Busy doing nothing: researching the phenomenon of "quiet time" in a challenge-based wilderness therapy program

Valerie E. Nicholls
University of Wollongong

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
BUSY DOING NOTHING: RESEARCHING THE PHENOMENON OF “QUIET TIME” IN A CHALLENGE-BASED WILDERNESS THERAPY PROGRAM

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

VALERIE E. NICHOLLS

BFA (Hons) (University of Tasmania)

Faculty of Education
2008
DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted for any degree.

I certify that any help in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged.

Signed

Date

VALERIE E. NICHOLLS
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It seems appropriate that the theme of this thesis is one of solitude. Alone but not lonely, I have spent much of the last few years sitting in silence. This been both a privilege and a torture. That there is now an enormous sense of satisfaction and accomplishment is largely due to the people who have propped me up with their support, enthusiasm and good will.

I would like to acknowledge the input of my parents, Tom and Jane. In my early years reading and spelling were not my forte. I thank them for their encouragement and instilling in me the notion that education equalled freedom. I realise now that they trained me to be an independent student, to sink or swim according to my own merit. What a strength that has been during the course of this project.

I am indebted to the participants in this study and to the staff at Project Hahn. Particular thanks goes to Rob Sveen. Without his irrepressible enthusiasm and vision I may never seen that there was a place for me in the world of research. Thanks Rob.

Especial thanks goes to my supervisors Dr Tonia Gray and Associate Professor Dr Garry Hoban. They brought complementary skills and perspective to the task of getting me over the academic line. Thanks Tonia for your enthusiasm, belief, eye for editorial detail, friendship and hospitality. Thanks Garry for your encouragement and faith in my ability. You have truly mastered the art of constructive criticism, thank you.

Over the last couple of years writing this thesis has been one of a number of significant life challenges that have demanded my attention. My social life has been neglected in the extreme. That I have any friends at all is nothing short of a miracle. But a miracle it is and I acknowledge the love, patience and good humour of every one of them. Especial thanks goes to Dyan and Haydn Perndt. Angels.

To my family, Pete, Nick and Emma I say a heartfelt thank you. United in their belief in my capacity and respectful of my passion, each in their own way has contributed to
keeping this thesis ‘afloat’. Thanks Em’ for your delight in my achievement, the sushi eraser, the pencils, and all the stationery gizmos that have made sitting at this desk more fun. Thanks Nick for your support across the miles and giving me the strength of the pounamou. Dear Pete, I so often take your support, patience, unfaltering love and belief in me utterly for granted. Thank you. Thank you. Time to balance solitude with noise and action - lets get out and have some raucous adventure!

In closing, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dear pal Kate. In life she inspired me to embark on this journey and in death she inspired me to bring it to completion. Thank you Kate, you are in every page.
Wilderness therapy programs are increasingly regarded as an effective alternative to more traditional forms of therapy for people identified as ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ (Gass, 1993). Despite substantial evidence to support the use of wilderness and adventure experiences to promote attitudinal and behavioural change, much remains unknown about the process of change and the experiences of participants.

The purpose of the research was to generate a grounded theory about participants’ experiences of Quiet Time within a challenge-based wilderness therapy program. The central question to be addressed was: What is the phenomenon of Quiet Time from the participants’ point of view and how do they use this phenomenon in a challenge-based wilderness therapy program?

A grounded theory design (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was chosen as a methodology to guide the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Sixteen male and two female participants from four Mountain Challenge wilderness therapy programs scheduled between February 2002 and February 2005 participated in the study. All but one of the participants came to the Mountain Challenge as part of ongoing therapy for drug and/or alcohol addiction. This triggered significant and particular ethical concerns that impacted on the design of the study. The exception was a female trainee facilitator who participated as all other participants and had no facilitative responsibilities. Data were collected in the form of interviews, photographs, journals, field notes and standard program documentation. An analytical framework using inductive and deductive categories was selected to analyse the data.

Based on the findings a theoretical model of the phenomenon of Quiet Time was deduced and a number of propositions for practice and research advanced. The research findings identify Quiet Time as a ‘sense’ of solitude that, contrary to understandings of solitude as an objective and external condition, is defined by the four co-occurring subjective and internal conditions: a sense of being alone; a positive mind frame; a personal time perspective and focussed attention. Further analysis led to an
understanding that *Quiet Time* was typically brief, participant initiated, and inclusive of experiences of “being alone together.” Participants utilised *Quiet Time* as an opportunity to focus on nature, reflect, and to engage in authentic and heartfelt conversation. The outcomes of *Quiet Time* were found to impact positively on participants’ immediate experience and processing of the wilderness therapy program. The study also indicates that the incidence and use of *Quiet Time* may be facilitated or constrained by a number of conditions including environmental factors, leadership styles, levels of group development and the individual needs, strengths and limitations of the participant. Among a number of outcomes found to extend beyond the duration of the program was, for some, the taking up of a habit of *Quiet Time* as a deliberate self-help and life enhancing strategy. Unexpected findings included the potential for *Quiet Time* to arouse feelings that may overwhelm and confuse participants.

One of the major contributions of the study is that it identifies *Quiet Time* as a commonly occurring, and predominately participant initiated phenomenon that has, despite its capacity to impact positively on participants’ attitudes and behaviours, been largely overlooked by the wilderness therapy literature. *Quiet Time* was found to differ from traditional concepts of solitude in wilderness programs in terms of its duration, how it is defined and how it is initiated. Despite its brevity the outcomes of *Quiet Time* parallel positive outcomes documented elsewhere. The main implication from this research is that the therapeutic potential of challenge-based wilderness therapy programs can be enhanced by promoting the opportunity for participant initiated *Quiet Time* through the adoption of an unhurried and process oriented approach to the wilderness adventure.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1  AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1. The Research Problem                        2
2. Aims of the Study and the Research Question 3
3. Research Methodology                        4
4. A Personal Note                             5
5. Definition of Terms                         7
6. Structure of the Thesis                     8

## CHAPTER 2  CHALLENGE BASED WILDERNESS THERAPY

9. Introduction                                9
10. Defining Wilderness Therapy                9
   - What is Wilderness?                       10
   - Is it Therapy?                            11
   - What is Wilderness Therapy?               14
11. The Foundations of Wilderness Therapy      15
   - Experiential Education                   15
   - Therapeutic Use of Wilderness            18
   - Therapeutic Use of Adventure             19
12. Wilderness Therapy: Current State of Play  22
CHAPTER 3   LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction 37
Wilderness Therapy and Solitude 38
The Solitude of Wilderness 40
   Doing 42
   Being 44
   A Restorative Environment 46
   A Transformative Environment 49
   A Transactional Relationship 52
A Typology of Solitude 53
   Vision Quest 55
   Survival Solo 56
   Reflective Solo 57
      Extended time frame 57
Group 2                          100
  Pre-Trip Interviews                     101
  Post-Trip Interviews                     101
The Use of Photography                   102
Participant Observation                   103
Written Journals                      104
Group 3                                   105
Group 4                           106
Data Analysis                           106
  Phase One: Open Coding and Initial Category Building           108
  Phase Two: Axial Coding and Identification of the Core category       108
  Phase Three: Selective Coding                   109
  Phase Four: Developing a Visual Coding Paradigm Model          110
Analysis of Transcripts and Text                   110
Analysis of Written Journals                    111
Analysis of Photographs                     111
Analysis of Field Notes and Observations               112
Analysis of Project Hahn Documentation                112
Memoing                          112
Trustworthiness                          113
  Theoretical Rigour                     113
  Methodological Rigour                   114
  Interpretative Rigour                   114
  Ethical Rigour                          116
  Rigorous Reflexivity                      116
Summary                            118

CHAPTER 5  RESEARCH FINDINGS  119
Overview                             119
Phase One: Building the Foundations Through Open Coding           120
  Open Coding Category One: Being Me                   122
  Before the Bridge                          122
  Feeling like A Drug Addict                     123
Trying to Find M’self 124
Open Coding Category Two: Having an Adventure 125
Open Coding Category Three: Being in a Group 128
  Group Context 128
  Group Goals 128
  Group Development 129
  Leadership 129
  Group as Teacher 130
Open Coding Category Four: Being in the Bush 131
Open Coding Category Five: Having Quiet Time 133
Phase Two: Definition of the Core Category 134
  Quiet Time: A Sense of Solitude 134
    A Sense of Being Alone 135
    Positive Frame of Mind 136
    A Personal Time Perspective 137
    Focussed Attention 137
Summary 140

CHAPTER 6  RESEARCH FINDINGS (2) 141
Introduction 141
Phase Three: Selective Coding 142
Antecedent Conditions 142
  Having Time: No Rush 143
  Taking Time 144
  Making Time 146
  Summary 147
Strategies: The Ways in Which Participants Utilise Quiet Time 149
  Responding: Letting Nature In 149
    Savouring Experience 150
    Processing Experience 151
    Unexpected Consequences 153
    Reflecting 156
    Monitoring Progress 156
CHAPTER 8 IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction 217
Implications for Practice 217
  Reflections of Reflection 222
  Transfer of Learning 223
  Program Design 225
Recommendations for Further Research 226
Reflections on the Research Process 227

REFERENCES 229

APPENDICES 256
Appendix 1 Human Research Ethics Approval 257
Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet 258
Appendix 3 Staff Supplement Information Sheet 260
Appendix 4 Participant Consent to Participate 261
Appendix 5 Staff consent to participate 262
Appendix 6 Project Hahn Application Form 263
Appendix 7 Project Hahn Participant Self-Assessment Form 264
Appendix 8 Project Hahn Referral Agent Participant Assessment Form 265
Appendix 9 Framework for Pre-trip Interview 266
Appendix 10 Framework for In-depth Interview 267
Appendix 11 Pro Forma for Daily Documentation 268
Appendix 12 Pro Forma for Participant Observation 270
Appendix 13 Personal Diary Guidelines 272
Appendix 14 Sample Interview Charlie 273
Appendix 15 Sample Interview Dane 281
Appendix 16 Early Open Coding Report 291
Appendix 17 The Route of the Mountain Challenge 296
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Depth of Intervention Continuum 12
Figure 2.2 Experiential Learning Cycle 17
Figure 2.3 Project Hahn Programming Structure 34
Figure 3.1 Four Types of Wilderness Solitude 54
Figure 3.2 Nature and purpose of solo at Cheley Colorado Camp 58
Figure 3.3 Self-Imposed Wilderness Time Alone 66
Figure 3.4 Dimensions of Alonetime 73
Figure 3.5 Privacy Functions Associated with Solitude and Isolation 78
Figure 3.6 Chinese Tai Chi Diagram 80
Figure 4.1 Research Groups and Participants 90
Figure 4.2 Alternating Approach to Data gathering and Analysis 94
Figure 4.3 The Analytic Framework for a Grounded Theory of Quiet Time 107
Figure 4.4 Grounded Theory Coding from Open Coding to the Axial Coding Paradigm 110
Figure 5.1 Laying the Foundations: Open Coding and Initial Category Building 121
Figure 5.2 “I Got Right into Checking all the Flora and Fauna” 131
Figure 5.3 Being in the Bush 132
Figure 5.4 Four Key Elements of Quiet Time 135
Figure 6.1 “There was no rush.” 142
Figure 6.2 “I couldn’t do what they did...” 149
Figure 6.3 “When you get Quiet Time you can think, I did a good job.” 156
Figure 6.4 “To see other people go into detail like that.....” 159
Figure 6.5 “It was like the old people were talking to me.” 162
Figure 6.6 “I still do, I still do, I take my 10 minutes every night.” 166
Figure 6.7 The Habit of Quiet Time. 169
Figure 6.8 Coding the Context of Quiet Time 174
Figure 6.9 Being in the Bush 180
Figure 7.1 A Model for Understanding Quiet Time 199
Figure 8.1 Dimensions of Facilitator Style 219
Figure 8.2 Interpersonal Boundary Control within the Experience of Quiet Time and the Mountain Challenge 222
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Key Differences Between “Therapy” and “Therapeutic”</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Solitude is...</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Information Provided by Project Hahn Documentation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Components of Selective Coding</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Before the Bridge: Some Personal Histories</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Dimensions of “Feeling like a Drug Addict”</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Learning Through Observation and Communication: Developing Insight and Empathy</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td><em>Quiet Time</em>: A Sense of Solitude: Some Characteristics and Examples</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Taking Time for <em>Quiet Time</em></td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Antecedent Conditions: Some Characteristics and Examples</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Ways in Which Participants Utilise <em>Quiet Time</em>: Their Characteristics and Immediate Discernible Effects</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Post-Trip Consequences of <em>Quiet Time</em>: Tools for the Toolbox</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Participant Aspirations for the Mountain Challenge</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>The Context of <em>Quiet Time</em>: An Adjunctive Wilderness Therapy Program.</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Examples of Personal Intervening Factors</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Intervening Variables: Some Factors that Facilitate or Constrain <em>Quiet Time</em></td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>