more lateral thinking for the next task. There’s no building like in a sense an academic progression and I don’t know how you do that. I mean in content learning it’s easy to get more and more content to learn. How do you test more complex skills, how do you build that into a task? I find the kids at the end of year 9 have really good research skills but they don’t really do very much with the information they collect. They don’t seem to be able to write at any depth about the material that they have seen within our school program. I mean on (activity) in XXXX City they will do something about changing buildings or types of buildings and it’s like a picture mash. Different sorts of style, but what does that mean? They have gone out there and looked at things and recognized that they are different. That they represent different styles. But there’s nothing there about filling some background as to why that might be or relating it to anything that would give it any sort of depth. There’s not a lot of intellectual about that program and that concerns me a little too as how you get academic rigor into experiential learning.

MP
What are the sort of accountabilities that arise from say that program?

KC
I don’t know. I mean it seems to me that the reporting is mostly based on. I mean there are no exams. There’s a mark on the report and it comes down to the learning area leader writing a …more or less like the report of Darwinia. It’s quite lengthy and talks about kids social interactions and so on but not a great deal about the measure of the content of what they are learning.

MP
Is the Darwinia program measured?

KC
Do I think it is? Well at the time when I got my children’s report back I think it was actually a really wonderful thing when in the middle of the year I got a report back telling me a little about my child’s character and their abilities other than that they could pass academic tests. But in terms of intellectual development no probably not and I am thinking about the way the kids approach their projects and so on and I think they were allowed to get away with fairly sloppy project work. They should been able to develop much deeper pieces of work, given the time and where they were. That’s the down side of experiential learning and that’s that they do learn an enormous amount, but they don’t realize that they are. I was actually disappointed with the projects there because I thought that there was a chance to encourage the kids to combine the two things but it didn’t happen. It probably comes down to field trips too. They have a day out of school and don’t have to do anything.

Yet one of my strongest memories was sitting in Darwinia listening to (teacher 1) talking to a group of kids about (topic) in a quite complex way and the attention started to wane picking on a particular kid who she had some idea would have some sort of answer and away would go the conversation again and that will have an impact on the way they think about that. When that topic comes up again they will remember that they did that. Whereas if they had read it they wouldn’t have remembered.

MP
How important is the setting of that program?

KC
I think it’s really important. You do remember somebody standing there and talking to you about how things happened. You remember walking down the walkway with the animals. The link is there and I think it is quite important. You couldn’t cover that many topics in a classroom situation at school and get the same level of understanding.

MP
Given what you have said that students get out of it, the social dimension, the independence, the processing skills etc. You could put it in Bali or Wellington or Dubbo.

KC
No. I actually think that one of the strongest things in that program is where it is.

MP
Ok let's put in Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea?

KC
You probably could, what sort of place is it? I mean I think that Darwinia is a particularly clever choice in that there are enough things to keep the kids interested in terms of where they are personally at, at that stage. It’s a very diverse sort of place in terms of things that you see in terms of little back lanes that changes while you look at it. But it's outside their comfort zone and they put their faith in the program because the program is what looks after them and that just makes a difference to the way they approach a lot of things I think. I think Darwinia is a sensational place to have that type of program because it isn’t touristy yet it has this connection that the kids can relate to. It doesn’t have to be necessarily at Darwinia’s location, but it just happens to work really well.

MP
Thank you.

End of Interview – KC
Interview 25

Interview on 29/06/2007
Neville O’Connell (School D) Darwinia Campus

MP
Just a bit about the work that you did at Darwinia. What sort of education were you involved in delivering? What sort of learning occurred within your interest and operation?

NO
The program was based in Darwinia and a lot of the learning was about Darwinia, but for me, the most important thing was that the students learnt about themselves, how they developed, the challenges that they faced and how they handled those challenges, how they came up to solutions to problems, how they worked together with other people, how to overcome personal conflicts and how they coped being a long way from home was for them a very different environment within the Darwinia environment. However I saw Darwinia as secondary other than the setting of what I saw was the more important learning, take place. Also learning about their own background and coming to realize that their cultural background is one of very many that exist. That their life, which they perceive as being normal, is not normal. There are other ways of living that are equally valid, that are equally normal for people living those lives. So being able to reflect on their place in the world and what they can contribute and what they can also gain from others who come from a different background, a different place.

MP
So it seems to you that the setting was almost irrelevant in the specific sense of Darwinia?

NO
Almost. I mean, I wouldn’t have got the job I don’t think if it had been anywhere else, but for me Darwinia is important because Darwinia provided a number of challenges and it is good for them to know about. To feel comfortable operating in, to feel comfortable relating to people from that background. So that was important, but in terms of Darwinia a brought a lot of things that other places couldn’t have brought, but I for me the major learning was at that personal level for students.

MP
Just in that opening statement you have focused on a strongly social dimension in a sense. There’s not only finding out about themselves, but about themselves in a social setting?

NO
Yes that was important because although half the students they knew before from their campus the other half they didn’t know. They were actually with
them in a very different way than they had ever been before at school. A really important part of the program was that students directed the learning. That they took control of the learning. The students organized themselves. Initially under guidance, but the program quickly developed and the students knew what they had to do without being told, without being shy they were able to organize themselves finish themselves, direct themselves and learn together. Either in groups or separately and then share that knowledge with other people. That as a teacher, my role was very different to what it normally would have been in a school. Where again you still encourage students to learn stuff as well but there is a lot more input in this scenario. In this program the input came from the students themselves in response to the environment that they were in. Looking at all the things that they looked at in that program it was them organizing and managing themselves. In a way I think with true responsibility and accountability because if they made a mistake they then had to discover that for themselves, then had to find a solution to that for themselves. Once I got more comfortable in my role I got better at doing this my role was to find out when they made a mistake but to let them find out the mistake for themselves as well. For me that’s true responsibility. I am not looking over their shoulder as a safety net, although in the worst case scenario I am there. I can’t actually think of a time when that happened. To allow students to make mistakes and then have the time to work that out and also have the time to deal with those problems because in terms of my managing of the program for me, it was to make space for them to do all of those things.

MP
You mentioned before that Darwinia was important because it provided a scenario for students to meet challenges. What were the challenges that the students had to meet?

NO
There were a number of challenges. One was being far away from home and they weren’t just away from home... So they didn’t have a lot of support of that immediate access like a phone call home... They had the challenge of then getting themselves up and being responsible for that and then using the skills that they developed to be able to communicate and navigate with a map and asking questions around them to achieve the goal that the group had set... The challenge of trying things that they had never really thought of. To start opening themselves up to new experiences and trying not to dismiss them. Even small things...

MP
What do you think those activities enabled to students to do in a learning sense?

NO
To me there’s a common line underneath the whole program and it’s about students learning about themselves and growing confidence, but doing that
and also learning about this other place and feeling comfortable in that other place and to understand what that other place was about. Darwinia--------Memorial I think is a good example of that because in terms of getting their, the students organized all of that...there is the reflecting upon the world more generally and then perhaps reflecting upon how they could contribute to make the world a better place. One thing the program did was try and get the students to think back upon what they were doing and why they were doing it and how has it impacted upon them. They have a chance of doing that through the program as well as their major piece of work at the end of their program for their personal reflection as well.

MP
You mentioned the distance and isolation and the students not having the immediacy for contact with parents. How did that contribute to the learning environment?

NO
It made the students look within themselves and to their peers for answers to problems, for support. Teamwork is a very important aspect of the program for students to grow and respect each other. For students who didn’t get on or who were very different were able to get on and respect each other. So for me that isolation meant that students had no one else to look too really apart from themselves and to their peers. Of course, there were the activity teachers as well and to get support and help when needed, but primarily it was with each other and themselves.

MP
Do you think that the peer group in Darwinia was just a transplant from who they came over with, or was there a sense of that changing over time?

NO
Changing very much, because that peer group that they came with. I mean there were people in their activity groups that they didn’t get on with back in their own campus, there were people from the other campus that they didn’t know and there were of course, close friends that they came with as well. But that changed significantly for the majority of students during the course of the program. In terms of developing new friendships not only from the other campus but also from the campus they came with as well. There was a new understanding of people, but also their role within the peer group and what they can give to that peer group. So to me it was important that that peer group became quite inclusive and that also people respected differences between this and that peer group as well.

MP
Can you give me some examples as to how peer groups changed?

NO
For me it was that people who were quite different could work together, or for someone who, before they came to Darwinia, was on the outer back in School D and through the experience of being with the group in Darwinia and through
the experience of being able to contribute, but also through other students allowing them to contribute, became part of the inner.

MP
Most of these groups have a pretty defined structure and those structures would have students in certain leaderships or power. Do you have a sense that those leaderships or power changed in someway in Darwinia?

NO
Very strongly. You would get students who were quiet back in School D suddenly discovering their voice and discovering abilities and they were able to contribute. I remember one student with a Chinese background he was in a bit of trouble and had a bit of a reputation back in School D for being a troublemaker, but perhaps that’s too strong a word, but for not contributing, for being derisive of things and coming to Darwinia and having this amazing experience of (a) relishing learning about the background (b) also enjoying being able to share that with students and having the students enjoy the sharing of it by him. So there were students who back in School D may not have had that much to contribute but given the opportunity discovered things for themselves and shared with the group and the group appreciated it and through sharing those skills becoming part of the group. For me it is very important and I stress this from the start and try and encourage that everyone in the group that we are part of this group and it’s important that students supported each other. I think that how the program was structured the students could actually see it for themselves.

MP
How do you mean the way the program was structured?

NO
Students being responsible for the learning, being responsible for what happens in a course of a day, through being away from their normal support systems.

MP
In what sense are students accountable for their learning?

NO
A lot of the learning was that I didn’t have to teach. The students had resources that they made use of and found that information and then they needed to share that information. The students were accountable for the quality of that sharing because the other students relied upon them a certain bank of knowledge. Just as they had learnt from students who had done some other aspect of it. In terms of accountability as well. Leading the groups, navigating, finding the way, organizing the group and the students themselves were also responsible for that and they were accountable to the group, through achieving goals.

MP
So your sense of the change in social status revolved around need? If a student was able to meet some perceived or real group need they would be elevated in status?

NO
That did happen but just students were learning to respect the people in Darwinia in that environment and people in Darwinia were incredibly kind to our students so many times, but they would also apply that to people in the group as well. There is a case that some people really didn’t have as much to give as other people, but they were also still a part of the group and were an important part of the group.

One of the things that I believe that students were responsible for the group and it was their group, but if there was on the outer a bit, I might ask another student who is showing good leadership to try and find ways that this person could be incorporated more strongly into the group. For them to look out for this other person. So the students themselves were responsible for someone who was struggling a little bit…the challenge there was how do we not overuse those who were leaders and respect their desire to just be part of the group and contribute when there was a real need. Also within this group other people are developing skills.

MP
How do students demonstrate leadership?

NO
You would go to those who were showing some signs of leadership. Through contributions that they made and those contributions might have been answering questions, helping be leader for the day, navigation issues, there might be student who relate well and go out of their way to talk to people from another campus or people they don’t know very well. So it wasn’t just those who were leaders for the day, but students who actively support those leaders helping them with map work…offering suggestions for problems, students walking along and see a landmark that might recognize the group to know whether they are on the right track…

MP
Leaders for the day. How would you go about choosing a formal leader for the day?

NO
I hope I put a lot of thought and care and this is where I manipulate some things. I would always try and choose two or three leaders for the day. I would want my students to be leaders for the whole day but I would have two or three people for that day. I would try and mix gender and mix compass as well. So students would have at least two days opportunity at leading and on their second opportunity it would not be with someone from their first opportunity. In terms of other criteria that I took. I would look at what maybe the challenges for the day I would think about who would best benefit for maybe dealing with these challenges. I would also take into account of
looking at the two students that if one was a very quiet student I would tend not to put them with a student who was overly confident and might dominate and not give the quieter student opportunities.

MP
How would you define benefit? Who would benefit from the challenge of the day?

NO
For me it was important that students succeeded so I would try and set things up that say yesterday they had problems and today they would try and deal with those problems. So if I thought a particular day was going to be difficult, either in terms of getting to a site that was one of the harder places to get to, then I might not choose someone who I thought was weak in those areas. For the first time I would be conscious of choosing a leader who I thought would get the group there.

MP
Did you have personal yardstick that you used to gauge success? What was success to you?

NO
Success for me was that students enjoyed it. They were able to organize the group (some students did this better than others), that they were able to give instructions successfully, (in other words they were able get the students to hear what they wanted them to do) and to respond. That they were able to navigate the group to the site and hopefully, along the way if they were any issues, they were able to sort those out. It might not be that they solve it themselves but were able to opt for other people working out the problem as well.

MP
What would happen if the student failed at any or all of those? Did that happen often?

NO
No it was very rare for that to happen…It’s more that we have this problem (whether it’s partly to do with time or getting lost) and how do the students feel with sorting this out. In terms of how did they deal with that and what were they going to do? Sometimes it’s ok if we make a decision and cut our losses and then go wherever. Failure was rare from my memory of it. I think part of it was that success had a very broad definition as well. Success often depended upon the ability of the students as well and this is because if there was some challenges, some issues which once you had…under were easy to deal with and it wasn’t a problem at all. Therefore you would try other ways of challenging that student. It depends on the student for some it may be small thing but for others it would be a large thing. For me it was very important for me to be aware of the individual student as well. To take each student on their own merits.
MP
So do you think gave the students a sense of progress? What were the markers along the journey that told them that they were achieving changing and growing?

NO
Often it was very small things, it was being able to order a meal, ask for directions. For the students I think a lot of it was about in succeeding in some way and by that I mean things were not always smooth sailing but being able to deal with any problems or issues that came up along the way. Particularly, when they were leading and having a particular leadership role gave a lot of scope for students to be able to succeed and there lots of roles and responsibilities that students shared that they could contribute to.

MP
Did you define those tasks or did students define them?

NO
Initially, I defined them. So in terms of the program and particularly that tour day was a great model that I would like to see the students talk about during the course of the day. Like what I am doing I would like to see you do…what am I looking at here, what do we look for because I am going to do it for you today, but I also get the students to help as well…I would be there to provide the answers and I will be posing questions…In terms of what they needed to do generally was find the site, navigate the group, convey instructions to the group…making sure that the group stayed together and that people were included in what was going on.

MP
Why did you think that was important?

NO
I expected the leaders to do. They had a role to do and if there were problems ask for help, but also being included – that no one was left behind. No one was on the outer. The leaders needed to show a pastoral care for the group as well as the management care of the group. So that was important for me and it wasn’t just about managing. We were more than a work unit that people were supported and not alienated.

MP
Is that something that you set out deliberately to create?

NO
That was the value that I was trying to impart. The first time when we met and I gave my introduction to the students and I would stress strongly that we were in this group together and that each person had a responsibility to the group. There are sixteen students and me so there are seventeen in this group and I contribute 1/17th to the group. That although I am a teacher, in this, we are learning together and I hope that students can teach me. So as
much as possible I tried to create the expectation that in this group there was equality. One of the things that I didn’t push it at the time in Darwinia and I wish I had now. The whole thing about being called ‘Mr. O’Connell’. Because we were in this together I would have liked to been called ‘Neville’, to get away the teacher/student situation at school. I really did feel that it was their group as well as it was my group.

Once the students could see that I wasn’t going to step in and solve their problems for them. I had this ploy when students asked me a question I would give a totally nonsensical answer. They thought it was a bit of a joke but they very quickly learnt that if there is a problem, don’t ask me.

MP
So the markers for the journey were small things but as they gained confidence in ordering or managing the group, they would be aware that they had moved on from the first day.

NO
Yes. I think that home stay was a pretty major marker for the students and generally speaking, they didn’t have the support that the campus had.

MP
You spoke about reflection. What was the role of reflection in that kind of learning?

NO
I think what reflection did is that it deepened the learning, gave them an understanding of what was going on in their lives, gave them an appreciation of what they actually were doing in undertaking the various tasks and experiences they were going through and it gave them a chance to be able to see that they were growing. To not have reflection I think would have taken away some of the impact of the experiences that they went through. They needed to be able to reflect upon and reflect on what they were doing and what they had achieved at different times.

MP
How does it do that?

NO
Through talking about what they were doing, through talking about what they achieved, it helped them to appreciate what was happening in their live and so through that process I think they had a better understanding of it and with a better understanding of it they were able to apply that to other situations in their lives more fully than the experience actually was integrate it into who they are as people.
On that notion of reflection then. What do you think the students found most membrable about the program?

NO
A variety of things because each student is different but there are some common threads that I think run through it for people. The home stay experience was the major one for students. Another that was quite strong for students and came through to me was the connections they formed with other people. To me that was very important because that was something that I had stressed at the start. Particularly in the activity group just reading their personal reflections I felt was good. The other thing too that was memorable for the students was the success that they had during the time and the confidence that that gave them and the deeper understanding of who they are as a person that goes with that...

MP
Do you think that they found the physical setting particularly memorable?

NO
Yes. As I was saying earlier to what was important to the students along within themselves, it was within the setting of Darwinia and that was underpinned a lot about what was going on with the students. Because of the challenges that they faced or the issues they faced...They also came to an understanding of Darwinia itself and it broke down a lot of stereotypes of Darwinia,

Breaking down old ideas and replacing them with something much richer and deeper as well...

MP
So the memories that they are going to bring back with them are in a sense shaped by the setting both within the campus and beyond and also shaped by some of these experiences such as home stay. Do you feel that some of those things will stick? I mean a student ten years on and you say Darwinia, what do you think the first thing that would come into their head?

NO
To find their way around...they also related to the outside of school structure.

MP
Well the last question that I want to put to you is that if you had the magic want and you could change things. What would you change to improve the learning?

NO
I would change the rule about addressing the teachers as 'Mr. or Miss'. I think it could have been more helpful not to have had that wall. Like situations at night or whatever in the dormitories but I don't think that that would have blurred the distinctions in one sense. It’s like the trainees when they needed
to be authoritative they learnt how to do that. I would have found it helpful, right from the start, if they had not being equal, but I think in the structure of the program and the emphasis on student responsibility and that’s as much their program as it is mine, I think that would have helped acceptance of that notion, or encouraged the reality of it earlier.

MP
So it had a symbolic importance.

NO
Actually a year and a half later, I can’t think of anything important that I would change.

MP
Longer, fewer students?

NO
Ok. I don’t know if I would have gone for longer. I think the program had enough in it to keep them occupied and although students may have said that they would have liked some more downtime I actually if you gave them more downtime they would have been twiddling their thumbs and that might have taken them away from their experience.

In terms of numbers. We had activity groups getting up to like seventeen/twenty and fewer than that I think would have been more engaging for the students and more challenging. When we had thirteen, fourteen fifteen (a) it gave more leadership opportunities. If you have larger numbers you have to be creative to try and come up with things to make sure that students have those opportunities to get what they could out of the program. With a smaller group it meant that people could get to know each other better and just to enhance that sense of responsibility and that shared participation. With smaller numbers too you could probably get students to participate more in the building as well. They could also perhaps have that care for the home where they were living. There was the sense that this is more than just a dormitory. Also, all the time you are having conversations with students, but formally we only had the one opportunity where we really made efforts to meet with everyone and track wherever was going. It may not be one to one, but maybe a group meeting where we could just talk about how we are traveling as a group. I think it might be good to have that built into the program as well so the group could also reflect as a whole. This is one thing I found hard…I struggled with this where I think it’s useful for the students to get the skill where you could talk about how you went and others may have gone as a group but to do it in such a way where you are not attacking people. Do it in a way which is respectful and mindful of sensitivities…Someone who was not pulling their weight and talk about these issues but in a way that we have a blame game. The blame game is quite prevalent and one of the things that I tried to do within my group was to not follow that paradigm. Often I found it hard to navigate that path as well. But I thought the program itself was amazing and the opportunities it gave the students to develop and become more caring, more respectful to people, I
thought it was just phenomenal. I was personally inspired by a number of my students throughout my three years in Darwinia. I would look at those students and think that there’s no way I was like them at that age. For some students they made major steps and others not as much, but for them, it was important steps. I can think of one student (only in all of that time I was there) that comes to mind that at the end of the program I thought why did you come? Even if it wasn't apparent at the time seeds were planted and things began to happen in people during that time that would reverberate all through their life.

End of Interview – NO
Interview 26

Interview on 26/06/2007
Wynona Irving (School D) Darwinia Campus

MP
We had just starting touching on the before and after and you said that we never anticipated what would happen. Would you follow that thought?

WI
I think that we were given out homework by going to the specialist that you recommended, the expatriate stuff. We learnt a lot about the cycle of what the kids were going to go through and we kept refining as we kept going. We had more examples under our belt, we knew how to prepare the kids and the staff better for the experience that way ahead. However I don’t thing that we ever got on top of the repatriate type issue. Of the students we probably managed them better, simply because they had a five week exposure and maybe we were in control more but I don’t think we did very well with the staff and their needs. People that come to mind are probably (teacher 1, teacher 2) struggled terribly when she came back and having discussions with her mother, it didn’t matter how much the parents tried to get her settled she just wasn’t settling. So in some ways you could almost predict that she didn’t have closure until she repeated the whole program a few years down the track as a trainee. Some passion had been lit in that young girl and in many ways she reminded me of (teacher 3) who had that same sort of passion in the eyes. The eyes were just alight as though some door had been open to those people.

MP
What is it that the participants got out of Darwinia?

WI
For some of them I think they were probably exposed to a whole set of cultural things that they hadn’t been exposed to and lived quite insular lives, if you looked at the background that some of those kids come from. They knew one way of operating and that was family operated and all of a sudden they learnt how to operate within a bigger group (but still with boundaries), and then in a group with another family with their home stay experience. That opened up their eyes as to how different groups of people can operate together and independently, to get an outcome. Whether it’s to live as a family, whether it’s to travel, whether its to work. Certainly they were exposed to that.

Some of the kids who didn’t have siblings, they were exposed to a whole lot there, both good and bad. Some of them didn’t cope with the fact that they had to share, didn’t cope with the fact that now they might be responsible for their actions, whereas at home they could get away with.
If I reflect on my two children and particularly for (student 1) who struggled with learning in a traditional environment and taking responsibility for his learning. I think the Darwinia experience was the best thing that happened to him. Because he was pushed beyond where anyone had pushed him before, but he was also held accountable to a greater level than probably I did as his mother. There for kid like (student 1) they need a tough hand.

MP
What was he pushed to do?

WI
At home if he couldn’t complete a task the natural thing would be for (student 2) or I was to pull him out of the pit and help to finish. It was the writing in the case of Darwinia, it was the journal and if it was here we would help him finish off whereas there he had to do it for himself. I think there’s a sense of the whole community if you don’t get your task completed or if you are not in the shower when you are told to be. The sense of urgency I think was much more in the community setting.

MP
So there was a strong social structure there that he was in that he couldn’t hide.

WI
Yes he couldn’t hide, but here, because of the nature of my work, there weren’t immediate consequences. I mean by the time you got home he’d be asleep and the next morning the last thing you are going to do is scream when you are trying to get them in the car to go to school. There were a lot more consequences and immediate consequences.

MP
With your own children, do you sense that that was across the board for all of the participants in Darwinia?

WI
I would have said that it was the same for all because the way I would have set a program with both of us being a couple of times with each group that went through, the rules were the same. I don’t think you changed your rules but you might have modified them because it was a better way for the whole group. But essentially, kids knew where they stood. Your box is so big and you have this much space that you can move within it, but the moment that you start crossing over the line, this is the way that I would deal with it. Sometimes I thought that you were being harsh but I can understand that it needed to be like that for the safety of the whole group and for the group to live harmoniously within a very different cultural setting to ours.

MP
So for you a major structure of the learning there was a sense of responsibility and consequence.
Yes and I think it’s a lot about I like to see young navigate the unknown safely.

So Darwinia was about navigating the unknowns?

Yes I would have said that for lots of reasons. No matter how much you prepared them, by showing a video or reading a text or whatever, there would be still an unknown.

How were the students prepared to go?

Theirs all the theoretical stuff that you do back here, whether it was done by the classroom teachers, whether it was done by the language department. Everybody who was onboard did their little bit in their own little way. It could be the history teachers for example, doing a unit. So there was snippets of unofficial help and then there was the official stuff to get kids through a regimented program of preparing them for the experience. That was everything from the document handbooks that the staff put together to the (School D)......weekend and all of those debriefings that we had before.

How important do you think was that preparation?

I think when the kids went through it they probably didn’t see it as important as we might have imagined it but then we had to be in a position of age and experience.

I am just wondering what it would have been like for those students if they hadn’t had the (School D) and handbooks.

I don’t have real concrete evidence other than when I compare the comments made by some of the students that I am interviewing in my own thesis who have done other experiential programs in other settings and they talk about things that didn’t go well and how much better they would have been if they had been prepared by some sort of process before they went. They had the ability to debrief as they were going on a program throughout on a monthly or weekly basis. Those sort of structures seem to be absent in many programs and in many ways, when I was listening to the participants reflecting on their own schools. I thought well how could staff not know that this was going to be a problem?
What about the learning model in Darwinia? What do you think that students learned?

WI
I think that the greatest thing about it was their ownership of the learning. If they were given a broad structure, or an umbrella structure for handling this for destinations and so on, but the rest of it they had to do it themselves. They had to determine everything, from finding out the historical information about what they were doing and then actually getting themselves there and back. They had to negotiate what was appropriate for the group and if they got it wrong well then they all took the consequences on board….Whatever problems came along it had to be an immediate response because no one is going to pull us out of this.

MP
So learning by mistake then, or learning through errors and making decisions and risking consequences. You see this as important?

WI
Absolutely. It’s a lifelong skill if we are looking for competencies in young people, or skills they are going to need in the future it would have to be a generic skill. So take the risk and if it doesn’t work out quite right well, you have a coping mechanism that says I can get it back on track. Because they have already put themselves in that situation where they were not in control so they were able to get it back on track.

MP
How was success do you think in that program?

WI
I think we all had to define it for ourselves.

I think I learnt more from those young kids that day by pushing myself and they could see I was pushing myself further than what was possible and those kids taught me a lot that day. I don’t need to be the one in control all the time. I think amongst themselves they could see what strengths they had and they said what do you think, how would you do it?

MP
Do you think the students came over with control being handed to them, or power being handed to them?

WI
I don’t think they were ready for it. Learning here in XXXX City it just doesn’t work like that. As teachers we didn’t take risks. It was all about controlling our environment. I know it might sound like generalizing, but most of it is getting the kids through to that next period. Get this lot off to the next class – a survival almost.
MP
So how was it different in Darwinia? Wasn't it survival there?

WI
We learnt not to fear not having control because it doesn't really matter. As long as we were safe as a group and that we weren't taking risks with our lives. We could take risks and actually learn to enjoy it.

MP
What was your experience with the large numbers of teacher from School D who accompanied the groups, who weren't necessarily part of the program? Did they all struggle with the same thing?

WI
I couple that I recall. (Teacher 3 and 4) particularly, stand out with struggling with a whole lot of that.

MP
What with being in control?

VM
Not being in control. Their whole careers had been structured and their whole lives had been structured in a way where they were always in control and they appeared to the rest of the world as being in control, but the reality was that they were only in control within four walls between the ringing of one bell and the next. I don't know how to describe it but when they took away the structures there was something wrong. They felt that they should know what was happening, they needed to know what was happening because otherwise they felt that they weren't in control of where it was all going. Somebody else was in the driver's seat and that didn't feel natural. I know both of those staff struggled until the very end. Yet they are the biggest advocate for the program and as you know (Teacher 4) went on to do another (teaching) experience. Which then put everybody else out of their comfort zone because they had already pigeon holed (teacher 4) as one type of maths teacher/ systems head of house. I remember having them over as a family and he was reflecting as to how upset some of this colleagues were that he was going to do this. Yet this is what he loved because this program gave him a chance to step out of the box.

MP
So what was the thing that triggered the learning for him?

WI
It was a whole lot of things for him because his teaching buddy was not a good match (in fact I probably think one of the worst matches that I have ever put together). We didn't envisage that that combination was never going to work because she was a very free spirit and he was a control freak and never the two should meet. What he valued was a whole lot of other people, both
younger and older than him on the ground who had such understanding of the kids that were in their command in such a short space of time and he said how could you not respect that? It was only five weeks but as professionals with different levels of experience. They could get to know the kids as well as he did over a much longer period of time that he was exposed to them.

MP
So compared with the relationship that a teacher in a classroom would have with their charges and the sort of relationships that existed in Darwinia. What’s the difference?

WI
Look again, some teachers because it’s the nature of who they are will put a lot more into getting to understand the human being first – all parts that what makes them an individual, before they worry about the content and getting it up on the board and all that stuff that happens in a classroom.

MP
Was that relationship, the fact that it was different in that it was focused more on knowing the person rather than the finalities, was that an important part of the learning do you think?

WI
From both sides I would have thought. For the kids to see your mentors, teachers as a human face, not just someone who delivers instructions all the time. That they too had normal feelings and emotions just like you have only that they are in a much older body. To be able to go from adult to child and blur that boundary is terrific.

MP
Did they sometime undermine their authority?

WI
I didn’t see it, but the kids that are likely to test you are going to test you wherever you are, in Darwinia. The real hard cases that just push because they are wired that way, will take you on as they test their mates. But by and large the majority of them could see that you were still in control.

MP
So would you characterize that relationship as being a trust relationship?

WI
Yes it was. I trusted them to do the right thing for the sake of the group and they trusted me that I wasn’t going to fall apart, or expose them and be left in the danger zone.

MP
How important was the setting do you think with the learning that occurred?

WI
It provided I guess the starting block that was the same for everybody. None of us had really been exposed to that sort of setting. I don’t know that the same outcomes could have been achieved in the traditional setting back here. We had already made up our minds about the setting back here. When we went to Darwinia we went to something that was brand new for all of us... Some sprinted faster than others, but essentially we took control by saying ok we’ll all start on this line now.

MP
Just speculate for a moment, if you can, with your experience, what might have been missing if a more traditional remote campus setting was chosen?

WI
I think that most of us probably had already predetermined and made so many assumptions about the setting. Thinking because we had an element of knowledge. The fact was that we didn’t have any knowledge of this, even from group to group. It was not in their zone of experience that they could automatically say ok…The setting was very unique. I think that a lot of that that actually takes your breath away is in the setting. You were left with the wow factor with a lot of things.

MP
So how did the wow work? Did it focus attention?

WI
It gathers your attention into one thing at that particular moment, but when you are given also the opportunity to reflect and you go away and then you come home and actually tell the story to the people back home to your partners, or writing it in your diary or capturing it with photographs. You get that opportunity to look back on it and say look I saw this physically, on the surface, but underneath there are all these other layers of experience happening and kid and adults will decipher it which way depending on what they need at time…but it’s when you start to unlock a whole lot of things and reflect. I think more than anything I have ever done that unlocked my imagination.

MP
So imagination is important?

WI
Imagining themselves in a situation and would I do this again. Would I come back here with my parents, what would I tell people about? However, there were students who compartmentalized the whole experience. It’s a point in time and then you lock it away and you park it. Like being in Darwinia has been. For others they have to unpack it at so many different levels
You mentioned reflections and writing in journals and the other things that they used to look back on it. What do you think the students found most memorable about Darwinia and the setting?

WI
I think reading some of those stories that they were writing back home, yes, they were fascinated by some of those physical structures, but by and large they do talk about those relationships. It’s their relationships that they had with each other, within the bigger campus setting that they had with the community that they were engaged with. Why? It’s about the set of relationships that they have outside their normal experience. That people could be so friendly and so welcoming when you are a stranger. Is that the way that you behave when you meet strangers? If you see someone lost in the street, do you go and say can I help?

MP
So have you ever had a sense of what they had was the most enduring memories of Darwinia?

WI
Both of them would say their home stay was the highlight. I think (student 1) in particular, was flying right out of his comfort zone...he had to pull a whole lot of survival techniques from within him so he could get through this. (student 2) would probably have survived no matter what because of the nature of who he is and because he’s a student and a particular role in our own family. For (student 1) it was quite challenging and one of the most rewarding things that he did.

MP
Was there anything else particularly challenging for him do you think? Was it isolation or being away from School D?

WI
Not that I can recall him saying…

MP
Is there a sense of your own boys or other students who have come back reflected on their Darwinia experience? Like an important memory that they have carried with them, or is it just something and they have finished and that’s it?

WI
From my own (experience) it hasn’t finished because they will put the DVD on probably at least once a year and his mates will gather around and they will remember and there will always be somebody new within that group who hasn’t had that experience so they will say I want to show you this and that gives the old guard an opportunity to reminisce. Now there would be no real reason to be watching the DVD or photographs if the experience wasn’t important to them and trying to have him included in what they experienced. They still have their photographs as screen savers on the computer. Every
now and again things will come up like little bits and pieces that they bought like a small pen in their bedrooms and they have set their own bedrooms up.

**MP**
You have been involved in many students. Do you think their experience often mirrored (student 1 and student 2)?

**WI**
Some. A majority of kids might have had some powerful experiences. You get the minority who dismiss it and saw it as a holiday and didn’t get anything else more out of it. Looking at (student 1) and his learning difficulties and the different layers that he could get out of it. I would like to say as an educator, the majority of kids would go an ex number of layers under the surface in time and will come back to the experience every now and again. And we have often used it when something was confronting. Like saying remember when and then you would have some example that they did in Darwinia and you would be able to bring it back to their level and say well, you coped with that. Why can’t we use the strategies that you had then to help with the problems we have today?

**MP**
Are you aware …of evidence of change resulting from their time in Darwinia?

**WI**
I think that they can take on just about anything and conquer it. So more in a sense of their confidence. You don’t have to have mum their all the time. There’s certainly confidence and independence. I think I had trouble more with letting go than I though I would…There was a whole lot of stuff that I didn’t anticipate when (student 1) went through. Even though I had held the hand of so many parents go through. I hadn’t dissected it far enough for what it meant for my own kids who had been on the rim of all these stories for so many years and when their turn came I wasn’t ready for their reaction and that I had to let them go.

**MP**
Do you think that the peer groups changed in Darwinia?

**WI**
They blurred the boundaries of who were their most closest friends that they chosen with and then they got to realize that I can extend my social group, my friends don’t have to be the ones I have all my life, there are other people that I quite like. There’s nothing to be feared instead there is a richness to come out of that.

**MP**
What were the things that you feel may have influenced the students who emerged as leaders in Darwinia?

**WI**
Some of them probably back here weren’t given the opportunity or didn’t give themselves enough credit for being able to do it. Darwinia gave them the opportunity to put their name on the map that had never happened before and in many ways we used this as a briefing by saying this is your opportunity to invent yourself in another place and people aren’t going to judge you. So don’t give them an opportunity to judge.

MP
How frequent was that?

WI
I think every group brought kids forward. For example, you can recall kids who were little rat bags here and initially, the message was for them to say you are one step from being kicked out of the school and this is the one chance for you to prove yourself go and do it, because if you fail you can only blame yourself. But I think as the program continued and we could see the benefits that were happening, the message to the deliverer was to everybody to do a ‘Kath & Kim’ “look at me, look at me”! If you think you can then go and do it!

MP
Did many do that?

WI
Well a number of kids write in their reflections certain things that they had heard of the briefing and then just gone to Darwinia and then just resonated at some time with something that you were leading them through. I thought well it must have been hitting a chord with quite a few of them. There was enough of them that were saying get up and have a go and it doesn’t matter about your lack of ability have a go at something. You don’t want to come back and say I could’ve, would’ve, should’ve. You don’t want to have regrets when you come back.

MP
So what made a leader in Darwinia, where they didn’t exist here?

WI
The opportunities were there in so many different ways.

MP
But I mean you could have given them an opportunity in Wangaratta or somewhere. What was different in Darwinia do you think?

WI
Going back to the uniqueness of the setting. I can’t imagine that we would get the same outcome at Wangaratta. We’ve got too many ‘knowns’ in that sort of setting. There were a whole lot of unknowns in Darwinia and they just took the risks. At the end of the day some of them will take risks here and emerge as leaders, then the rest of the group just sit back and let them do it time after time. Whereas also having much smaller groups in Darwinia was very
successful because you couldn’t run, you couldn’t hide, or sit in the back block for too long because there were so many functions to perform in the small unit somebody had to take them on board and at some point it was going to be you.

MP
What sort of functions?

WI
Whether it was navigating, whether it was managing.

MP
So meeting the needs of the group.

WI
Yes, how are we going to manage? We all have to wash and manage our time and water supply in the showers, or get the washing done. How do we work this for everybody? We have X amount of food and if all the boys who have huge appetites sit at one table, then there won’t be enough to go around. How do we operate smarter to get the best out of what we have got? We don’t all fit onto a bus in one go, what are we going to do?

MP
So a lot of the outcomes in Darwinia in a sense were immediate. If the students didn’t perform they would not succeed in the particular task at hand. Looking back on it now, long after the experience, what sense of achievement would a student have?

WI
I would have to say the achievement of taking on the unknown, I have to trust my own judgment and I will be held accountable for my judgment. The success and failure of the group depends on my judgment. You can’t shirk responsibility for something the way the Darwinia program was set up. The spotlight is on you and the group relies on you and common sense has to kick in. When they are teenagers, often they can avoid that common sense responsibility – it’s all about me and my needs as opposed to well, my needs may cut somebody else short. I am sure also, the opportunity to run back to your family every night, must reinforce a lot of those learning skills. Because they get it right one day and then the next they slip back into old behaviour. Here, other than expulsion there’s no sense of immediacy in anything they do, and even then expulsion would take take two weeks by the time the parents are informed and so on. Whereas here it’s immediate if you are stuck at a train station you have to move on. It has to be dealt with right there and then.

MP
If you were comparing teaching loads. Like here I am trying to teach them about Darwinia, or I am doing it in the streets in a similar kind of content. Do you think that there’s any difference of the content that’s obtained?

WI
Depending on your own learning style. Some of them are going to be able to take it on board no matter – they can deliver it write it up and copy it all down, but learning by doing (in my own teaching experience) gave them greater recall, gave them a greater sense of meaning to their learning and they are more likely to recall that and use it and reflect on it.

MP
What would you change about that particular experiential learning program?

WI
It’s really the outcome at the other end that I would change. I don’t think when they start to come back to XXXX City and we have given them this magnificent experience and then we expect them to go back into their little boxes and perform like monkeys in a cage, almost. I don’t think we have the expertise to know how to integrate that learning and bring it back into the classroom setting. Some staff were trying. The English department were trying saying how could we do it, and some of the principles of PLE were trying to be taken on board by maths and science teachers, but I don’t think we have that right. Hence, the frustration of a lot of kids and why, for a lot of reasons, they were trying to hang on to the experience.

MP
So the class way might get rid of the experience altogether.

WI
No because I think the benefits to them and those life saving skills are much longer term than the just one off experience. We can’t teach those global competencies as well in a classroom setting. It’s too regimented. Even with two teachers in a classroom. In the learning approach they are starting to make inroads but they are not there yet.

End of Interview - WI
Interview 27

Interview on 15/06/2007
Vanessa Lowe (School D) Darwinia Campus

MP
To start off with I would like us to have a discussion about what you think learning is. What are the elements of learning? What happens in learning?

VL
Learning is to me a process of having new things new ideas new concepts that is something that is unknown and finding and making sense of it in some way. I guess when you see something out here that is unknown initially and you don’t understand, then you go through a process of ok what does it mean, what are the implications, how do I slot this in my understanding of the world. So learning of all types, whether its language or just general, about relationships.

MP
So you encounter something that you haven’t encountered before and you try and make sense of it.

VL
Yes. For example, in the learning situation you find something that isn’t in your (knowledge base), a new structure and you say I have recognized that before and you go about and say how can I use it? You go through a process of working it out and you can be divided during the process in different ways, or you can… And that’s a very independent process and that a good example of learning, but there’s also learning that occurs in the classroom where there are different subject matter items that are presented and the students are going through a more divided process but still learning. However, I think that students will be remembered long term will be different depending on which context that is.

MP
If you try to think of learning as a kind of model trying to put it into a structure. What are the components that are important?

VL
For self learning (any kind of learning), I am not quite sure if it’s practical or theory but I think there is a thought process. So there is process of reflection to go on thinking about an issue. So I guess that would go into the cognitive side of learning. It certainly has to be that element identification reflection or the issue of the problem, its something to learn about.

MP
Encountering the gap and what’s missing that you don’t know.

VL
Yes. I guess you are thinking there’s a gap in my knowledge but is ...........in the world. I think it’s the same thing we are looking at it from the inside outside sort of thing. Then there is the thought process, the reflection process. I think that in that process for me, I would talk about it with people just informally. So you get peoples’ opinions and you talk and through that you form your own ideas. So for me I would go through a process of thinking about it but I would also get other peoples input, more of a social interaction and then from that another process of reflection based on the new input, the new ideas that I have got.

MP
Do you learn something without reflecting on it?

VL
No. I think unless you can reflect on it you are simply memorizing and I think that learning of the mind is something different. For me, I have gone through school, I have done a lot of motivation based work and I was able go incredibly high in my VCE results, but if there was anything that I memorized in that I really cannot remember those details. I think the process of memorization is temporary and none has meaning in my life now because I haven’t retained it. But the actual learning that I have through my life I have actually taken in. It’s relevant in that it connects in some way and I retain that.

MP
Could I paraphrase that in someway and say that what you call learning in someway involves change and memorization doesn’t change you?

VL
Definitely and that’s probably the reason why it comes in and goes straight out again. And when you learn its either a change that you put into it or just the filling in of the gap because that’s the way that you see the world and your vision has changed. Whereas through memorization it doesn’t involve any kind of gap filling.

MP
I am interested in your idea of memorization. Let’s say today I need to know a telephone number and I write it down and I remember it and then a couple of days later I can’t remember it. Does that mean that I learned it and then I unlearned it?

VL
It’s the definition in context because it’s a broad term I think in English and the way that we use it in different context. I mean we could use that broadly and say yes I learnt it for a test, for example, but in my mind that would be a different use of the word and a more social use as opposed to using it in a specific educational context.

MP
As you mentioned it I do want to move into a specific educational context. What sort of learning (and you can define the word however you deem
appropriate) occurs in that secondary classroom? Pick a school, any school that is recognizable as a school. What sort of learning occurs there in that school classroom setting?

VL
I think that there is a whole bunch of different things that are happening. There’s a lot of social learning that’s happening. People finding their place in the world, learning from each other through interactions with each other. Learning in the playground, they are learning how to get respect from their peers, learning how to get what they want, learning how to resolve conflicts. If you think about the students maybe learning in a home … environment that don’t have that socialization I would be very hesitant to recommend it because I think that social learning is huge. There is obviously a lot of wording in areas where you are learning about how to pass a test, how to write this assignment, how to prepare this so that they can pass the particular subject and get into the next year and there is certainly learning that is going on and how to structure an essay, that we do in high school, but they are often guided I think, by having to move on to the next level. I also think there is course learning that happens through life to, but I think there’s a lot of it that simply is not retained. Going back to my high school, the things I really retained and remembered were things that were of interest to me, because I felt had relevance and made me think deeply by going through a process of reflection.

MP
It’s interesting in that you feel that in your experience learning only occurred when there was a connection.

VL
Yes I really do, although at the time I would never have made that decision, because at the time I felt that if I was able to retain it for the test I had learnt something and maybe it’s just a decision of degrees, completely different learning processes, I don’t know. I certainly look back now and feel that a lot of my high school years were wasted by being filled with meaningless facts that enabled me to pass tests. Whereas actually, I could have done a lot more if I had done less of that and more of the things that were really interesting to me. I think with hindsight I put a lot of value on those final results and that probably meant that I didn’t as much social activities as I should have, because through that there are a lot of experiences that come through.

MP
Let’s focus it down even further. The lesson, the classroom, it could be any subject and the learning that goes on in that lesson. What are the essential processes that occur in that classroom at that moment?

VL
I think there is the idea of a source of information. So you are presenting a language. So my mind if I was teaching I would have a target what I would want students to be able to acquire.
MP
So that’s the objective of the learning transaction.

VL
Yes. So for example in a …classroom you would want students at a beginning level to be learning acquiring ………… and you would need to first make sure that the students have an idea of that concept conceptually….but it’s all based on conceptually the way we would use it as something that is general or something that is discrete. So for example, for that lesson, it would be first conferring and understanding the general concept probably by presenting either physical examples or pictures and then providing example sentences and what interactions that they would model and have the student. For example, you would get the idea of some water an apple a glass of water and go through and question what did you have for dinner last night? What did you eat this week, what do you think of the picture.

MP
This is a model of teaching that you have given me as in these are the things I would do and this is how I would present. I am talking about the learner. So a learner comes into the classroom what are their processes? There’s some reason or motivation when the student walks into the classroom.

VL
Students go into a classroom because it’s compulsory. I think the teacher has a goal where they want the students to get to, but students just want to get to the end of the class. I don’t think that most learners (unless they are self directed or driven) have any idea of where they want to get to.

MP
So we assume that learning occurs. They learn something, so what is that process for them?

VL
In a classroom students come into the class and if we are talking about an objective, they maybe able to understand through the presentation, though the teacher and it’s done well the student will have an idea of the end point and probably for the student that would be some sort of performance, in terms of that could be some sort of submission. I guess a piece of material that they are to present or it would be an oral presentation, a discussion, or there is some sort of thing that would be for the student. That would be their focal point and then they go through the procedure that gets them to it.

MP
What are the things that need to be there in that procedure?

VL
There needs to be a point where students make decisions themselves on maybe the relevance of one sort of information, make decisions for actions or
reasoning. I think they need to take something that’s broad and then they need to focus and they need to go through a process of working it out and through working it out there is analysis of what are you thinking, whether that’s what we choose. Sometimes that can be, ok this is what the teacher wants to hear and other times I think it can be that I find this very interesting and I think relevant. So learning is a process of organizing inside their minds a thought process and that leads to designing relevant information, choosing what things are and what things are important. I guess that to me, is part of the reflection process. Not necessarily always a process in your mind or a ........reflecting on your knowledge but drawing through and maybe talking with their class mates and through the interactions there is a thought process that accompanies it and I think there is a rehearsal stage as well. There is a point where students will, whether it’s in their mind or on paper, practice bits of knowledge, of ways to phrase that verbally or just in images inside their head and that is a preparation for their performance. I know not every student will draft but a lot of students will draft in their head an idea of what comes out as an idea, as well.

MP
As a rehearsal a performance and then there’s the learner as well as part of that model. Are there any other elements of the model that needs to be present for learning to occur?

VL
I think there needs to be some sort of use of the other people in the environment. Like people around them, or in a classroom I think that’s an element that has to be present. I don’t know how to put it in the broad picture, but I do think there should be a way of making the new information relevant. Whether that’s through props, through video, through people or resources. So some sort of something that gives significance. I think that’s vital to make it from memorization into something that gives students a frame of reference. Something that they can relate it to but they can also join it into their own understanding. There’s something that maybe physically ties a student to a concept.

MP
I would like to move from the classroom now to experiential learning. What do you understand by the term?

VL
Experiential learning is learning by doing. I think we often use that name in specific programs that are offered separate from the classroom. I don’t always think that’s the case. Maybe a science classroom is a good example. Experiential learning in terms of experiments, although often it isn’t as free and independent as it would be if it was out of the classroom. I think the whole idea of experiential learning is about (the process is similar to a classroom I guess) instead of being in a classroom presenting the props, resources externally that maybe words pictures or something else and you can actually encounter them. That you can touch them and smell them and that gives a huge frame of reference. That would give the students a much
greater ability to be able to lock yourself into the picture. To be able to become a part of the world that you are learning about as opposed to just a feeling like you are outside learning about something that’s far away. So there’s a degree of distance.

MP
So experiential learning is close up where you encounter things as opposed to being distant. By distant you refer to what sort of learning?

VL
By distance I am referring to that conventional type of learning which is factual. The learning that happens in the traditional classroom. Where there’s no context, where it’s factual. Nothing that would encourage learners to take it into themselves and actually go through the reflection and working it out themselves process. As opposed to where I think people are forced to live the experience and actually reflect on and think about the issues of what.

MP
You talk about encountering things.

VL
I think there’s a lot of physical things you are involved with as well. You actually go through physical actions and your body is involved as well.

MP
What are the other essential elements for you then in experiential learning?

VL
There’s a physical interaction, there’s a mental interaction and I think that there has to be a social interaction. Where there’s a process that you go through where you talk about an action, to actually verbalize the new environment, or the new situation, or the new experience that you have gone through and I think maybe there are reflection process involved as a verbal process. You talk to be able to actually get everything out of the experience that you have gone through. In a science classroom you would talk about why you have done this and what you think they show. Whereas in an environment like Darwinia for instance it will show how we conducted these interviews, what the response was, without some sort of direction, (directive thinking maybe) through the experience there will be a level of depth that isn’t developed without the reflection.

MP
So theoretically you could learn experientially without necessarily reflecting. You could encounter and still learn something. Are there other parts of experiential learning that you think are important? Where do you learn experientially?
VL
I guess anywhere. For example football training is a type of experiential learning because it does involve a lot of the aspects. You are physically there, you will reflect on performance, you will then take that on and go to improve your performance and that requires a level of analysis. In order to get better they will go through that process.

I think if we think about experiential learning as not just discrete programs that you are limiting the scope of and possibilities. So experiential learning can occur anywhere.

MP
So in an experiential setting (or process) then, who are the main actors?

VL
I think you have experts that are guiders that will hopefully direct the learning.

MP
Do you have a learning experience on your own?

VL
Yes, you may however, I don’t think you are ever on your own because you are always part of something bigger and that's the experience. So it can be individual, always within the context of the world around you and even if there’s no interaction with other people there is always an outside environment to interact with.

MP
So setting is part of it.

VL
Yes. I guess if we are talking about a program we will have an expert that will help direct the experience. You have the environment of things and other people that are there to be interacted with.

MP
Is there anything else that becomes part of that model of experiential learning?

VL
I think that within that there are different packets that you can use like the performance that you have in a classroom. However, I think you have a lot more scope for the type of performance and the type of thing that will be done in an experiential classroom. For example, our program with the idea of traveling from one place to another and the model in life, in a way, and the problems and issues that come from just taking fifteen or sixteen others to another part of the city. Just that whole process of them going on a public bus from a to b can be I guess a performance classroom because you could never
do that in a traditional classroom. It just makes it bigger in my mind. The type of things that can be learning experiences.

MP
So you have got your learning, your environment which includes social and relevant parts of that environment that you could call it a performance and then there’s a problem that they will encounter. So walk me through an experiential lesson.

VL
I am actually thinking about a specific encounter. During my first year here we had a group of students out and there were two girls responsible for getting us there and back, taking care of all the details along the way …these two girls, they both decided that it was too hard for them. They were not going to do anymore so Vanessa you can have your map back. Then I had never been in that situation before and I knew that I had so ok well I am not doing anything, you can keep your maps. We will stay here until tomorrow morning, but you girls are going to get us home. We sat for probably twenty minutes while they complained that’s not fair and then they actually realized that this was their responsibility and they actually asked for other students assistance who up until that point hadn’t stepped in and said let’s do this….That was a bit of an experiment for me because I would often feel the need there to guide the process and say well what would you do girls you are out in the middle of nowhere. But that particular day these two girls were quite able and so they interacted and reflected afterwards and wrote at the evaluation at the end that that was highlight for them in being able to get through when they really realized that they were responsible for their decisions and had really learnt from.

MP
What was the learning outcome for you?

VL
It’s two-fold (or maybe three-fold). From most of those members of the group they were able to see students making mistake that’s ok and then go through an analysis and say ok that’s what happened and a lot of the group members who were not involved directly were able to see it and gain just from watching ideas and skills about future problem solving that they were encountering. The people that were directly involved we able to put into practice a solution and try different things and were able to reuse that strategy and apply them in other situations as well. It wasn’t a particularly creative problem solving session other than asking local people for help. However, they won the confidence that comes out of it and I think it gave them the motivation and willingness to try again.

MP
What do you feel are the main differences between that kind of learning and the classroom stuff that you were talking about?
Maybe it’s about that issue of motivation. It doesn’t come from within. I think that motivation is because of exam results, because of future career choices, because of pleasing parents, because of peer (looking good in front of their mates).

Why is it hard to have that motivation in a classroom experience?

Mainly because it’s to do with the successes that people have.

Are they motivated before they succeed?

They are though. Maybe by seeing others success, because its new.

What’s new?

It’s definitely the physical situation. I think in our program, certainly by having real responsibility and real problems. I think a lot of learning that happens in a classroom, even if it is experiential in terms of science experiments, it’s not designed to have real problems it’s designed to go a b and c from start to the finish. That we know what aim is and the result of the experiment should be. It would be very unusual I think to have a new experiment in a classroom. I put my wet socks in the microwave thinking they would dry, well they didn’t get dry just hot. That’s a perfect example of a new experiment. One has no idea of what the results will be. Perhaps that’s where it comes from here as well, because it’s real and in an experiential program that would work, its to do with things that are not step by step and we already know the outcome.

Visually here in Darwinia there’s a lot of interest that comes from our physical environment and everything is different and the fact that that calls for students to be so keenly aware of it and the differences, and I am certain, at the same time want to find out what it’s all about, without having the thirst for knowledge that you may see in just one or two students that you see in the normal classroom. This thirst for knowledge comes just because of the different physical environment.

I want to ask you about memories.

One of my fondest memories of learning was when I was sick and I couldn’t go to school for a long time (about ten weeks). I was bedridden and the only thing that I can remember from that time was having this book of America (I was quite young at this stage) and I memorized all of the States of America in
alphabetical order and just kept reading this book and to this day I can probably cite the fifty States in America.

MP
The memories that children take away from a classroom in contrast to an experiential setting. Are they different?

VL
It’s a difficult one for me because I have never been on an experiential program and only having a limited teaching in an individual classroom.

Although my experience as an exchange student in (country X) I was learning by experience, although it wasn’t a program. I imagine that it would be more vivid because of the stimulus. I think that you remember things that are new and then become familiar. The experience when I was in (country X), I think the first smells that then became regular. They were quite strong memories. The variables within the family. The difficulties in communication and being able to understand each other. I have really strong memories of a lot of that. However, the memories of my classroom at that time I guess were mostly to do with interactions with people (maybe because they were new), I learnt something other than words on a page and I don’t remember the words on pages, the science in itself. I have physical memories, how it felt to be dancing. From my experience in this program the reflection that students give is something that they remember and I would think it would be different for each as to why they remember it. I think the learning outcomes that we have are things like problem solving and those sorts of things are quite applicable in everyday life. So the things that are tied to those sorts of skills you do it over and over again maybe that’s why you are tied.

MP
It’s hard to teach problem solving in a classroom. Why is that?

VL
I think that there is a limit to the sorts of problems that can be presented in a classroom.
It’s to do with setting and there are always going to be interpersonal issues, but there are a huge range of other problems to do with environmental factors to do with international factors. Problems to do with world issues even, that cannot be presented in the same way in a classroom that they can in an experiential program. Even if you went to XXXX City and seeing the areas of poverty stricken places, I think that would tie an emotion to a problem much than in a classroom scene.

MP
How would you go about assessing someone who is learning experientially?

VL
I think self assessment is probably the best way. Having students this about what they have achieved. I think if we had students writing about their key competencies, they could reflect what they had learnt more. You have to
know a student very well to provide some sort of assessment of where they are.

MP
If you could assess, what would it be?

VL
Their own journey I guess. It's quite difficult to use the word assess because it implies some sort of numerical outcome.

MP
You could have narrative assessment.

VL
Mm maybe some sort of joint space that you come to through discussions and social interaction, perhaps decided within a group and the teacher/student negotiated point. I guess students would put their own goals and their own outcomes and then assessing how far they had come along that line from where they were at the beginning.

MP
Thank you.

End of Interview - VL
Interview 28
Interview on 15/06/2007
Elaine Andrews (School D) Darwinia Campus

MP
What's your own idea of the process of learning? How does learning occur?

EA
It occurs at different levels, it occurs when it delivers information where another person I guess has an obligation to learn about and interest to learn about. I don't think that it's necessarily all about how the person presents the information, its more about how much the receiver wants to learn. I mean just because I talk doesn't mean that somebody is going to learn from that.

MP
So by presenting, do you mean a teacher or a lecturer?

EA
Any sort of person. It could be a parent, a teacher an elder or a peer. In everyday and every action that we do there's always an opportunity, but one person has to be receptive to the idea of learning it.

MP
What's the basic thing that triggers learning, in your opinion?

EA
Interest. The motivation can be because there's a personal interest in it, the motivation could be a mark at the end, or they feel that they won't get the job. There's a whole variety of reasons. Sometimes it might just be because the person likes the area but other times because it's something that they are required to know.

MP
Do you think that there is any motivation to learning? When you talk about interest and motivation.

EA
I am sure there are lots of triggers to learning but sometimes it's a requirement and when you have learnt to do that skill that is actually going to impede the rest of your actions.

MP
What is an externally imposed requirement?

EA
Maybe not but if you don't learn basic social interactions when it has an impact of life. So if you give a common response when people react badly to it, you either choose to learn from that or you choose not to. If you figure out
that that’s a bad response and everyone’s reacting badly. If I go up and ask
them for $5.00 and give them no reason, but then if I go up and say that I am
in a situation and I learnt from that reaction that that didn’t work. So
sometimes there’s a social requirement for social interaction, then there might
be some requirements in the workplace. Like in a teaching profession you
natural gut response may not be an appropriate response and you have to
learn that that’s not the way to respond to a student, if you want work create a
positive working environment. It might be the way to respond to a peer, but
not the right way to respond to a student.

MP
So learning is something that you are not sure of, and you sense a gap where
you seek to fill that gap somehow?

EA
Yes. I mean as ............living in Darwinia....Even though it’s not my
specialization, you learn....it would be really inappropriate not to learn.

MP
My interest is in secondary age students, seventeen, sixteen, fifteen or
fourteen year olds. How would you then, from your understanding, learn in
that setting in a secondary school setting? What sort of learning occurs
there?

EA
A level of individual learning where, it’s often depending on what the student
wants out of it. So I could deliver the to the same class of fifteen or twenty
kids, but the learning that goes on could be quite different for each individual
student. Because of their skills, their experience, because their background.
So that in the process teaching them, in the process of aiding
them to learn it I
have to consider all of those things. I have to consider the social background
from where the kids come from, consider their contact with the world beyond
the world that they know.

MP
 Previously you were talking from the students’ perspective, about having a
gap that they needed to fill. We moved from the secondary setting and now
you are focusing on the delivering to one from a number of students in a
class. Do you see what I mean, you have turned it around?

EA
I do, but in order for them to be able to learn it I think the facilitator needs to
understand their audience. So I think when we are talking about a classroom
environment.

MP
We have twenty young faces looking at you – what do you do?

EA
Yes, I am going to facilitate some of the learning and hand a lot of it over, but before I hand it over I need to identify who I have in front of me and therefore how am I going to gain their interest and to teach them. In my previous school trying to teach... The first thing that I have to do is to create a level of interest. Then once I have got that then the learning occurs through engaging them. Through allowing them, for them the students, to own a level of that learning and to own it they have to know what they want out of it.

MP
So again you are looking at that from your own perspective, but do you have to understand their interests and do you have to seek ways in engaging them in the task in your setting?

EA
Yes, in a classroom environment.

MP
What does the student come into that learning setting with? What do they bring in with them?

EA
They come in with a bank of experiences and I guess, a bank of knowledge that doesn’t necessarily get opened unless it’s tapped the right way. They could have a whole level of knowledge but they don’t see a direct connection to. So I could be talking about one aspect of…history and they perhaps have learnt a lot about military defense. They make their own connection, but I have to somehow have to draw a connection to bring it around to get them to that point in a classroom setting.

MP
What are the basic elements of the model of learning in the classroom?

EA
I think that there has to be a level of engagement and that comes through creating the interest.

MP
Engagement between what?

EA
Either between the students themselves or the teacher who is a facilitator (but not always). To start it you do. Whether you started them three weeks ago and you have got them on independent learning and then you are just there observing it. Usually at that age group you still need a facilitator to keep them

MP
So you have a learner and you have a facilitator. What else do you need?

EA
A framework for what you are aiming to teach. Whether it be a curriculum or whether it be a(n experience).

MP
What would that include?

EA
A hard question. I don’t know. I will go back to a level of interest. Whether I am following a curriculum framework, but it doesn’t state in the curriculum to teach… but that was one of the things that I try to foster in a classroom setting. It depends whether your children have had a learning that’s tangible by a testing type thing or you are talking about learning. Sometimes you do an activity and particularly in a team group work activity in a classroom. Where in fact depending on the dynamics of the classroom, all you have to get them to do is get a new level of interaction and a level of trust that you are building. That might be purely what you are aiming for. You might have started off with something that you are going to learn today but that might not be your actual objective for the lesson.

MP
So will you say then that learning needs to have some sort of test, or goal or point where you can say that we’ve moved from that engaging interest that we talked about to some point?

EA
As a facilitator I think when I am going into a classroom I need to refer to a strong understanding of what is my outcome for the rest of it.

MP
So that’s a learner a facilitator and outcome.

EA
It’s not necessarily something that can be tested. It’s not necessarily a piece of knowledge that I am after. It could be an emotion. It might be empathy that we are trying to build in a class, it might be cooperation, it might be tolerance and other than having students interact and watching the way that moves throughout the lesson, then later on I might be able to test it by later on putting a challenge in front of them and see how they react under that challenge.

MP
So the learning model may include some sort of performance then against an objective?
Is there anything else that must be present in order for learning to occur, from your perspective?

EA
No I don’t think so I think there needs to be people with an object, but I guess there needs to be a focus, whether its content or activity based.

MP
In classroom learning would you consider the setting to be an important part of the learning? Or is it not problematic?

EA
I think it can add to it and detract from it but I think when we are bound by classroom walls and you are in a school ground. Yes, you have classes that you hate teaching in because kids walk into them and there is, I know that if you have to teach in the art room, there’s a different mentality when the kids walk into that room.

MP
So they respond differently to different settings?

EA
Yes, but not always. I could move a group into our English classrooms and it probably didn’t change, but you could move them into another building like the art/music building and there’s a different drive when you walk into the classroom, because of the configuration of the class tables because there’s a much freer space. When they have classes there it’s much more interpretive than taking them into a mathematics class and there is more teacher control (and I use that term loosely), in a maths. space More teacher direction. I think if you walk into a messy classroom you have messy behaviour, initially. Yes, I think that setting can play a role.

You move a group of students who aren’t used to being outdoors and I did that regularly, taking them out to interact stuff and that altered enormously.

MP
One of the things that I am interested in experiential learning, learning by experience, learning by doing and there are many different words that describe the mode of learning that occurs when you take students out of a classroom. I would like to hear what you think experiential learning is.

EA
An opportunity for students to find their own learning, to learn through doing and interact in a more real sense of learning. It’s not controlled by the facilitator so it can go in lots of different directions and the students will determine the direction, much more in an experiential learning situation than would be the case in the classroom.

MP
You mentioned that they will find their own learning. What does that mean?

EA
Depending on where they are at as a person, their maturity and all of those things. There’s not the same level conformity as perhaps there is in a classroom where there’s the level of expectation. So student’s personality, independence, interest. All of those things could actually take them into a different direction. To another student who was put in exactly the same
environment. I think the objective is often much more open in an experiential learning environment.

MP
So individuals can learn at different levels in experiential learning?

EA
Yes, but they can in a classroom too, but the variation is not as marked I don’t think.

MP
How is the learning different to classroom learning in an experiential setting?

EA
In either types of learning there are lots of things that will inhibit learning. So in our classroom environment literacy will inhibit. In experiential learning environment, a student who is often inhibited in a classroom will actually blossom because they can draw on a lot of different skills. Experiential learning enables a learner to use all of the skills in a much more wholesome way out of a classroom environment.

MP
Wholesome? What do you mean by that word?

EA
Maybe holistic. But in terms of the personality, I think it’s more wholesome. I think it’s a much healthier learning environment because there’s not as many things that will predict if they pass or fail, or that indicates to them that they are passing or failing.

MP
Because performance is different, is that what you mean? You talked before about normal learning called the classroom learning, having some sort of performance or outcome that different in experiential learning.

EA
I think there’s still performance and still an outcome. But particularly, if you are talking between the ages of twelve and seventeen where they have already had six or seven years of education, they already understand some of the things that defines success in a classroom learning environment. Take them out of that classroom learning environment and they actually resent some of those things because it’s a new environment and they are not sure. So I don’t think that kids go into it thinking that they are good or bad before they start and I think that’s a really positive thing. I think that experiential learning is sometimes harder for very quiet students because it takes them a while for the their voice to be heard.

MP
Why would that be so?
EA
Because a quiet student will often have less confidence to perform in front of everybody.

MP
So experiential learning involves public performance?

EA
Absolutely and it can be an incredibly threatening environment initially and kids can be quite vulnerable in that environment. So you need to have a supportive team around those people.

MP
Is that not present in a classroom setting?

EA
Not to the same degree I don't think, because your individual preferment is not publicly displayed as often. There might be discussions, or there could be small talks given, but your skills are not as exposed because a lot of work in a classroom is written up in or I guess reading and that sort of thing where there is not constant. In an experiential environment there is constant interactions that you are responding to. Interactions with the environment with each other with a facilitator. So we are moving along a street and we have to solve the problem before we can move on. There’s a lot more problem solving going on in experiential learning.

MP
You just mentioned interaction with facilitators. What about intervention with the environment? Is the environment different in experiential learning?

EA
The environment is much less predictable. So there is degree of uncertainty. It can change whereas in a classroom setting it’s more stable. Certainly not the change that we see in experiential learning where the environment can change minute by minute at a time.

MP
How does students react with the environment?

EA
At different levels. A student who is more comfortable in an experiential environment will interact a whole lot more with their new environment. It might be because of the people around them asking questions to get information. They maybe using visual cues. There might be street signs, it could be cars, whatever is going on. They are learning and getting visual stimulus every minute. It could be the sounds. There’s a lot of sensory input going on. I think that’s markedly different to a classroom setting. Of course the most active weapon in a classroom, I don’t think would be as active as your most passive experiential learning setting.
You mentioned that the setting is changing and that there is a constant level of unpredictability in the setting of experiential learning. Would you say therefore, that the setting is an active participant in experiential learning?

Yes, I hadn’t thought of it but yes, because in our experiential learning it plays an essential role. I guess if you were on an outdoor type thing the environment, the weather, all of those things play a key role in what you are facing and that is very much certainly in this environment in a multicultural new language environment. Because initially, it can’t affect sometimes as a facilitator who lives in this country and who has a reasonable understanding of the foreigners of the country, you forget what’s really different. You forget that could be challenging. We are extremely lucky because we have new learners through all the time and we get reminded of what’s exciting and what’s new and how hard it is to adjust to that and how confronting it can...You go straight from one group to the next group after we have had a three day break and it’s hard to adjust your mind to where you are at on the first day in Darwinia and that’s when it becomes very clear as to how significant that setting is.

So there is a great deal of uncertainty perhaps created in the minds of the learners because the setting creates a whole lot of issues for them.

Absolutely and I think you can see a student some not all. Some straight A students who can actually come out in experiential learning environment and struggle enormously and be so confused and confronted as to why the mixtures in students are doing it so successfully. It calls for a whole lot of different skills. The experiential learning environment doesn’t rely heavily on a structure. It relies (to a degree) a (mixture) of chaos where the learners have to actually put things together on a daily outing.

What does an experiential learning lesson look like to you?

Anything. I could leave the building imagining that a major figurehead that shaped the future of Darwinia, or perhaps we talk a bit about who we might be and then we head off out the building and at the end of the day I would guarantee that they will have learnt something about the figurehead but I don’t know if they are going to go home as that being the most important lesson. If they get lost then they have to work harder as a team work that out. There’s learning in everything they do.

Is there a lot of problems that they are going to encounter in the course of that day or in a course of a lesson?
EA
I don’t know that in a classroom environment that we have these blocks of times that we call a lesson and you feel like its ended. You feel like, ok I’ve had my fifty five minutes of English and I am going to go out and I have got ten minutes and I will have to do maths and English I might have learnt nothing but in maths I might. In experiential learning I don’t think it stops and starts I think it’s constant.

MP
The time interval is different and there are patterned times.

EA
Absolutely different. I think good experiential learning depends a lot more on social interaction than classroom learning depends on it.

MP
You have used that word before in terms of a student interacting with the environment and you describe that as being sensory. You would talk to people observe and hear things. That there are a number of sensors involved in interaction. What about the social interaction that you are talking about?

EA
Where there’s a level of reliance and exposure and vulnerability. Whereas students often need to ask for assistance. It might be from a local, it might be from a team member, it might be from a facilitator. They don’t always need an answer, but they may need a strategy on how to get the answer. They may need a confidence builder to tell them they will be ok and they will be able to solve the problem to go through it, but the interactions can be between their peers and if it works at a peer level.

MP
So the peers become the teachers in some senses?

EA
Absolutely. To observe the whole. The social interactions and interactions vary enormously over the time frame. What you see is worthwhile is sometimes hugely different from what you see and work through and there are very few kids would it be very similar across that timeframe. So in the initial stages the interaction maybe dominated by simple questions and they be dominated by purely just chit chat, but as you go on there will be lot deeper conversations, there will be a lot more reliance on peers – oh so an so you are good at reading a map. So it will be drawing information and drawing pieces together and very much about the peer teaching and the peer learning. Sometimes I don’t think that they could make a distinction between what teaching and what’s learning.

MP
I am interested in memory. The function of memory in learning and I know in some lessons the job is to sit down and memorize a list of facts of names numbers or dates. What sort of memory do you think that a student takes
away from a classroom lesson? What sort of memory would they take away at that particular moment?

EA
Whether it maths whether it’s a new formulae whether it’s an application, whether it’s.

MP
So every student walks out of that classroom with the memory in their brain.

EA
Not the same thing. It all depends on how confident they are and whether it’s in the right learning mode for them.

MP
So learning in different ways may depend on whether they can retain things.

EA
If I had a lesson and didn’t take notes, there’s no way I would recall everything. Unless, they brought it alive. If they brought history alive like through a story I could probably understand it.

MP
So in your own learning you would struggle to learn much in a lesson if you didn’t reinforce it.

EA
Yes. I mean I got really good at identifying at what I was good at so I would take a lot more notes or I would have connections in some ways. If I walked into a lecture room and the lecturer was talking at me I would go out of that room remembering very little of what the person had said. But if I did the reading before and I prepared it or if I did the reading after it would make sense.

MP
So what does the student have in their head some days down the track and you said ok think back to that lesson and what we did?

EA
I think that they draw a lot on the thing that struck them, the thing that they could connect to.

MP
So connections important. For recall and retention. Connection with what?

EA
Sometimes with other peoples’ information so it becomes clearer, bits of information go together. Sometimes connections, sometimes a concrete examples like something to do with a………………….and they understand how
a car moves. A connection to a real life example may enable them to remember and understand and transfer.

MP
So the success of retention is measured by the degree of a connection with pre-existing experiences and understandings.

EA
That’s the way I learn. To some students who have incredible memories may not need the connection, but for me as a learner I need to have resource connections.

MP
Is that hypothesis different in experiential learning do you think?

EA
I think its different because you are going through the motions and you are making connections. You are forced to make connections and you are forced to learn and to follow, therefore it doesn’t become an abstract idea. It’s a real thing because you are in the process of doing it. If you talk about a particular person and you take them to their graveside you talk about features and people that you can see in what you are surrounded by.

MP
So it’s again the setting is it?

EA
Yes hugely different, but the processes. I think natural in an experiential learning model the facilitator gives first and demands more later. They are piecing bits together all the time. You are not giving them information, they are seeing it. They are actually posing the questions and you are giving the answers and their questions indicate to you what they are connecting to and what they are not connecting to also.

MP
How does that connect to their memory of their experience?

EA
Between five people their memories maybe quite different because their questions may have been quite different and their interest and their connections, but because they actively participated in it, they discovered it, questioned it and solved it then their ability to recall it is greater.

MP
Greater than in a classroom?

EA
For the majority. Although some students in a classroom may remember it later. Perhaps that’s their learning style that’s their ability, but for the majority
of students they won’t learn it by just hearing it once in a classroom environment.

MP
Is there anything else about the memorability of an experiential learning transaction that’s different to?

EA
In anything that we do if we participate more actively, the more active that we are the more we own the experience and will probably remember it in our own way. It’s not someone else’s experience. The same with the kids. If you have a passive kid and they are right at the back I couldn’t guarantee that the student will recall that experience, but if they are active in it and making decisions about it and questioning it then it becomes their experience alone.

MP
So if you take away the degree of that distraction it then solves in the experience that makes a difference. That’s a form of (awareness in) memory called auto-noesis. Which is the memory function that you have the sense of yourself having experienced the thing that you are remembering.

You talked about problem solving let’s say in an experiential setting when a student goes out runs into a problem. What then?

EA
They are going to have to make an active choice that they are going to do anything about it or not. In the process of solving it they may make far more mistakes, but from each of those there’s a learning experience that goes on and generally they won’t repeat the same mistake over and over again.

MP
What if one of your students hits a problem that they can’t or won’t solve?

EA
To start with you ask them to identify the problem. I mean they need to identify that they get off the bus too soon, or are they at where they need to be at, are they looking for an entrance or are they looking for a location and are they at the wrong place? The first thing is to identify what the issue is and then if they can’t make the next step to identify a set of steps to solving it, I wouldn’t give them the steps I would probably pull on others to help them and you do it in a team environment around that and that’s not uncommon because a lot of students at fifteen don’t have a lot of problem solving skills when they first arrive.

MP
Why’s that?

EA
Because people solve their problems for them and a lot of classroom teaching doesn’t draw on that skill very often. They solve curriculum-based problems,
but they may not solve learning problems, they may not solve their own problems.

MP
So they may solve problems that we give them but they may not solve problems that they encounter themselves.

EA
Yes because we often take over that process and the parents often takeover that process. Say Jimmy runs out of money for the week so rather than getting him to work through that you get more money. Whereas I think the beauty of experiential learning program is that you don't solve their problems and you allow them to flounder and allow them to realize that if they don't work on their problems they are not going to be solved. I also think that's dependent on the facilitator. The more confident you are in allowing them to run with problems and not to solve it for them. In the early stages when you first start and you are not as confident you can solve the problem because you want to fix the problems. But if we're horribly lost, through my own confident I will know when to intervene and not to intervene and probe with the question and not to probe. It would be easier for me to solve the problems because I know we would get to the (activity) site faster, I know that I can control it and therefore let it get beyond what I know what to do. As a teacher and I get for confident and I can predict what's going to happen, to a degree, and I can see the progress and a student asking a question by facilitating it towards a resolution rather than giving an answer.

MP
So you tap someone on the shoulder and you ask a question that may open up a more productive line of enquiry. So you use your questions then to nudge. So if they are not able to do it you help to focus and define the problem a little better.

EA
Yes without answering. But if they are not able to do it, it might be as simple as asking what question do we not know?... Then they have to solve it from there… Where would you find that information from? Have you got another map to match it to? It's just reminding them of the resources around them.

MP
Students in that learning situation may make a mistake and you said before it’s about giving them the right answer but allowing them to solve problems. How do they feel about making mistakes?

EA
It varies over the time frame that you participate in an experiential program. Sometimes they will remove themselves from responsibility of anything to do with it. That’s up to the facilitator to monitor how others react and in experiential learning that’s a key role that we play as facilitators. If they have made a mistake and provide a supportive environment for them to solve the problem in. I actually find it more difficult working with a kid who never gets
lost, but have frequent navigational issues because you can only challenge
yourself when you have challenging knowledge about making those mistakes.
So if they are not making mistakes they are not challenging themselves to the
full degree.

MP
In a sense you are saying that their learning is better if they are working
beyond their capacity.

EA
Yes and they have to draw on it for themselves and they have to learn about
problem solving from making mistakes they usually have to communicate with
a local person or they have to get out resources but they have to rely on more
than their knowledge base, therefore the have to learn more?

MP
How is your management of stakes………different from experiential learning
compared to classroom learning?

EA
Because in a classroom environment, I am forced to tick or cross or give a
mark or something in the school environment. So I compare one student next
to another student. In experiential learning I praise someone for the possibility
of solving a problem rather than actually identifying who that someone was. I
can walk them through the developments that they have made in that
process. I am comparing them from the beginning of the day and the
problems that they faced and then you work through and therefore your skill
level has increased and I am not comparing them to another person.

MP
How do they report their feelings about mistakes?

EA
In the experiential learning environment because so much is on social
interaction, you have conversations constantly about what’s going on. It might
be about the actual physicalities of what’s going on, it might be about the
reaction of what someone says is going on (particularly if we are lost) and
how that made them feel. It might be identifying the things that they did in a
day and praising them for those things, but as I have said before the students
are far more vulnerable and exposed in this environment. So in order to have
a successful experiential learning environment they need to have fairly strong
pastoral carers. People who can work them through the fact that being
challenged and making mistakes is a learning profit and pointing what they
have learnt out of that. I guess it constant feedback.

MP
So that makes you stop and think about what you learnt.

EA
Yes by constantly focusing on it. About setting those goals, changing those goals and adjusting those goals.

MP
What do you mean by reflection?

EA
Identifying your response to things, their personal success in what they did, identifying what they would like to do better next time, identify that they think the same way as me, I saw their performance the same way that they saw their performance, hearing the way that they saw their performance, because students will often judge themselves much more harshly than I would judge them.

MP
Is there a sort of process of confirmation that goes on do you think at the end of the learning?

EA
Yes and I think often in a classroom setting they restrict their learning, they see their learning as a very narrow thing. You all talk and walk out of the class and think that you have had an amazing discussion and when all has been revealed we hadn’t learnt anything we didn’t write it down. I think they adjust their mentality during their time here, to I don’t need to write that much down to actually know that I am learning and engaging. Their level of their personal awareness of what is going on is very important. Our kids of fourteen or fifteen are not accustomed to reflecting and analysing and don’t do it particularly well and they are used to the copout comments ‘I don’t know’ and it obviously works in a classroom environment.

MP
Why does it work in a classroom environment and not in an experiential environment?

EA
Because we have more time learning in an experiential program to probe and I think every person plays an intricate role in a team in experiential learning. I don’t think every person plays an intricate role in a classroom environment. They don’t actually play much of a role in group learning.

MP
How’s that different in experiential learning?

EA
The exception to have a kid who plays a very good role in that because others demand more of them they are forced to take on the role of responsibility where they are personally responsible. I mean they can reject it and not actively do it, but they become responsible to sixteen people when they are not doing their job... So there is greater ownership of you experience,
therefore they tend to be more engaged. There is a lot more social interaction required in that learning model.

MP
I am also interested in the way in which experiential learning differs in classroom learning in outcomes.

EA
Often in experiential learning environment the content is perhaps, while it may end up actually being more it’s not always the focus of the day. It’s the process that’s the most important thing in an experiential learning day. The process of getting to a place or getting more information, is as significant if not more important, than the actual piece of learning that they actually got out. So every moment is a learning bit but I don’t think that there is much dead time in an experiential learning environment. I think it’s very dependent on. For some students they perhaps get a lot more out of this program socially than they might get out of it academically, but that’s where they are at and if they came in with very few friends and they walk out with a lot, that’s a life turning experience. I think it’s the building of skills in the process that because it’s in this dynamic environment and because they are learning on the spot all the time, they also walk away with content. Whereas in the classroom content is what you often see as being objective.

MP
How do you assess experiential learning?

EA
There is not really and A+ or a fail. There’s did you engage, or didn’t you engage and did you engage at your highest level, did I see a change through the process, did your skills develop? Now the kid that comes in with the lowest level of skills may not go out with highest level of skills but they maybe more successful in the learning environment and therefore they walk away with a different understanding. I think for most students who come here through this program they will leave here with a sense of I am very good at this and have never identified that they are very good at anything before. I think it’s their development of skills and their level of engagement that indicates how successful they are.

MP
So there’s not only a degree of cognitive but also a mega-cognitive?

EA
They are more aware of their place in the world.

MP
But could you assess the student? You talked about degrees of success and a student having a really successful experiential learning experience but how do you measure that success?

EA
Through tracking their input and their performance over an extended period. Experiential learning is performance based but not performance based as in pass or fail but in that they need to show that they have developed skills. A student who is successful in the experiential model, in my eyes, is a student who tries and through their efforts they will see improvement in what they can do. But a student in a classroom may try their guts out but that doesn’t mean that you are going to move from a C average to an A+. Because in this model they don’t have tests and they don’t have grades I can demonstrate improvement by looking at individual instances where they show that they have developed in that skill, they show that they have gained confidence in something and can produce something more.

MP
So the student gain, is it different between the two types of learning?

EA
I think they come out a lot more aware of themselves as learners, themselves as people, more aware of working in teams, relying on people. I think that their life skills are enhanced greatly from an extended experiential learning environment. I think if you just took kids out of a classroom and took them on a one-day excursion, I don’t know that I would call that truly experiential, but to create a truly experiential environment you have to remove them for a long enough period that you can allow them to develop.

MP
Remove them from?

EA
Their comfort zone. Their immediate environment.

MP
Why?

EA
Because it increases the challenges, reduces the barriers and they become more vulnerable.

MP
What would be the difficulties that you could see in trying to learn in that experiential mode in a classroom setting?

EA
I think they rely on old habits because they are creatures of habit, so if you don’t remove them from – they go back into their home environment for the night or whatever, they don’t have the same openness of that experience.

MP
That’s assuming that you have a long period of sitting in classrooms, but say right from the start, their first day at school that you tried to teach experientially. Could you do it in a classroom?
EA
If we work on the basis that a setting plays a role then you could do it better perhaps than a regular classroom but you are not going to have the same level than if you were moved from that comfort zone. Probably.

MP
The important thing for you I guess is a bit of risk, problems, facing challenge.

EA
I don’t mean that they need to like in another country and I think it depends on the individual but I think the social side of it plays a role.

End of Interview – EA
Interview 29

Interview on 18/06/2007
Tina Earle (School E) Eucalypt Campus

MP
What is your view of the learning that goes on here at Eucalypt?

TE
My view is that it takes time, it’s a slow process and not the academic side of it but the other side, is a bit difficult to determine what is going to be learnt. It’s a bit inexact. What I mean by that is it’s hard to measure but it’s also hard to know what exactly the students are going to get out of here. I think academic learning aside, the most valuable learning that happens here is when the students are interacting with each other and the staff and put in different situations. While you can have ideas about what you hope that people will get out of being in a new environment and being in difficult situations and you hope what they get out of it will be positive. I mean that you don’t know that every student that comes here will get from A to B.

MP
So the interactions are very important and the social dimension to the experience?

TE
Yes I think so. Just the fact that for their whole lives, generally speaking, before they come here would have been following a particular course for fourteen years. Then suddenly they are in this situation that’s not adapted to. Everything that they have known and learnt to deal with is thrown out of the window and they come here and have to learn a new set of ways of coping and dealing with people.

MP
Do you set out to do something that’s completely different to their home?

TE
I think that’s quite important. If these students stayed at School E they would reach a point in their lives where lives would completely change. I mean they would go to university or leave home travel overseas or whatever. They would be thrown into unfamiliar situations on a large scale, but I think, coming to somewhere like this just makes that happen a bit earlier. I mean I am not saying that nothing in their life changes until they come here, obviously there are things going on in peoples’ lives all the time, but this large scale uprooting and shifting to anywhere. I mean whether it’s going on exchange or some families probably pack up and go interstate etc., which could be a similar kind of experience. I guess the other side of it is when they come here they have moved away from all their usual support structures and social networks.

MP
Is that an important part of the Eucalypt experience? The breaking of existing support structures?

TE
I think it's important if the program is important, which is debatable isn't it. I think that is an important part of it, doing something completely different.

MP
You seem to be asking in your own mind whether the program is useful.

TE
Yes, I think it is, but I guess it could be argued well, in my mind one of the important parts of the program is the opportunity to be in an unfamiliar situation and develop different ways of coping. That's going to happen eventually anyway in everyone's lives you would assume. It's like giving you a practice run for life, even though they are already experiencing life. Perhaps there is less tendency for people to have those experiences and to go outside their comfort zone that perhaps they once would have. I mean people live with their parents for much longer.

MP
You think there is a more pressing need to have a program like this because there's a tendency for people to stay home longer and there remain within the family setting for a longer period.

TE
It's good practice to learn what you would do if everything was taken away.

MP
Just mentioning the academic program that's done here. Is there anything special about that do you think, or is it similar to what they would do in a normal setting in School E?

TE
I can only really speak from my experience and I haven't ever worked in a normal classroom setting really, so I couldn't comment too precisely. I mean the fact that they do get out of the classroom more here and they say their learning is related to what they see here but often I am not sure that they are saying that because they think it's true or whether they are saying it because they think that what they are meant to say. I don't necessarily think that my classes are all that different to what would be if I was teaching in a normal school but that's probably to do with my level of experience and the comfort in teaching the subject that I am teaching. I am teaching humanities health and drama.

MP
Is there an active link between the academic program and the surroundings or setting?

TE
In theory, I think in English they are doing (historical person) and they go out on tour to sites and in humanities early in the year when we do geography that was great for the students to come here and look at water issues. It was really good for the students to come here just after the fires to see how dry it was, without just reading about it in the paper.

MP
Was it quite an intensive reaction, or more a visual sort of thing?

TE
I think it was probably more visual.

MP
You talk about unfamiliarity. How important do you think the setting is for the learning that happens here?

TE
I don’t think just because we are here, in this specific place, is important. I think what is important is that it’s different to what they are used to. I think the distance from home helps. I think that it helps but I think the most important thing is that it’s not in the same place as they spend every day for the fourteen years. But having said that I think it’s good, the bus trip here and the plane trip to get down to Grevillea Campus program is symbolic. It’s almost like a passageway between the two experiences.

MP
You were at Grevillea Campus were you?

TE
Yes I was there for one year as an assistant and I went back after I had done my Dip Ed and did another two years. I have only been here for six months so I haven’t made up my mind about program yet. But it did feel very much this year particularly at the start of term one and the start of this term that the students were taking a long time to get to the point where some of the Grevillea Campus kids were at the end of their term and I started to think that maybe the longer you have to achieve something, the longer it takes. But I am just starting to see the benefits now as the students are spending more time.

MP
What are the benefits from the students spending more time?

TE
I think maybe that are given more of an opportunity to consolidate what they are learning? I think there’s definitely more of an opportunity for mutual understanding and respect of other people. I mean maybe you can get brush things under the carpet a little bit with a nine week term but here it’s a bit more essential that the students genuinely learn to deal with each other. I think here also there is a much bigger emphasis on the academic program here than there was on Grevillea Campus, although that was changing when I left.
In some ways yes we have more time but there are more things in the program that need to be achieved.

MP
Do you think that detracts from what’s trying to be done here?

TE
Yes and no. Like I think that it’s possible for the students to continue with an academic program while they are experiencing all the other things they are experiencing. I think logistically, its really difficult to adhere to all of the demands of being in an academic program like a school like School E as well as trying to achieve outcomes that go and above what they are hoping to achieve at School E. You would think having a campus like this you would think that the school would hoping to achieve something that cannot be achieved at School E. And yet often the school program takes precedence over everything else that’s going on.

MP
But in your perception it does sometimes take precedence.

TE
I think it does. The reality of school is that they are like businesses, they are competitive and they have to market themselves.

MP
Do they do the MYP?

TE
Yes they are in the process of bringing that in here. The MYP structure is being used, in theory, here. They are moving towards that. I mean that’s fine but having English drama and French and Chinese, all of those subjects here and it’s such a small staff team and I think we will be really compromised on quality. It’s like me teaching drama. I am not very good at teaching drama!

MP
As you say that could really be done anywhere given that it’s not strongly linked to the setting. Now stepping outside of the academic program, for a moment, into the more experiential side of being here. You started to say about the social things. What does that mean to you?

TE
I think the social side of it is about that idea of being with your peers as well as adults who you don’t know very well at the start of the year and you being in that environment intensely twenty four hours a day seven days a week for three or four weeks at a time and that’s one of the most important things I think where a lot of the teaching goes on, or certainly a lot of the learning goes on.

MP
What sort of learning?
Learning about tolerance. One of the things I think about working here and it doesn’t always translate into reality is that one of most important things that you can do is just be as good an example of an adult that you can be and that’s not always easy in the environment because you do get grumpy and people annoy you and you have so much access to the students and in so many different contexts and they see each other so often in so many different contexts. They can’t ignore each other they can’t get away from each other. I mean you can’t go through the whole year without speaking to a particular person or dealing with them in some way. It’s a consequence of being here and as a result the students are exposed to people who they may not have spoken to or had anything to do with in a different world, in a different environment.

What about the micro setting, I mean the houses and the way they are set up?

Yes I think so that is one of the places they learn. I mean I have an interest in a group of students who are really different students and amazingly they have to get on and manage their differences.

Have you taught them to manage their differences?

They just do it. I mean this is my first house here whereas at Grevillea Campus I was more involved in actively teaching those things and I think you role model it. I haven’t explicitly gone in and taught these students how to get along with each other. You demonstrate how you would deal with different situations and particularly people. But they just don’t have a choice, they have to learn get along. There are some quite strong personalities in house and it doesn’t take the other students long to work out how they need to manage that somehow in order to survive being here and sometimes the ways that they learn to manage might not be the best way. There is always room for discussion and they do learn to deal with different personalities by living in close proximity to people who are very different to them. Living in a way that they probably won’t live their lives ever again.

Do you intervene much?

Yes mostly with my house it’s been with cleaning, they need a lot of help with that stuff. They are interesting in that they don’t have a lot of conflict with each other. I mean the strong personalities that they dominate but you can only give them suggestions and then hopefully they can work it out for themselves in the end. I don’t intervene very much except for the cleaning
and that’s a pretty big issue. They come here not knowing how to clean and
my house, especially, don’t think it’s very important.

MP
With your Grevillea Campus experience then, were there differences the way
the dorms ran there and did that have an impact on the social and living
dimension?

TE
The other thing I will say is that I think the students up there are dependent on
each other in some ways. I mean if someone is up late at night talking that’s
going to have an impact on everyone else, but because they did their own
cooking and cleaning and shopping, there were a lot more examples I think of
people being independent of each other. Whereas here, the students turn up
and dinner is provided.

MP
Was that all part of the Grevillea Campus experience was it?

TE
I don’t know if it was deliberate and I don’t know if it was in their planning for
that program.

MP
What were the units there?

TE
They were actually old houses there. It was an old mining town and the
school just bought the whole street of houses and did them up. Nine students
would have been a maximum to each house but usually six or seven.

MP
Do they have to budget as well?

TE
Yes. I would give them money and that had to last for a week and then they’d
go shopping as the local general store. It was quite challenging for them but it
was great and they really did a good job of it but occasionally they’d go over
budget and run out of money and have to go fishing or make damper but
generally they were pretty good. There was a bit of a safeguard system
where if they went over budget one week they would have to pay it back the
next week.

MP
The houses were single sex?

TE
Yes, but it was coed so the students houses were down one end of the street
and the boys houses down the other.
MP
Was that much of an issue?

TE
Generally, no. There was one incident where it was a bit of an issue where kids were sneaking out at night and getting up to no good (in a fifteen year old kid way). Most of them had a lot of respect and a good understanding of the importance of the program that generally they all wanted to be a part of.

MP
And that was a much more integrated program so they didn’t do separate classes that were academic, they just learnt from the experiences of being there?

TE
Well they did do academic classes, but when I first started down there in my first year of teaching down there, there were four subjects which were the subjects that they all did back at the main school in AAAA City, about teamwork and perseverance, relationship development, communications and the they did have English and history and they didn't do maths. I think earlier on they could do maths but by the time I got there, there was no maths. Like in science they did a subject called ‘earth sea and sky’ and it was about the local environment where they had to go out to an estuary where they spent the morning walking up the river and spending a fair bit of time observing the river and then they also did the marine studies project where they go snorkeling in BBBB and survey the fish and in English they wrote a narrative about their time on Grevillea Campus reflecting on the experience that they were having and then in history they learnt about the history of the island, but when I left they kind of merged all the curriculums. So personal futures is still a separate subject but English science and history had all become on subject. It was basically on the sustainability of Grevillea Campus.

MP
Was that useful?

TE
It depends who you ask but I preferred it the old way. They merged them all together thinking that an integrated curriculum in a disciplinary approach was the way to go, but I actually think that the old way (the three separate subjects) were actually more integrated with their life on Grevillea Campus because they would go walking snorkeling and meet locals and there was interaction with the island in a lot of different ways. I haven’t read all the research on the interdisciplinary approach but I am not sure what the big deal is! This approach much more about getting them to write an assignment about the sustainability of Grevillea Campus that didn’t have spelling mistakes and was grammatically correct. They were integrated in the sense they wrote out a good scientific and historically based project, but it wasn’t particularly integrated with the environment that they were in. I mean it was in some ways because they would still go round and visit the local industries and that sort of thing but it was difficult to combine their research with historical
industries with their interest in the local marine environment. So the local marine environment got thrown out. Which was a shame because the kids coming from AAAA, they hadn’t been in that environment before. They would still go surfing a snorkeling but it wasn’t part of the curriculum.

MP
Do you think that there are some similar objectives between the two programs?

TE
Yes I think the social outcomes that talked about similar for both programs.

MP
The comment that you made about Eucalypt that you could really pick it up and put it down almost anywhere. Would you say the same thing about Grevillea Campus?

TE
I think so. I think Grevillea Campus is a very special place to me because it was an island and that was a really great side affect. The setting was special for me in a broader sense and I think special for the kids as well because it was an island and they had to fly there, but it’s not essential, it was an added bonus that worked really well. It probably works well here also but I am new and getting my head around it and I don’t know this area very well. So I suppose I am not aware of the possibilities here as I was on Grevillea Campus.

MP
So for you knowledge of the local environment is important for you to make it a meaningful experience and integrate it into your teaching.

TE
Yes I think integrate is the academic side of things but probably not all that important for the social side of things. Although, the other good thing about Grevillea Campus was the campus was in a little town and the kids would interact with the local people.

MP
How many people live in that town?

TE
About a hundred I think.

MP
What are the measures used (and we did touch on this briefly) for the two programs? What were the ways that the students and others might measure progress?

TE
A very academic reporting process. They had a personal teacher’s report about how they went in personal teacher’s classes and related to their involvement into the community and here the students have house reports written by their tutors. All tutors write about different things and it’s not a universal measure as far as I can tell. We might share amongst ourselves in an informal way and I ring students occasionally.

MP
How would students become aware of change?

TE
There is a reflection process. The personal passport process and gets them thinking about themselves and they do get feedback on that but it’s pretty inexact though but maybe that’s ok.

MP
Was there some single sort of reflection that a Grevillea Campus would do?

TE
Yes, they did a portfolio as well and like for every subject and for everything that the children learn that was a continuum for that and where they are and what the top level is and so for everything that is meant to be taught at the end of the term, the students would get a placement on a continuum of where they are at. Which I guess was exact in some ways but giving someone a continuum placement for teamwork.

MP
Is that is a subjective perspective of the teacher?

TE
Well kids will also do self assessment and it can work in some situations for different things.

MP
What would self assessment be?

TE
Well they would be for particular things like going on trips. Like if you get involved in the community you get a sheet with all the continuums on it and they would have to write down where they think they were and why.

MP
So it’s a self rating sheet. Is that taken into account in formalizing the report?

TE
It would generally be a bit of a discussion so they do self rating and then you would sit down with them and then you would have a bit of dialogue and say what about this and I thought in that situation you were more like this.

MP
Were they modified extensively do you think?

TE
Yes.

MP
So the rating appraisal wasn’t all that accurate?

TE
They were generally pretty good actually. Like the Year 12 continuums were pretty accurate because they knew them inside out. From grade 5 to year 10 they have these continuums so it’s really clear as to where you start and where you are meant to get to. They are quite good at assessing themselves. I have only worked there and here and there is nothing like that here as far as I can tell. The passport at Eucalypt is that main self reflective assessing vehicle and I think at this campus they do a journal in English but I don’t know much about that.

MP
Do the Grevillea Campus students keep a journal?

TE
They used to but for some reason they don’t anymore. They still do in their personal futures subject where they write about the things that happened in their time at Grevillea Campus and most of them will keep the journal anyway but it’s just not a requirement.

MP
In both settings (I am happy for you to reflect on both), you talked about the students and the cleaning and the need to intervene. In your management of students where students are making a mistake or you can see a mistake unfolding. Is that something that allowed to happen or is there adult intervention?

TE
It depends on a lot of things. There are some things that you have to intervene. I think that it’s probably allowed to happen more on Grevillea Campus, but it’s dependent on so many things. Like the navigation example, where on any given day on any given outdoor….here might decide to do a number of different things in that situation, like me included. I mean sometimes I would so go and get lost and sometimes I would intervene.

MP
What would determine your decision?

TE
A few things. One would be my own knowledge of the area because I am new to this area I would probably be a bit more wary about getting too far from where I know I am, particularly, I am still learning what the weather conditions do so I need to feel confident in my own ability to get the students out of a
situation that they might get themselves into. You might also take into account how the group is going. I think here there it's not quite the done thing to let the student make a mistake without coming to their rescue. But I know personally here I have been less inclined to, particularly, in outdoor programs, to let things get too out of hand, whereas on Grevillea Campus I would just let them go for it and if they were still walking at 1.00 am that would be fine and that did happen. Often that happened because I planned it that way. I was quite comfortable to let the kids run the trip and sleep in till ten in the morning and take five hours to pack up and consequently get back about four in the morning. We had four or five day walks and eight or nine day walks so there were lots of opportunities. It was very safe kind of walking, like beach walking. I wouldn’t do that here in fact I don’t think I would ever do that here.

MP
The setting allowed you to do that.

TE
Yes and also my comfort in that setting.

MP
Do the Grevillea Campus students have access to the telephone or email?

TE
Not email but they have the telephone once a week and there is a pay-phone down at the shops that they can use when they want to.

MP
Do you think that might have interfered with that sense of isolation, with being reliant on themselves?

TE
Possibly but they could only call the 1800 reverse number and they could only call home but the public phone was there and they could ring anyone from there. They usually had about $10 a week pocket money and go down to the café and have a milk shake. I don’t think they needed to have the phone and overtime will probably get phased out of the program down there.

MP
How many students at a time there?

TE
It varies, sometimes you only get about twenty five kids and I think the most that we ever had was forty five and generally about thirty five and four groups a year.

MP
What memories do you think the students take back from these experiences here and Grevillea Campus that are most memorable?

TE
I think the outdoor program and their house, the experiences they have in their house. A lot of the students in their personal passport talked about outdoor programs and all of them talked about the relationships that developed in their house and the fun times they had in their house.

MP
In both places did you consciously use memories in some way? I mean you mentioned the first walk four or five days and the second walk eight or nine days. Was there a sense of you building the journey and references being made to that?

TE
Absolutely and they do the first trip in the same group as they do the second. Yes it was made very specific that this was kind of where we had a first go at it and then built on it the second time. Once everyone would get back from the southern challenge, which was the first at the start of term all the groups would come together that night and talk about each others trips and that would all happen again after the northern journey with photos and movies and all that sort of thing and showing the students what they had been doing and thinking about it. It doesn't happen as much here because the outdoor program finishes and then the next day it’s classes and the students do share stories, you hear them about what happened on the trip.

MP
What about debriefs? Do students articulate what’s happened and what’s come out of it?

TE
For me, that happened more on Grevillea Campus. Here, I mean I still find it strange just going on an overnight trip, like you unpack and then say hey it’s going home time. So you just completely forget to debrief with the students because you end up leaving about 11.00am on the first day and be back by lunchtime the next day. You can sit around the campfire at night and have a chat. Often I’d just get them to talk about things that they had done well that day. I did that a lot more on Grevillea Campus. I think I spent more time talking about debriefing with the house and talking about issues than I have up here. Time just keeps rolling on here. Classroom activities take up a lot of time.

MP
Do you think the students have a strong sense of themselves in the experience?

TE
Yes I think they do. The majority of them recognize that it’s something very different from their other lives, they can’t help but notice and you do hear them
talking about wanting to make the most of it, making the most of all the opportunities.

End of Interview TE
Interview 30

Interview on 17/06/2007
Colin Isaacs (School E) Eucalypt Campus

MP
I understand that you have been here for three weeks. Give me your first impressions of the learning that happens here at Eucalypt.

CI
The learning is very social. A big part of it is social and emotional growth, as well as linked into the academic side of it as well.

MP
What do you mean by social and emotional growth?

CI
It’s more about how they interact with other people and how that affects outcomes of those interactions. So how they are perceived by others as well as skills managing conflict and surviving in a group situation so by then living in a house they need to pull their own weight.

MP
How would a student pull their weight living in a house here?

CI
It’s basically right down to the little things. So doing their duties that they have been allocated and so it’s all even and equal i.e. sweeping the floor, washing the bathroom because they make their own breakfast to deal with meal preparation for that. Also cleaning, tidying and keeping things like the fire going and collecting the wood and bringing that down. They are very house specific duties.

MP
What sort of learning do you think occurs as a result of that?

CI
Managing conflict and surviving and pulling their weight but it’s more learning school-style learning so it’s not (I am trying do describe). Learning about themselves and how they react to their own situations, but also having the support to realize that maybe how they react to a situation isn’t the best for both the group or them individually.

MP
What sort of things might occur that would be bad for the group in terms of student reaction?

CI
I suppose, just obviously refusing to do it – that’s not my job so they don’t bother. Also when react too quickly and when they talk to someone, the other person misinterprets what is meant. If they actually had sat back and thought about something before they jumped in it may not have had the negative affect.

MP
What would happen if a student just refused? From a staff perspective?

CI
That’s a situation where you sit down and reason the whole thing out with the student and making them feel guilty and having a direct consequence with that, rather than leaving it go to make sure the consequence is a natural consequence but it’s directly related to them refusing to do whatever it is. Mostly, it’s about someone who has moaned about doing something, is often asked whether that is a reasonable request and they usually say ok and gone and done it. Instead of framing in whether it was reasonable or unreasonable they say yes it is fine. Like part of it could be if they are not collecting the wood for the fire for instance and another direct one is it’s just simply cold and rather than just let it happen explain that this whole house is going to be freezing tonight but let’s just leave it and that’s a consequence that everyone suffers. The issue of that becomes a bit of a fine line because this whole house is suffering because this one person is refusing.

MP
Getting back to what you were talking about the social learning that occurs. Is that the sort of social learning?

CI
Yes, and what often will happen is that someone who is game enough will get stuck into that person and it’s a situation that can either explode or can actually deal with it itself. It’s just a matter of keeping in touch with that and knowing your house and knowing the students and knowing who might be the one that will really be digging in having a go at that person who is not doing her job because they are affected by it as well.

MP
Do you think a student would understand the consequences on others?

CI
I think at this point in time, not at exactly that point in time when they are refusing to do something but if you can sit down and work through it with them, I think yes they do. However, at the beginning of first term, my perception is that would be very different.

MP
Is this the first time you have worked on an extended stay at a residential exterior campus is it?

CI
It depends on what you classify an extended stay.

MP
What sort of periods of residence have you worked for before?

CI
The longest that I have had was actually a term long plan but it was split up into fortnights. Which in some schools they would say that was an extended stay but personally I don’t think that’s an extended stay program.

MP
So they would go out for a fortnight and then come back.

CI
Basically they would be based at a site for a fortnight, which has got dorms and kitchens etc and then from there they would go off and do expeditions of kind. So the first of the week is pretty much training and then they head off from there and do overnight trips and culminate in a three-day trip and that’s just for fourteen days and then they go back to school.

MP
Where was that?

CI
AAAA School in Adelaide. It’s their AAAA program it’s called. I went to this school as a student and before I came to BBBB I did quite a lot of work with them. What contrast then could you draw with a fourteen day program with a three-day expedition and your experience here, and what are the things that stand out?

CI
What I noticed was how much the students gained after the fourteen day program and near the end they we sort of self reliant. Whereas here, it’s got a level of that, for example, I have only been on the one outdoor program so far since I have been here, but the students on that basically ran the whole thing themselves. I barely had to say a word about do this, in terms of cooking, setting up tents and just standard things that happen on every outdoor program. They were just doing it before I even had to look around and give a suggestion. Whereas on the fourteen day program it wasn’t quite to that standard. I mean they were reliant enough that you could trust that they knew how to use everything properly and be safe with it, whereas here it happened and it was all packed up and it was just normal. So the more time made them more competent in their skills. The students here would have been out thirteen or fourteen nights so far. Whereas, at AAAA School they would have been out about four nights by the end of the program.

MP
Were there any other differences like social interactions?
CI
I can see the way, I mean it’s all (one gender) here and AAAA School is coed basically up until now. It’s less rushed basically. So girls you can pretty much love the social things. So even to the extent of if you say, now look if you sit and chat for ten minutes, I’ll go and set up something and I’ll be back. And when you come back they will still be sitting there chatting. They’re not skylarking as boys often would. So in a coed situation I would never have been able to do that and never would. You would always have them doing something.

MP
So there are some interesting gender bases there. I mean you would find there were things that students would do and boys wouldn’t through AAAA School?

CI
Boys generally, I have found, take greater risks and if I was out in the field somewhere and made a decision that I don’t think this is appropriate to do this because it’s unsafe because the weather conditions aren’t right and they will say well why not? Whereas in the situation of the mountain riding, we didn’t ride the trail because we deemed that it was too wet. It was more about, well you know about it and we’ll go with what you think. The students were happy not to go but the boys were eager to give it a go and there maybe that sort of arrogance that I can do this. I would probably say that in an all student setting it’s probably the case because generally they don’t seem to take as great a risk. I don’t know if it’s a maturity thing, like the students brains at that age are a little more mature and they are able to thing a little more and they can make the links that this is going to happen, whereas with boys they don’t think passed that I want to do this because it’s fun.

MP
I don’t if you have had any experience in teaching in a more conventional sense in a classroom.

CI
Yes, that’s what I have done from basically from School M for four years to the senior school and School N.

MP
So what contrast can you now draw between what happens in a classroom that is called mainstream learning and what happens outside of a classroom say (activity program), or this program?

CI
I would say that in a classroom the way I teach is very teacher driven, so you are pushing the direction. Whereas a situation like up here it can often be a bit more student driven. So you give them choices of what options they can go with so they feel like being in charge of the situation, more so than in a classroom where you have to do the worksheet because that is what they are given.
MP
So there is less passivity in this?

CI
Yes.

MP
Do students learn the same sorts of things, just in a different way?

CI
I would probably say no, because in a classroom setting you are definitely missing that social and emotional growth. One of the things that I found very tricky was the pastoral care in the situation at School N, where I had a pastoral care group of twenty students and out of those twenty students I only taught one of them in the classroom, and that I still have the idea that that is not pastoral care in my mind. You just couldn’t do it as well, compared to a pastoral system in School M, which is a much smaller school, I actually taught every single of the students in my pastoral care group. Not just in classroom stuff but also for PE because I was teaching PE as well as, even to the extent, (because it was a small community), the whole school evolved around sport really so students who played in sport teams, I actually coached and in some instances I was actually playing in a team that I was coaching as well. So you had all these links coming in. In terms of pastoral care you were so much more in front of knowing these students and having a different relationship with them and here you have that as well because you are looking after a house and you are seeing the outdoor environment as well as the classroom setting and you have all these links coming in. So it’s a much stronger pastoral program I think compared to what the School N one was and School M as well, and that was just the country community really.

MP
What about the setting here. Do you think the setting is significant in the learning?

CI
It is something I think in terms of the geographical location for the outdoor program. It’s wonderful because it’s easily accessible into a lot of different environments and hence those activities that can occur in those environments. I have to say that I haven’t explored the idea with the students’ connection with a place, if that makes sense.

MP
I am probably thinking of it on a slightly different level. If, for example, you picked this up and moved this back to School E but would you achieved the same sorts of things. Do you think you could do that?

CI
I don’t think so, no, because like the School N model as well they have the year 9 campus and it’s not residential and they are separate, but the
separation from one of the other campuses is literally across the oval and the students just see that as pointless because they can see the other campus. So if it had have been say two streets away, it could be different. I think it’s because they think hey just a minute the other campus is over there, we don’t have to be with just the year 9s. There are still friendships across year levels but not to the same extent as in a smaller school setting.

MP
So there is still the draw of social networks beyond the year level that have a sort of gravitational effect on students’ interaction?

CI
Yes and also that separation is good for, well I suppose what we have got here is the right communication of that kind of letter writing, (except obviously phone calls are allowed) they have no mobile phone reception up here and no email connections. I suppose what the students would call old technology and that’s quite interesting. You can actually see the students who have got letters from home they love and cherish that bit of paper, it’s almost like back to the early 1900s of the idea of carrying something close to your heart, in most of them, you can almost see that develop.

MP
That’s interesting. You have a physical object that starts to have an emotional significance – a symbolic significance to the students.

CI
Yes. And you see them reread the letters again. I know when I was chatting to (head) of campus prior to starting here he touched on that because he is an English teacher, but then to see that actually happen in my house that I am looking after. You can see students sleeping with letters under their pillows and before they go to bed each night they read certain letters from certain people. It’s kind of like a homesickness type thing but then their support is the letter there. You can even see it when they come to collect mail they are so disappointed if they haven’t got mail.

MP
So that the place here is significant and you mentioned the houses and the way that that has an impact on their social and emotional growth and maturity. Are there places here that have a symbolism do you think with the students, an importance that’s and arbitrary?
I am thinking of last night and (activity site) and it seemed to have an importance, is that so?

CI
That’s good. It’s a run and if you have the time there are stunning views towards Mt AAAA. That’s what they ran this morning. The students in their spare time will actually go for a walk or a run and that’s quite a popular one because it is just so beautiful, the views as well as the setting up there. That’s something that I would like to chat with these students down the track and find out what they remember from their time here. I have heard in an interview I
had with a deputy principal and the head of a senior school. They spoke about when the year 8s come here they know a bit about the place when they come here but then in year 10 and after they have done their year here, they actually do come back for various days and the students wander around a little and make comments about oh that’s changed and the only thing that’s changed is like a table might be in a different spot, but then they pick up little intricacies more than anything else.

MP
Are there any other places here that have a special local significance?

CI
The flat area down there I know and this is just little things since I have been here. It’s almost like the active sporty sort of area and that’s because that’s where they have done sort of event with the whole school generally they go down there to do it. They go down in their spare time for say an hour and play soccer. I imagine that in that sense the area is like the active fun area for that sort of site. But then probably (activity site) would be the main that I have picked up on but they there may be more that I haven’t picked up yet in my three weeks here.

MP
After participating in an experiential learning program what do you think the students remember most and that they will hang to for a long period of time?

CI
The funny occasions are the ones that will always come up and the relationship they have with the staff or the persons running their group. Whether that’s an (outside instructor) whether that’s an actual person within the school. All staff work on the outside program plus if we need others we employ those in, then you have a sessional staff member. This is not just from this program it’s from all experiential learning programs that I have worked on. Therefore there are two main things, the funny occasions and the relationship that they have developed with the staff member, or they didn’t develop. So there are two sides to that. The staff can be either be very positive and fun people and get along very well with them, or it can go the opposite.

MP
And that has an impact on the learning do you think?

CI
I definitely think it has an impact on learning afterwards. Like if you are teaching in a classroom setting or a school setting and there has not been a positive relationship on that program then you are pushing up hill.

MP
Do you find the interaction with the students is different when you move out of the classroom?
CI
Here I am much more serious in a classroom situation and very structured, whereas in an experiential program or outer education style, I try to come across as having fun and making things fun and not quite so structured. Even in activities where you have to minimize bigger risks, the students wouldn’t see the bigger structure. I mean it might be more structured, for example, say rock climbing is more structured than running a bush walk but it’s not as structured as if I were in a classroom setting.

MP
Does that lack of structure give you opportunities in some ways?

CI
Yes that lack of structure allows the interaction to occur and for them to see you in a completely different situation and different light and hopefully that would allow us to develop a different relationship than they would experience in the classroom.

MP
Has that contributed to different learning?

CI
This was what I found and this was a great one at Hamilton was that with behaviour management it was much less of you being the ogre telling them off, you could actually reason with them and even if it was just saying what’s going on and why did you do that? And they would come forth and say look you can’t do that because how do you think that this person felt? They would ok fair enough and that was fixed. Whereas, rather than in a classroom setting it’s like you are up against them the mentality of student against teachers and see what you can get away with. That’s an extreme version but still it happens.

MP
So there is a fundamental shift in the nature of the relationship between you and the student.

CI
Yes it’s almost like moving from a power type relationship through to not quite because they then see it as you are equals and you have gone too far. They need to see yes you are equal to some level, but there are times where you need to be doing what they are supposed to be doing.

MP
The relationship between students in this sort of setting, said it is different because they interrupt because of the house setting. Does that change for you the way that they go about their learning? I guess what I am asking is there a change in the attitude towards learning?

CI
One thing I have picked up here is the students know how they learn best and I think that may have been that they did an activity which was all structured out but it was obviously quite a meaningful experience for them…..which was a more traditional structured classroom and there wasn’t that knowledge of how they learn best.

MP
Is that something peculiar to School E?

CI
In my experience as it is at the moment, yes.

MP
But not necessarily tied to this program.

CI
Yes I don’t know if it’s tied to this program or it was happening before here. It could be something that’s focused back in School E in year 7 or year 8. I mean even to the extent that a student might say oh I am not very good at doing these sorts of things can I go in this direction with it? She would actually come up and ask about it which I think is a great idea because they which learning style is best for them.

MP
Tell me about mistakes. Errors in learning. How you would approach a situation where a student is making a mistake that you can see?

CI
Generally, in my view on the mistake system that’s where most learning occurs, or should be and personally I am really grumpy if I make the same mistake twice with myself and in an experiential program I try to put that view forward to students and hopefully get them to embrace a similar type of philosophy on the mistakes. Let’s not make this mistake again. But teaching in a senior school setting in a classroom of Year 12 students, it just didn’t seem to work for them because they would often be making the same mistakes over and over again and that was one of my biggest frustrations with teaching at a senior school that the same mistakes would be made every time. A classic mistake is in an exam and a test situation they get a question and wouldn’t actually read the question so they wouldn’t answer the question, they would just see one word and then just write down this blurred of whatever, which was probably a good answer but they didn’t answer the question posed because they wouldn’t read the question properly. It was the same mistake by the same people over and over again.

MP
What about experiential learning? You said that’s learning occurs. How does that happen to you?

CI
I think it’s because the mistake is more direct implicational outcome.

MP
So there’s direct correlation between the mistake and the outcome?

CI
Yes exactly. One example is they are putting their tents up and you say the weather forecast is like it’s going to rain, but they are too lazy to put the pegs in and so it does rain everything is wet the next day. So they have to face the fact that they tried to save time by not putting the pegs in properly so therefore the direct consequence was that they got wet and were uncomfortable for the next day and that mistake will never happen again.

MP
If you saw some students setting up a tent know it was going to rain overnight and not put their pegs in, would you not tell to put their pegs in or not?

CI
I might just allude to the fact that it’s probably going to rain and leave it at that, it’s their decision. Then the whole idea is next day say well you made that choice to leave the pegs out, so this is the consequence. I call it facilitating that whole idea of mistakes and direct implication. So rather than them moaning that they got wet and blaming the weather for it they can actually swing that around and say well we didn’t do the right thing.

MP
It’s a sort of I told you so response isn’t it?

CI
It could be it depends how you frame it.

MP
When you are dealing with students and you can see an error unfolding, you can see a poor choice or a misconception unfolding leading to a course of action. At what point do you intervene?

CI
Obviously, if there is a risk or danger and part of that is also to do with knowing the student as well. So with a little bit of background knowledge of that student you might know what’s going on which could ultimately affect the outcome of that. So it’s not something as clear cut and just let them go. Like a tent situation and they get wet. There might be times when you know a little more information and then rather than just let it all happen, actually sit down and say this is what is going to potentially going to happen and you talk it out first before you let it happen and then it’s really blatantly obvious that if they don’t fix up the tent they are going to get wet. That might have something that might be happening at home and the student I worried about and their mind is elsewhere rather than for themselves at that time.

MP
So you would moderate your approach sometimes on an individual basis based on your knowledge of where the student was. A step on from all this, a number of staff have talked about reflection and about the debriefs. How does that work for you?

CI
I have seen debriefs that just go completely the wrong way. So you have to go in very clear as to where you want to go. You can almost extend it and not leave until it's gone in that direction from where you have brought it back. Debriefing is a very complex skill I think.

MP
Give me an example where a debrief has gone the wrong way?

CI
I actually ran this one years and years ago and we almost turned on each other and just a total blame game and just couldn't get them around to seeing things from a different perspective.

MP
So there was lot of recrimination about things that went wrong and pointing at each other saying you didn’t do this.

CI
Yes and that was quite a long time ago when I was young as well and hopefully will never make that mistake again.

MP
For you does the debrief and getting back to that notion of memory of what students remember, do you use that consciously as a way of targeting certain things that have occurred, or try to keep it at a different level?

CI
It depends on the program and where you are going with it. So different things. Some might simply be what do you remember most about this program whereas others might be focusing on a particular issue. One of the companies that I used to work for in YYYY City was a lot of corporate training. So you would go in with notions of where you were going and which avenue you were going to take with debriefs. So all the activities were specifically designed to exploit a certain part of the organization that the head of the organization wanted to work on.

MP
So it’s a particular outcome and it’s all structured around getting that outcome.

CI
Yes and doing that, or having experiences with people who I thought were brilliant in debriefing and it was like just amazing to pick up and learn things
as well as how you can actually adjust an activity to get an outcome that you wish, or aiming, to get as well.

MP
How would you run a debrief for the School E students here?

CI
It changes quite a lot. I actually found the interesting one that I had (I have only had the one experience so far), was a mountain bike one and they debriefed themselves and that was something that I thought was amazing because I had never have that happen before. When they were just chatting under a tarp when it was raining and they were just chatting about the day and it was going exactly where I thought it would have gone and I literally did not say a word for the whole time which was very amazing. Then there could be times where an incident has happened and you want to focus on that and go with that and try and flush it and get solutions rather than blaming.

MP
What did the students say in the debrief?

CI
I suppose part of it was the activity itself, other parts were looking at what they had learnt and comparing it back to the first outdoor experiences that they had this year while others were focusing on an elective where they choose the activity they do and a lot of them were linking it back to what they wanted to do in this activity and extend their skills in that for various reasons or that they don’t want to do a certain activity, because they didn’t enjoy that for some reason and going into a bit of detail as to why they didn’t like it.

MP
What did they speak about in terms of the activity itself?

CI
A lot of them liked that particular activity which was mountain biking and were very strong to do that for one of their electives. Some of it was that they liked the idea of not being physically hard, even though they were probably expending as much energy as on a bush walk. A lot of the students had a negative feeling about bush walking because they were carrying a heavy pack and just felt that they were suffering. So they made that connection with the activity and I do have a feeling that – when I think back to their first bushwalk and they had to carry packs and that’s what they vividly remember about bushwalking because in the time frame of things that was only a couple of months ago.

MP
So what idea did they like about it?

CI
With mountain climbing they felt good because they had to work hard to get to the top of the hill and then the whole idea was getting to the top of the hill so you could go down the other side, not pedaling basically. They also liked the idea that the mountain biking is not run as a journey based. Ok you have a base camp and they were out from that and just doing small trips out from base camp and they really enjoyed that. Whereas, had it been a journey base I don’t think they would have been so keen on it. Which I found interesting because if you look at the programs, they are purely journey based and I don’t know whether it was just the students here because I have had experiences where the kids love the fact that it was real because we had to carry everything with us. I don’t know whether that developed from the end of the outdoor program, each week they come back here to campus and whether it’s just flowed on from that.

MP
Ok so we commented on the nature of the experience, about it being different to another experience. Did you get any sense as to what they got out of it?

CI
One thing that I picked up and it was actually an accident where a student came off her mountain bike and it could have been much worse and she was known as someone who would have dramatized things (she was always ‘sick’), but after this she didn’t make a big deal out of it. She was very much oh it could have been much worse and I am so glad that it turned out the way it did, rather than poor me attitude. I think that was a general progression rather than just a one off incident and that’s what I think that most of those have been.

MP
So that’s something that you have noticed. Would the students themselves articulate growth or change through the experience?

CI
Not from that one off experience. I think it’s more that its something that happens much more gradually than that. Like compared from a term ago from that that’s a huge growth.

MP
How do you measure the growth?

CI
I think that’s one of the crux about education is to measure that growth. My personal beliefs are that in general outreach programs things like one or three day hikes that are quite short in duration, those sorts of programs always have the objective along the lines of personal objectives, personal growth or character building, but they are actually things that you can’t measure, so how can you prove that it works or doesn’t work? So with those sorts of programs in education it will remain a fringe dwelling subject. Whereas, a program like this where they are very much in engrossed in the whole out for education idea, trying to link it into both pastoral care and academic program and they
are doing it over an extended time, I think that’s where the big outcomes of growth and developments are seen much more holistically rather than having it as a subject on the outside, it’s something that’s in the middle and really there and I think that’s when it’s most powerful, but you still have that issue where it’s very hard to measure outcome. I suppose one way to do it is by interview, personal learning, which they have just recently done and there’s a much more deeper level of thought that they students here had to their own experiences and what they had learnt, than what I have seen at other schools with shorter programs. Again that’s a very subjective comparison.

MP
Then the students at the school are a different cohort to what you had at other schools. The results have been here.

CI
Parents are another interesting one in that speaking to parents of students in my house, the common theme is that the parents will say that they have matured and are much more independent and that I would call a measurement tool that one could look at.

MP
As a subjective scale that the parent might fill in?

CI
That’s what I feel is that the big issue for outer education is that there is no really accurate way to measure a lot of the outcomes. I think it’s the nature of a lot of education subjects as well.

End of Tape CI
Interview 31

Interview on 18/06/2007
Benjamin Castles (School E) Eucalypt Campus

MP
What are your impressions of the learning here at Eucalypt?

BC
That’s a difficult question. It’s quite a broad question. The hardest thing the students do here is arrive in that house. The have got ten people with them and they probably don’t know very well and they have to learn to deal with that and I think that’s the most profound learning that happens here. In that they just couldn’t get anywhere else. I mean there are frameworks that they understand that they have grown up with but there are so many things here that they have to learn and it really impresses me that they are able to do that. We don’t acknowledge how hard that is.

Learning as far as the curriculum, I like to think that they are just as high, if not higher, and we are always training to improve and in terms of traditional outcomes in the curriculum, but I also think that they have to develop organizational and motivational skills that they wouldn’t otherwise have in year 9 at other schools. Having said that I haven’t taught anywhere else, but from my impression of other schools and from general knowledge, I would anticipate that these students have organizational and motivational skills academically as well as other year 9 students, simply because they have to.

All of them arrive and think that the place is a bit of a camp and a lot of them crash a little bit when they realize they have to do some work and other people have to chase them to a certain extent and they have a window of opportunity where they can do their prep or catch up on revision, because they are always busy elsewhere (there are so many other distractions).

We do some great integration and I really enjoy that. I imagine that happens everywhere.

MP
You said the standard is high if not higher. Are you comparing this with other institutions? Is that School E or what?

BC
I guess School E and traditional academic schools, in general. When I came here I think there was a perception that Eucalypt was a year off academically and I am not sure if that was true in the past, but certainly when I came here at the beginning of last year there were a lot of people working very hard to change that. I don’t know if that perception still exists. I think there are people who still believe that perception exists and I have certainly seen evidence of it down in School E just in talking to other staff and parents. The perception that they are not going to do as much work but I think that their
understanding, especially in the humanities area where I am involved in, in terms of the content it’s just as vigorous.

MP
There seems to be two, almost finely balanced, connections. You mentioned moving into the house and found challenge with coping with those students that don’t like and they don’t know and then the academic standards. Do you think that one is overemphasized over the other here?

BC
As I say I think for the students the much profound thing is definitely that.

MP
From your perception?

BC
That’s not something that we project on to them. We try and make that learning as smooth and easy. I mean the first term for us is really about sure the students settle in and certainly the first half of the first term. We spend a lot of time trying to make the students feel safe and let them know that they are going to be able to get some sleep and something to eat, they are going to be ok and I think that’s something that they have to learn and I also think that the ability to put up with people when normally they would go home and that is what we are trying to tell them and illustrate it when it’s happening but obviously it’s only something you can learn from experience. It’s not something that we deliberately that balance but I think in terms of the students’ time and mental energy it’s one of the big competing interests and would be the biggest, probably, all through the year because social life is such an important thing for these students.

MP
So their personal space is quite intentionally limited, do you think?

BC
Yes. We don’t have any locks, we encourage openness.

MP
What do you mean by locks?

BC
For instance at Acacia (I went there), they have locked boxes and locked cupboards, separate wardrobe area and closed with doors. I think physically we encourage openness. I mean you have seen the houses they are very open but they have their own space where they can put up their own letters in a little cubicle but it’s by no means private. It’s something that they do figure out pretty quickly is that it helps to have a space around the campus where they can go and have a bit of a timeout if you like and also socially, we encourage openness.

MP
What does that mean?

BC
Sharing emotions. The difference between surliness and aggressiveness in terms of letting other people know how you feel and how their actions might be challenging for them and then to try and openly reason why their own actions might be challenging for other people and the reasons for those actions. Controlling their own emotions and that sort of thing. We obviously have the pastoral care – time managed. Have you been told about that? Ok. On Thursday we have half a day where basically the tutor of the houses, usually, in some sort of formal structure, talking about any kind of pastoral issue, whether it be a clash that has occurred in the house or asking the students what sort of role do they think they will play in growth. All that sort of stuff and then Jack will generally provide information on that. A lot of that happens in the formal stuff in the first term and then after that it’s up to the tutor to assess what’s going to happen. Often it’s just playing a game or having a chat.

MP
We are sort of in a unique position here given that you went to Acacia and we have the Acacia year and I think it’s a very interesting opportunity for me to perhaps draw on your experience. So which year were you at Acacia?

BC
I was there in 1996 and I imagine that it’s changed a lot since then.

MP
You are not telling me that it’s changed when they say old school and their strength is in their traditions.

BC
I guess what I mean I wouldn’t like to make that assumption that I talk about in terms of when I was there.

MP
Oh no not at all. But what I am interested in is your perception now. What is your most enduring memory that you have of Acacia, now.

BC
I think Acacia is a place (and I think here may be very similar), that you don’t really appreciate until much later. I don’t think that you can have any understanding of what value that an experience like that is until you are much older and have had experiences outside, especially if you continue in that fairly close environment which is a private school, particularly a boarding school like AAAA. It’s not really until you get out into the world that you realize how unique that was. I probably didn’t appreciate it while I was there, not that I didn’t enjoy it, I loved it.

MP
What stands out in your memory of that year?
Certain the dormitory and the relationships that you develop in that dormitory and your relationship with your tutor, but the hiking as well. I mean that outdoor experience was jolly profound. Not so much of developing an understanding with nature, but just the ability to be independent and to accept challenge and realize that you can be ok on your own. Again, I am not sure I felt like that when I was there or have thought about over time.

That’s why I am not talking to students at all because it is so methodologically so difficult to try and dismantle the social things that are going on to get to the heart of experiences, it’s not until much later.

I am sure that if you had spoken to me when I was at Acacia I probably would have said that it’s a terrible place. It’s like the students here you speak to them one day and they hate it and the next they love it. But you really need to see it as a package and that’s another reason why you can’t get a generic answer from students.

So in term one there’s a lot of scaffolding built around the students in terms of getting through experience and is this something that is practiced here?

It varies quite a bit from tutor to tutor as well. We have quite a bit of leeway as to what we do with out houses and Jack is there to guide and I find that very useful but some would use him more than others. I mean that’s what I found most challenging when I arrived here, having not taught anywhere else. I would like to think that I had some benefit coming from a boarding school, but there’s no real training for dealing with houseful of 15 year old students. The second year has been immeasurably easier in that regard.

The integration that you mentioned. That there’s some nice integration in your view between the academic program and the other earning that goes on here. How does that work?

Well, again, I can only speak in terms of humanities. The first term for instance, we worked hard on the water management and tried to integrate the water use around the campus and the environment in general and pollution. Trying to relate their experiences with the academics and the other place that we do it a lot is English. For instance, “To Kill a Mocking Bird” it was nice to put that into context with understanding and misunderstanding putting people in boxes and not give people the benefit of the doubt. Which obviously applies to directly to house scenario all the time….We do a…tour and go around and look at all the sites, telling them the stories and trying to make it very real for them. I think that “To Kill a Mocking Bird” really hit home for them.
in terms of social. You know just talking about racism in Southern America, may be not directly, but I think that sense of judgment and misunderstanding relates across without you having to illustrate it to the students. I mean that’s something they might do according to appearance and when you do illustrate it for them it can be quite profound, I think.

MP
So that’s reinforced through the social?

BC
Yes, we did that in my class a lot. They made those comparisons. It’s all very well to say that that person is wrong for giving a judgment, but how often do you judge somebody according to their appearance?

MP
I am interested in the setting. Now we have got an academic program here that you compare to programs that you imagine might run elsewhere. So theoretically that could run anywhere. I mean you could have a classroom in AAAA, a classroom in XXXX City and run an academic program, much the same as it’s run here. I am paraphrasing on what you have said, but the other part of the experience here. How important is the setting for that?

BC
I think in isolation it’s important. I mean yes, the location is important because it’s beautiful in the outdoor experiences that we have found. When I do go on a trip I try to make it as much as an eye opener as possible, but a lot of the times it’s just me making sure that they are safe and that is certainly the way Acacia operated when I was there. I think at the beginning of last year we experimented a little bit with debriefing trips and illustrating experiences that the students might not have consciously made note of when they were in group dynamics. The students didn’t enjoy it. The students were quite resistant of it. That was my experience anyway and I think that was a general experience. So we cut it back. I still believe that those hike speak for themselves and if they don’t they won’t until much later. I mean like in Acacia it would be hard and frustrating and exhausting and then you would come home and go to bed and it wouldn’t be until afterwards that you actually found that very enjoyable and something that you were very proud of. Sitting down in a circle and having a discussion during or after the hike isn’t necessarily a helpful and beneficial thing. I think it can be talked about a little on the hike, things like waiting for each other and supporting each other and making independent decisions but I think taking to another level would not be appropriate at the time.

Talking about locations, we get the isolations so I don’t know if you could replicate this experience in XXXX City because they would still have those links to the environment that they feel comfortable with and understood and they would still have the communications. Isolation physically and socially as well. They’re in an environment here that’s very alien to them. I think if you put them in an alien environment, not only in the bush, but in another culture
in a society, then you would be able to magnify those things that we talked about.

MP
So debrief is not something that you are happy with?

BC
I don’t enjoy it and I don’t think the students are either. Not in a formal sense. I mean those things are important but I think they can be illustrated as something occurs because someone is worried that the group are not moving quickly enough, or getting frustrated with the leader getting people lost or just slipping back and asking people to make decisions or stopping in time or route planning etc. and when that happens I think you have got to jump on it and illustrate it very quickly. There are only so many times that you can do that and I think that the benefit of these hikes is that after one they really should be learning things on their own and suffering the consequences if they don’t. Because when you are in that environment and you don’t do those things and essentially it’s always the group who suffers and who end up walking in the dark. They are the ones that get lost. So the teacher really doesn’t have to illustrate those things because they become pretty clear on their own. Obviously you don’t want the students in danger but I think you can do both. I mean I think you can protect them while letting them experience themselves without mollycoddling them.

MP
Do you let the experience have some harsh edges?

BC
Absolutely. Like getting tired, getting sore feet, getting lost, getting wet, running out of food, getting angry with each other. All those things that happen when not making basic decisions on a hike.

MP
Apart from the safety, are there at any other points that you would intervene?

BC
Emotional safety. If someone is being very negatively treated, or students not being very considerate of a student, that happens a lot and you have to step in there and protect that person. Apart from that generally not. In first term, obviously the lack of skill, I mean if they can’t read a map, then they can’t read a map and I don’t want them to get lost. But when they have more experience I think it’s healthy for the students to get lost and it’s also very rewarding when they get themselves out of a situation, of they run out of food and realize that by using their own initiative, get by. By solving the problem of initiative, you can give them some suggestions that will solve the problems for them. I think that’s much more rewarding for them rather than you warning them and making a problem for them.

MP
What types of problems would the students solve then?
Getting lost would be the big one and you might just make some suggestions as to how they could fix it, walking in the dark. Perhaps there are some things you could do tomorrow and then you wouldn’t do that again. This doesn’t happen often. I mean if they decide that they are going to have a lazy day have a long lunch and sit around that’s their decision I am not going to tell them to get up and start walking because I don’t think that’s the nature of the experience. Generally, it doesn’t come to that. Maybe once, but if you sit back and don’t interfere they will make the decision themselves. They have to understand how to use their equipment properly, how to ration their food, how to walk well so that their breaks are appropriate and water and spacing out their food.

Have you got some examples of where students have solved the problem and felt really encouraged because they worked it out themselves?

Again navigation is the main one I think and they realize that they can find their own way by maps, orientation and natural vegetation to get a sense of how high they are or low they are and using a compass. All those things they use to reading the geography and demography and even going off track. I find it very rewarding for them and be very happy when they get themselves out of that situation.

At the end of a hike when there has been something challenging, for instance, if it’s been raining the whole time or they have run out of food. I think they find the experience much more rewarding rather than when they come back from a hike when everything has gone to plan. They don’t have that sense of achievement.

How important is it for students to learn from their own mistakes here?

I think it’s important anywhere. In my opinion I think it’s very important. There is a certain amount of learning that has to take place academically and experiential learning in the classroom is important I think. Self direction in terms of study and analysis. They will learn which way it works for them.

You mentioned experiential learning in the classroom. Do you have sense that that is as effective as what might occur here on a mountain top?

Yes. I think if you are making the comparison. Something that they learn on the mountain top will generally be about their own self control and independence. Whereas, in the classroom experiential learning is about their
ability to do something by using a particular skill that they may not have been aware of before, or for allowing for another skill that they might not have been aware of before. So I guess they are different things because is very personal and one is about a sense of achievement and independence and the other one is more about their sense of a skill that they might develop.

MP
What’s the nature of relationships between students and staff here compared to School A where you would have referred to teachers by their surname only? Is it the same thing?

BC
Generally, yes. I mean in my house though they often refer to me as XXXX, which is fine. I mean you do have a different relationship with the house, but they say in the classroom ‘Mr. Castles’. I think these students come from pretty defined fences and we don’t have discipline problems in terms of their relationship with staff. Speaking personally, I find it better if I do establish a line of discipline, because perhaps being young and male. I think it’s more about motivation and getting things done and asking them to do something I need them to do it. So I think that line of discipline for me is important. Also, I think because I am an English teacher and a lot of the time I am involved in discussions on their level and I think that it would be very easy for that to slip into familiarity. I don’t want that to happen because there are occasions where I need them to respect my authority. When I am on duty I need for them to do what I say.

MP
So you don’t find that students challenge your authority here?

BC
I think they do but I don’t think very seriously and they will always try that in class but I have never had any problems with it and I have never thought that my authority has been undermined to the point where it’s out of control.

MP
Do you think your role as staff member is different here?

BC
I suppose it is just because it’s extended, but I think my responsibility is the same and I don’t think my responsibility would be any different elsewhere. It’s just that I am with them longer and those responsibilities are extended to outside areas which they might have missed in a normal school. I am still interested in the same areas. I mean I am still interested in their academic and social development and their safety. I don’t think it’s any different from any other school really. It’s just that here it happens a lot more because I am with them a lot more.

MP
But very few schools put their year 9s in this sort of setting and get them to go to school under these conditions.
BC
Yes, but in the normal classroom it's the same I am still interested in their development academically and socially and think about all those things that I want them to be thinking about in the house and maybe trying to relate that to the curriculum. My responsibilities and values are still the same.

MP
Do you have a set of values that you seek to instill?

BC
I think value in education is pretty important. It's hard to define. I think I do. I think you would have to because otherwise you would be somewhat hypocritical. Just the little things like telling a student off for swearing or telling students not to be rude to each other and tell them that it's not nice to make someone feel bad. That is a value judgment and if I don't believe in that value that would be hypocritical of me to make that judgment. It's not my responsibility to pass on my values to the students but it is my responsibility to get them to think about those values.

MP
Is that something that happens more in this setting?

BC
More probably because it happens more often because I spend more time with the students but not more than it happens in the classroom. I think students are probably more aware of it because they have been forced to reflect than others.

MP
Just in terms of that awareness. Do you think that you actively work on building an awareness in the students of their own memories and experiences here that you build on sequentially, or perhaps just drawn arbitrarily?

BC
Yes I think so because as I said if we are teaching any type of curriculum we often ask how does this compare to your experiences in the house? We do that in English quite a lot. Also again in terms of integration, if we are on a hike you might draw links between that and the house. Often on Thursdays I will ask them to think about how something worked on a hike or didn't work on a hike and how that might relate to the house. Yes, I think I asked to them to consider their experiences. Again, hopefully that's something that they do themselves without prompting them and I think that they do. Students might come up to me and may say I feel this about something or I feel good about it, or I did this and this happened and what will I do about it? They want to discussion experiences, for whatever reason whether it's made them sad or happy. Generally, it would be if they need help.

MP
You mentioned that your own experiences at Acacia the most memorable thing was unit wise... Do you think that the students at Eucalypt will leave here with a similar set of memories? Perhaps the most memorable thing that they would carry back to XXXX City.

BC
Yes I think so.

MP
Are you aware of that having any flow on back in (School E)?

BC
I really wouldn’t know. I mean I have spoken to students from last year, only once and they thought that it was interesting (they were the ones from my house) and they said that our group was the only group that stuck together, the friendship group, whereas the others haven’t. I didn’t ask for that, they just happened to mention it. I really wouldn’t know. I’d be speculating and am only going on what I have heard. From my experience at Acacia, I have got good friends from that particular unit and I remember those experiences and relationships very well.

MP
Do think when the students go back to the mainstream at School E, is there a reaction from the teachers there to the changes?

BC
I have spoken to a couple teachers down there about that and they say it’s remarkable the difference between the students from when they leave to when they come back. But I think if you took and year 9s away for a year in any environment and then took them back, there would be a big change. Here there is less time and so many competing interests here and distractions also and the staff and everyone wants to push, perhaps here it’s just a little bit tighter.

MP
After your year at Acacia was there a sense of reaction from your teachers at School A?

BC
That’s different at Acacia (or at least it was when I was there) because it was very much a senior school at School A, it’s a different school in itself, which is quite separate to middle school. I didn’t go to middle school, but there is no link between middle and senior school. Acacia is the bridge and middle school is very small. I think the majority of students would have started at AAAA at Acacia, do your year there and then you go to School A. Whereas at Eucalypt you have to fit in and do as part of the School E experience. I think that has probably a lot to do with the fact (as you say) Acacia has that tradition. They have established themselves and the way the program will be run and established a very clear close.....system and my feeling about the School E system is that Eucalypt is new and is only sixteen years old or
thereabouts and it’s still evolving all the time. Over the last two years it has become much more academic and I know that the teachers the year before I was here really worked hard and it’s only relatively recently that we have become a full year, which I think was in 1997 and obviously there are more students coming and going. It’s a relatively young program and I still think it feels it’s in flux a little bit and it’s much smaller as well. So I think that the parents don’t have the understanding either. They don’t know what to expect when they come here, whether it is a camp or academic here. Perhaps they don’t have the faith in the program, the teachers may not have the faith in the program or the students may not have the faith in the program. It’s not a criticism of Eucalypt by any means but I think that Eucalypt still feels attached to School E, that’s my feeling and may seem a bit of a hassle that the student have to go away and do this Eucalypt year and progress to getting a good HSC result.

Whereas at Acacia my sense was that it was very much a central program.

MP
What new knowledge do the students create during their time here, different from outcome, different from skills?

BC
I like the idea that they are much more aware of themselves here but I don’t know if that’s true for all students, I don’t think it is. I like the idea that students mature a little more quickly and they go away from Eucalypt possessing a greater knowledge of themselves. I like the idea that they have a clearer understanding of their own values because they are isolated and are away from other influences and decisions that are essentially value judgments. I think they have a better understanding of the environment from where they have come from socially and how they feel about that environment. Certainly they have a much better relationship with their parents and they think their relationship with us is great.

MP
Is that something that you have actively promoted or discussed?

BC
Not at all.

MP
What sort of learning do the parents go through in their time here?

BC
I am not sure. I suppose it varies from parent to parent and some of the parents have a good understanding of what will happen here because they have had other children who have come here, or they have been to boarding school themselves. I think there are quite a few parents who have been to Acacia or some other boarding program and will understand what the program will do. Quite a few parents have said to me that they like the idea of Eucalypt because they want to develop those skills that we have just talked about. The
skills that come from living in a house, the personal values that come from living in a house and I think a lot of parents like the idea that students will get a sense of what they do have in XXXX City and what they don't have at Eucalypt. By sending them up here the students will have a keener appreciation of how lucky they are in XXXX City and I think they do. I also think that they may have an understanding about how shallow things might be. It must be hard on the parents to have children up here knowing the environment that they are in. Again, I think the staff don’t always understand how hard it can be for the students to live in this environment. But I don’t think the parents I think they are very aware.

MP
There is an awareness of the parents that their children are going through hard times.

BC
There would have to be I would have thought.

MP
Do you have much interaction with parents?

BC
Yes the parents in my house and they have always been very supportive of me.

MP
Even if they are cross about their child being bullied, wet, cold or hungry?

BC
Yes. I mean the times that parents have been upset it’s almost as though something has gone wrong and they haven’t been informed about it and they have heard about it from a letter from the student and usually when you explain that it’s not exactly what happened and the picture that you have got isn’t entirely clear. Generally, it’s my impression that they like to be informed and have a good understanding of what’s happening and if something goes wrong and the student has been upset about something has happened in the house or wherever and the parent hasn’t been informed of that, they can be quite upset about that. Often the students will use letter writing from escaping frustrations in the house and they use their diaries for the same reason. Often I get a call from a parent who I have had this letter from so and so and she sounds really upset and I don’t know what it’s about so I say I will get back to them when I know more and by that time they have received another letter saying everything is good.

MP
How often to the students write the letters?

BC
All the time. Some daily and I would say the majority would write a couple of letters a week. If not to parents then to friends. Communication is very important for these students.

MP
Do they learn much from that?

BC
They certainly learn some good letter writing techniques and are able to write rich communicative letters that their parents enjoy and a lot of the parents will say how improved their letter writing is and it comes from practice. I think they learn the value of communication by just picking up the phone or get in touch with someone on the internet. It’s just one of those things that they take for granted in XXXX City that they don’t have up here. But the other thing I was thinking was that when I got back from Acacia I thought TV wasn’t so great after all. I think that happens often here as well. It’s also something that they talk about in English and communication, the idea of spin and advertising, the idea that they are manipulated as a target group. I mean year 9 students or young teenagers are considered an easy target for advertising and styles. Look at all those stereotypes and you don’t have to illustrate it they know straight away.

MP
That’s a good example of new knowledge that they develop while you are here and they wouldn’t have developed in the XXXX City environment. So I guess that’s what we were saying about isolation and distance.

Of all the myths and legends I mean the practices that have importance only here. I mean sort of part of the life of the place. Things that require an almost symbolic, almost spiritual. A good example, the woodshed at Acacia. I mean woodshed and straight away an Acacia kid will have a reaction.

BC
Comparisons are pretty profound and I think that’s one of the main differences between here and there. I think Acacia has quite an established tradition, like the woodshed that has been understood for a couple of generations now. And another thing I hear from Acacia staff is that parents will actively encourage the students to do these things that they did when they were at Acacia. You know have you done a new year run yet, have you rung the bell have you climbed to the mountain to in the middle of the night (which I did, you have to do), have you tried to escape in the laundry basket. I think that comes with time and things become traditional because they are practiced. I don’t think here there are many of those things, although they probably do exist and I am just not aware of them and the students do try and establish them. You will find that say in Thompson House, you will have to do this and this this year because we did that last year, but I don’t see it carrying through this year very much. I am sure that there will be things like taking your clothes off in the middle of the night and running out and touching the verandah. At Acacia it’s generally doing something and not getting caught and students
definitely do that I mean they do things and the challenge is not getting caught.

MP
Is that reaction to the very strict regime at Acacia? Because things are more relaxed here and you only have to sit in the dining room and get a sense of that.

BC
Most of the things that happen like that at Acacia happen after dark. We think have the same harsh rules about doing things after dark here but yes Acacia certainly has a more rigid type of discipline. The students here are aware of it too. That they have to run 50km in the snow and carry logs. Well when I was at Acacia we had no idea that anything else existed. We didn’t have time to think about it.

MP
Are there any places here that are starting to acquire a special significance?

BC
I think probably……(sporting)……where people choose to go down to get their space
There are traditions like king of the mountain where every year they have to run up HHHH and back and the king of the mountain, solo is a tradition. I think the solo challenge of going out on your own and being out for a night, the students find very intimidating. There are the motivating challenges as well. Often they will do it on the outdoor programs. A good example is probably bike riding where you go down a very steep hill and the students won’t mention it, but then you stop at the top of the hill and they will say you have to go down Deadman’s Drop. Every year you have to go down Deadman’s Drop, I mean it might just a gully and not intimidating, but just the idea of that is something that is a tradition and somehow challenging, solo is easy but it’s still a very intimidating thing. So I think when they come here one of the things I ask is about solo and they have no concept of it and are scared of it, so that’s something that’s a tradition and the six-day hike is a tradition, Acacia have got the marathon (28 kilometers) and we have the six-day hike which they see as challenging at the end of the year. There’s certainly nothing to do with the academic program that has become tradition. I wouldn’t be surprised if each house had their little thing, probably written down somewhere what each house has to do.

End of Interview BC
Interview 32

Interview on 17/06/2007
Michelle Elliot (School E) Eucalypt Campus

MP
Could I just start by asking what your role is here?

ME
I teach mathematics and also run the fitness program and I have a house of nine students who I am in charge of and look after as well.

MP
How long have you been here for?

ME
This is my third year full time and I was here part time the year before that.

MP
What was the part time here like? I mean were you living in the local area?

ME
I was coming up from XXXX City to do three days a week and mainly just oversee (XX) and other programs. I didn’t have any classes it was just to fill in the gaps while the other teacher was on stress leave so they needed someone to do odd jobs that don’t get filled when the teacher is away.

MP
So you were at (XXXX City)?

ME
No, I was just finishing my degree. So I came up as a sort of resident assistant role.

MP
Did you drive up and then drive back?

ME
No, I would drive up on Friday morning and stay Friday and Saturday nights and go home Sunday night. It was tough doing this but I wanted to get a job here after I graduated so I put in the hard yards and also extra money.

MP
You are not an ex-graduate from here are you?

ME
At university I studied education and my lecturer left university and came here as a director of the school so that was when I started to do professional work as an… instructor for a couple of years…

MP
There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions that I ask. Just your own perceptions of things which is what I want to discover. What do you think that characterizes the learning that happens here in this program?

ME
I think that the learning that happens in the classrooms isn’t actually different to the learning that happens in any other classrooms in most schools. I don’t think that the way in which we teach is different to School E. I think that the learning that is quite different is learning out of the classrooms throughout the day, everyday life, getting up in the morning and living with nine other students and learning to live in a very different environment where you can’t just push the button to put the air conditioner or heater on. I guess it’s taking them out of a lifestyle that is modern and taking just one step back, a little bit more simplified and manual rather than automatic. I think they learn a lot just through living experiences like outside the classrooms and also outdoor programs like journey based programs, overnight experiences. I think that’s a lot of experiential learning curves.

MP
What do you mean by journey based programs?

ME
Where they start at one particular place and they journey via canoe or bike or horse or on foot in similar environments but using different methods and in different groups and with different focuses each time. A lot of it is based on the journey rather than you have to get to this destination or you have to walk this many ks. It’s about what happens on the way learning skills along the way.

MP
What do you think the students learn from all of this?

ME
I think they learn a lot of values. I think they learn the values that their friends and families have in XXXX City may not be the only values that they can have. They learn about what it’s like to live in a small community rather than being one person in a massive big metropolitan area. They learn about themselves and what sort of people they are, what things they can cope with and they realize that a lot of stuff that they thought they didn’t like they find that they actually do like. A lot activities and outdoor stuff that they have never had a chance to do. They also learn about being independent and a lot of relationship skills, so I guess intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

MP
You used the word alternative values before. What does that mean to you?

ME
I guess the majority of the people who they are surrounded by on a daily basis in XXXX City, may not have, or haven’t learn those values through growing up
in the area that they have grown up in and the culture that they have been brought up in.

MP
Do you have any examples of what you might think to be alternative values?

ME
Rather than valuing materialistic things and their appearances and what they look like and having to live up to the expectations of what’s fashionable and what’s not and what Hollywood is doing now. They find they don’t need TV, they don’t need internet, they don’t need DVDs, they don’t need to be constantly entertained. After a while of being up here they don’t care what they look like, they walk around school wearing tracksuits and Ugg boots and everyone accepts each other, they are just being themselves.

MP
How would a learning transaction in that sort of mode occur here?

ME
I don’t think it’s something that is taught I think it’s something that they realize over a long period of time. I realize this by little conversations they have with each other like, my friends when I went home, they couldn’t believe what I was wearing, or laughing at this and they just have no idea what the house is like. They talk about how they learn to occupy themselves and be themselves and not to rely on multimedia bombardment all the time and they just mention to one another informally and you just pick up on it. I mean before they didn’t realize that but as before they might not have realized that where they have grown up and society and culture has had an impact on them but now they can see what impact it has had.

MP
Would there be a formal process where you seek to get confirmation of that?

ME
The students have just done their personal passport which takes them to looking at what they have learnt about themselves and how Eucalypt has changed them over six months and it’s like a reflective process and listening to the students give their presentations about themselves is quite interesting. Another thing that came up is they learnt to value their families a lot more. The students I listened to (there was about ten of them) said that before they used to fight with their mum all the time and they are really ashamed as to how they treated their parents and since being away they have realized that when they go home they are so happy to see them, that they realize how important that they actually were. They took them for granted and they also realized after having to do everything themselves, get ready for school, get their own breakfast and they don’t have a mum to ask how was your day at school?

MP
So it’s that sense of reflecting on their memories do you think?

ME
Yes.

MP
What other things did the students report to you about their learning?

ME
I guess they have learned that they don’t need all the stuff they have in XXXX City or their things that they have. Because when they are on their hike they only need a tent and a … and that’s all they need to survive. They learn the value of nature and the environment, like the animals and the sunset and the bush rather than the footpaths and the shops.

MP
You said that it takes a year for that to happen. Does it happen before then?

ME
Some people are different but a lot of the students say I can’t wait to get back to XXXX City, how can you not like XXXX City and don’t want to spend your weekends in XXXX City and they don’t like it, all the pollution and they find it hard to understand until the end of the year when they do understand.

When they are going back to XXXX City and they don’t want to leave on the bus on the last day they don’t want to go; they miss Eucalypt, they miss the running tracks because they have to run on the footpaths.

MP
What do they miss at Eucalypt when they leave?

ME
I think they probably miss their independence that they have here got here, they miss living with their friends and having their friends about all the time because they get to be in a room by themselves. They cement the relationships that they have with the staff because they are a very different from normal relationships that you would have with your teacher at a non-residential school. I think they miss the fitness and the settings, the outdoor program and all the adventurous activities.

MP
How is your relationship with students here?

ME
You get to know the students on a much deeper level because you don’t only see them in a classroom. You see them in the house in the mornings, once they have woken up, you see them after school and you spend a lot of your spare time hanging out with them, taking them for rides and runs, you see them at night, you help them with homework, you eat meals with them. Your life is, rather than it being a job, it’s more like your life and they are a part of
your life, not just a part of your work life but a part of your whole life. They get
to know what’s going on in your life and it’s harder to hide a bad day, or it’s
harder for them to put on an act, you get to see what they are really like
because they can’t sustain an act for the whole year. I think because they get
to know us better and we let them be involved in our lives and we feel that we
can have more fun with them and be more open with them. You feel respect.
I mean you are a teacher in the classroom but outside of the classroom you
are not really a teacher, you are their mum, or their sister, or their outdoor
leader.

MP
At the start you talked about it being an academic program and things that
happened outside of that and you thought that the academic program was
much the same as anywhere else. Do you see that is an effective program
because of where it’s sitting, or is it largely irrelevant?

ME
No I think a lot of other residences do a lot better than we do but, School E is
such an academic school that they want success, they want high awards and
they also want high HSC marks and there’s only one way to get those results.
I mean the assessment is planned towards year 12 and we have to aim
toward that and also because they are here for a whole year you can’t really
run seven alternative programs because they miss out on a whole year of
work and although they would get awesome learning from that it wouldn’t be
the type of learning to get an awesome result in their HSC maths.

MP
Do you think that the learning is different and if so, why is that learning
different?

ME
I think it’s about learning (especially for maths), you need to develop certain
skills and the way in which you would learn those skills in year 11 and year 12
it needs to be so sequential and a lot of the skills need repetition and
integrating, writing a whole big unit where you can integrate with other
subjects, that’s fine, but they are not learning the skills that they need to learn
to be able to cope when they get to year 10, 11 and 12.

MP
You couldn’t see a way that that could be done in the context of the program?

ME
No. Not if School E wants us to cover the subjects that they want us to cover.
It could be done if we didn’t have to teach. Like there’s an expectation that
when the students leave here they can do this and this and there’s no way
around unless that was changed.

MP
What are the hard things for you that need that sequential focus that you can’t give unless you are in a classroom?

ME
Everything, really. Everything that they learn they need to be sitting down and doing examples and getting into their head, looking at the blackboard and it’s not something that they are going to learn in the bush in a practical sense. They can apply but we don’t have time to apply. So once we have sourced a topic, that’s it, then we have to get on to the next topic of work and if you only had to get through half the amount of work then we could spend this time learning other skills and going out into the field and applying that knowledge and looking at how it’s used.

MP
What are the major areas in mathematics for year 9?

ME
They do Pythagoras’ Theorem, trigonometry, linear graph, linear equations and measurements. We incorporate different investigations and practical tasks and applications into the classroom, it’s not like it’s all text book stuff but it’s nothing I couldn’t do if I say taught in say AAAA, there’s nothing I couldn’t do the same, I could do all the activities that we do there.

MP
So in your area there’s not a strong integration between the experiential and the mainstream then. Have you heard about other areas where the program could be done?

ME
Well I know places like Grevillea Campus, Boronia, School B has rather than a classroom based, they have more units. So they might do a two week base something, like it might be a geography based unit and everyday spent out in the field working through the unit and then have another couple of weeks and you might do a science based unit, or something like that but, they are only there for a term. So they have this awesome experience and then they go back and work really hard for the next three terms in order to catch up on anything they have missed out on in the interim. Maths you can’t work that way because you can’t maintain that level of concentration for that length of time for two weeks all day, every day, unless you combine with a lot of other subjects and then it gets lost.

MP
So it’s a comparison between the one term somewhere versus the one year here?

ME
Yes. I think that academically, the programs at the other term places are much more experiential but I don’t think they are sustainable for any longer than a term. But I think with everything else that occurs I think the year on is
much better because, it takes them a full year to get the benefit out of something like this.

MP
What about the setting of the campus? Do you think that is an important part of the learning?

ME
Yes, I think that it is important that they feel that they are isolated a little bit. I mean there’s no town they can walk to or they can see and they don’t really see anyone from the public at all. Which means they feel very safe and quiet and they can just be themselves. I think it helps with their natural appreciation of the environment, where you look around and it’s very uninhabited and quiet and that’s what your perception of the wilderness is.

MP
So for you it’s a sense of isolation and distance is most important?

ME
And the bush hasn’t been affected (there may be a few running trails) by humans or altered in any way.

MP
Do you think that the setting is used effectively in the program?

ME
I think the running program is run quite well and there are four different areas. I know that in science they go out and art they go out and look. Like at the moment they are looking at the impact on the fires on certain areas in science. They do games and orienteering around the campus so they get to explore and go off track.

MP
But is there anything, in particular, about being here, near CCCC that’s significant, or could you lift it up and put it down anywhere where there is unspoilt bush?

ME
I guess it could be anywhere where you have got the same access to a lot of rivers around here, so you need to be in less than a two hour driving distance for any activities because there are lots of mountain biking, there are lots of rivers that the students travel on, we are close to Mt DDDD and FFFF. So whatever activity that they are doing those activities are quite close and it’s all accessible from here.

MP
Students do work on FFFF and DDDD, do they?

ME
They go skiing in term 3 every Wednesday is across country skiing and every Tuesday is downhill skiing. Not every student goes every time, it’s on a rotational basis but they do about six downhill day and about four or five across country skiing over the term in winter.

MP
Do you feel that there’s a very good range of activities, I mean too much or too little?

ME
I think there is a good range of activities. I think that the downhill skiing takes them all back a big step. They get up back at DDDD and all of a sudden they are back in their own environment as they were in XXXX City. Around similar sorts of people of similar perceptions and expectations and all of a sudden it matters what you look like, it matters who you know and who your dad knows. I would love to see it scrapped from an educational point of view. It’s completely a waste of time in my opinion but, it’s the draw card and there’s a lot of wealthy families who send their students and it’s one of the draw cards that they use to get parents keen that the students are doing downhill skiing because it’s one of those exclusive sports. I hate the day because they turn into different people again – from happy students they are all of a sudden completely different and they find it difficult to transfer their values back into our environment.

MP
That happens in term 3 so it seems to suggest that they revert back to type fairly quickly, is that so?

ME
Yes. Especially after only doing six months. I mean you can talk to them about it. Like in term 4 generally, a lot of conversations come up and I will give my perceptions of what they were like when they went to DDDD and point out that as soon as you went back to that that’s what you become and then it become more of a, oh yes, and some of them get it and some don’t. So it can be a learning experience if you reflect upon it afterwards. But definitely, year 10s and 11s, the memories of Eucalypt are still there. I think it’s always and I think they are changed forever, but I think it’s very easy to just slip back and forget about it.

MP
What’s there to remember?

ME
They remember their six-day hike, which is the last hike that they do where they are completely independent and don’t have a staff member leading them. They remember the staff, they remember the house and the students that they lived with for the year.
Are you aware of those memories being used in anyway during the year as they build up experiences? I mean are they used in any sort of intentional way?

**ME**
They keep journals. The students are encouraged to keep a journal or scrap book and a lot of them make scrap books and a lot of them write in their journals every night before they go to bed, but some of them don’t at all. So it’s encouraged but a little bit up to them. It’s compulsory to have a journal but not to do it properly because it’s never read. It’s completely private and personal.

**MP**
Are you aware of any other things that are particularly memorable? Perhaps what the students tell you afterwards?

**ME**
They remember specific events, like they remember when something happened in the program, like someone fall off their horse, or little events that have happened that they found funny or house socials they quite often remember.

**MP**
Are you aware of how you can measure the way they change? How much they change? Are their any mechanisms or way of doing that?

**ME**
There’s nothing in place at the moment in School E.

**MP**
So how do they know that money is not being wasted?

**ME**
I guess the teachers in School E notice that there is definitely a change. The School E staff say, “Oh, yes we notice a difference when they come back and we have to beat out Eucalypt once they come back.” Which is pretty sad because they come back much more independent and free thinkers. They don’t just accept exactly what’s told to them. They ask questions and then they challenge norms and ideas and potentials and in School E they find that quite difficult and they come back from here and the staff believe that they become naughty, rather than they have come back and actually thinking for themselves now and that in the last year or two I am told that it’s not so bad but I think that’s more a sign of the program over the last two years rather than anything else.

**MP**
How do they think differently?

**ME**
Their values have changed. They are frustrated that they can't build the same relationship with the teachers in School E that they did here and they all of a sudden have to wear a school uniform and comply to rules and expectations that they see as superficial and not important anymore and every year is different I mean some students slot back into School E very easily and others find it difficult and there's a lot of conflict with staff but the last two years have been fine. Three years ago it was really hard for them. So I think a lot of it has to do with the staff here as well. The values the staff have, because the culture of the place is very much directed by the staff and the values they have and what they want the students to learn. It changes so rapidly because there is such a high turnover of staff. Three years ago it was very much a young staff from residential background, the outdoors, country people. Now you have got a lot more people who come from the City and come from the same background as the students have. I don't think the students change as much, because it's not as consistent. It think that the approach has been consistent from the staff.

MP
How has it been consistent?

ME
I think, for instance with socialites, three years ago we take the students out, we take our house out to places like taking them down to the river, or we would go to picnic spots and taking them on a hike up a big hill so that you can see the valley and sliding down the hill in waxed cardboard boxes on the grass and taking them into HHHH to check out the local band playing and all the music teachers are in the local band and they see the local community and just having fun with what's around locally. Whereas, now that the staff has changed, it's basically put on a DVD and go into HHHH, get a DVD for the students, take them to the visitors' house, buy them heaps of junk food, put on the DVD and sit there for six hours so they can watch the DVDs.

MP
Which visitor's house?

ME
Are you staying there?

MP
Oh is that where the students watch the DVD? How many students are there?

ME
About nine. Just one house full. So it's up to each individual tutor what you do with your house and three years ago the tutor was always the one who decided what happens, but they wanted to give the students the same sort of experiences. Whereas, now there is a lot of staff that resent giving up their own time and resent having to do anything extra outside of their normal teaching load. Then you now get some students do something and the other students doing the other, they say why do we have to watch DVD why don't
you take us and show us this and this? So they decide to can the other stuff and say ok you can’t go off campus anymore, you have to the house nights in the visitors’ house. It’s really sad because it was an awesome thing to be able to out with your house and now being band because you have half the staff thinking it’s a waste of time and can’t be bothered. So a lot of what the students get out of that specific year depends on the staff and it changes every year as to what Eucalypt is about.

I think School E places a lot on the academic again, so they seem to be choosing staff who are academically very capable and have had a lot of experience academically. Whereas, they don’t seem to think much about the overall experience of here. I think they like the idea of it and Eucalypt is an amazing place, but when it actually comes down to it they don’t really want that. There has been talk about horse riding being a risk, even though there hasn’t been an accident. Also there’s a risk of students falling off their bikes and hurting themselves and because of the clientele, on day the students may one day become hand models or leg models and may have a scar on their hand or leg and therefore, we are liable.

MP
Has that sort of thing happened? Has it been raised with you?

ME
We are always told if they scold themselves or scratch themselves we must evacuate them immediately and get them back to the health centre if anywhere that you think might scar.

MP
And you think that is a fundamental contradiction of the values here?

ME
Yes I think so

MP
It’s compulsory to come here in year 9 isn’t it?

ME
Yes, but a lot of students leave the school in year 8 because they don’t want to come here. About ten leave here but they also gain ten.

MP
I want to hear your view on the place of mistakes and error in learning, particularly in the learning that’s done here. What’s your take on it?

ME
I think that the whole reason why the Eucalypt program is important is because if you think without the program, for example, you think about Monday and Tuesday and they go out and you have a group of ten students and you take them hiking or whatever and they do gear check before they go out. There’s a big list that they have been given about what they have to have
in their pack and should empty out their pack and you are supposed to say ok and take up a knife and say everyone hold your knife up and put that in your pack, so everyone does and then you say sleeping bag and everyone holds it up and then puts in their pack. I refuse to do that. I sit down with the students and say ok students, this is the list, know what is on the list and the important things on this list are you...port extractor, if you don’t have that you are going to get wet, ...feed..mat and if you don’t have that you are going to get uncomfortable, the sleeping bag and if you don’t have that you are going to be cold and you need to have that but if you don’t you will definitely remember it next time because you will remember how cold and wet you were. You can do that because there are other hikes and the students will remember. In XXXX City you can’t do that on a one off hike where the learning is so much more condensed whereas here you can allow them to forget things. It’s really good for them to make mistakes in a year’s program.

MP
If you saw a student that didn’t have a jacket would you say, “Hey what about your jacket?”

ME
It doesn’t really happen, their pack is already packed. I go through the list and say who has it and if you don’t have it make sure you get it. Actually I quite like the students making mistakes and probably wouldn’t remind them if they haven’t included their jacket.

MP
What about if you get a parent complaint saying, “My child went out in term one and got soaking wet?” Don’t you get the parents saying you the one whose professional it’s your responsibility to check?

ME
Yes I get a lot of those, but no, the parents don’t say that. They are just used to rescuing their child from every situation. I would say the students have to accept the consequences because a lot of these students don’t have consequences at home. When they are told to do something and they don’t do it they can always con their way out of it and always get what they want, not matter what. So they come up here and I tell them to do whatever and they don’t and they say well that’s not fair. I say no it’s not but there are a lot of consequences in life and you need to learn to accept the consequences for what happens.

MP
How does the parent feel after that? Do they accept it?

ME
Yes, they normally come around. It helps to explain to them that the students always write letters to home when they get upset about something and they get angry and the first thing they do is write home. I mean three days later when the parents get the letter they are concerned, but by that time the
student has forgotten all about that incidence and I say, “She’s fine, she is having a great day today and she is out playing soccer or whatever.”

MP
It sounds like there is some learning for the parents as well as much as the students.

ME
Yes, sometimes they do. For example, a certain student in the house leaves the house completely messy and at 8.15 am it’s inspection time and you go in and the house has to be cleaned. You try everything and they don’t clean the house. There were two students that they would drag their whole wardrobe out and it would be spread over four metres of living area at 8.15am and I come in and I have a garbage bag and anything on the floor I take and they get it back in a week. One parent and I had several conversations about it. The student was very upset because I had taken the soccer boots because they were on the floor and she wrote home and said I can’t play soccer for a week because she has taken my soccer boots and then I get a phone call and it takes a while to explain to them that this has been a problem for a year, she knew the consequences and she knew that this was going to happen if they were on the floor and she needs to accept the consequences for leaving them there. But her mum wanted me to give them back to her but then she would have done that again. I guess that would be called experiential learning.

MP
Yes. You are seeking to transform behaviour through learning.

ME
Yes and I don’t get her into trouble or anything. It’s just a natural consequence of her actions. But I think it is hard for the parents sometimes because they have had a way of dealing with their child and then they send them away and someone else is treating their child completely differently.

MP
Do the parents give you feedback about the difficulties of readjustment?

ME
You hear quite a lot but you don’t hear much once they have left for good. But over the school holidays every year parents will say oh she has matured so much and she is a completely different student and things she talks about are completely different and they help out around the house because they know how to sweep the floor and they know that someone has to do that otherwise it won’t get done and they are used to pulling their weight a little more.

MP
And you don’t get a reflection on how the house experience has impacted on them down the track.

ME
No you don’t. When you go to School E perhaps a couple of time a year you will see students you know and run up and give you a hug and you have a chat that’s all. There’s no real way of finding out.

End of Interview ME
Interview 33

Interview on 18/06/07
Gerald Notting (School E) Eucalypt Campus

MP
We'll continue on that track that we were following a moment ago about when you talked about the moment the students got it. What was the change that occurred?

GN
Well, students struggles, as they always do at the beginning of term one where they have to clean up after themselves, all the basic things, not really the class work but the basic things, help out around the campus and that had to be done and the motivation wasn’t coming from them but from the teachers. Trying to drum that in that that had to happen and they found that very hard to come to terms with. I think a lot of them expected it to be lots of social time, lots of free time, lots of unstructured programming and they actually found it to be the opposite, lots and lots of structure. Not that that wasn’t obvious in the handbook that they would have read. Students notoriously don’t read them. And most them struggling with that idea. The big change occurred, I think, when they realized that they were going to make it. It was hard, they all said that, homesickness, the rules and not really seeing why the rules needed to be there, despite the fact that you have constant assemblies to let the students know that its all about helping the community or oneself. They still didn’t really understand what that was all about and about two weeks from the end of last term, there was a change where I simply said at assembly where I said students you can pat yourself on the back, you realize that you made it through first term. Everyone’s going to make it through now there’s only a fortnight to go. That realization changed their attitude and what was going on all around and they realized that the rules supported the community. In the second term they realized that it was an amazing experience and really inspirational and they just embraced and realized where the rules were necessary and why you have to moderate your own behaviour and make sacrifices of how you would like things to be when you live in a house with ten students the entire year. I guess students kind of process things and they just didn’t realize. Yes the first week was great, an amazing experience and what a beautiful place we’re in with our friends, but the structure is a bit difficult. Then suddenly the realization that the whole term they won’t be able to see their parents, their room, their technology. It takes children a long time for them to realize that they have a whole year ahead of them and when it hits them it’s a pretty big deal. However, once they realized they were going to survive they started to see the value in the experience and from then on it’s been all up hill, it’s been incredible. The students have changed.

MP
How would you perceive that realization when you said that when they came back in second term it’s tenfold in terms of the realization. How does that manifest itself to you?

GN
The way the students look you in the eye when they are speaking to you, the way they apologize when they know they have done the wrong thing and they can see they should have done the opposite. I think the way they look at you and speak to you and understand that as a teacher you are there to help them. Help them with their learning but also help them cope with their life up here. There’s not a single student at this campus that’s not on that level at this stage and that’s not something I can say for regular schools. So it’s very exciting to work with students who have that understanding and I think the preservation of the community. All of the understandings that they gather they take forward with their experiences here and why they behave towards others, stem from the fact that they have to protect others to protect themselves. So when they are in a house with ten students, you might value clutter because its homely and something that you like to surround yourself in and the person next to you is perhaps a neat freak and you just have to find that middle ground and what it is in your behaviour that’s upsetting the other people. It’s self analysis that comes from that is really powerful stuff and the students actually start to realize that and noticing that they might have upset someone for example. They realize that they have to clearly with other people, rather than being misunderstood all the time and blaming everyone else other than themselves.

MP
A lot of those changes seem to be on a social plain. Their interaction with you, there interaction with other students, there is more sense of other, rather than self. Is that true?

GN
Yes I agree. I think at this stage of the year you are probably right and the thing that I have noticed the most that they are aware. I mean they were probably many students who came here with those attributes but one of the big changes is that they become to realize how they affect others and how to make their own experience more pleasant up here by helping others.

MP
What about the setting. I am interested in where it is. I mean we are not in School E, are we?

GN
Well architecturally all the students come from (suburbs) that kind of demographic and to bring them out here to the bush. I know its very interesting and a lot of the students mention to me early in the year and they find there are two way that they feel about going bush: 1 scared and 2 ugly, actually they don’t think its attractive. When they arrive up here I sympathize with them because its forty degrees (and forty seven degrees on five separate occasions) in term one and the grass is yellow and there’s dust everywhere,
but the landscape has grown on them and they can’t change it. The place has been architecturally designed so that every classroom is stinking, even during dinner, in the art shed, it doesn’t matter where you are around the campus or in the house you can’t escape the outside world. We have very strong values and philosophies around that. I mean we have been offered microwaves from parents and small technologies and cooking gear and let’s get air conditioning in. I have said no, on a philosophical level, every time those offers have been made because when it’s cold we want the kids to know they have to do something about it. Something organic, like grab some wood and make the effort and get it lit and when it’s hot you have to slow down. You can’t run around any more you have to slow down and it takes a long time for the students to understand the value in that and when it’s raining you can hear it, its tin. All of that is not being able to escape, or being exposed to the bush. By the end of the year this place has a huge place in their heart and it’s hard to keep them out of the place when they are not supposed to be here in holidays when they come up for a walk. They just come back in their interest of seeing their home that they had for a year.

MP
What is it that sticks in their mind when they leave here?

GN
I guess I haven’t been through it myself, but I would imagine in the sense of all the clicks (and that’s something else I have noticed as well and it will happen more so by the end of the year), but all the clicks that you always get and I can imagine, especially in a students school and I know last year there were very obvious clicks and there’s just nothing but support for each other and it’s not meant to be an easy experience. So I think that the ‘cohesiveness’ of the year is something that they would take away. That this is the place that has really cemented my relationship and my understanding of my relationship with my peers. I know that being a teenager can be a very isolating experience and that’s the thing that’s cut out of the equation for these students, you can’t possibly feel isolated from the emotions of the teenagers around you. You have to discuss and problem solve in the houses for the course of the whole year. So they realize that their emotions are quite similar to the student next to them and I think that’s where some of the confidence comes from.

MP
Have you had any sense of particularly strong memories that have been formed in the students so far?

GN
I think the outdoor programs are probably the biggest evoker of memories, if you like. It’s interesting that one thing that we do here is that we mix up the groups. Their house group is different from the group they have for dinner, which is different to the group that they hike with and they identify with all these different groups. It’s simply the placing around of these groups that cause the cohesion. In terms of memories, I think the hike groups would be
something that they already really do have memories of. You have got overnight rock climbing, overnight white water kayaking and horse riding. All of these amazing events and I think that a high percentage of the students would have considered it to be an adventure getting rained on without an umbrella in AAAAA Street. They are now out there in the bush having to camp with all the snakes and spiders and all the rest of it and put up their own tents and cook on a trangia stove and climb up and down cliffs and using their hands and feet and trusting implicitly their teachers. I think that’s one thing that we have our teachers as qualified outdoor staff as well to run that program. So we don’t have the teachers along for a ride, they actually are heavily involved in running the program. Maybe that’s one of the reasons that the attitudes of the students change and they look at you and see that you have so many strings to your bow, you’re not just a one dimensional human being. I always say that it’s the things that the students weren’t expecting is what they remember. I mean I know there were five students who went out with their teacher alone mountain biking, just before dark and deliberately just rode, not knowing where they were going, just riding along tracks and that’s something they won’t forget.

We had 170 kmh winds on HHHH seven weeks ago and the students stayed on there. I think they had ability because they had been camping every weekend for all of this year and were well and truly able to cope with the experience when it came up. It’s been a stepping stone for them and that’s an experience they will never forget. Having to stay in their tents and cook, having to stand up all night with their backs pressed against the wall. Put all the students in one tent so that the tent has got enough support. That kind of think they will carry in their hearts forever.

MP
Tell me about the learning that occurs here. The isolation from the outside world and lack of isolation from each other. You talked about learning from others and learning about how to interact with others and learning respect. You have an academic program as well. What’s the relationship that you see between the two?

GN
We have a lot of links that’s rich for linking and cross discipline. We do and we call HLAs Eucalypt learning areas and there are science and arts together and science and maths and even maths and English and lots of crossing over. It’s easy to do that when you have a staff that you can communicate with and are very supportive of the idea.

One thing that we do and in keeping with the experiential learning is the (local) tour. That’s just an incredible opportunity for the students to learn local history. To read the novel about the district and to create an impression of a pioneer’s wife with the concrete evidence that we have of his wife. To weigh it all up and to think about the big questions, was he a hero or was he a villain, should he have the place he does in the Australian identity psyche and then go out and they go out and realize that it was only 110 years ago and that’s really not long ago and you can go and speak to his relatives and you can go to the places where he live, you can see board that had been shot in the tree at JJJJ Creek and then you sit them around the fire and read a few stories.
about what happened and then tell ghost stories. That kind of thing you don’t forget. So it’s an indelible entry to show the students it’s up to you to make the most of the learning that you get when you are back at school in the classroom. We can do it easily here because it’s all around us but when you get back there you have to keep the spark going that you get here and continue that on. I think the experiential learning certainly helps.

MP
Is the academic program added to, or in competition with, or complimented by experiential learning? Do you feel that there is a tension between the two?

GN
I think potentially in the maths/sciences, not so much in sciences but people in mathematics there can be some difficulties because there is a certain amount of material that you have to get through. I guess one of the compromises is that if the teacher is feeling that really we have been three or four weeks where we are not connected with the place with maths studies, we will just take them out into the outdoor classroom and at least you are surrounded by bush. You have no walls and you can continue your lesson the way you need to. The only thing is that you have to prepare, especially for subjects like that that are so sequential. English and history are areas that are right for it. We did a lot of looking at water and conservation at the beginning of the year. Our creek hadn’t flowed for eighteen months, our water reservoir was down to 1 ½ year low.
I don’t think across the board that there’s tension between experiential learning and academic programs, but I think certainly with subjects that are sequential like mathematics and there’s so much responsibility on those teachers there is tension there and hard to marry them.

How strongly does the learning and I am using that term here in its all embracing and encompassing sense. How well integrated is that into the down steam processes that occur at School E after the Eucalypt year?

GN
I have to plead a little bit of ignorance on that because I have only been halfway through the program. One way of answering that I suppose, that I can answer, is the staff at School E, as a whole, are really supportive of the process. The students arrive back and they are incredibly amenable and easy to teach and the report is usually that they are pretty thirsty for knowledge. How well is it married? I think probably the answer I gave you is the best response that I can.

MP
You have had exposure to experiential learning and I am interested in your experiences, not as head of campus, but your own professional personal experiences. Would you say that there is a strong link with mainstream education and experiential programs, or is it sometimes a bit of a shotgun marriage?

GN
I think it’s a bit of a shotgun marriage most of the time. I am thinking back to regular schooling and learning that I have been involved in outer education I suppose. There was a group I used to run at School F called School F Adventure Group, it’s difficult to marrying students back into Ferntree for example, and there was a lot of subversion amongst the staff there with the program because there was very little structure. The kids arrived back and they turned the corner but only just made it. They knew they didn’t really have to change and they played lip service to the values and ideas of Ferntree program in order to make it through, but they quickly dropped all of that when they got back to school. Just the organization of experiential learning at Ferntree, you had to have a class away at a time. So you had kids coming back into class and you had a whole lot of other kids who hadn’t had the experience. So they were on a completely different level. So it was very difficult to integrate them back properly and smoothly into the program. I think it’s very hard to combine that experiential learning in the classroom, you have so many limitations and boundaries and expectations too from the parents. As educators I think we all believe that teaching and learning is more than that and should be more than that. In fact without passion and that’s where experiential learning comes in and it’s hard to learn in a classroom. It is possible though. I have always felt that teaching is acting. You act it up and you have to force yourself into a positive time frame, if you actually care about what you do and the kids will follow you.

MP
You just made an observation about Ferntree. The setting of the two campuses and the two programs. Are there any insights or feelings that you have about that?

GN
Well Eucalypt is in a very enviable position where it’s in the lap of the mountains and the toe of the national park here and Ferntree is in CCCC area and actually in the township itself, where we see nothing but trees here. I think that real alien feeling is where the power comes from.

MP
So it’s the sense of isolation and not being able to see.

GN
It’s interesting. A lot of the things that we focus on are the lack of familiarity experience I think, being exposed to something different. Looking for difference in life can be a really worthwhile thing to do.

MP
So there’s a lack of familiarity here that is not present at Ferntree?

GN
You are not as intimidated as you are here.

MP
So the contrast with the home environment is important.
Yes. One of the things that we do is try to make experiences as different as we possibly can and one of the things that our leader at School E, who has seven years of this program under her belt, is that she loves the fact that the students don’t have technology. So that’s another familiarity that we take away from them. More important is they learn the value of imaginative play. We also take competition away. We avoid any semblance of competition if we can. Competition in education has a way of extracting energy. We avoid it because they are used to it and have been exposed to competition nearly all their lives. We try to promote a competitive spirit that you support yourself. We don’t have soccer matches and we don’t encourage teacher student football games.

Setting up a completely different social dynamic that’s not based on singling out one from the many, but in fact, trying to integrate the many into one.

That phrase, ‘imaginative play’, how does that work in here?

The students get free time between 3.45 pm and 6.00 pm each day and between 2 and 2.30 and quite often in the mornings as well. On Thursdays outdoor programs they get half the day off and you are talking to your friends in that time, but we often see students in the summer down at the creek building little dams with rocks and stones and making things out of sticks and having boat races down the creek with leaves and things like that which are far more imaginative than what they could have done when they arrived. So those are the sort of changes and I think the students take a lot of peace from the experience. I mean I know what I get from the bush personally, and that is whenever things get terribly difficult in life you can to the bush because it’s so vast and you are so small that it doesn’t notice you. It’s a really solid thing to know that you can always go back to it in life and I hope that’s what the students take away with them.

There’s an environment that’s created that lacks a lot of the modern stimulants that creates an environment where they need to focus more on each other and perhaps draw more on their imagination.

Yes. I call it sensory overload. The feeling the students get from the modern world and the kind of students we get when they arrive. I remember talking to a student at the open day recently who is coming up next year and she said to me where’s HHHH and I said just over there behind. What do the students do here all day? And she wasn’t looking at me and she wasn’t interested in my answers either and there was this constant restless distracted looking for stimulus all over the place, that you get in a student before they arrive. I mean I often have a lot of students that can’t listen to a song and you see what they
do they plug it in for a few moments and then switch over to another song. So it’s slowing down. There’s something really rich in reading an entire poem or an entire novel, actually going through the process and the hard work of admiring them in a work of art like that rather than little snippets. You will get that on TV, the flicks and the screens and the advertisements where…these days and I wonder if that does rub off on children.

MP
Well it does and you just really triggered a thought in my head. I had a keen sense of us raising because of old technologies that we have created a generation of students or young people for whom there is no longer a lineal sense of narrative. That their world and their logic is largely a branching logic. We’ll jump from branch to branch and go perhaps go down the tree and then go up again the tree and down a different part and in a sense what I am hearing is what you are talking about holding a much more linear narrative that actually has to take one step and one day at a time and they can’t take the hyper link to the next section.

GN
Yes. I find it a truly disturbing experience. Like in a phone conversation, these kids can talk on a mobile and landline at the same time. I admit I cannot operate like that I have just got to do one thing well or else I lose my focus. I mean there is real enjoyment to be had like you have the experience in creative writing and you edit it and the hard work and the prize that you can get from what you have achieved. I think at what the students baulk at these days is the hard work out of it. They take the best part of the experience out and forget the rest and of course the real glow that you get from doing and producing something that you are proud of through hard work. I think that’s a very important thing. I mean with my mountaineering background, I can say to the students the summit is always there to be climbed, always and sometimes it’s incredibly beautiful, but the thing that sticks in your mind years after you have had the experience, is struggle that you had to get there. So the essence of life is a struggle, not necessarily of arriving anywhere. So if you are not struggling you should be concerned. Try and use the road that’s most stimulating and most difficult and gives you the most challenge.

MP
Just taking you back to a thought that you express then about the experience and then the hard work and then what that experience means then to the student. What sorts of avenues are created for the expression of the experience? To have an outworking or to have a path onwards whether its something expressed to each other, to teachers, to family members?

GN
Well we have and it’s only been going this year of the presentation of passports. Where the students are asked to look at varying different degrees of their life. They look at seven different areas of their life and the things that they have learned in the health workshops. It just asks them to reflect and they actually enjoyed the experience and they produced some kind of hard
copy record of their experiences at Eucalypt and there were elements like managing conflict, difficult and isolating emotions, meeting the challenge and analyzing your own behaviour, all of those kinds of things. We looked at health this year and had to present it in a fifteen-minute oral presentation and they did that with their manager and their house tutor. It wasn’t meant to be a spilling of the students’ emotions but it was just meant to be a chance for a student to reflect and so there are avenues for them to realize what they have actually got from those experiences.

It’s interesting because at School E quite often, that it’s not until you are twelve that all the students realize what they experience and the value of it. At the end of year 9 when they go home a survey showed that 75% showed that it was the most amazing time of their life. While 10% say that they are not sure, they found it good but they don’t really know why and they are really on the fence as to whether they would recommend it to someone else. 5% said they hated it. By year 12, 99% of the students said it was the most amazing year of their life and they value (it). And so that highlights I guess. We had a PE presenter with us recently, who was highlighting the great truism of the modern generation that he has seen in his research. That we have got a generation of students who are incredibly sophisticated but incredibly immature and it’s very hard for educators to cope with that. They have such external signs of maturity but none of it is really actually there and we are trying to match those two together by the end of the year. And School E gets the most extraordinary year 12 results and I wonder if Eucalypt has a real impact on that.

MP
You talk about risk taking and learning from mistakes. Do you see that as an important part of what happens here?

GN
Yes. I think so. I mean the students are encouraged to confront their fears outdoor program. I know I am a fully qualified rock climbing instructor myself and I was incredibly impressed with out of thirty students I had worked with at least six students that were deeply intimidated and they were encouraged just to go slow and the amount of support that the students give to each other and the help to those who were struggling to get through those experience was extraordinary.

Risk taking, I mean the students have a lot of responsibility attached to their experience here. We trust them a lot and expect a lot from them. For example, once they have got used to the place they are able to run on running tracks in groups of four on their own right out on the mountaintops that you can see out of the window here. They are able to go mountain bike riding by themselves and so there is a lot of responsibility in that. This is not really answering your question, but I think it’s very important. The students that have let us down, I was speaking to them like I am speaking to you now and I said that you have made me deeply ashamed and you should have made me ashamed of your behaviour which means I can’t trust you anymore and they actually listened to that opposed to looking the other way. So they actually respect the responsibility that we expect from them.
Risk taking. The outdoor program is all about that. Pastoral care, the risk taking of approaching other students with a genuine issue that you have with them and you know if you keep quiet it’s going to get worse and it explodes and the house tutor, the pastoral carer for that house will facilitate that conversation with that student and the other student. I think in the curriculum we could look at more risk taking. I would like to see the students hone their risk taking abilities. Forget about the assessments, not just catering to the criteria, actually take a risk do something new and test the theory out properly, don’t just spew out what you know in order to get good marks. The emphasis is not on the attainment of grades at Eucalypt, although the students want to get through the year and maintain their results, but that shouldn’t be the bottom line of the experience. We are not too assessment driven.

MP
Do you consciously encourage students to make mistakes and to learn from them?

GN
Yes we do. As teachers I would hope that we all do that and we have such a good relationship with students and we are able to trust them.

MP
And the corollary to that of course is the extent to which a student might expect an adult to intervene to save them and students who are sent to our kind of school often have parents who are protective and who have the means and often the intention to rescue and protect and eliminate risk.

GN
Absolutely and that’s one of the hardest thing things. You just touched on the essence of my job. The funny thing is of course is that the reason that the parents thank us is they get home students who are not so protected. The systems we have here are extraordinary and we have the most amazing communication system and radio setups, we have got incredible policy documents and amazing qualifications. At the end of the day we have got those so we can sit back and use our judgment to allow the students to work through their own problems. Now we don’t have a counselor on campus for example, because we don’t want to pretend that we cater for that. We will send students home who might need that emotional stimulus. Of course we do step in as much as we can because they are only fourteen years old. Very often students will approach us and say we’re having problems with someone and could you facilitate the meeting. The students are the ones talking you are just making sure that solution focus is not aimed at blaming or having one student being put on the back burner.

MP
It seems like it’s a rich learning experience for parents as well. Do you think that’s deliberate?

GN
I think so. One of the things. A big part is marketing and I speak to parents. One of the things we do on open day is and I will say to the parents, well I have told you as much as I can about the campus and we have got some students here and they are our current students and they will tell you how it really is and the students actually sell the place for us and they love it and they go home and tell their parents what a great place it is. So parents understand and realize that facing the odds and taking the risks and the fact that Eucalypt is a struggle is not something that should be deplored, it’s something that should be supported. Sometimes I wonder and I look from afar at Acacia and their support because of years of tradition and the parents that when they buy a package there they know it will be a hard experience. I mean that’s a harder experience than Eucalypt; it’s far more military. Here I think the parents feel that the program works because it’s a struggle. At the beginning of term one I have morning teas with the parents and I go down to School E every two weeks where we have question and answer sessions and we have question and answer questions here too, the one’s that are coming next year and we have big open days up here. This is just so that the parents realize what happens down here. There are no phone calls and no parent contact during term and letter writing is very much part of the experience and it’s almost like revisiting skills. The parents have this pile of letters at the end of the year where there is a chronology of their daughter’s experiences. Not to mention the practice of writing. That form of communication is where the students are far more deliberate in what they write. You can imagine from my point of view, they tend to write when they are sad and I have to say at assembly every now and again, students don’t forget we are happy here too! Your parents would really like to know that so make sure that you tell them so in your letters. They also write in turmoil one day and the next it’s forgotten, of course the parents ring up concerned the next day and no one knows what they are talking about.

MP
Is there a deliberate cultivation of symbols and myths around practices and places here, do you think?

GN
No I don’t think so. It’s a place that’s quite young really being only fourteen years old. I think Eucalypt could stand to gain a lot from concentrating on those things more. Nothing like Acacia where they are very conscious of symbols. In fact, their head of campus is really a role model for the students in that he is involved in what he does and that is one of the great differences. We have a smaller staff here and a different structure to what they have there. So it’s not so much that we have been able to indulge in so far in our history.

MP
How many staff do you have?

GN
There are actually thirty one staff for ninety three students. There are actually only twelve fulltime teaching staff and then you have the fulltime assistants, there’s two of those, you have an office manager, a fulltime health nurse, you
have three full-time teaching staff, one full-time property manager and two off
siders and then you start getting to the teachers that come out at the
weekend, the sessional staff that are involved in the outdoor program, when
we need them, the music teachers that come who teach pretty much any kind
of musical instrument.

End of Interview GN
Interview 34

Interview on 17/06/2007
Ken Ingles (School E) Eucalypt Campus

MP
What sort of learning goes on here at Eucalypt?

KI
From a structural perspective there’s the academic content knowledge based on the English and it’s formal and then there’s the incidental informal learning that occurs through the interaction with relationships and the place itself. Incidental learning is the stuff that’s never planned. I mean it is planned in a way because there are structures that create certain learning. For example, the students live in a small cottage and self sufficient for breakfast, snacks, they have to organize all daily functions including cleaning, laundry and they have to interact with each other, they have to work together. There are places they need to be at certain times (that’s outside the normal time table), there are tasks that need to be performed, like the collection of the daily food, the collection of chemicals, the collection of what we call the ‘tuck’ here (the fun food). There’s lots of little things that I suppose in the big scheme of education that might seem minor and trivial, but it’s through the interaction of the students within those structures, that I think contributes to the most significant learning here.

I think if you would try and weigh up a remote residential school against a day school and say ok what is the quintessential difference, is the fact that it’s a residential school and the formal learning, the academic based and school based learning, can occur in any environment and School E is trying to in someway, keep the academic connections between here and in XXXX City. However, there is a desire to make use of the local environment a lot more. So the big difference is if we stripped away the classroom and the six hours a day that the students are involved in that, the rest of the time they are involved in living in a place and living together with each other and adults in a place that doesn’t have the same technology, the same dependencies, the same support structures as they have in XXXX City. The uniqueness of this place is that they don’t go home at night. They are confronted by each other as the students say because the conflict here is far more complex because they can’t run away from it. The student or the staff member that they might have conflict with, they have to be sitting and having meals with and seeing them around the place, they are going to go on an outdoor program with them. There is significantly greater interaction with other people on a very regular and constant basis than you get in a day school.

MP
The notion then of incidental learning, what do the students learn do you think, through those themes?

KI
The students would say cliques things but what I believe they learn a lot more about is their own sense of confidence in the world that they are operating and it’s hard to measure though and hard to put that against any standard. By the end of the year the students will get about 20 out 50 points of confidence that they need in life. It’s utterly personal. It’s related to not only where they are at in their own personality, their own beliefs and values, their own sense of themselves, but also their own motivation and willingness to take on confidence in some way. I know the students are definitely challenged by their own masks, they are challenged by reflection here, formal and informal and many of the students are confronted by themselves and they see themselves in relation to other people over the twelve months and I suppose how they want to be themselves, how they want to represent to the world come to them quite a lot. So they do face a lot of decisions about who they want the world to actually see. I think their confidence plays a big role in them being able to cope and to achieve, it’s a skill in a way. I mean if you are not that good at processing information and presenting it, then by being very confident you can still get your information over to some degree. I mean whether the students is trying to explain a body of knowledge or whether they are just simply trying to let the world know who they are and where the boundaries are and how they want people to respond to them. This can also occur in a day school but it doesn’t go away here and that can be stressful too, so the second important learning that occurs the ability to cope and become emotionally independent or move along the continuum of emotional independence and some of the students actually recognize that and we recognize it more and more when they become less dependent on the cruxes, like telephone calls home and additional immediate gratification, calling for help less, finding their own solutions to conflict or stress, or being able to articulate where they are at more clearly or accepting their own limitations. It’s about how the students try and deal with their own sense of themselves in relation to other people.

MP
I just want to go back to a couple of interesting words and phrases that you used one was when you used the word ‘place’ when you said that this place had a significance for you in the way that you conceptualized that. What is that sense of place for you here?

KI
The place has two components there’s the physical environment in which the students interact and that physical environment is insular both inside the houses and of course this environment and how the students interrelate with that is also part of how they start to understand themselves in relation to the world. So in the house they will do all sorts of things to be popular and to meet their needs (and the two things can be exclusive and inclusive) and then at the same time be aware of looking out the window at a view that is so different to the one they have at home and then they go running here and they have to deal with the cold, have to deal with lighting fires, have to deal with the heat, they recreate in it and find peace in it as well in the mere fact that they are here and both from the program perspective where we actually facilitate them to be in this place. In their interaction they start to find what is it
about this place that connects them and some of them don’t. Some of the find
that this place is too alien and I guess that if they were a little older and a little
wiser they would see that as a reflection of themselves. If the students get to
that stage then the support of our XXXX City counselors. And the other place
is the introspective place where the students find themselves looking inward
because they just don’t have the usual distractions, there’s no TV and no
parties to go to, they can’t go shopping and even though the students say
there is so little time, they go into their personal space as much as they
possibly can and where they possibly can. I guess when they say it’s difficult
to find their personal space that is what they are looking for. That
introspection is part of their needs and I think that most students will process
their perceptions and find some meaning of it.

It’s interesting how I teach art here. Initially, all I am asking the students to do
is interact and respond to the immediate environment in a number of different
ways, no deep meaning, no thought, purely aesthetic/esthetic? purely
technical. At the end of the three works, I ask them to review their artwork
and the way in which we review, we ask them to look at the subjective
perspective of cultural perspective and it’s amazing what the students have
written. Some of the students I can see their struggles, their world and trying
to deal with their interpretation of their own art. So from that I can see that is
constantly processing with experience inside and when we provide them with
the opportunity to express that then we might get an inkling of what’s going
on. On the outside you wouldn’t. Fourteen year old students on the outside
do everything that fourteen year old students do.

What we have never done before is personal passports. The students were
outraged that we should force them to write anything about themselves and
how they actually respond to this experience in a number of different
categories and even more outraged how they had to express their hurt.
Anyway as good School E students that they are, they went through the
process and then where that process worked for some of the students was an
insight again, into that internal world and where one student who had been
presenting this persona this mask of being very gruff and short tempered,
moody, dark, through a series of different sorts of interactions over time just
the time factor of this student and responding to what’s happening here and
now and she came to realize that this was not really how she actually wanted
to respond and not how she wanted the world to see her. The motivation
came within her to make some changes. Then this passport we forced to
confront formally what was going on and all of a sudden she was a different
person in the sense that she walked about the campus without the scowl, her
face was more open and I said to her a week after this presentation, have you
noticed that you seem to have had this weight lifted off your shoulders and
she started to unpack what she had and she was able to articulate exactly
why she had been going through this moody stage, why she needed to make
the changes and then she made the changes. I guess that can happen
because it is an interaction between the internal place and the external world
and that happens incidentally, simply because relationships are ongoing here
and are constant and the remoteness and the natural environment and then
some of the formal process that we have in place continue to I guess, put
them into small crises which then facilitate, to some degree, introspection. We had one student who flatly refused to do the passport and she is a student who has some significant learning difficulties (significant in the sense of this context, not special needs) but she was overwhelmed and she had negotiated with her mother that if she spent all this time on this she wasn’t going to go and spend the time she needed on languages and mathematics, the things that she felt were more important at this stage. So even though she didn’t do it, she actually did it in a way by explaining why she wouldn’t do it.

MP
You mentioned the words ‘small crises that you create’. Is the passport an example of a small crisis?

KI
Yes it’s a crisis for them because it’s outside their comfort zone. So every single time that we take them out of their comfort zone, they learn.

MP
What does the passport do as a (form of) learning?

KI
As a learning tool it formalizes their introspections so that it forces them to a place of time and a structured time, where the students have to think back through the experience and then pull out of that experience. I mean there are academic skills like synthesis, there are opportunities for the students to take to the stage and perform. So again there’s an outcome of confidence and that’s one of the reasons that we do it. It has a performance dimension as well as a written dimension. So there’s a language dimension, there’s the performance confidence thing, and then there’s the introspection side of it.

MP
In that it’s about introspection and personal journey. How would you perform that as a group?

KI
The framework is present on what has been a significant learning for themselves and the categories that we use like relationships, we do some work on conflict resolution, we use a model to show the students what their preferences for learning are, we look at teamwork, we some work on stress management. There is a whole lot of work that we do around reliance, emotional intelligence and then relationship skills, as well as the body of knowledge that is built around adolescent health issues. So the students are advised that they could do them all or they could choose what was significant for them at this stage.

MP
Just for the transcript. Relationships with others, beliefs and values, learning and thinking, working with others in team groups, managing stress, skills and abilities, managing difficult emotions, healthy Eucalypt lifestyle, risk taking and
moving out of your comfort zone, drug awareness, setting goals and making plans and the relationships with others.

KI
Whenever they presented an observation or idea that had to be backed up by some evidence. So they would have to draw from experiences and explain and support the scenario that they did. So there’s that academics research language skill as well.

MP
Earlier on you used the term ‘mask’ and you have used it a couple of times and you talked about the mask changing. Was it intentional to strip the mask away, or for the students to be more deliberate and mature about how they form the mask?

KI
It’s in terms of helping the kids to become more in control of their lives. They get many masks that we present, helping the students to understand that they might be wearing at the moment to manage relationship situations, or just to manage being in the world that they are in, isn’t necessarily the one that they have to have all the time.

MP
It is quite intentionally, to help the students choose a mask, or to shape it is that right?

KI
I guess we’re really talking about my perspective and how I understand. What I think really happens a lot here is the students are challenged by the masks they wear and then over time they learn that there are effective ways to relate to the world and there are ineffective ways and the ability to choose that is sometimes improved by how they are supported through the different experiences that go on here. So for example, a kid who has a lot of crises throughout their time has the potential of learning a lot more about themselves, if they choose to take that on and work with it. So the kid who might be struggling and decides to stay here and to work through that with their peers and adults, often have expressed a greater understanding of how they can interact with the world. Manage their emotions more effectively, improve relationships by how they deal with conflict that doesn’t push people away and but just to help themselves defining the boundaries. The kid who doesn’t have a lot of those crises. Overtly anyway, will continue to learn a lot more. Maybe it’s more obvious with the kid who has a lot more crises than the ones who don’t. You learn through experiences as you go, but what I hope with the students here that they have a lot more experiences to do that.

MP
Very early on in our discussion you mentioned the aspiration perhaps of the program to make better use of the environment and in the immediate sense
houses and the way that shapes the life and then there is the broader setting still in the local area. What are your thoughts on that?

KI
I think there’s always potential for expanding of any curriculum program. I don’t think that we are doing that very well at the moment. I think there’s a lot of pressure for us to maintain the academic equilibrium with School E and because there’s a reluctance to do things like that, to throw out the timetable like the School H for example, or like Boronia does for example, having a specific term program and then have another specific term program and do that sort of thing. I don’t think that we are doing anything cutting edge, academically at all. I guess coming back after four years of not being here, personally I find the place intellectually and academically, unsatisfying because I don’t think we do enough. There is enormous potential here and amazing innovative programs with year 9 and we are still stuck in the rut of the old model which is very similar to Acacia, just watered down a little.

I have tried with the art program to try a few different things but there are still some constraints around it. I mean after a while the kids themselves get sick of drawing trees. The management this year has embraced the idea of looking outwardly. I guess it’s interpretation. Working in the natural environment a lot of what we’ve done academically, is say ok let’s go and do an environmental science project, let’s go and find out about the history of this area, let’s do community service, let us go and study the river. A knowledge based curriculum while I am not against it, but it’s all in little boxes and components and the students are not seeing enough of the links between their learning because we don’t actually create those links enough. Or we don’t take on programs that are highly stimulating intellectually for these students. So we are working with kids who often need to be extended by learning how to apply the knowledge and skills they actually have and looking at integrated ways that we can. Say we take the School H, …One of the purposes of that experience is built around developing these skills and so they have a program designed to attack that from a number of different perspectives. What we have here whether it’s French, Chinese, we have to learn history, maths, English and in Art, what I am trying to do is use the environment and then try and teach them the process of creation. I mean compared to some of the programs that come out of America, some of the charter schools there, where is a year 9 program where there the task was to build a documentary on one of the local rivers and they studied this river for six months, or longer and they studied it from the source to the time it went into the ocean and in that time they studied everything along that river – the social aspects, the industrial aspects, the economic aspects and they used different tools and they used creative tools in order to put this together with IT to put the whole thing together. It’s a brilliant way of bringing together formal disciplines into one point and them having this almost adventure, so there is this adventure in learning. The canoed and walked different sections of it, so this outdoor type travel through it and would do this section of it and study it and come back and process it in the classroom. We don’t do any of that.

MP
How would you apply that here do you think?

KI
We have lots of environments in which that could happen. Some of the integrated stuff that I was involved in was still in boxes and not looking at it as something as an entire concept. There isn’t the desire academically in the school to do that because they don’t want the kids to lose the thread of the formal classroom education thing.

MP
In a sense you are perhaps suggesting an unwillingness to take a risk with the curriculum, but you may be able to achieve the same academic outcome in terms of schools knowledge but doing it in a different way.

KI
However, in the scheme of things it’s not very important because to me that’s not what this place is about. I guess the schools who have one term or half a term experiences are in a better position to experiment academically or create more innovative experiences for the kids because they are only stepping out of that formal learning for a short period of time. However, we could too. We could choose a term. I wouldn’t do it in term one because the students need some degree of familiarity, they don’t need the entire world to be different in coping with change, but it’s what else happens here that is really more important than what happens academically.

MP
The things we have been talking about, the confidence, the struggle in oneself. You did talk about a student in particular, who became aware of the persona that she was projecting and through the process of interacting with others she saw the mirror.

I just want to put a thought to you, if she has learnt the language, if she has mastered the language without seeing the substance underneath, or is it truly a sense of oh is that what I am like? Is it another mask?

KI
It’s probably both in this particular student. It would definitely be the change because I have seen the changes in how she presents herself and what she is trying to do. It’s in the actions, in the behaviours that one sees change, but I do agree with you that it’s so easy (and these students are very good at it), to use the language and tell us what they think we want to know and that’s part of the tour, that’s the next bit, there are all these little steps along the way and that’s why I don’t think you can measure it. With some of the students it will be three years down the track before it kicks in to see the relevance of their learning. It’s like in our own lives and we look back and say oh now I can see the significant moments of change and learning and it actually influences the next set of decision or behaviour.

We can challenge reality formal through the academic program and we might assess a piece of work, or even challenge it through conversation but often
we choose not to and just let the next set of experiences see where we will go.

MP
You have touched a couple of times on the immeasurability of some of the outcomes. Is there a sense that the personal passport is an attempt of measuring? Are there any other mechanisms that you might use to measure?

KI
From our perspective it’s a way in which we can write a set of criteria in rubric and report back to parents for accountability. I think if we didn’t have to report on that aspect of the curriculum I would probably be tempted not to, but I would also still go through the process because for the students themselves it’s a bit self-measuring. They have to measure up if this is an experience that they want to take on and actually how far they want to actually go.

MP
Do you intentionally use students’ memory at any point in your aim?

KI
I really haven’t given that much thought. I would have to consider that in some sort of context to really respond accurately. We do in a sense in the way that we ask them to look back and reflect. So in a number of areas of curriculum, we say go back to that point in time and unpack the value of that and some of the reflections might be looking at the motive of memory as well as might be of some sort of value. A lot of narrative, so a lot of reflection in this school is about the students telling us their story and there will be memories of like and dislikes in that.

MP
What I will put to you seeing you have had experience here, at the School H and Acacia. What is it as a graduate of one of these programs somewhere down the track pick an arbitrary point say ten years later. What is it that they would have as their most enduring memory do you think?

KI
I would think it’s the friendships that they have made. The feeling that they will still have and the emotion that goes with it (I guess an elation), when they become challenged and they realize that somewhere in this that they can whatever that might be. I don’t think that’s exclusive to here, it’s our memories throughout our whole life that you get. It’s a flow on experience. Then there will be memories of the things that didn’t quite work as well. But for many of these students and talking to them years down the track, they are by far the lesser value, the negatives. The discomfort, the irritation, the pain of hiking.

MP
That notion of failure of negatives of making mistakes. How is that built into the process of the rebuild of the students in the sense that I am given choices
I can make decisions I can make mistakes. Does that have a learning dimension?

KI
Yes it does. We are trying to do this in our student management. The hard thing is convincing staff that managing student behaviour is also a learning dimension. We are heading in that direction and I think that’s one of the hardest things for our staff to learn to accept, is that when we are working with young people it isn’t about control it’s about management of situations, its about helping them learn a lot more about the impact or outcomes of their behaviour. It’s through language and in our practice we try and not disregard failure but see anything that doesn’t work is an opportunity to unpack that. So that next time that particular experience is confronted there is a better chance for them to be in more control of the situation. A lot that happens here is to learn a lot about their own control.

MP
Do you think that you will actually allow a student to make a mistake and learn from that, or is there a point at which you intervene to prevent the mistake being made?

KI
I guess it depends on what the mistake might have been. Obviously if the mistake has the potential of being very harmful there needs to be some sort of intervention. I don’t believe that the destiny of adolescence needs to be entirely in their own hands. I think as adults we have a responsibility to make some decisions for them. Not allowing them necessarily to make choices that are based on instant gratification. So where kids might say oh I’d rather not do this today and I would say I am sorry you don’t have any choice in that. I have one student who has refused to do the art assessment at the moment, for some reason she wants to make a point about something, so what I will do is change the structure, so that it will make it more difficult for her to opt out of that. So she has to confront the issue. It’s a balance between compelling young people with experience and empowering them to be able to make choices. We are more in tune in not allowing students to opt out of experiences, if they feel that they might fail in some sort of area. I wouldn’t say it’s experimental, there’s a lot of facilitation and manipulation that we work on.

MP
Facilitation, what does that mean?

KI
It means setting up the experience that we have some idea of what the outcomes might be. For example, in art there will be some boundaries around the task but there will be lots of choices within those boundaries. There will be limits set on the work. I mean not to start to finish something in a designated time and then I am chasing work for the next three weeks. Also most of them are fairly hopeless at time management. I mean one could say ok if they don’t finish the work they suffer – but what’s the point of that?
Because it’s about a kid making a poor decision based on skills they do or don’t have or they are trying to satisfy what’s most important to them right now than being able to think down the track and say well look it’s very important that I do this now because down the track xyz is going to happen or I am not going to find out what I know or don’t know if I don’t go through with it. Facilitation for me is about managing the environment in which the learning might go ahead based on what the outcomes should be but working with the individual and the group as well, so you are trying to pull for them what is significant for them at that time. So in this art project one of the students might want to pursue a conceptual direction or a materialist direction and I will allow that to happen within the boundaries. So I will allow the students to pursue their own personal goals to some degree, but they are also going to be exposed to some mini crises in moments where they will have to go outside what they already know to learn something new.

MP
Comparing that say with Acacia, it seems that there is a much harder register of boundaries at a place like Acacia. How do you feel personally, philosophically about the difference?

KI
I would just love the hard-edged boundaries on young people but it’s control of them by putting them in a box. But whenever that feeling comes over I know that feeling’s about me and it’s not about the kids. Here it’s about trying to find a middle ground between ensuring some degree of an environment where it’s safe physically and emotionally and it’s respectful and we can get some good stuff done. So if you look at it at mealtime it’s rowdy and we work one on one a lot to try and manage those behaviours and if it’s a bit silly then we manage it with immediate intervention, but we also have an environment where we want the kids to interact, we want conversation and we want them to have fun, we want them to feel relaxed and we don’t want them to feel that they are in an environment where they are constantly controlled and manipulated. We want them on the edge of feeling a bit of freedom, of feeling a degree of power but not too much. It’s about putting them there and bringing them back, putting them there and bringing them back and we are not doing as much as we need to do here in the intervention of values. Acacia has the advantage of being able to do that through the Chapel and the Christian framework that the place operates on. They can have daily inputs into how a community works in a value perspective. That’s one of the reasons that this place is different and exciting has a factor too.

MP
How many students do you have?

KI
There are eighty-eight here at the moment.

MP
What balance to you see as your personal conviction of what is education effectiveness? What do you see as the optimal between the Acacia hard
edge in boxes and compartments and the freedom and more negotiated approach that’s taken here, or School H or anywhere else?

KI
I think what we were doing at School H was .....I really do. The involvement of kids in day to day leadership and responsibility. There was clear understanding of what was important for the individual responsibility to the community and how that was actually unpacked so for example, their tree rooms could be messy, but the communal area had to be respectful to the whole community so there were the community values that extended there. When we ate together, there was the respect for food, there was respect for each others needs. We were giving lots of responsibility to organize things. They had to meet certain criteria. Individual responsibility was in relation to I guess what they were doing, so if they were on one particular duty it was important that they fulfilled that to the community standards. Because of the size of the school of having on forty five kids it was so much easier to do that, whereas, having eighty eight kids, than handing over of that responsibility, the loosening of that starts to conflict with a lot of health and safety and also the stronger and more powerful students can actually dominate the less powerful and so we have a whole bunch of kids that feel suppressed. That’s why we have standards in the houses and structures in the house that the students have to follow. So we give everybody the opportunity of being equal as well as fair.

MP
But you inherited a previous social dynamic here whereas School H doesn’t where you actually create the social dynamic don’t you.

KI
Absolutely, and you are constructing it right through the term, far more than you are constructing it here. For the twelve months there is a definite deconstruction as well as a construction. Like we are slowly moving the kids away from being utterly and entirely self focused and power hunger, to a one where they are more willing to follow the rules and fit into the structures and if the personalities and programs matches, by the end of the year you may have some kids, and some houses, who are genuinely empathetic and caring to each other and some years that happens and some years the kids are still following the rules and following the structures. It’s so much to do with where their values as an individual fall.

MP
How long is the School H program?

KI
Nine weeks. We go back and say well where’s the happy medium? For me personally, it’s somewhere between here at Eucalypt and at Acacia. I don’t think we could reach the School H simply because of the size and the fact that we have little units here of houses because the dynamics of each of those houses are critical to how the rest of the place operates. There are still some things about student learning and management and relationships of how they
behave that we as a staff, need to do more to feel comfortable that we are managing the students in a way that facilitates learning as well as keeping them safe and together. A place like this could so easily re-enact “Lord of the Flies” and it often sits on that edge.

MP
How many students are in a unit.

KI
We have got nine to eleven. Ideally, we don’t want to put anymore than ten but eight would be better.

MP
Just getting back to the things that a student takes away from Eucalypt experience. What type of knowledge would a student leave here with. Have you any thoughts on that?

KI
I guess it comes back to I don’t think that the new knowledge academically, is that significant and the students would tell you. What they learn in class isn’t that exciting really. The class that the kids really like and they are actually learning is when they are doing a lot more discussion stuff and learning a lot more about their own ideas and their ideas in relation to other kids and they will take away some academic achievements and that will transfer to some of the classes in academics next year. I think the new learning really comes back to self, all the time, in relation to other people and a lot about what they can do. What they are capable of doing. Some of the students will say I never knew that I could do that. I am absolutely blown away that I could hike all day and this is the significant structures that we have in place. The six day hike at the end of the year is enormous. It’s a peak experience. It’s where the kids realize that I am capable and emotionally capable to confront this experience. Whether that will be utterly transferable, I don’t think so. I wouldn’t be bold enough to say that just because the kids can finish a 6-day hike that what they learn about themselves is then transferable to every other life experience that they come across. It won’t be because I don’t believe that that’s how it works, but there’s something there. They will at least go into the next bit knowing that they are more capable than they were at the beginning.

MP
You touched a moment ago on the notion that the discussion being sort of learning of that social of a social plan as opposed to just the one on one content. Is that something that they find more engaging?

KI
If you were able to turn every single moment and based around what is happening internally with each kid, we would kick goals all the time. We wouldn’t have a boring class we would have an exciting class. The kids aren’t really very interested in …..they are more interested in what’s happening, their ideas. Not that I believe that we should steer an entire curriculum based around adolescent views, not at all. As one student said to me that the
previous school she was at they did this sort of thing where they studied youth culture and it was a waste of time. I know that and I think we have an obligation to take kids to new places all the time but I think where it will work is if we take them to a new place they can see the connection of themselves to that new place. They can actually fit into that. It think from a facilitator’s perspective that’s always the hardest thing and we have these learning outcomes that we have in mind, going back to the idea of what is facilitation is to make every person’s individual experience relevant and dove tailed into those learning experiences.

MP
It seems that the embedding of a mainstream learning program with an experiential framework here hasn’t been particularly successful in your view. Is it because of the lack of connection between the two?

KI
Yes and I also think it’s part of being an independent school. The years that I was here from 1999 to 2001, in the early days of the school, there was a fear that have we let down the students and that was fear from the academic staff and the parents. These students are under enormous pressure and one of the things that I like about this year is they’re not with their parents. They know that this is not an academically challenging year and that’s ok but I don’t agree that it shouldn’t be but there’s a lot of fear that if we don’t keep them in the same box and that’s why it hasn’t really developed that much I don’t think. The students are sick and tired of doing projects.

MP
If you picked the whole place up and moved to another location, would it achieve the same thing?

KI
Yes. It again comes back to relationships between people in the place wherever that might be and that out of world in the world interaction.

End of Interview KI
Interview 35

Interview on 22 June 2007

Noelene Abbotell (School F) Ferntree Campus

MP
If we could start with your school, please describe it from your perspective?

NA
Well the three campuses are very different in City XXXX and the students are very identifiable when they come here. In AAAA Road we have a lot of wealthy kids. In AAAA they tend to be a little more down to earth and in BBBB they tend to be a bit more artistic and their parents tend to be a bit more left wing. When they come up here we try to encourage them as much as possible to learn about themselves. With a lot of them we have great success. With some we have some success and with others they go back home similar as when they arrived.

MP
With others they are unchanged.

NA
It is a very political, a very community struggle. But first and for most what is happening here is that the students are learning about themselves, learning to take a more critical look at themselves in the way they are.

MP
That word theoretically they are a community base, I mean what is it? I mean what seems to use that word theoretically? I mean you might say to a parent about the program or you might say to the students when they arrive, that this is what we are going to do for that community?

NA
All of it yes. I mean in actual prep of what falls down in a heap when we don’t have the staff or resources of what we should be putting into practice.

MP
How does that constrain what you would like to do?

NA
We can’t run a lot of our programs and we tend to focus on how we can focus on how we can manage students with the staff we have. Instead of saying how we can make things better and how can we make this easier which is quite difficult sometimes.

MP
I want to come back later on and return to that sense of how you might change it if you redesigned it.
MP
So your focus is a lot on managing people managing students and managing what, behaviours?

NA
My focus isn't but ....at hand and every single shift which... because of the larger numbers... This term coming up will be a lot different because it is a lot smaller term, which is good and I have the same number of staff so if there is a very big group, providing if everything goes right, we have the staff even there is a strain on the staff and it is very busy providing nothing goes wrong we are ok. If anything does go wrong it's monumentally? It can be very difficult.

MP
I gather that this last group was very challenging.

NA
I had a great time with this last group. Yes I found it very challenging.

MP
So what do you do then? What is your daily life here?

NA
My actual teaching method is history and English. But here my last term I was a house parent which meant that I was in the middle of two houses here. I had four senior tutors so there was a lot of mediation between the houses helping them to learn how to be an independent adult. Teaching them how to use a washing machine and teaching them how to wash dishes without a dishwasher (or a maid) and helping them learn that what they do and everything they do affects somebody, somehow. It's about their interaction with students and very little teaching. When you are a house parent, it's much more.

MP
So you are saying there is very little teaching and lots of learning. You are distinguishing the centre of something in a didactic mode as opposed to you doing things and you just being there. Someone recently used the word shepherd, which I thought was an interesting term. What do you think?

NA
Not necessarily a shepherd because I think shepherds tend to walk behind the sheep. I would much prefer the term people when they mean to be led but otherwise, allow them to explore and I people who do stupid things isn't very much like sheep because they...

MP
I am sure that you can draw those implications but I think the metaphor is used in the sense that somebody who used to keep the watch. Knew where
the pasture was, knew where the pasture was and knew where the hazards were.

NA
Yes certainly the terrain and potential hazards, I would try utmost to warn them first thing, but ultimately, if they choose to wander off in the wrong direction and (metaphorically) fall off a cliff, it is part of the mistakes that they have to make. Although it’s very dangerous making mistakes, giving them the freedom to make mistakes is part of growing up.

I try to encourage my kids to not make mistakes that I have made (providing that it is not too personal) but if I share that information with them but they make their choice. I don’t think it is my right to say you can’t do that because of blah. It is the principles of the protocol that we have.

MP
Which, in your experience, is the most effective way of learning? In this mode, is it saying, “Oh, I made this mistake, please don’t do it, or you really stuffed it up?”

NA
You can never say that you really stuffed up. The kids I think I have a very good rapport with and they want to make a decision, I say yes you can make your decision, that is your choice, but if anything goes wrong I shall laugh at you and they are very good about that. Obviously, you have to develop that rapport first.

MP
So how in a learning setting, not just the house but part of the program, do you see the course of action being adopted by students and you know it’s not a safety issue but you know through your own experience that it’s going to be a disaster, do you intervene or just let it happen?

NA
I intervene. We have to it’s our responsibility because if we see something and then let it go ahead, we are basically consenting to let it happen. It we do that we can’t then say that you shouldn’t have done that because they need to know that. We can give them all the private work in the world to stick up on their pin board. We cannot condone it because ultimately these kids are fourteen of fifteen years old and they are not going to read it and if probably 90% did read it once it would have been forgotten in the next hour.

MP
Where does history and English come into your work with students here?

NA
With the projects here a lot of that is English. The students send emails to me and I tend to correct their English and grammar and send it back to them and with essays particularly….there is a lot of written work. My field is medieval history but there is no arena for me in medieval history so I have developed
for myself a course in natural history because that interests me and I take a
course on the indigenous because it’s fun and it’s not course history (although
it’s course history!) and I think if I don’t like it then I know that my teachers
won’t like it as well. So we go out in the field.

MP
Is there a lot of field work involved in that?

NA
Well there has only been one occasion that it hasn’t rained on my excursion
but we have persisted. There is very little field work involved. We have four
long sessions where it’s pretty much lots and lots of note taking and research
where it’s pretty much the whole day. There are a lot of extinct volcanoes
around here so we do a session in volcanology. It’s something the students
seem to like, the whole concept of studying volcanology in a volcano. Then
we set up a picnic and have lunch.

MP
Is this all part of the DDDD Basalt Plains, which is an outflow from a volcano?

NA
There is certainly a basalt plain not far from here but I don’t know if this
volcano is part of the DDDD Basalt Plains.

MP
So to give you a good example of the use of what I call set an expediential
learning program I would like to explore that idea of setting for a moment.
How does the setting contribute to your learning program?

NA
This is generally a community based program and we are actually in the
community. I have previously worked at Acacia and I love Acacia, I love the
concept of it but this is not Acacia because it’s not an outdoor program. I
remember when I first started here people were ‘hung drawn and quartered’ if
they referred to the place as a camp. It’s about learning and community and
learning to contribute to the community and learning to step up and take your
place in the community. So it’s about the welfare of the community, it’s about
the …and it’s about the immersion in the community and then there is a lot of
reflection on your own community such as family, socially what you are in at
school and things like that. So setting is quite important and if we had been
out in the middle of the bush the kids couldn’t go out and find…..at lunch
time…but they would not have involvement with the whole community and that
is integral to the program, particularly Friday morning when they…they are all
over the place working with locals.

MP
So you have a house design where it is a micro community that develops and
you feel that the community within the community is the most significant part
and it is interacting within a non-School F part of the world that’s critical.
It's certainly a non-regulative without being immersed in the indigenous community and certainly ............Anglo centric I think we have a tiny smattering of Eastern European, particularly old Eastern European people here but the rest are almost entirely English/Scottish. We have kids from a very multi-cultural background being immersed in this very Anglo/Celtic origin.

So you would say that there is a dimension of a cultural environment?

Very much so. Socio- economic and social and cultural and educational....Because a large section of the community does not have a higher profession.

How does that turn into something significant for the students to learn? If you are interpreting that the people are not highly educated?

I think it takes a little while to actually realize that not everybody is like them. I know that whenever I confess to students that I have never been overseas it shocks them. Because every part of life for them it not just a month off for holidays and will probably never happen to them, it is a yearly experience and it takes them a while to get their heads around the concept that not everybody is like that.

So mixing with a group of people who are less educated?

Less educated and less affluent. When I first said less educated it's not very simple...it's because they haven't got.......in their lives to do other things apart from education whether that's having families or going back and working on the farm or whether it's getting a trade because it's a more logical option and certainly a more financially sensible option.

So what is it that you hope that a student would learn from that? What's your intention in creating that contact with people who are demonstrably not the type of people that you mix with?

I hope that students would get out of it that they are not better than people because they have more money, or they come from the city and that's certainly often the case. They come up here thinking that they are actually better because they are richer or they are from the city and they think they are smarter and I think it's great that they learn that teenagers here are like teenagers in City XXXX. They wear the same clothes and have the same haircuts and ultimately they want the same things. One of my students is a
Korean boy and this is a fabulous learning experience for him. ….. He felt that not only were the people old and from the country but that they would be mean to him because he was Korean and he was quite shocked that the people were very kind and very welcoming. It was a double learning experience for him because he also thought that he would be able to play chess with one of the old men up there but because he was old his brain would be old and he would be able to beat him but in fact he was thrashed………..So the student learnt that although people may be old they are actually quite smart. Which was a good experience for him to learn.

MP
Do you have any personal antidotes in the sense that those intentions were achieved? Is that reflected back to you? How is it demonstrated?

NA
Yes. Last year one of the girls in one of my houses (was) a very beautiful girl from one of the wealthiest families in Australia, a lovely girl. When she came up she was a bit of a princess and she was very homesick because she couldn’t be down at CCCC Street every day (it wasn’t so much homesick as environment sick) and at the term she stated that she was not the centre of the universe, that your external appearance isn’t the most important thing about you and that it’s not what you can get from other people but what you can give that is the most important in life. She was up here for eight weeks and when she first arrived she believed that that shopping was very important and how she looked and every single day she would get up and spend time on her hair and makeup and clothes. By the end of the term she spent her time in track suites and T-shirts, no makeup and not worrying about here hair and thinking what she could give to other people and it was such a remarkable change. Actually a few months ago I got an email from her. She did an elective potential project called Break the Cycle and she was one of the captains on that cycle and the amount of work that she did for that because of her new understanding about how other people live. She was just so dedicated to it.

MP
Do you sense that the change for her has been permanent? That the scenes have changed?

NA
Yes I think that the scenes have changed. When they get back to AAAA Street and not have to do all this hard work. I mean for some kids. I mean there was a kid that was in my house this term and I don’t believe that he has changed at all. He will go back to City XXXX and he will not help at home at all and he will continue to be lazy and selfish and I feel that we didn’t really have an affect on him at all. Perhaps in a few years he may.

MP
So by what you were saying the social setting is critical it’s not just living in the town but living in a town that offers enormous contrast to their own urban experience that seems to be significant. Could that be achieved in any town
like EEEE? I mean is there any significance to physically where it is, I mean being quite close to FFFF and City XXXX. Could you put it in another State or on an island somewhere else and achieve similar objectives?

NA
I think it could be achieve in other small communities. I don’t think that EEEE in itself is a significant factor in the program. We had looked at a number of places such as HHHH but I think that HHHH would have change it entirely because it is really another suburb of City XXXX. It’s much closer to AAAA Street or JJJJ Street in City XXXX.

I mean I used to live on the north coast of NSW and there were a lot of towns like EEEE there and we could have chosen anyone there.

MP
Do the students get any sense of distance or journey or a sense of isolation when they come here?

NA
Not so much isolation but separation. Some people obviously do feel isolation because they miss home and they miss their family. It’s so different here. They see the sky and they miss the traffic and it’s is very quiet here at night. So they will miss everything that they associate with at home, including pollution, traffic noise.

MP
What are the things that are memorable for a student here? I mean you talked about separation so there is clearly a fairly strong contrast from their lives in City XXXX coming here. What would stick? If you asked a EEEE student ten years down the track, what comes to mind about Ferntree?

NA
I think for most of them it would be the community and living with their peers and even if some of them do have a difficult time they will still remember that sense of community here and truly I think for the last year a lot of the kids who have been involved in the circuit program will remember that and I that is a big aspect of this program.

MP
And that is the trips and things?

NA
It’s performance based and honestly what we see come out these kids and it’s not usually the ‘cool’ kids and I think it’s for the kids that are not in the limelight and will not be given a second chance, they are extraordinary and I think for them in the last few months more and more kids have reflected on that have been highlighted in Ferntree. That is being in the community and they are doing something extraordinary and they know that and they have this want because are doing something completely unique.
It was interesting, in this last term the separation between those who were
doing the circus and those who weren’t and after the circus performance
nearly every single student who wasn’t involved ran amuck. I think it was
attention seeking behaviour and they came to the realization dawned on them
that they hadn’t been part of this extraordinary circus that happened within the
school.

MP
Are there structured or intentional uses of memories that the students develop
here as you go?

NA
As a house member each ‘parent’ talks individually to the kids each week and
we take notes and by week four we refer back to something and they reflect
on week one and two and ask them to elaborate or to acknowledge any
change of anything and then we encourage them each week to mark down
significant things and then at the end of the term they will reflect back on
them. It helps them see and it also helps us to change things in the next term.

MP
Do the students keep a journal or visual diary?

NA
We encourage them to keep a journal. But journal writing is not part of our
program. Most students hated it but you would get some students that would
keep the most magnificent journals and they will have them in ten/twenty
years from now to look back on them and you will have some that wished they
had. It’s very difficult to encourage, particularly fourteen year old boys.

MP
What about the gender dimension, if I can put it that way. I mean you have
boys, girls = testosterone/estrogen based life forms, the heady mix of
inexperience. Do you think that adds to it in some way? I mean does it need
to be controlled or beaten out in some way? Or do you think in some ways it
enriches that community?

NA
Well we don’t have any Ferntree babies yet but we do have some Ferntree
couples though. I think what it does is as far as relationship goes and it is
quite unusual in that way. At 14 and 15 the students meet each other at
school or at parties. They don’t seem to have in depth adult relationships.
What you see happening up here is people getting to know each other and
developing relationships from the basis of knowing the person not just being
‘hot’. We had a term last year and some very cool females sat down and said
there is only one good guy here this term. I said what do you mean only one
good guy? They said there’s all these guys here that we wouldn’t give a
second glance to in City XXXX. But there were really two that term and one
had a girlfriend in City XXXX. This was week two of the program. By the end
of term one of the girls actually reflected that they were forming very close
friendships and sometimes relationships with boys that they would not have
given a second glance before they came to Ferntree. We allowed them to see passed the structured hierarchy that is all they see at School F in City XXXX.

MP
That is a rather interesting change and good evidence of the strength of the community that is essentially created here. I mean they bring a peer group but it falls part and they re build it based on clearly a different set of rules. Do you know what the rules are?

NA
I think the rules are largely made up as they go along. Clearly some people come here and they say I am not meeting with you because you are too old but usually within the first two weeks that is broken down because they meet people out of their usual circle, outside their own comfort zone. Some people will not step outside their comfort zone and that is sad to see but you can usually pick the ones that that will happen to.

MP
So are you structured driven solely by those who come here determined to shake it up?

NA
I think it’s driven by people who are a little further down the pecking order or a little further down the hierarchy and they will associate and mix above and below that bridge really between them and the people up the top learn very quickly that they don’t have the same power up here as they do in City XXXX because there are a lot of opportunities here.

MP
But doesn’t that apply that what is in the top pecking order in City XXXX is not operational up here? That’s the negative but the positive is that they are different dynamics that create a hierarchy that’s based on something else. I am trying to get a sense of something else and do you know what that is?

NA
I really don’t. Somebody brought up an interesting topic the other day and this certainly have something to do with it. You have top dogs from each campus, so they can either assimilate or, they are not popular because they are nice people they are popular because they are powerful people, but her they lose some of that power. But sometimes they stay with their own people and then they are just as popular here as in City XXXX.

MP
Here there is a different set of rules and I am just wondering what they are. Understanding them. I mean is it based on competence, for example? I mean some people just perhaps find their level quicker than others. Such as they are good in the kitchen, or seem to be better with their living skills and therefore others try and follow them because they sense they know what they are doing.
NA
Again I think it’s because they don’t just see the exterior, they don’t just see the social group, they see the person and they realize that that person is worth knowing and they realize that they are quite willing to know that person and I think that they lose their outer shell and the outer shell usually on some people is invisible. You know it’s there but it’s not something that you can see.

With a lot of these kids the outer shell is very visible. It’s their clothing, their makeup, their ridiculously expensive perfume, their shoes. We had a girl come up here on orientation day and to look at her she looked as though she was going out to a bar. She was wearing red patent leather stilettos.

Everything about her said structured polished façade. By the end of the term the makeup had gone, the stilettos had gone, the jeans that were so tight she couldn’t sit down in, they were gone and they tend to relax and become more comfortable with who they are and relaxing they become more comfortable with who other people are. It doesn’t matter that you are hanging out with people who in City XXXX you would never speak to because I think they are more able to be themselves up here. The people who are either not able to or unwilling to go through that process, they are the ones who don’t achieve much up here.

MP
So who are the leaders? Who are the ones that become top dogs here?

NA
It’s usually people who can cross over the border. The leaders here are the ones who can lead the popular ones as well as the less popular ones. These people don’t dominate because they are popular or they are strong or whatever. They become leaders because people are willing to be led by them because they are respected. They learn a lot about what it is to respect and what it is to earn respect and what it is to deserve respect, not just power.

We had a boy last term. He was in a music group. Obsessive, compulsive music mad. I have never come across one like him, music was literally his life. At fourteen he could play ten instruments and most of them self taught and the respect that he had from who were way too cool for him normally because he had this gift and he was also very generous and very humble young man and helped them all.

We had it again this term with couple of boys who were really socially quite inept but technologically brilliant and ended up mixing sound for the dads that we had. With concerts that we had, the performance nights that we had and it got to the point where in the weekend if something goes wrong with some ones computer they would fix it. They had an enormous amount of respect and when they get back to City XXXX that will show because they are able to cross boundaries. People were willing to see them as valuable members of the community not just some geeky computer nuts. It helped them as well because it helped them develop social skills and I think consider themselves more as a vehicle.
MP
What would you change to make Ferntree more effective? You have hinted at resourcing etc.

NA
I would, if I could, change the number of staff we have and change the diversity of the staff we have. Because we have a lot of people working here. I think one can have too many PE people and I think there needs to be a greater diversity in people’s backgrounds. In the place where I first started the people were mostly eclectic. A couple of them were Mensa so absolutely brilliant minds, completely mad of course and I think that conservatism is creeping in the program and I don’t think it’s the change for the better. I think that the diversity is very valuable.

MP
So some eccentrics to shake it up?

NA
It doesn’t have to be eccentrics but I don’t think we need any more PE people because we do have an overbalance. However, we certainly need more staff so that we can run more programs. We don’t have to say oh we can’t do that today because we haven’t enough staff, in fact we can’t do that at all this term because we don’t have enough staff, or, how about we just get rid of it from the program. I think that’s really sad because it shouldn’t be happening. It should be about what can we do?

MP
I guess the answer’s reality versus resourcing and RDOs, isn’t it?

NA
Well I think the problem that I have and perhaps I shouldn’t bring politics into it, but quite frankly I think that if one can justify a $200,000 refurbishment of one office, one should be able to justify giving me a budget for books so that I don’t have to rely being given books for Christmas or what would you like for your birthday and I say well I really need this book for work, how about you get me that for my birthday. I shouldn’t have to buy my resources. Quite frankly, I don’t think that $10,000 armchairs are more important than a problem child in our program.

We have to do night shift here but we are not paid for it, which is unethical and illegal.

MP
How often do you do night shift?

NA
We have to do four a term.

MP
So everyone does four?

NA
Some people do five.

MP
So what is the sleepover period?

NA
Technically sleep, that’s the excuse being given why we don’t get paid because we sleep. I don’t sleep because it’s strange. We sleep in the medical room and it smells.

MP
Where is it?

NA
In staff house next to us in a down stairs room. It’s where we take kids when they are sick. We have kids with gastro waiting to be picked up, lying in bed violently ill from both ends. You can boil the sheets but you can’t boil the mattress.

I tend to just sit up all night and work, or cruise all night around the campus and make sure people are ok. A lot of the time, it gives me an opportunity to catch up.

MP
Is there a fair bit of escapism going on? Do the kids try to get out of their forms at night?

NA
They try sometimes. We did have a group in first term. Ultimately, I don’t think they really want to go any more, they just want to be able to. Before we got the electronic system put in they could just open the door and then when you were on night shift you were on patrol all night. Unfortunately we had a day shift starting about 3.45 in the afternoon and then that would be backed by night shift, so you were actually working 24 hour shifts.

MP
Is there a sense that the learning used will be integrated into the program will flow on from this?

NA
No. A couple of the campuses do a little of the transition. One campus in particular, is very disrespectful of Ferntree, very disrespectful of the staff in front of students and lot of the students come up to us with a bad attitude because they have learnt from the teachers in City XXXX. A lot of the teachers don’t like it because the kids love it. I don’t say all of them. A lot of the teachers are fabulous but they are the ones that come up here. But a lot
of teachers think that we have a very easy job because we are not in the classroom everyday

End of Interview - NA
Interview 36

Interview on 21/06/2007 – (Tape A)
Tom Chambers (School F) Ferntree Campus

MP
We’ll start out with an easy question. What do you do here?

TC
My role here depends on a very small groups that are here ever year and then depending on what leadership and we can sort of see the necessary direction they are calculated? and then the house leader which I will be doing this upcoming term which means that you are basically responsible for the welfare of two student houses. In January you usually have a boys house and a girls house and it also means that you are their first point of contact. So you are basically helping them with their shopping preparing what they are going to eat for the week, creating rosters and then on top of that I am also first point of call you also help them try to diffuse any tension in the house. So you are looking really at how they are dealing up here, what they are getting out of the program, how they are getting along with one another, both in the house and outside the house. So you are really that main indoor parent person as a house worker. If you are not a house leader, then you are a mental leader and so what you get is basically a class of students that you work with for the whole of Wednesday (morning and afternoon) and what you do in that role, you are basically guiding them to a Ferntree project so they have to choose their topic under certain promos that we set and then they have write a thousand word essay and they have to come up with a creative practical element to that on their topic and they have to give a presentation to their parents. They have to design a work page to actually publish their essay and they have to keep a log book of their experience. Which we are really trying to delve into what they are learning about their learning style and that’s the crux of what the Ferntree project is all about.

So for the first two terms this year I was mental and all of last year I was a house leader and now I am about to be house leader again. I would like to see that as a primary role in a given term. But then on top of that your other duties are: you run a course a course is basically like you are taking a class and teaching them your subject but they are all mult-discipline areas so there’s not necessarily a course where you just sit down and work on say maths problems for a day. We coach under certain guidelines, so one course is focused on where am I going and one is focused on who am I and another is focused on where am I living. So we basically design say a three day program or a three day lesson based around that general theme. Most of the staff do that so that’s another role and then (Do you want me as an individual or in general?)

Ok. I look after the ....program. The.....program is all about teaming different houses up. So I am a house leader and will be looking after houses 4 and 5 this term. So in this program I try and break up those two houses and get house 4 doing something with another house. So we put two houses together
in a cluster and then we go down to the community centre in Ferntree. It’s basically just fun game but it’s an over the term competition and in the last week we have a cluster final afternoon and they play off to be the grand champion. I co-ordinate that program. It’s more of a voluntary program and other staff give up their time to run it as well but I am pretty much the main person when it comes to the Mt AAAA learning program so that is a challenge that we give to the students which totally voluntary. They have to give up their free time to actually participate in it and what the challenge is that they have to run this campus to the top of Mount AAAA to the lollypop tree. They have to run three times a week to allow them to actually be able to qualify to line up in the last week. I coordinate whether the students are in or out of that program, whether they have done sufficient training or not and then I coordinate staff as to who is actually going to run with the kids in the training and who is going to run on the day. So my role is to basically coordinate that role in the last week and also in the last week I coordinate the cluster final day. So that’s basically my role and there are some incidental stuff that I do as well.

MP
Explain to me the house, physically, education the kids, what is the house here?

TC
Ok I will just start off with the basics to just give you some ideas. All the houses are identical except for one and the only difference is that it has an extra bedroom. It seems a bit funny really but there may be 96 kids up here and only two kids have a bedroom to themselves. We fit in, in what we call the pit area which is the range area. We have the dine area which is next to that, which just have the table and chairs and then the kitchen and a fridge and a microwave. Every house has a laundry. Every house has an upstairs bathroom and downstairs bathroom. Every house has a downstairs bedroom and three upstairs bedrooms. So that means that two students share the bedroom downstairs – each of the bedrooms accommodate two students. So the only way a student can have their own bedroom……or if their house isn’t full.

Now about how the house works. It’s sort of driven by the students I guess. I like to think of myself as a shepherd, I just there to advise them and help them and not tell them necessarily what to do but as you can imagine the dynamics are different and what will work for one house may not work for another and visa versa. Pretty much what students have to figure out is what is a fair position to them in a house in regards to cooking and then when it comes to food they have to think no just of the physical act of cooking, often we have dietary requirements so we have to take all of that on board and have to work a system that is a fair one. So even if they come up with a system that you like and then they have to deal with ego and conforming to the system that they have developed or not. Then they have to deal with issues of how am I getting along with my room mate and how are the people in the house getting on because we have very different campuses in XXXX City so when the come up here there is potentially students from (School F). This term we will only be
having students from two campuses because (School F Campus) are not sending any. So that has implications that kids coming this term will not get to know kids from all the campuses so we will only have 70 kids coming this term.

I’l1 say ok, what’s you definition of a clean house and they obviously have their own ideas about personal space and then in free time they have got to deal with friends of their house mates coming into their house. So while some house mates are happy to share with friends others don’t think it’s so great to have say twenty extra people one doesn’t know sharing their food and all that kind of stuff.

The house itself, the way it’s set up and the way the campus is set up it’s hard for kids to get a line time down time and it’s hard for kids to just have personal space and quiet time. It’s not only that it’s that they come up here thinking that this is where I am supposed to have a good time with friends. This is the kid’s perception. So kids need to have down time for their own sanity and stuff, you get others wondering why is he up there reading a book in their free time when you are supposed to be talking to people. I don’t think this is a major issue for the majority of the kids but there some quieter less confident kids just like time on their own.

MP
How do you describe the house and your involvement? It’s probably a fair thing to ask. What is the essence of your learning?

TC
I think it’s really multi-faceted because there are so many things that we involve the kids in so I think the out of class time so the total configuration it might be the free time that they have, the house time, the less structured like sitting down and discussing an outcome and how we are going to achieve that outcome etc. I think the things they learn up here are practical living skills because they all have to cook and clean and that does two things for them in a practical sense. One are those practical skills two getting those practical skills to a really high level. I would think every kid would walk out of here saying running a house is hard work and they probably have learned to be appreciative of what mum and dad do at home. I have a lot of kids in the house say I can’t believe what mum and dad do. They work all day and then come home and cook dinner and the house is clean and they run errands. So they get a real sense of appreciation of their family. So I think that’s one thing and in the unstructured class sense as well and I think they really learn a lot about relationships – they can be complex and they can be a lot of hard work. Friendships come and go and it’s a really fantastic thing even though it means a lot of hardship for the family and the staff in the initial instance, but while the kids are upset because they are not in the house with their friends, it’s only a minority of kids that this is a major issue for and after seven or eight weeks that they have learnt to make new friends. They have also learnt a lot about who their friends in XXXX City are and a lot more about them and what makes them tick. Often if there are two friends from XXXX City and they come up
here and share a room together, they find that they may not have much to talk about. They just appreciate the complexity of relationships.

Then there are hard times to they have to learn that they need a lot of support and skills that they need to develop so that they can actually work through the hard times in the future, or they can work out that they are quite resilient, or that they can work out that they are quite a good supportive person and can really help others and they can learn where they stand, whether they are respected or whether they or sort of isolated or they can pick up on the person that they really are.

I think I have found from being up here is that kids can have an image at school and they can keep up that image from 9 to 3 or whatever the time is in school but up here because they are living at 24 hours a day I think by the end of eight weeks everyone has cut through that façade and they tend to see people for what they are and that can be a good thing or a bad thing. I think that that’s just one of the indirect stuff that’s just part of the program of being up here for us to facilitate and help kids with. It all depends on the individual student as to what they learn up here as well because it depends on the courses that they choose – what’s their collective potential called. They can have a different focus in the program so not every kid will necessarily gain the same things out of it because it is their individual gain.

MP
Those courses are three-day courses?

TC
Yes. The courses have that individual focus, like where am I at, where am I going and they run on a Tuesday a Thursday and a Tuesday. The second one runs on a Thursday Tuesday Thursday. So they are all on a full day on a Tuesday Thursday Tuesday. Then they have what is collective potential and that runs for three days straight, in week five at the moment, so that’s Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday. The whole idea of collective potential is this course is about me as an individual. This course is about what can I achieve as a group of people that I wouldn’t be able to achieve individually. So what happens is you get about nine people together who want to work on the same task what actually can we achieve together. So these course have an under lining theme and they also have a sense of community as well, to benefit other people not just to benefit just the group that you are working in. It also depends on what kids want to pick up and do as well. I mean some kids come up here and want to get involved in absolutely everything. So for those kids they will be in the music program, in the circus performance troupe. So basically they can learn a lot more because of their involvement. Part of what I have been saying is we are going to present you with all these opportunities but it’s up to you to choose how much you can take on. And what’s going to be valuable for you. So some kids want to get involved in everything and other kids find just being away from home to eight weeks is a big enough thing in itself and probably won’t get involved in much and therefore won’t have the learning opportunities that other kids do but, may be even bigger just because of where they are at and develop emotionally and mentally and things.
Then we have the community service program too. Like so many kids are getting out into the community on a Friday morning and say that it is a highlight of the whole program which is just so great to hear. They learn a lot and make connections with people. So that's really heartening.

MP
It seems to me that there's a strong social dimension to everything. You have the house which is the focus on so many students, you have the group focusing, you have the community focusing. So as you say it's all about relationships. Is that very common? I mean does that differ strongly with the learning that they would have at one of the three campuses in XXXX City do you think?

TC
I guess like it's not just Ferntree but probably what the difference is, is that the whole social thing is so big. When you are at a normal school where you have your friends and you have your enemies, all of that happens in a set structure of time and then you get out from that and you get to go home and you get a hug from mum and dad and they think you are wonderful and you do it all over again. That's the routine from Monday to Friday. I mean up here you don't have that outlet so you don't get that downtime, like having a scrap with someone one day and coming back the next and resolving it after you have had some space whereas up here you are living it 24 hours a day and you have to deal with your actions when you are in action sort of thing. That's why there is that big aspect to it.

MP
It seems that you deliberately place problems in front of the students. I mean problems that need to be resolved, things that they need to work out. I mean they have to choose and it's not the teacher telling them to go to room 3 or 5, they are given the freedom to decide for themselves, what are you going to eat tonight? That's a problem. How are you going to interact with these twenty people in your area that you don't like and don't want? So there is a deliberate creation of problem for students to solve.

I think one of the early things you said was that you are the shepherd. So it's not for you to choose a particular path, but it's for you to make sure that there is a general movement in a safe direction.

TC
Yes. I think we do have to offer potential problems that they need to work out. I think we present them with challenges that they have to work out which challenge are they going to take on? What's enough? What's not enough? I think that just the coming up here and living away from home for the first time, I think that inherently provides problems and it's also they don't have the skills for example, how to cook, to deal with a situation so there are definitely problems inherent in the nature of the program. Although as much as we can we try and minimize those problems so they don't get out of control.
MP
But you don’t expect people to for example, do cooking classes before coming to Ferntree, do you?

TC
I think that we are going down those lines. I mean this year to be honest we had kids coming in first term who had attended a formal cooking lesson in XXXX City and what we always do before they come up here we ask them what is going to be the best meal that you can make? And the kid say I can’t really cook anything, then we say well you are coming up here next Sunday, get in the kitchen with mum or dad or your brother or sister and make sure you know some things to cook. It’s not a requirement but it’s a recommendation.

MP
That cooking class, is that to create anticipation, or is truly to impart some skills?

TC
I think it’s to impart some skills. I don’t want kids to come up here with no skills and for them to have to eat rubbish for eight weeks.

MP
Do students sometimes meet students that are going to be part of their group before coming to Ferntree, or do they arrive here on day one of the program and meet then?

TC
Every single time before a group arrives we meet together as that group in XXXX City at one of the City campuses. At that meeting (we have just done it differently this term). I mean it’s basically the same thing. Basically what happens in that meeting in XXXX City is we outline what coming up here is all about facing challenges and give an idea of what the program is all about. Then they find out who their house group is because they don’t know before that day. Then, as a house leader, you take away the people from the two houses that you are looking after and then you give a little personal time. Like what sort questions do you have, do you know what the program is about, do you know what a house looks like? Then I ask people what’s the best thing that you can cook? What’s your definition of playing and let them ask questions about how things work and what they can bring and what they can’t etc? Then we get back together and talk to them about what opportunities they have in the program and talk about the circus program and the music program and that’s all we have talked about for this group coming up. We talk to them about sport and recreation opportunities and the community which is going to be a big part of their program. This time we haven’t done that because we have got them to choose their courses straight away. So in the past what we have done the group arrive here and within the first couple of days they have then chosen their courses.

MP
The circus program. What’s that?

TC
That’s another voluntary program and we are quite lucky that we have two of the staff that are coordinators and that’s another thing to look after is the circus program. It’s just another thing that the kids can work on over the term. It’s totally voluntary so they can go through the whole term or drop out if they want to. It’s basically learning circus tricks, things like hula hoops, there’s a dance element to it, there’s acrobatics. These a small groups to work on their circus skills. Basically what we are aiming to do is to put on a circus performance at the end of week seven for the rest of the students. Also on Presentation Day we also actually put on a smaller version so that kids can actually be acknowledged for the work that they have put in and perform for their parents when the come up.

MP
Is participation in these voluntary programs mandatory to the extent that you have to choose something, or you can opt out and choose to do nothing at all?

TC
They have to be doing something so it just depends on what day that program is going to run. Like music is voluntary. If they choose music they can do it on a Friday morning or Friday afternoon or if they are involved enough, they can do it all day. If they do music that means that they don’t do community services in the morning and they don’t do a set class in the afternoon. So if they do circus that’s what they do on a Sunday afternoon and they miss out on the recreational activity.

At the times that those voluntary programs are going on, the only one that is different is the running program and if they choose not to do the running program they have free time and they can do whatever they want.

MP
So all of these choices have consequences. I mean if I choose to do X it precludes Y and Z.

TC
Yes. Like in the running program I can choose to be with my friend in that time or I can choose to go for a run and take on that challenge.

MP
Considering that notion of choice and constructing their own program and then managing their choices. Like cooking terrible meals, or having terrible hygiene standards in the home. What for you is the tension then between intervention and giving a freedom to choose?

TC
I can’t let things get out of hand. The practicality of it is necessary. I mean we have two house inspections a day so that we know the house is fairly
clean. Saturday morning is house inspection and the quicker that they do that the more choice they have as to the activities that they do only the Saturday afternoon, but it’s still like saying ok well you are going to have to get up to this standard. It’s the same with their meals. Even though one kid might botch a meal. Like the staff will go into the houses that night and ask who is cooking and say right, now have you got everything you need and that can be a yes or a no. If I know the kids are good cooks and can handle it I will pretty much let them get on with it just making sure they have the food necessary for that meal and I will basically help a kid who I know is struggling to cook. The main priority it is that you want them to eat well and to be clean and hygienic, yet you are not going to do it for them but I will give them as much help as they need.

With cleaning is funny, but in every term one house will be clean and the other house will atrocious. The house that is filthy, I will spend a lot of time with them to get a bit more enthusiasm among them to get them to do their cleaning. Whereas the ones I know are responsible and will get it done, I will say ok I’ll be back in half an hour but make sure you do this and this.

MP
Do you share meals with the kids? Do you sit down with them?

TC
Sometimes. It’s not a requirement. As a house leader I would probably just once in the term eat with them and I will probably make the meal. I think it depends on your home situation as well. I mean if you have got a family to go home to you probably do your own thing with the family.

I remember a young single male who has just left at the start of this year for another position. He used to walk around the houses and say what are you cooking, what are you cooking? He would happily eat with them and he was actually a good cook. It’s a fairly individual sort of decision.

MP
The essence that you have mentioned about the learning about the social stuff, developing relationships. Is that learning only possible because you are here?

TC
I don’t think so. I think they are lessons that you can learn anywhere. Maybe it’s more intensified and accelerated here because of where we are. I mean you can learn about relationships and you can understand who you are in a relationship. I think that you can learn this in outside life no matter what school that you go to. I think up here and with the house and our emphasis on it in a lot of our course we get kids to examine who you are, what tells you anything that you do and what is your role in your social group and what is your role in the community and what’s your role in the family and all that kind of stuff. That is basically what learning is about.

MP
Are they truly unique to this program do you think?

TC
I find when you talk to people about Ferntree. The big wow factor for people is kids working in the house, kids cooking for themselves, kids getting out and shopping for themselves...I don’t think the kids get a true living in the country experience but they are still living in their own little community. Just having that living interaction with the community, going to the local town and being face to face with people rather than removed from it is really great and something that I don’t think that a lot of residential programs do from my knowledge.

MP
So how is this setting then contribute to the learning? A setting in terms of this house, this design, houses around it, this street, the region, distance from XXXX City or climate.

TC
Another big thing here that we try to emphasize is that idea of community. When the kids choose a topic they choose whatever topic they like but it has to be about either community, Ferntree and its immediate surrounds or whether you know Australia. So ok, we are living in a small town so that’s a community and they need to know the difference between the interactions that the Ferntree people have here and the interactions in XXXX City. I emphasize that they have been part of the Ferntree Campus and aided by the setting of the campus which is right in the middle of the town and for a time they are allowed to go down the street and interact with local shopkeepers and community service. It is very easy interact with the local primary schools and the animal farm and walking down the streets and all the other things that they do. It just makes it easy and it’s very interactive. Also here on the campus the houses are all in a block so everyone can see one another rather than the houses all spread out. I mean, one kid was saying it’s really great that if you run out of something while cooking, you can run into another house and borrow some food from them. So they get that sense of living within a community.

Every group up here is different and in general their own feelings and vibes. They tend to develop their own community as a group and then you get that on a micro level where they see their house as a community, where kids often say oh that Clive’s house, that’s Peter’s house – they all have a sense of identity of the house and they can love the house that they are in and they can for a sort of club of friendships within the house.

Then we have a community of the circus where kids get quite close and holiday together because they are doing all this training together and then you have the courses. The learning and the journey that you take them through with the course and they have that identity as a course group. That’s what really sparked all that social stuff between kids when they come up here because when they originally arrive, they come up with quite an open mind that they want to be friends with everyone (I mean that’s their ideal). So they
are quite open to being friendly and probably more engaging than with kids in XXXXX City because of the whole notion of community.

Our structure and the way we do things there are little groups that they can be in helps them to make friends, they may say oh I know so and so in that house, I can talk to him because he is in my course group.

MP
So there are some intentional activities that we have seen there...Is there a sense in (School F) a sense of learning from that experience from that institution? I mean the institution, School F had kind of benefited from the (leader’s) experience about something that was in a very remote location?

TC
Yes, although it’s only my opinion. But I would think if I were him I would say ok this is what happens when a campus is set up in quite a remote location, what would happen. Maybe what we wanted to get out of that location was a sense of community but they actually didn’t get that flow, so what would happen if we slapped them in the middle of a town? A community within a community. We were lucky that he had the opportunity to do it. Well that was the first campus that I have heard about that was what it is. There are remote campuses like Acacia Campus but as far as I know no one has thought of putting a campus in the middle of a township.

MP
Steve, coming back to your own experience then. You have taught as an outdoor educator in a number of settings and run camps. There are things that you have learnt about setting that tell you that this is particularly right in a setting in a particular way.

TC
I have found that wherever I have worked I keep taking people away and putting them in a group situation where they don’t have that out of going away from a group and then coming back. I think that’s what really has sparked all of that social interaction and learning how to deal with the hard times. I don’t think it’s necessarily, when you are talking about the social fabric of the place and the way people interact and what they learn about relationships. I think that happens anywhere in any scene where I have been.

MP
I mean a community in a community would have to be a different factor compared to somewhere like Outward bound operates, where you find yourself the only group within a particular area.

TC
Absolutely. In regards to having interaction with the local community and opening up the school community to a wider population.

MP
Not only are you seeking to open up a community for the school to access. You are opening up the school for the community to access.

TC
Yes absolutely. We are talking almost in the middle of our campus, every Sunday morning the local community come up to go to Church. It’s not like we have high walls around our campus so locals keep out. They come in. We have had heads of the community groups which are attached to the church. The kids put on concerts for the community and I’ll be involved with the local footy club, it’s really interactive.

I have just put my hand up to run community basketball on a Friday night. The idea is to get the local kids to come down and work with our kids and play basketball on Friday night and build up those interactions. So my vision is that the local kids can actually understand that although our kids come from a private school in XXXX City, it doesn’t mean that you are a certain way and visa versa with our kids – breaking down those stereotypes and generalizations. Yes it’s definitely unique in that way.

MP
I am interested in the particular symbolic importance that might develop the traditions, the myths that might develop about particular places, or things that have become part of the Ferntree experience. Now you mention Mt AAAA and clearly that sort of thing probable has a kind of independent life within the minds of the students because it’s a place that you run to rather than any other point around here. Are there other places around here that would have a significant that would be related to learning?

TC
Well I think for a student that came back here ten years down the track, the immediately the thing that would jump into their minds would be Mt AAAA. I have heard students say that it doesn’t matter where you are as soon as you see Mt AAAA you know that you are close to Ferntree. On the last day the whole campus gets their running shoes on (even they were part of the program or not) and run or walk to the (Ferntree) tree. I also think that their house would bring back memories to them – that’s where did all our lessons, all our meetings, it’s where they had movie nights together on a Sunday night. I would guess that the church at the bottom of the campus, they would immediate think of music performance and concerts and……is for them too because when they get to go off the campus that’s where they are going, like……Street is really symbolic aspect for them to. I know that BBBB Street would bring back memories for them to, even though they aren’t allowed to go there but I know they do and probably the pub and again they are not allowed to but!

MP
The (Ferntree) tree?

TC
That’s the tree on top of Mt AAAAA. Someone planted a pine which has white trunk and has basically been cropped so it’s just this big round ball and it doesn’t matter where you look out you can see this tree, so yes it’s very significant. My wife and I are building our house outside of CCCC at DDDD and we can look out and still see the (Ferntree) tree. And then again it depends on what the kids get involved in certain places are significant for them such as visiting Mt EEEE to go rock climbing. For them in years to come, they may be driving passed Mt EEEE and think of Ferntree and their rock climbing expedition.

MP
I will put that question to you. Ten years down the track what would a Ferntree graduate instantly call to mind?

TC
I know we teach them a lot of stuff and they go away with a lot of things but I reckon if you monitor any kid in any situation and you ask them what are you going to remember it, the first thing would be that we had fun up here.

But I think if the students came back in ten years time they would say they remember the fun but also I think that back in their minds they would think well we learnt this and that. Things that we try and put into it and it’s probably not at the forefront of their minds and I explain to them this has been the training now you go and learn your lessons once you walk out that door go away and live what you have learnt. I mean to me instead of just being a teacher, I am a bit of a gardener, as long as I plant seeds in the back of their minds. I mean they might get it when they are 30 or 40 – way down the track whilst others will get it as soon as they walk out the door.

MP
What forms of evaluation do you have? Do the students here have a sense of their own journey, of moving, growing or changing?

TC
We are very much into bookends up here so on the very first morning that they are here they get up and watch the sunrise and the very last night they are here we go down to Francis Street together and look at the sunset on the last day. So all the way along we try to say this is you at the starting journey and look at how different you at the end of that journey.

Every course they do as a house member they do self assessment and they are pretty much on their own as to how much they got out of it in their experience. We don’t just say that you have learnt A B and C, but we ask what did you get out of it, what did you learn about the topic? Every course study is different but that is the general idea of what we want is self assessment. We generally are here to ask i.e. what’s your organization like, have you got all of your stuff, did you put in your best effort, did you find that you worked well around others, could you work well in you studying, were you better at learning or were you a better performer, or were you better at practical or were you better at doing something creative? So they work out
their learning style with the mentor project. Probably the biggest evaluation is about the house leader. The house leader not only manages the house thing but you are really that main point of reference for them. So you are not just talking about how stuff works. So we ask in the first what do you think you are up here for, do you think you are going to cope, what do you think of your house, all of that kind of thing so the we are getting an evaluation on how they think they are going. Then we catch up with them in the middle of the program. The general idea is that did this at the start and what do you want to get out of it and how do you think you are going? If you don't think you are getting there what can you do, what else can you get out of it because you have more knowledge now of what it's about and we have a one off interview before they do their self assessment and you say what have you got out of this place and what have you learnt and it can be very different from kid to kid. So I think we have a very sense of each individual kid.

**MP**
How well integrated is the program into the main stream courses that precede and succeed it?

**TC**
I have no idea. As I said that I know what my role is and I do my role the best as I can but it is discussed in professional developing that we have and I think there’s more and more trying to link a casual linkage with Ferntree and XXXX City about what goes on. I mean we don’t want to be doubling up because that devalues what we do. So how can we help you guys. We are getting more interaction. The kids before they start here are doing a lot more preliminary stuff before the come.

**MP**
Let’s call it the main stream learning, the more formal classes. Do you have a sense of that being effective or about the same?

**TC**
There’s no formal courses here. I think they will learn.

**MP**
What would you change if you could, given a magic wand?

**TC**
Probably for eight days in a week. I think the big problem is that we have so many grand ideas that we do in our program. Our problem is letting go of things, saying well that’s a really good idea and so is that so let’s just jam that in somewhere and I think that we are becoming more aware that we have to start pulling things out. We have to work out what is this really all about and what do we really want to do and we what we want to do really well. If you get too crowded everyone is going to get frustrated. From 4.00pm when the last class finishes, they don’t actually have an activity until 7.00pm but in the meantime you are running around saying are you getting on with that person, are you going to cook, what are you going to cook? So we have to start kicking things out of the program so we can start doing things really well.
MP
Is there much time for reflection in a formal or informal sense?

TC
For students yes, it's the staff room.

MP
Do the students have a certain time each day?

TC
I guess they think about things because we frame things to them to think about but probably not. They are supposed to have general learning time but again that's something that illustrates my point. They only get fifteen minutes to do it but then the majority of kids might like to have meet their friends and have a chat, But I do feel confident that I do most things well like that our house relations are very good and I know they have learnt things long the way but giving them structured time to do it, maybe not. It's just a full on fifty day program, running around trying to get things organized for them to arrive and then after they go we say ok what are we going to do different next time and how are we coping but there's certainly not much time.

MP
…I realized that we…talked a lot about the structural elements of the program but we haven't really looked at what is done here particularly the emphasis on living and those social relational dimensions of having boys and girls together and whether that particular dynamic presents an opportunity for living (I am sure that it does) but also whether it constrains you in ways or changes the approach that you take.

TC
No I don't think so. Both girls and boys are given the same opportunities to do the same things in the program. The only things that are gender specific are two courses that are gender-specific one is “I Am Woman” and one for the boys “Boys to Men” and a significant part of that course is fathers coming up and spending an overnight stay and just passing on their knowledge and experience and I am doing an all boy's course this term.

In terms of relationships it's what we were saying yesterday that this place really gets kids to think about the complexities of relationships. They come up here and want a partner and then you bring in those other elements of relationships. One really interesting thing that actually happened is that we started doing a ball so on Saturday night we had just a fun night, like a performance night where kids get up and perform, or we have like an 1980s theme disco and one of the things that we did was the ball like old time dances and it turned into this (we just wanted it to be like a dance) big social thing about who is going to take who to the ball. We couldn't believe it, like they were only down there for an hour and they weren't dancing with their
partner the whole time but it was a really interesting dynamic to the kids. So obviously in forefront of their minds was about mixed relationships of boys and girls. But as you can recognize they are at such an interesting stage of their development where some are approaching adults. Often the kids that we get here are taller than the staff and physically mature for their age and have romantic relationships and others are just little kids and just hanging out and not really interested in it.

MP
So is that a conscious development in every activity that you run? Are you conscious of a balance of activities of both boys and girls or boys/girls and do those relationship issues impact on the social setting? For example, boys slipping out wanting to be with girls and does that have an impact on supervision and the way in which you manage the kids?

TC
Yes. They are living in their own houses and we have a rule that no one is allowed of his communal area. That is in the forefront of our mind.

MP
So in a boys’ house the girls could come in here?

TC
Yes. In the communal area. We just make it a general rule that no one is allowed in each other’s bedroom. It is explained that we don’t want anyone getting intimate. And the staff are quite explicit at the start and explain that this is acceptable behaviour if you are in a relationship and this goes too far things will have to be dealt with. That is something that we need to factor in. We try to have a mix of activities in the program where some activities are going to be more comfortable for girls, so for the discos the girls love it and the boys say ok I’ll go, but it’s not that big a thing for guys. Whereas the boys like competing and stuff and a lot of girls do to but they are more happy getting dressed up.

MP
The ball, do you do that just once?

TC
Yes. Saturday night fever is an activity that happens on a Saturday night and it’s really to get everyone together and have fund together.

MP
Thank you.

End of Interview TC
Interview 37

Interview on 22/6/2007
Teresa Atkins (School F) Ferntree Campus

MP
It’s not an easy question to start with but is there a way that you could characterise the learning that goes on here at Ferntree?

TA
As a key objective of the program or what I think happens not what I think we want to happen?

MP
Yes. It’s not in theory, it’s the reality.

TA
I mean obviously kids learn to cook and clean and they certainly learn those skills. Then there’s the stuff about learning about myself and I don’t think every kid walks away having a deep reflection of who they are and what they want to do, but certainly some kids do in this program. Kids will walk away with a whole lot of different things because they don’t have any core subjects as such. Even though we have scenes of who am I and where am I going, I think that they are probably a bit loose here and I can’t say that each walks away with a core set of anything much. Kids are learning about relationships and learning about conflict and learning about what it means to live together and some more than others. Community is a big part here. There are some kids here who learn about what it is to live in a community and the giving and receiving concept of it but there are also lots of kids who don’t get that. I find it hard here at Ferntree. I have worked in other residential programs but there is nothing core for the kids to walk out of here.

MP
What are the programs that you worked on?

TA
In terms of residential programs Boronia? and my brother had worked here and Grevillea Campus and I have an association with Grevillea Campus as well. I worked for (program manager) but he came mid the year before.

MP
I am happy for you to answer some of these questions in terms of your overall experience. The question is obviously when you worked here. But something like Boronia? It’s contrast because of its eco-footprint and farm focus does have a particular peg that hangs a lot of the long living related learning. Whereas here it’s community.

TA
It’s something that Ferntree is trying to get working. There’s a recruitment review which is one of our major understanding and objectives for kids when they live here. But I would say that community would be the key.

MP
Community because of its setting within a community within a town.

TA
In terms of what you want the kids to learn.

MP
Yes. The reason why we are sitting here and not in School F main campus.

TA
A good question. I think probably why it was put here was because it is different. I remember when I was being interviewed in the first years that it was all set up and it all happened quite quickly and I think probably (without being disloyal to School F) happened this way because it was to be different from the other programs and to be unique. I think that the concept of people sitting around a table and saying wow let’s go smack bang into the middle of a community. It would be so exciting we could do this and do that. I think in reality it turned out quite different than and that recruitment review that is happening now is very timely.

MP
It’s highlighting the things that you see are shortcomings?

TA
It’s really interesting actually because I really like being here and it’s only been eight years and the campus is still quite young and we can say what are we actually doing here? I feel that there is so much room to move, coming from a place like Boronia? that has been around a lot longer and a lot of those things in terms of what the kids are getting out of it a deeper level, whereas here I still feel that we are on a superficial level and I think we have a long way to go.

MP
Why do you think that Boronia? Works at a deeper level?

TA
There is a lot of core stuff going on. In fact this is absolutely vital. Otherwise everybody get confused and staff will change. Like here were have .... In terms of we have to run a course about who am I but that could be anything. If you start to run courses or three days of teaching based on what they are interested in and generally you could probably stretch it out and not really cover that theme at all. So unless the programs have something specific for it and that’s what I am on about and we want every kid to walk away with that knowledge or that understanding and I think it can get too staff specific.
So you can have a program with some core values so that you can have an integrity or is a motivating growing force in what you do there but without a core driving idea it tends to be a bit fragmented.

TA
I think that the majority of the programs, whether they are a year long or a term long, the majority of them would have 4 or 5 core values that are exactly the same. I mean whatever comes under that key of the self, then understand self and all that come under that and I think most programs have 3 or 4 that are all the same regardless of what they are or how long they go for. I think they are probably doing it at year 9 kids we going to have objectives for a few of them, we have to.

MP
Is that the right years level I mean school age for doing this type of thing?

TA
I think that the year 9 of ten years ago...but I still think it’s probably still too early for year 8. I think that we are probably eventually going to get to that the way our society is. You are definitely getting some kids from year 9 that are just grown up, almost bordering on too late in a way. The majority of kids I wouldn’t say, yet.

MP
There’s a common thread that runs through these programs that sets up the isolation/separation between the student and their surrounding environment and setting. Which I include family, the street value bond, the school, the social fabric and you seek then to translate them into something quite different which involves a number of things. Do you think that in this program and Boronia that’s a successful operation and in what ways do you think it contributes to the learning?

TA
Here I think that we don’t do that separation. It’s not a high priority. I mean mum can take the student down to the dentist, or run down to XXXX City for the day to the dentist. It’s not a major aspect of this program. We are not removing them from things like they can still ring home and friends whenever they want, they can send emails, read magazines, removing them from all those influences. We have jurisdiction on campus but not massive ones. So it’s not a major component.

MP
Does that you think distract from what you are trying to do?

TA
I do.

MP
So the isolation is an effective part of the learning setting?
Absolutely. With 14 or 15 year old kids there’s just too much going on for them to ever really go this way too much. It might sound harsh but if we actually say that we are not going to have all of those things here then you can achieve much bigger things quicker.

What’s the setting for experimental learning? I think there are experimental learning program in every setting imaginable.

How important is it? If you have a conversation with a staff member and talking about the length of program and one of the comments I was making which I thought about afterwards was that I think we have kids who go through here in eight weeks and probably don’t get as much out of program in terms of themselves and we are getting a good look at what they are on about as a kid who I might have taken down the road. So based on that yes, or a five day bush walk or something. We are really just stripping everything, everything here is different and you are getting through those layers quicker. So I think the setting definitely major. Like here I feel that main thing that the kid and other staff will disagree with me and that’s because I believe they haven’t experienced other programs and so if you are coming from a normal school setting, you come into Ferntree and you thing wow you can do amazing things and you would and here I think you are achieving more than at home in XXXX City but I don’t think that we are getting close to what we could be achieving. So the setting for me is really crucial. I can’t think where I was going with that.

You said that obviously if you haven’t had the experience of other programs you are not achieving as much at this school.

I think probably the main thing that kids learn here, sure they have had some challenges at times and it’s been really hard in the house and you have to work through things with other house members, but for them is current environment. Most important for them is where do I fit into the social group, who is going out with who and who they might want to go out with. Through the whole of the eight week program it’s always the number one thing for them and I don’t expect that to be any different but I think for us to achieve what we really like to think that we want to achieve here, we have somehow got to get rid of some of that stuff.

Would you do that by separating the genders and having Ferntree females and Ferntree males?

I can’t comment on the male thing but coming Boronia I really think that for girls that single sex is the say to go. Particularly if you are trying to give them
an understanding of really who they are. That real sense of I can do and I am
important. I mean they can’t get in there when their main focus socializing.

MP
Or you accept that they main focus is social and you put them together
deliberately because what you are trying to achieve is social outcomes. I
mean the conscious decision that you made is in designing the program.

TA
You might but then they are not going to be your social objectives, they are
going to be theirs.

MP
I want to just touch on something and please compare and draw on both
experiences. Here you draw on the experiences of three campuses, Boronia
just the one, but they come to you with a pre-existing social structure. Does
the time of the year change that social order and if so, what are the principles
that govern that change? I mean, do other students rise here that wouldn’t
necessarily be the leaders in the urban normal setting.

TA
I probably think here that the struggling kids and who has been an all round
good guy who has been at the bottom of the tree for while, gets an opportunity
to but probably not in the way generally by the group who is up the top of the
rank because I think it’s hierarchy that’s grabbed that kid. But with the three
campuses things just become a bit more blurred but it might swap in the
middle a little bit but I don’t think that it changes all that much. Friendship
groups change.

MP
Some of the others have mentioned that they think the social does change a
bit.

TA
I think that there is a greater appreciation of kids, maybe, but I don’t think that
it changes but having said that we don’t what happens in XXXX City that
much. They have a sense of community but I think that’s quite different to
social hierarchy. They have a sense that we are one but I don’t know that it’s
social hierarchy changes.

MP
What about Boronia, did you notice change in the social pecking order at all?

TA
I can’t really remember.

MP
Do you think that the students who come through these programs really
memorable? That there are particularly strong memory associations?
TA
That's one of the things that I found was a huge thing when I first came here from Boronia. I felt that the kids had a sense of this is going to be a great term and you might get a hug from the odd kid, whereas in Boronia it was absolute tears, don't make me go. It was completely different. I mean the school had its policy on it, but you would have kids that would email you asking your advice on say, this has come up a school and I am thinking of going for the trip to etc. or going for a trip overseas, what do you think – that important goal for that age group of all young people. That relationship with an adult whom they trust. At Boronia it's so much more entrenched – they are actually asking for your advice. Whereas here I don't think the level is as deep so therefore I think they move on quicker. I mean here they will remember it forever, but I just don't think it is such an experience because I don't think our challenge is enough. I think that core set of what we are on about where we want each kid to lead, where they are having a journey that's shared, because at the moment they are doing all different things. I think that we are not challenging enough in the sense that the kids are still exposed to music, movies, magazines, dentist appointment. It's not like it's a block that's separate.

MP
What are the things do you think would mark the journey for a School F student or a Boronia student? Are those things important in a sense of being reminded? They are away from home for eight weeks and one of the things that I have asked others is do you feel that it’s a journey to a destination, or is it sustaining a state of being? In the program. Is it about sustaining a sense of surviving and coping or is it a journey where I have started at point X and I am going to finish it. Is it a journey for the students here do you think?

TA
Probably not much. I think that there are a couple of milestones like presentation day in terms of the mentor gave, the big one but there probably is not before that time except probably the running program, which is not everyone. There is probably not that sense of the journey being continuous rather than oh well we have finished that course and go on to the next one.

MP
So something like presentation day is a passage for those?

TA
Absolutely.

MP
Do you think the students here do have a strong sense of reflecting back on day 1, week 1, week 2 and week 3 a some point and say well I have moved?

TA
Certainly we have tried to in the house programs and part of the community, we do reflective stuff but we need to do a lot more. They don't do enough
reflecting. They do but probably not through the whole program, they do in the house projects they ask how are you going rather than you as a person, how are you going?

MP
How well integrated are (and encourage you to comment on both) these programs into the mainstream programs?

TA
School F for a long time we do it separately. There is always a standard that yes that’s what happens in year 9 but very few staff actually knew what happened, on in XXXX City. That is definitely changing now and those things are absolutely so important. We went to so much trouble with Boronia originally, just that lack of communication, because you do see yourself as part of the bigger school but on a daily basis you don’t speak to anyone from the main school and that’s just so important. That’s why when I was there at the end of doing all the changes that happened at the start of last year we were trying to build that sense that we are one not separate. Now I have come here where our program is getting into the middle years model whereas at the moment that’s two separate documents which I imagine that very few people in XXXX City have ever seen. So the kids that are coming up here think they know what’s happening here but they don’t really know what’s happening here. Whereas, Boronia has their presentation time down in XXXX City, which I think is terrific.

MP
They were having their Wednesday night and lots of other things going on with the sort of re-integration.

TA
Yes, it is so important. The parents need to know what the eight weeks was all about and from a really simple level even the staff that I meet with on those sorts of nights. That they looked after the kids for eight weeks, all that is so crucial. Otherwise you get the them and us concept in it can become really ugly thing rather than what are we trying to do with year 9?

MP
How successful is it to bed mainstream study into an experiential framework?

TA
I think that in programs like this is that you get an opportunity to show kids that that maths doesn’t have to be done as maths in terms of that subject. Can be done in that subject and can be done in another subject. It’s about getting kids to like learning again, so I think it’s benefit having those transitional subjects is how you get kids to enjoy learning. I have heard a lot of success stories of kids coming to Boronia. A lot of the kids learn how to perform in a mainstream school.

MP
In eight weeks at Ferntree or Boronia the kids go back and are successful, why is that?

TA
Because they believe in themselves, or they realize that someone else does. I think the parents give them the encouragement, but not the school because of the setting and because of the mood it’s different, I don’t know why, it just is.

End of Interview with TA
Interview on 22/06/2007
Steven Reagan (School F) Ferntree Campus

MP
If we start with a fairly easy question. What do you do here?

SR
My role is (a program manager) making sure it is going well and to plan for the future of programs, to have a strong link with the (other) campuses about how the program is run and giving them a picture of what’s going on here us a picture of what’s going on there and also a big focus in my job is on the focus in my job is the connection with the wider community of Ferntree so that there is a good relationship maintained there and also the relationship contact with parents and the School F community and the PR side of the progression of the program. For instance, I get out there and find out what’s gone on in the first week and reassure parents, which is all very important stuff to do.

MP
We will come back to that but one of the ideas that has evolved as I have spoken to people at this campus is that there is a dimension of parent education here. The parents have to go through a learning process which is completely invisible to the school initially but they think about PR but they don’t think about the learning that parents go through?

SR
Yes. The program here is not just for the child but for the whole family.

MP
That is certainly emerging for me. They family dimensional programs but in multi dimensional way. I know this is a simple question and I don’t want you to think that I am just stabbing at the surface here, but what is the essence of the learning?

SR
I think that in the essence of the learning there is a number of factors and we use different vehicles to achieve it. Really, it’s about the students learning about themselves as learners and to a very large extent, the concept of community and their place and role within that and I guess what it makes for a healthy community and what we need to do to achieve this. So unlike many other places this is about education within the community and by the community. It’s very much apart of and what is written so clearly in all of the ‘hate work’ about the place, the interaction is working with the community here and particularly the senior citizens really enjoy the contact. The students are known as the School F students by the community but it’s not a derogatory term.
It’s funny about the difference to the town here and I have been thinking about this. A phrase that popped into my mind. I work a lot in metaphors and analogies to help explain things and all the town here the School F students are like the kids, it’s like a Peter Pan syndrome. They never get older. Whereas our kids who live in this town, grow up and the teachers who used to interact with the School F kids eight years ago and were of a similar age, are now in their twenties and there’s a different bunch of Ferntree kids to interact with, yet again 14 and 15 year olds. So they never grow old they are always 14 or 15. That in itself is an interesting thing for the kids at Ferntree who live here.

MP
Isn’t it a bit like Mr Chips but just putting a different perspective on it?

SR
I haven’t looked at it a lot about the impact on the local kids here. They enjoy the contact and sometimes they make friendships afterwards. I am interested to hear from the local kids as to what it’s like have new kids coming every term. Is there a sort of hold back because they are only here for eight weeks, or is there the thought that this is great. I think that is an interesting concept to see what the local kids think as well.

When I first came here my children’s ages ranged from 2½ up to 7½ and our kids live on campus. I think the most interesting thing is that we have had a number of staff who have had their families here and that line between work and home is blurred and the kids get to see little kids and see us in the role of parents and I think that that is a good thing. When my kids were little, there was the cute factor and now they grown out of that, my eldest being 14½. He is exactly their age and also he is particularly interested in being involved in the program. My other children are 13 12 and 9 year old and it will be interesting to see how they respond.

MP
Someone else I have spoken to talked about the use of contrast that we draw from (other schools) in XXXX City and clearly the socio economic spectre of XXXX City that acts as a School F education is profoundly different to the time that is given in Ferntree. So there is a contrast there.

I would just like to invite you to reflect on setting then in that physical sense. Here we are within a town, we are located a certain distance from the campuses that feed Ferntree, but also that social setting – please describe?

SR
That is a broad question. When I first came here I thought that eight weeks isn’t going to be long enough. In some respects it’s not, in other respects it’s about right, or maybe even too long. There are a lot of things that I think we have found is that initially the students were given verses – a broad blue sky version of how it would be. I came here in the first year and the first group of
students were handpicked (they were the pioneers) and some of the buildings weren’t finished and they didn’t have running water. Ferntree was advised to boil the water or get it from the central highlands water, through a water tank. There wasn’t much in the way of structure just a lot of determination.

I had the second group who weren’t handpicked and they were a nightmare. I mean we had kids who misbehaved and were sent home and we knew that we had to get a stronger teaching staff in we had to boost the teaching side of it, which is where I got a job. We spent a lot of time developing curriculum and the program is still evolving now and that’s one of it’s benefits that you have in front of you eight weeks and you can that work that didn’t work, you can keep fine tuning it, which is good but tiring because you can’t just come up with a set thing and say that that’s the we will do it from now on. It develops over year. We seem to still be coming up with good ideas and variations to it.

Last term there were a large number of kids, ninety two and that kept us busy and a number of kids involved in some bullying, it was not out of the ordinary type bullying, not to minimize it – psychological stuff some between boys and some between girls. It makes you go well was eight weeks the right amount of time, or was it a too bigger student intake. We continue to evolve the program and I on a number of occasions have reassessed it and I think rather than going on such a broad leaf that we are used to, or that we are expecting, we need to put some stepping stones in. And that’s the analogy that I have used. I mean that it’s no point saying to kids really this is what we expect and therefore get upset when they don’t do it because we want them to go high but not that high that they won’t achieve it. That’s the way our program has evolved and sometimes we have had to put in checks and balances to assist the students. In hindsight we look back and say that that is probably too much to ask.

Originally, we would ask how are you going on and get on with it. I mean like presentation day on the last Sunday before they go home – how are you going? Well now over time has evolved you have a deadline for your first draft and then there might be a second draft and you must start your graphic component by now and you will have speech practice beforehand. There’s a fine line, I mean we don’t want to get into the situation where we spoon feed them but we want them to be challenged and step outside their comfort zone.

MP
So I can see that the setting contributes to that in a sense, so that we have moved where there was homework from 9 till 3 structured day, where we go home and school is a predictable cycle and we put them into a house setting where obviously there are some living skills, there are some other expectations that you place, and as you say that you have moderated those over the years to make sure that the goals are achievable. And you are stopping along the way to say ok let’s check and make sure that we are progressing towards our target in a reasonable way. Perhaps if I could use the analogy of the early warning system?
SR
Yes and that’s something that we are trying to get better at as well and where we need to improve and that’s about dealing with the students emotional wellbeing while they up here.

The reality is that in this sort of setting because I think this is because legislative process affects us up here certainly because we are working here, there is still a long way to go to educate the rest of School F in XXXX City about it. Because there is no blueprint really and I think we need to have better interactions other similar campuses and discuss all of these issues. There is also the education of the parents and the students. You have to be careful with this and program it that folklore doesn’t rule the expectations. I mean 20% of students, at least, would have had sibling that has been up in previous groups and by and large they have all talked to their mates who have been already. It’s about encouraging them to learn what is going on and step outside their comfort zone and not to have made their mind up about how it’s going to be based on other peoples’ journey.

MP
How do students step outside their comfort zone?

SR
They do right from the word go by being put into a house with people they know and people they don’t know. So they don’t organize who is going to be in the house before they come up and I think that’s crucial because I think that would be a nightmare of bullying if you said to the kids who are going to be in your house. I mean apart from who gets left out and who is included, you would have a situation where the kids come and they know all who live in the house and establish relationships there. They will have at least on of those people that they have put down to share a house with, but you will having people from the campus and people from other campuses who are either they are not particularly close with or, they don’t know at all. And the fact that everyone comes with that same feeling. In other words, no one comes with an advantage as far as who is in the house.

MP
Is there a lot of politics about I didn’t get put into the house where my friends are?

SR
A little bit. Sometimes now, but certainly in the first few years, especially with some parents. I have had parents come up here and say my child’s in a house and unless you shift them I’ll take them home. I would answer, sorry that would be your decision and they would take them home. I mean there’s a degree of ‘knee jerk’ with a lot of things but we continue to fly a straight line through stormy weather.

The peer group spin that comes. Now we have got three campuses competing and we don’t always have three campuses represented in the group but we are assuming that, to an extent, there will be an established
peer group within those campus groups who arrive here and those social hierarchies will be established on rules and principles that are operated in campuses in XXXX City. The ultra males, the ultra bullies and the ultra females.

MP
Does that change here at Ferntree?

SR
It has the potential to change and sometimes it does a bit but it’s bloody hard to change that and I would say that it’s hard because when you think about the groupings from school it usually has reasonably negative connotations. You know, when you think about bullies and think about the outward males and females. Sometimes you have really strong kids who are good (ie leaders). In this last group this year there have been some really good kids that have come up but they tended to be quieter kids rather than kids who have a pretty dominant personality and they are the ones who model negative messages for others to copy.

MP
Do you have a sense in your own mind what it is – what are the rules that operate here that cause a student who wouldn’t be a leader in campuses in XXXX City, to emerge as a leader here at Ferntree?

SR
That’s a challenge for us to allow them to do that. We have seen kids who have come up here who get a sort of a feeling about – that kid won’t survive, or that kid will get sent home and those kids have become beautiful kids, even in last term – fantastic kids and I believe that some kids do find it difficult here while other kids actually shine. I guess my feelings about it, although I haven’t got any hard and fast rules why it’s like that but I think it’s something to do with some kids are better at adapting to change and some other kids who are so called good kids within a very strict structure back in XXXX City. Within that framework and structure of what we normally call school, they shine but when it comes to here and they have to make decisions about making choices about the way things are, they given more freedom, they are apt do the wrong thing. I don’t know what it is. I have had a couple of kids in last term and this term who were kids that have got into trouble. Their behaviour left a lot to be desired and they were school leaders and I ask the question is it because they came up here, or were those sorts of things apparent if you looked hard enough in XXXX City?

There were some kids from School F Campus who came up, mostly girls, but the leaders were not very nice kids and there were some kids who came from that campus and I think if they had a better selection process, should have been chosen as school captain. I sent the school captain back to School F in first term and she lost her job for the term and the deputy captain from this has lost his job for good. Both from the same campus. The boy who was deputy leader, he may have been fantastic in XXXX City but didn’t cope well up here and the girl that came up first term was not a nice kid at all.
MP
So would it be fair to say that some of those unexpected kids who emerge as leaders seem to cope better with the social dimension, or house dimension?

SR
Yes and that’s a big thing. Some of the kids don’t necessarily emerge as fantastic leaders but we get to actually see that kids who were predicted won’t last. Like ones that their life hasn’t been too good, they come up here and have a good time. Now we had a kid in here in this house in this term who was a very angry kid who was on computers, very poor interpersonal skills. He happened to be in with a house of very confident boys but who were tolerant and this kid, he was so proud that he said to his dad last Saturday “Dad here’s the badge, I have got the badge....This kid did a whole lot of work with the staff and he’s gone. A big thing when the kids come up, can they cope with other people. Some people are intolerant and don’t try and compromise with the situation and I think that’s a big thing for kids to learn. Yes that kid was a screaming success story and that kid would have been predicted as well he’s gone there’s no way he’ll last.

MP
One of the trains of thought here was out of the co-educational (the gender of actual politics), of having 15 years boys and girls here. The potential is there for relationships to form. Whether they would choose, or pursue, different partners than might be seen as desirable in XXXX City.

SR
I don’t know. Maybe some might see others in a different light and that might have an impact. There have been a few relationships develop up here but not a huge number. The kids are far more confident these days in talking to members of the opposite sex. I certainly wasn’t that confident at their age, but still there are many kids here who don’t have a boyfriend or girlfriend.

MP
How is that co-ed configuration of the program impact on what we can and can’t do and what is harder and what might be possible here that can’t do in a single sex environment?

SR
The only difference I suppose and it brings up the whole concept of what is acceptable behaviour. We have a rule that any sexual intimacy is against school rules. So if I found a girl and boy having sex together or in the shower together, I would say right, you go straight home. It hasn’t happened yet, but what would happen if I found two boys having sex, or two girls having sex, well I guess the same rule applies. The reality is though is there a bigger consequence because of the social implication of why kids get sent home. Is that a bigger issue for two boys or two girls?

MP
So the accepted behaviour stuff is harder in education of what is going to be accepted by the community (although community, I guess is probably
problematic for you because what might be a School F community may not necessarily be a Ferntree community."

SR
We talk to students about being in a community which is by and large a little conservative country town. Clothing behaviour and rules might still apply.

MP
I don’t want to go into the whole single sex co –ed debate because it’s not fruitful, but I was curious, given the strong social function and community function and let’s face it, given the special artificial creations in a society that has two genders.

SR
I think that is the case and we see things that are different here and we do do some things with single sex. I usually run a course called Boys to Men and a course called Girls to Women and I think that’s good for them and to be able to do separate things as well and acknowledge that the boys can do their thing and the girls can do their thing as well. I think that is a place to do more of those things. Of course the kids that come up here are used to a co-ed environment. I think that they came from single sex school, that would be a nightmare. We all know that teenagers think about sex all the time, but by and large all that stuff is just continuing on with the politics in XXXX City.

For me, there’s just one more rule that has to be enforced. There are some ‘no go’ zones that have to be enforced. It’s the same with alcohol, it’s the same with drugs, the same with violence and harassment and it’s the same with intimacy. They are all no go areas. In the long run it’s about teaching students about boundaries as well. They can look up on the internet and see what’s expected. I mean there are no surprises about it. I am concerned about...I use the analogy that when we work out how do things here that suits the protocol (a bit like a pendulum). You may move too far one way then you bring it back – you are eventually trying to guess the procedure protocol that fits and sometimes and that is the beauty of having the (activity) Program because there is a chance to review something at the end. I think with the strikes system at the moment that perhaps there is a tendency for some staff to give a strike – matter over. Whereas really you need to have a conversation with them, you can’t just go on strike. Things like coming late to your class and so on. If you just go on strike and don’t actually talk to the kid you have handed the problem to someone else. It’s a deferral. But I think the strike system is good in that it puts the ball back in the kid’s court about managing. “Oh gee, I have four strikes I had better be careful and not get any more strikes because it’s Friday and if I get to Sunday then I have a clean slate.”

I say to parents there are boundaries and they are not negotiable because we are not doing the kids a favour if we keep shifting the boundary line and society works that way in boundaries that are not really negotiable. Now the parents drive up here, and I say to the kids and the parents, now if you are
running late and then you do 115 k’s and are pulled over then why do 115 k’s? They say oh well I am running late to get to Ferntree and I say I am sorry to hear that, here’s your ticket and have a nice day. I tell the kids they have to work within the boundaries and regulate their own behaviour.

MP
Do the boundaries move here? Now let me explain that. You said that you don’t give anybody favours if the boundaries move, but do the boundaries move in line with growth or change in students as they become acclimatized and enculturated to what you are doing here?

SR
They tend not to in a term. We will perhaps change them from term to term. In an ideal world I would like to be able to do that. We caught with a bind consistency versus alterations to it. Most times we don’t.

They had a trial this term (which I didn’t agree with), about in the morning you come and do house inspections. The issue was that sparked off concerns that some kids were down here on their computers when the dishes hadn’t been done. They go well it’s not my turn on the roster was for your bedrooms and if you fail that then you get the strike. If the communal areas fail everyone gets a strike. The idea being that everyone feel a sense of ownership. The reality, as I expected that was going to happen, it caused friction with the kids because other kids did the work because they didn’t want to get a strike, while the kids who were slapped continued to be slapped. So halfway through the term we changed that and said ok from now on the consequences are whoever’s job it was gets a strike. The trouble was that in most cases the tendency was that the good kids got the work done. Part of this was that was some bullying going on. So it’s a constant juggle. I guess dependent upon the number and I think that we found 92 students to be a big group and next term coming we have got 67 coming and that’s a lot more manageable. Our staff doesn’t expand and contract with the numbers.

MP
If the boundaries can’t move with the growth and development of the group of the community, are there formal markers that the students are aware of as milestones, things that students are aware of, things that they can say that I started here and this is where I am now?

SR
There are in some ways. We brought with this term and I here I used the narrative that we need to try and balance the use of the carrot and the stick. It can’t be all one and none of the other. What we brought in this time was a much more apparent and consistent reward system for kids who are doing the right thing. It wasn’t just who has got the least number of strikes and I think that was well managed. It wasn’t just ok if you did that in the first weeks and you got strikes well forget it that’s it.

I reckon the three big things that powerful incentives for kids are about food, sleep and social times and if we give them those or take away those can be
very effective control mechanisms, for want of a better word. If this house has
done a fantastic job you get a half hours sleep in. If you are mucking around
at 10.30 at night and you have been warned a few times, you up at 7.00
instead of 7.30. If you have got to the point where things aren’t working you
are going to have detention between 4 and 6 while everyone else is
socializing

MP
So the reward side of things then you wouldn’t want to reward students who
don’t get strikes because they might be just doing nothing.

SR
True. I guess the strikes have been about insuring things like punctuality,
cleanliness and appropriate behaviour. All things that contribute towards the
effective running of the program.

MP
I guess the difference is between rewarding the positive rather than the
negative.

SR
I was talking to someone the other day about rewarding awards like a good
citizen’s award, or something like that. In the long run they are important to
do and we will have to look at the program and decide what are our core
things to do and what are the things, if push comes to shove, we get rid of
because we only have so much energy. So we start on all the things that we
want to do and have to be careful that you don’t over crowd the curriculum
and not do anything well. To start with I think we have to keep the students
very busy because if they have too much free time some of them do get up to
mischief. It’s all about striking a balance. But what you do and do really well
reflectively, adds to the depth. Particularly the relationship stuff. One of the
things that I am looking to do in this coming term. Monday is the house
meeting day. There’s a long time between that form of working time and the
next form of working time and I have tried to follow the way in which we can
come up with a system whereby we can have more contact with the house
leaders and their students without having huge changes to the program
because if I do that I have to put another I have to get rid of either a house
meeting day, or a mentor day or a course day or community service day, I
mean all those days are taken up. I have come up with what I think is a
solution in that it deals with a number of issues and I am in the process of
convincing my leadership team but I think that’s a good idea but it’s about
what it means to implement it. To have the house team, the staff or house
leaders on day shift on Saturday as well as the Monday. On that Saturday
they are therefore involved in that’s our major cleanup day. So they are in the
house with the kids talking about cleaning working along side them. It gives
the house leader a chance to keep an eye on them and have a look at the
house to see if there is any damage. It’s not a wide spread issue but it is an
issue of some kids damaging the property and it needs to be dealt
immediately it’s happened not weeks after. I also want to change our
shopping day to Saturday whereby the house leaders can go shopping with
the kids as well, with the emphasis on shared time and developing rapport.
Because one of our challenges is that we have these kids for eight weeks and
they are right outside their comfort zone. They are not in uniform, they call us
by our first name and all of those things are different for them to XXXX City
and to manage them well there needs to be a good relationship between the
house leader and them and it’s a big ask to have them all to adjust very
quickly. So I think that gives us more of a chance to bond with the kids.

I think there needs to be more contact between staff and students in XXXX
City and I think the staff should come up here with the students for a couple of
days, so there’s a sense of handing over, a sense touching base and how are
you going and also it gives the staff back in XXXX City what the kids have
experienced. I think that’s crucial to do that.

MP
Would you see the program as a journey? Will you move from a staff point to
a defined end point? So here it is laid out step to step to step, or more of an
attainment of a state that you need to sustain in a healthy qualitative way over
the eight weeks?

SR
A bit of both. Certainly, if you look at the kids and see the way they respond.
We have an idea we are trying to get the kids – it would be lovely to have a
situation where they are all kind, accepting and understanding. This is what
we all would like to achieve but hopefully there will be a bit of growth, where
the staff point was I think there has been a lot of growth. There is certainly a
pattern to it as a general rule to the group. They come with nerves and
excitement in the first week. Early on in the second week the novelty is a little
worn off about living with other people. I often see conflict arise in that
second week. There’s a buildup of excitement to the middle weekend, which
is a visiting weekend. That’s the focal point, they want to catch up with their
parents. There’s often, just after the visiting weekend, for some kids it’s a
down period because they like feel the focal point of visiting weekend has
been and gone and they still have another four weeks to go. The person that
was giving me the shits in the first week is still giving me the shits in the fourth
week. They have the projects ahead of them and the pressure of that. They
pick up again, you know, there’s the excitement and the nerves before exams
and the anxiety night before presentation day and that’s over and you can see
the visible sighs of relief after they have done their presentation. Then there’s
a week to go and in some ways a party atmosphere in which time we keep
them busy and we talk to kids about it and I talk to parents on presentation
day about having a quiet word with their child about not dropping the batten
now that the pressures off. There’s a lot of rituals involved including all the
things we do in the last week which is part of the winding up Ferntree
experience for the kids with an all night movie night? It’s a tradition and lots of
fun and a great social event and we know where they all are.

MP
What are the things then that a student might encounter or they might see
giving them a sense of their own change? You know, at all of the points
where a student might say look in the mirror and look at themselves and say ok I am not like that anymore.

SR
I think it’s about them being able to manage themselves – self reliance or independent living. They treat that as a challenge and I think the stuff that you learn how good you are, you still see. You know it’s all interactions that might happen. The doors locked the kids in bed – there’s stuff going on all the time.

MP
That’s why I am interested. Is there a way that a student apprehends their awareness that they have that kind of new idea moment?

SR
All their reflections, all their self assessments. I mean they are asked in each of three courses that they do like a report about living in the house and a report about their project and it’s about what have you learnt about yourself. What can you do now that you couldn’t before and what will you take away with you – it’s all those sort of things. The questions are there as part of the reflective process and the house admitting new students in the first week here and around the fourth week around visiting week and towards the end. They are the sorts of things which help them get a sense of what they have achieved.

MP
Each student set their own goals?

SR
Yes they are encouraged to do that and when they set them they have to make them something they have to reach for. A challenge but achievable and to look at things whether it’s about academic, about social, about physical, about emotional. To look at a range of goals

MP
Two years down the track what would a Ferntree graduate recall most vividly do you think?

SR
It’s hard to say. Kids could prove me wrong but I could say this to parents and students that I think when kids talk about how good it was and by and large a large majority of kids rave about their Ferntree time and I say to people when they talk about Ferntree is fantastic, it isn’t for every kid – it’s hard work – but the vast majority of kids will say it’s fantastic. If you asked some more pertinent questions, the probably would tell you it was good and what I liked about, apart from the social time, was that it was hard work, there were good days and bad days and they actually achieved it themselves. I think that’s the big thing. It’s also important to know when to step in and when not to step in.
What do parents learn in the Ferntree experience?

It’s a good question. I think parents learn that their children can do it. I don’t know how much they think about themselves but they probably do but it’s not something that’s articulated. Sometimes I think it’s great it’s like a right passage without driving so it sadly lacks. Then again is it right to take kids away from their parents – is it right to do that at this age? I don’t know. Should we be building their resilience within a strong community at home or do you need to take them out of that and create an artificial one? I think they come away with and I think a lasting understanding of what make things. It’s not much noticeable in XXXX City but it is here because everything that happens here, other than what’s provided by the Shire services, all the key things here are done by voluntary work.

So if they are not involved it probably won't be done.

Yes I hope kids go away with that understanding and I hope they come away with that fact that giving you actually receive. It’s sense of feeling good because you have done something to help.

What would you change about this if you could change anything?

I think perhaps putting some more of those stepping stones in and about checks and balances. One of the things we need to be aware of is to better give emotional support to kids while they are here and that’s a hard one to quantify about who needs what. I would love to be able to break down whatever it is that props up the social groupings. I feel frustrated by the ‘cools’ who come up here and continually be cool. I am not stereo-typing all kids who are cool, there are many that are popular who are actually very nice. I mean when it comes time to leave here they are just as careless of other people’s feelings as they were when they first came. I would like to change them and I guess in the long run, just how much can you change in eight weeks? There is a possibility that some of the seeds sown here will germinate down the track. We do get some nasty people, however, we also get lots of caring and giving kids. This is a good job – but it’s demanding.

Will you seek to improve integration in this program about what happens afterwards?

I think there certainly needs to be – XXXX City is working on that in the transition into Ferntree and the transition out of Ferntree. How does XXXX
City working wise acknowledge the growth that students have after coming to Ferntree. How do they build on what has been done here? They have classes of kids, some who have been here and some who haven't been. How do you give recognition to the growth that's occurred? It's not easy to do to recognize there has been a big change and we are not sure exactly what sometimes, you just get the sense that they have

MP

Thank you.

End of Interview
Interview 39

22 June 2007
Interview with Jane Nestor (School F) Ferntree Campus

MP
This is an interview with Jane Nestor

JN
That's right

MP
On the 22nd of June 2007 at School F Ferntree.
So Jane could we start with whatever it is that you do here, your role?

JN
I was employed here as a teacher four or five years ago and at the moment I
am currently a teacher and also part of the leadership team on a maternity
replacement position for twelve months, so it's leadership team,
administration and teacher and I am a staff member here.

MP
Wow there's a whole lot of things involved in that. What does it mean being a
leader here?

JN
It means everyone's part of the decision making but there's other decisions
that get made. It's about, I think the difference is that with leadership it's
about knowing what's happening on a day to day but it's about dealing with
what's happening in terms to come. It's the forward thinking and helping
things to run well.

MP
Yeah I can give you a pretty good example. I am a principal of a school I have
a deputy and someone said to me once the deputy was about today and the
principal was about tomorrow so perhaps the staff here would be about today,
the leadership team is about today and tomorrow – would you agree?

JN
Yes I'd say today's right and sometimes the reality of today can get in the way
of getting ready for tomorrow. That sometimes does happen which can be a
bit frustrating as well. Then you are always a little bit on the hop you know,
not as organised or (?)

MP
So Jane how long have you been here for, you said four years?

JN
Four going on five years
MP
Four years going on five, so that's a fair bit of exposure to what's happened here. That makes it about what about sixteen or seventeen different groups?

JN
Yes

MP
Have you seen much change in the groups over the time in the way that they are managed and the learning they do or is it pretty settled?

JN
I think we are always looking at ways to do things better or we might acknowledge. Sometimes things might be moved around a bit just due to numbers of kids or staffing constraints, or whatever. I think there are still a lot of things that run because that's how they were implemented from the start and yet within that too, people still treat them like their own and still make changes.

MP
What are the sort of enduring elements, the things that seem to have been around for ever?

JN
OK. Well just the fact that when the kids come in there, they're in a house without an adult living in there.

MP
Um That's pretty risky isn't it?

JN
Well it doesn't have to be risky but that's the big thing and that's happened since day one and that was the plan and that's very much the idea of what they wanted this place to be like.

MP
The basic idea was for students to come and live in the house?

JN
Yes, yes, to live in the house. I think the house thing was very much the driving idea and just looking at the way that they were built and initially there was no staff house.

MP
There was no staff house on site here?

JN
There was no house that was planned and the failing not to have it as a staff house, but over the time they realized we need a spot as well, but the plan
was that the staff would be so involved in the kids houses that they wouldn't need their own house

MP
What would that mean that they were so involved in the students here?

JN
I think it just meant that you didn't congregate together as staff. Well that was the impression I get that it wouldn't be like a kid's houses and a staff house but the staff house soon came about because they said we don't know if this is an oversight or not, but where actually are we going to be together, where do we go to. Where are our desks where do you put your handbag when you come to work you know, those sorts of things and so, it didn't take long for one of the houses to be allocated as a staff house.

MP
Does that constraint mean anyone?

JN
No. They've moved around the staff houses, yes.

MP
So you just sort of pick one at random and that becomes the staff house?

JN
Yes, it was down there, then it was over there and now it's back over here. As a staff house it doesn't really suit our needs like it does the kids, because we've actually got sixteen people living in the house.

MP
So there are sixteen staff now?

JN
Well yes. Round about sixteen adults and we don't live at the place like the kids live, so our needs aren't really serviced by living this style, but at least we have a spot.

MP
Mm. Can you sum up for me the essence of Ferntree learning?

JN
The essence of the Ferntree learning? I'd like to think that its an opportunity for kids to experience I'm going to say life but its that life in that three months without parents physically being there and what have you and I think it's a mixture of independence, inter-dependence, the notion of you know self but also community so its sort of.....

MP
I think you've put it very well. Independence, Inter-dependence, self and community some nice contrasts there.
JN
Yes and I think that's what it is like, because I don't think there is that kids don't have a free reign when they come here. Sometimes I think kids can arrive thinking that it's a holiday and we need to be explicit and we are, explaining to the kids you've actually enrolled to come to school for fifty six days and we are here all day and every day and because we are staff, we are employed by School F and the bottom line is schoolwork in many ways too.

MP
So it's a very balanced notion really of balancing a contrast and you can't have independence without a notion of dependence, you can't have a notion of self without an understanding of self in a community and mix and all the while some rules, or structures or principles that the inner sense create the framework around it.

JN
Yes and the kids need that framework as well and they need us to be, I think it is really important that whilst we are guiding, we are also there in as (supervisors), we're helping them too, instead of just saying clean your house go, ok .whose on dishes, whose on this, I'll dry, you wash, how about you grab the broom, I'll pick up the dirt, you know, o.k. whose on the compost, do you know how to do that you know. It works much better when we're not bossy. We still achieve the same outcome because we're not housekeeping or keeping it tidy.

MP
So there's not typically type of didactic approach taken here? The teacher centred: do this do that.

JN
I'm not saying we don't do that sometimes, but I feel that's not what we should be doing.

MP
The social dimension of what occurs, a number of students living in a house. What sort of things do the students learn do you think, living in the house?

JN
The very first thing I think they learn is that School F has more than one campus and I think this program from a school level really helps to reduce that isolation that they have, whether you go to this one or that one or whatever and they too do have their preconceived ideas about what kids are like that go to each of the campuses and coming into a house they immediately not only get to know other kids, but suddenly, hey that's what kids are like from another campus. It really helps to break down those barriers and when they return to, I think they've had some good contact with kids from other campuses and they do cross-connect with sport mainly. That's pretty much it.
MP
You are aware of the significant cultural differences that exist say within School F?

JN
If teachers come here from School F, when they then move to another campus of School F in year ten I think they feel that whilst there may be still a bit of nervousness basic and emotion faces in having to actually front those kids and good friendships can form with the kids. I think that from a college point of view, I think that would be a good thing because I've worked in AAAA before for a two campus secondary school and that's a real issue, with people and with staff I think about you know how busy you are just on your own campus. It's hard, at times to find out what's going on in someone else's, so in many ways, it's sort of like another school, like what's it got to do with me, so I think that's good. Socially, what else do they learn, I think that kids are really challenged about what's O.K. and what's not with behaviour. I found with the kids that they have got a lot of stuff inside them already and that this experience and the way that they deal with other people. What's happening is that they are going to find out. Hey wow, I didn't realize that I could be this patient, or I didn't realize that I had this much resilience, or I didn't realize that I actually need help, when it comes with dealing with kids who do xyz or you know there's more than one way to skin a cat, that kind of thing and it's definitely not easy we have a lot of issues dealing with kids issues and the way that they work with each other but as well, we have some great success stories and also in those hard times as well kids who are directly involved learning what's o.k. and what's not in questioning their own behaviour and their own thinking on things and the observers are going - well how does that fit in to what I think is ok

MP
Given that they come from three different campuses so there would be three different sub-peer groups that arrive here, so clearly there's going to be a re-establishment and a shaking out of the so-called order? Who are the top dogs that emerge here, the students who emerge as the leaders, within their network?

JN
Well, like what kind of kids do you mean?

MP
Are there things that you might observe in that are common across a number of groups that the rules that seem to operate here that would tend to push a certain type of student forward as a leader?

JN
I not sure that I really understand but ? Look how do you choose with kids you know giving each other a hard time and would have addressed some of those issues and even as a few kids said to us, the kids that you've just dealt with and have received consequences they are actually the coolest kids here and people don't normally do that, so, is that sort of what you mean?
MP
Well, I mean, for example, within a new level of class, let's take in School F (campus), it would be pretty visible to most teaching staff who the kids are that the students perceive as leaders, the ones who are the coolest, the better accepted that in a sense get to lord it over others. Would you agree that those are not necessarily the students who remain as the leaders here?

JN
Yes, o.k. well in the house, the house where there's sort of something to identify who those kids are that seem to have that sort of that extra bit. They've seen that kids are looking up to them, or whatever, and they try and work with them as well to identify them so hey you realize that you know they seem to have those leadership qualities so there is really explicit contact with those kids to say it would be great if we could really work with us here and realize that kids are going to follow on or be looking at what you do. Now there's not a lot of kids like that idea, but the interesting thing is when the staff over the last year or two are kid-proof called teenagers in Ferntree and a number of the kids in its not, if you would like to be in the teenagers in Ferntree group that meets once a week and you would like to be in that group you are welcome. So this term the interesting mix was there were some kids there who barely spoke but they wanted to come to those meetings every week and be able to have a chance to hear what was being said and to make a comment if they wanted to and we had some of those cool kids as well, the ones who were leaders, not necessarily with the leadership badge at school but were leading and they all improved as well, so it was really interesting being kind of an individual decision of whether you wanted to be in that group. Those kids stepped up and it meant though we asked them we said hey can you see we've got a problem here. How do you think we can address this o.k. We're going need you on Sunday night to help get the kids o.k. so you've got kids helping that would normally have just been sitting there doing nothing and they wouldn't have been mucking round but they are doing nothing and then you've got a good mix and then you've got kids who um, and they come without preconceived ideas as well, so you tend to, but yet of late the campuses in XXXX City are telling us who the leaders are, who own that leadership badge and they're being asked to step up and run the class as well.

MP
Do they?

JN
Well yes, yes they do. There was an instance during term, where there was a conference from leaders, you know staff members in XXXX City talking to the group of kids. Well these kids were chuffed that they were chosen and were asked to have a positive impact on a few things that were happening.

MP
So by the end of last group for example, do you have in your own mind, the sort of two, three or four kids who just stood out as being the ones who where,
the kind of the go to kids. If you need something done they were the ones that you would ask first?

JN
It would depend what it was yeah, but we knew that if these kids were on side they would bring with them you know, a group of kids and there are all sorts of leaders like there are so many kids that just bring different things.

MP
Well o.k. in your own mind, what makes a student leader?

JN
I guess first off someone who is prepared to say I want to be involved

MP
So a participant rather than a passenger?

JN
Yes, I would like to be involved, in someway I would like to think that I would be in there rather than just being dragged along with what's going on and not necessarily that kid who's always out in front, but just someone who just, I think the leadership thing comes first, that they've got to say, yeah I would like to be involved and conscious of what's going on. You know but someone who you can that dialogue with, that whilst not always agreeing but can see the merits of what's going on and is keen that the feeling around the place is one of being supportive and co-operative and this kid still might muck up and what have you but basically their heart's in the right spot and hangs free for the whole thing to work, whatever that means, they want to be conscious of what's going on and they want to be involved.

MP
What do you think the Ferntree student would find memorable about being here?

JN
I think the fact that they have lived in a house, cooked and cleaned and washed and shopped and done all that with a group of people that they have formed generally a good bond with, or a working relationship with and have been able to keep this house ticking along not necessarily, to some kids not necessarily the housework ticking along, but the house as a group of people ticking along and being able to work with each other more and I think in time that will be a big thing they will remember. I think the fact that they do the project I think a lot of kids would remember that and I think the involvement in the community, if you read the kids reports they always talk about, although not always, the number of kids the fact that they have made links with a group or a person in the community is really quite profound.

MP
So is it that notion of the community within the community that is important here?
JN
Yes, it's the Ferntree thing

MP|
That's what it means it the wider community not Ferntree School F the wider community?

JN
Yes the wider Ferntree community and I feel really happy about that because that's one of the reasons why it was chosen to be here, rather than in some remote setting. The idea that there was going to be that involvement in this town. So I feel happy that over the years down the track, we can still say that kids that's their really big thing and I think that what would also be memorable to kids, its going to be at the end of the day, all the things that we do in the program are not going to appeal to all the kids and that's ok. But at the end of it you would like to think that all kids would have really enjoyed most things that have happened.

MP
With the setting, the houses and we have talked a little bit about the needs and the duties and things that that imposes and puts on the town, how important is the setting you think, to set up that the learning?

JN
I'm not sure what you mean, like, the location of this place?

MP
Well location, like from the sense of where the houses are where we are in the town, the design, the distance from School F, those sorts of things?

JN
I think we are far enough away to feel the distance, but close enough for you to drive here in a day. Like you can still do the up and back in a day, so I think that's ok. The houses, I'm not an architect, but I do know that if they turned some of the houses around to get some nice winter sun. Some clothes lines don't even get any sun you know, during the winter. I don't like the fact that this is the structure of things. It does impact that you've got one bedroom downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs. I think that just for the kid's sake, it would have been nice to have had two and two.

MP
Do the students feel isolated here, do you think?

JN
I think some like it you know, some like it, far from the madding crowds you know, 10 p.m. but then other times too think its that lot of running up and down, running up and down because we don't know the kids and they are allocated to their houses by the XXXX City staff and in favour to them they do a fantastic job, because there's not one teacher that knows all the kids, so its
three people that go, I've got these kids, I've got kids that sound that they will never be similar or complement and that's how the houses are made up. I do wonder about the room downstairs and the three up. I do wonder about like the laundry upstairs. How could that have happened. Eight people living in a house. Have you seen the laundry, it's just the washing machine, the dryer, the sink and then just a foldaway doorway like there's... Would you have designed it that way for a family of eight.

MP
So you are speaking as a mum now are you?

JN
Yes I am, I am and also speaking as someone who works here because we've got to come in and deal with all that washing. You know, it's a funny thing. I think this is a great design, not to have had couches and stuff. I think this looks great and I actually spoke to the architect who is building an office in New York. I think it's great because you can swish along, you know, you don't have the furniture thing, so this is great.

MP
Do they, do the staff have storage bins?

JN
No way???????

MP
Well it's a good place to hide contraband.

JN
Yes that's right

MP
Yes, you just mentioned then about the laundry and getting in there and helping them to do it. To you, what's the balance between intervention and free rein?

JN
I'm not that happy with free rein. I think we've learnt from experience that, the way I look at it is, I'm here to help these kids succeed. I don't want them to come here and to be all so consuming that we've just gone right, go for it. Good luck, I'm out here if you need me. I do think that where they're at with their age and everything. I don't know that that's great. I would rather start by being in there helping O.K. Hey, do you know how to actually wash the dishes and when the kids stand there with the taps just running aimlessly, with no plug and standing there like?????? I go, let me show you another way to do that., so that we don't have that water spillage and trying to put into context why we want that plug in, hot soapy water and talk about hygiene. You know that sort of stuff. Let's have another go at this and then you say, hey you wash them and I won't say, would you like me to help you dry the dishes. So it is
their house, I'm not like going into the kids houses saying good day how are you going. Just don't boof your way in and say right, I'm here now.

MP
Let's get this place sorted out?

JN
Yeah, you'll be o.k. now, not like that, just more like more that they need some guidance and they do need direction as to, well how do you wipe that bench. What do you do with all that food, that's in the fridge that's going off you know rather than just leaving it to osmosis and just by chance they'll work out what to do with it. I just think how come and some kids, some houses they'll go, right their insular???? If you can see they don't need this help, they've already got it, I'll say o.k. back off, let's have a cup of tea together, tell us how was your course today, you know, something like that.

MP
Do students learn by mistakes effectively here?

JN
Learn by mistakes. We hope they do, yeah. Some of them learn, some of them have not learned. I think some kids get very good and I'm not saying they learnt it here, but they've got very good at learning to duck and weave and not pull their weight in the house, not do their share of the chores and kids have covered for them and all that sort of stuff and that can often be one of the reasons for a lot of tension or bluffs in the house and that's o.k. I'm not saying that that's not ok. but I think there does come to a point where we need to be able to help both sides, we need to be able to help that kid to realize that it's not all about them, it's about the team thing, its about all of us making this work. Its not about just you, doing your own thing, it comes to a point where its about, what can I do to help with the housework and I think it's all about making the kids accountable for what they're doing and I think it's ok to challenge the kids on tape. How come you're not pulling your weight, what's going on, tell me about that. What do you want the kids to be thinking about you, when your house finishes. What's your thoughts about what you want kids to think about when they think about you. Are they going to be saying gee thank god that's gone, we're over it because he was a good kid but he cheated or was selfish, you know, or whatever. So that's the way I'd go about it with the kids.

MP
How do you set up a form of accountability for the students here?

JN
We have a major management policy. Is that the sort of thing that you mean?

MP
I'm thinking more in the sense of that reckoning o.k. a life well lived over eight weeks with reasonable harmony. There's sort of an implied accountability
there, that, yes they met the standard. Are there points where the students do assess, appraise and account for themselves or for them?

JN
Every week they meet and have a house meeting. Is this the sort of thing that you mean and talk about o.k. where have we been and where are we now, so, yeah, things are better now, we've got that issue sorted out with the roster or Billy Bloggs has really lifted his game or whatever and things are working better, but now we've got the issue of missing the butcher on Saturday now that we aren't eating properly on the week-ends, or something like that. We give rewards to kids as well. It could be a reward for, in a week not shave, any house where the whole house gets less than fifteen strikes, which is you know, late to meetings, in the wrong place at the wrong time. The whole house has pastoral inspections which, you know is house inspections, your house has to make sure that you've got fifteen total or less, you'll get a three dollar voucher at the Bakery and you can go down and have afternoon tea together or something like that.

MP
Strikes. How did that work? Sort of an accounting system for things wrong and mistakes?

JN
When I first came here it was sort of like if you were late to meetings thats fine. You do the house inspection, you pass the house inspection. When I first came you were grounded for the day. That means you couldn't have gone down the street, you could join in with the activities, but you couldn't go down the street. Well, so, it was one thing you did wrong you get an immediate grounding. The difficulty with that was you had all these kids grounded and then if they did it again the next day, I can't remember how we kept a record, but we would have an in-house grounding which means then they couldn't go out of their house. So the part of a group that had just come from the house, then you had to follow up were you late you were grounded so on the white board you just had all these groundings. A couple of years ago we just thought it would be a good chance to have another go at this, so a lady who was the counselor here at the time, she came up with this idea about you know another way with the behaviour management would be, its sort of like a strike, it's a warning and o.k. so you've late this morning for the meeting, that's a strike, you've got four more to go before you're going to miss your sleep in on the Sunday, so giving the kids a bit more scope about things. It's about saying, o.k. so you mucked up today, it's a warning, you have got four more to go. All kids get a sleep in on the Sunday morning and that's a great incentive, because sleeping in, free time, that's sort of like the currency that the kids really go with. They don't like to lose any of that, so on Sunday at eight o'clock in the morning, if you've got five strikes or more you are up at eight o-clock and you are doing jobs like cleaning the bus, doing the compost you know that sort of stuff and generally the kids think it's fair. They like the idea that they are sort of in control about how many strikes they are going to get and its not all blown in one misdemeanour. However, if they do
something of a more serious nature, they could immediately go into the village payback, so it's a graduated sort of thing about what kids do.

MP
So village payback?

JN
It's kind of village payback yeah.

MP
That's an interesting use of a term of using currency in a sense. It's a currency that has both a positive and negative value, the positive value of the currency is the sleep in, meantime, the negative value of the currency is the payback. Yeah, get credit. What sorts of things would lead to a strike. You said late to a meeting?

JN
Don't pass the house inspection

MP
Don't pass the house inspection?

JN
You haven't done your bedroom or your brunch dishes, you didn't do that. If you were really trying not to have the kids just having free access to all parts of the houses, so sometimes kids will sneak in through these side doors here just out there. You know they'll come in a back door, like instead of walking round to come in here they come in the back door, so that would lead to a strike.

MP
How would you know that that had happened?

JN
Because you would have seen it. You saw them and then you would go up and say hey buddy, you've just gone through the back door of the housekeep. Oh yes. We would explain to them as to why we wanted them to understand that not being home by nine o'clock, you know kids not getting in before nine would lead to a strike. Providing its not that they are hiding somewhere and it's taken us ten or fifteen minutes to find them, that's different. It's those kids that are still running up the park at nine o'clock when the alarm system goes on, you know.

MP
So the alarms are set at nine and that means that if you open the doors and let them out the alarm goes off so the kids would expect to be inside?

JN
Yeah, by nine o'clock at night yeah, there's a few systems on all the time, but at a different level, that would depend on the time of day.
How many students would you have on the village payback typically, one, ten?

We had ninety-two kids here this term on village payback, one week there were fourteen kids, another week there was like nine kids, ten kids, something like that yeah... You can get an automatic payback as well, so on the last day of the term we had, get ready for it, we had twenty seven kids on automatic village payback and they were twenty seven kids who decided to do a runner the night before, you know they all left their house at quarter past nine, you know they weren't doing anything bad, but because the staff got worried, but the rules are fair, if you've left your house between nine and ten it's an automatic village, so whoever the kids were who got caught that's what happens and that takes the sting out of it as well because it's a consequence, so that was that one-off thing where the kids decided to run out on to the oval and run back and see if they can get away with it, you know, that sort of thing, it's gone past nine, but that doesn't happen all that often.

Do students get sent home from Ferntree very often?

Students get sent home, yeah, often, depends on the team, depends on, you could have a handful of kids sent home in a term for.......

Misbehaviour?

Yeah, yeah, and being sent home doesn't mean to say you can't come back.

So you might be given some time out?

Yeah

And with conditions, you might come back, so suspension?

Yes.

Do you have internal suspension?


Yeah we do, so that sort of the next level up an internal suspension which can happen all day, they're sort of hard to when you've got big numbers 92. I think that at the beginning you have to be able to manage that, you can have great new ideas, but it still has to be manageable and you have to be able to carry out that procedure and sometimes you really have to be so creative as to how you are going to work around it because you've still got to keep the rest of the place going and if you've got four kids on an internal, like if you're found in the bedroom of another student whose not in your house, we deem that to be serious, because we've said to the kids we don't want you in bedrooms of other kids, please don't put yourselves in that position and also we're trying to stop kids from just having that free rein of going to other kids houses and rooms. You've got 92 kids, you don't want 92 kids, because they have been allowed into the house, you know there's no other way to stop them and we don't want that, we want kids to feel that they can have their stuff up in their room even though they do have a lock on the cupboard and things like that.

MP
But these sort of things go missing light bulbs and money and.....?

JN
Yes. We just think if we are fairly firm on that, that will just deter a lot of kids, it doesn't deter them all. The difficulty is that some kids say, I just went up there for a joke, or I was up there just for this or that or whatever. They're the tricky ones but we say to them, don't go there, or they'll get the internal and we find that, we just think that if we just go with it, it just can eliminate the time for war over worrying what they were doing, or do I believe you but not believe you or that but if kids are caught in a compromising situation together, then they would be sent home, like we've had kids before, like if its not looking good, if we found them in the bathroom, in the shower.

MP
You've worked in school settings that are quite different to this in the mainstream?
Do you get a sense that the learning that occurs here is different in some way? Is it more effective, more? Because I understand that there are various elective programs, students do, the three day? Do you think so?

JN
I like teaching, you know, I like being a teacher and I think I've probably done some of my best teaching here, just because of the fact of a session where you are teaching goes for three hours, it could go for the whole day and you can really draw on the resources that are available around you, you know and you are encouraged to do that. Yes, I think the learning is different, the fact that you hardly see anyone photocopying things, we don't work out of books as such, kids have a workbook, but we don't work out of textbooks, our physical environment is so different, just with the classrooms that we have to work on. Sometimes I have actually given my class sitting on the bus to start the day ok and the kids are sitting on the bus and I am giving instructions, like have you on the bus. Our teaching environment spaces are not all that great,
but it's a matter of whether you can make the most of it and cope with it or what have you. There are some daggy spots, but we use the facilities around the town.

MP
So, I stayed at the (accommodation) last night, so we might use that space?

JN
Yes. and see not everyone likes that space, I personally don't like it, I think it's way too noisy, but I'll teach them there

MP
It echoes a bit doesn't it, yes.

JN
With the kids dragging their chairs on the floor. A lot of people love it, the workroom and then we've got AAAA Street up here, that's a daggy little house, but whilst you know we've might have extra space to get into, but the heater's not working so to have the first session there, we're all like you couldn't get enough blankets on us. So now the heater will get fixed and that room will be better. ok right here we go. I mean I really like??so it's that sort of thing, you don't have those lovely classrooms to work in, yet some of the teaching and learning is so exciting because it forces you to think about how else should I do this. ok why don't I take them down to the library the Ferntree Library and you know work down there for a bit, why don't I take a bus and get (name) to come around on a pub crawl for the kids. Let's find out about the history of Ferntree whilst sitting on a bus and then go into the…

MP
So sitting there in a house as opposed to a classroom does the student have a sense of being?

JN
When I first came here ad hoc classes could happen in a house and now they don't and there have been reasons for that, it's like let's not mix everything in together.

MP
Keep the houses separate from the learning?

JN
Well, houses are for the house staff, but lets have some stage where we have set areas where you go to class, because I think the kids need to realize that they're in an academic program which happens here and they are expected to work and that there are expectations in the classroom, whether its public transport, (locations) that their behaviour in the class would be no less fitting than in XXXX City or one of their swish classes there. And that's all about being explicit and when you put it to the kids like that they rise to it. They know what you mean.
MP
What would you change here if you had the opportunity, apart from the design of the houses?

JN
The laundry. What would I change? It’s a good time, can this be the last question?

MP
Yes, this is the last question.

JN
Great. What would I change? I think probably the numbers of kids that come at one time. With the constraints that we have on the number of staff that will be employed here at Ferntree, the number of kids which equals the number of houses that get used. With regard to the impact on how well we do, I think we do a really good job no matter the number that are there, but the number of kids I feel we are really stretched on some shifts, when you've got twelve houses operating as opposed to ten. Yes, I think the number of kids that came at one time has been my number one thing about being one thing. I feel I can change.

MP
Thanks.

End of Interview JN