Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Illuminating the Assessment Practices of Teachers in NZ Outdoor Education Tertiary Programmes

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of
Master of Education
(Adult Education)

At
Massey University
Manawatu
New Zealand

Stephen Raymond Chapman
2011
Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to illuminate the assessment practices of tertiary outdoor education teachers in the polytechnic sector. Outdoor education as a theoretical model and practice was quickly revealed as a contested space. One of the main issues in contention was the place of outdoor recreation, adventure and risk within outdoor education. There appeared a strong move by academics (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Irwin, 2010; Martin, 2005a) to reposition outdoor education as environmental and sustainability education.

The data was gathered through a questionnaire, observation of teachers as they assessed students, and from interviews with teachers. Using an illuminative evaluation approach, three themes were identified: teacher perceptions of assessment, the focus of assessment, and the practices used to make assessment decisions.

Teachers were generally highly skilled outdoor education practitioners, however, there were indications that there were gaps of understanding of theoretical assessment concepts. Teachers seemed to find summative assessment challenging but they routinely used formative assessment to promote learning and worked hard at providing quality opportunities for learning. Outdoor recreation in outdoor education was not contested by these teachers, although there was an over-emphasis on assessing technical outdoor pursuit skills, which resulted in a lack of assessment of other less tangible aspects of outdoor education. The use of assessment criteria was common practice although there were questions about how clearly these described the standard. The role of professional judgement in assessment decisions were treated with suspicion because it was seen as too subjective. However, it became clear that professional judgement was an essential aspect of their assessment practices. Criteria and professional judgement revealed themselves as mutually inclusive.

In conclusion, while teachers seem very skilled at providing quality-learning experiences, there appear to be opportunities to further develop teacher assessment practices, for example, through exploring approaches that assess less tangible aspects of practice such as leadership, judgement and decision-making.
Acknowledgments

The research process has meant many hours absorbed in books and articles, lost in thinking and spent writing on a computer. Thankfully, many friends were interested in this research and gave their time freely to discuss and critique this study. For this, I am truly grateful. Their insights, challenges, and support have helped the long and at times seemingly interminable journey for this research to become a reality. They deserve to share some of the credit for this research.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Gloria Slater and Dr Linda Leach for their support and help that they both gave throughout the research. They always gave critical feedback in a manner that was clear and supportive, beneficial for my development as an academic researcher and invaluable for this research thesis. They pushed me to do the best I could. It has been a pleasure working with them both.

This research involved travelling around New Zealand to observe and interview many specialist tertiary outdoor education teachers. Thankfully, both Massey University and Christchurch Polytechnic supported this research with funding grants to make this possible.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to Massey University for realising that the Christchurch earthquakes were extremely disruptive, and a serious impediment to quality study and research. The offering of time extensions during stressful times allowed me to bring this thesis to completion.
# Contents

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... 2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...................................................................................................... 3
TABLES ............................................................................................................................... 5
THE STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS ................................................................................ 6
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................... 7
  PERCEIVED ISSUES IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION ......................................................... 8
  THE RESEARCH QUESTION ....................................................................................... 10
  SUB-QUESTIONS .......................................................................................................... 10
  RATIONALE FOR AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY ......................... 10
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT OF RESEARCH, SUPPORTED BY A REVIEW
OF THE LITERATURE ON CONTEXTUAL ISSUES ........................................................ 11
  SETTING THE SCENE ................................................................................................... 11
  DEFINING OUTDOOR EDUCATION ............................................................................. 11
  Outdoor Recreation Education ...................................................................................... 12
  Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) ................................................................. 12
  Adventure Education .................................................................................................. 12
  Environmental / Sustainability Education ................................................................... 13
  OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND ............................................................. 14
  RECENT CHANGES TO THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION LANDSCAPE ....................... 20
  Legislation .................................................................................................................... 20
  Industry Training Act (ITO) 1992 ............................................................................... 22
  KEY ORGANISATIONS WITHIN NEW ZEALAND .................................................... 23
  CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................. 26
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................... 28
  CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................. 38
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY ............................................................................... 39
  RATIONALE FOR USE OF ILLUMINATIVE EVALUATION ........................................ 42
  ILLUMINATIVE EVALUATION APPROACH ................................................................ 43
  DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS ............................................................................ 43
  Questionnaire ............................................................................................................... 44
  Observation ................................................................................................................... 44
  Interview ....................................................................................................................... 44
  DATA COLLECTION ...................................................................................................... 45
  ANALYSING THE DATA ............................................................................................... 47
  WRITING UP THE RESEARCH .................................................................................... 48
  LIMITATIONS ............................................................................................................... 48
  ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ...................................................................................... 50
  MANAGEMENT OF THE KEY IDENTIFIED ISSUES .................................................... 51
  Minimising risk of harm to participants ................................................................. 51
  Respect for privacy and confidentiality ................................................................. 51
  Avoiding unnecessary deception ............................................................................. 51
  The avoidance of conflict of interest ......................................................................... 52
CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS ......................................................................... 53
The structure of this thesis
This thesis consists of seven chapters, a list of references, and a number of appendices. The topic of each chapter is briefly delineated below.

- **Chapter 1** acts as a general introduction to this research study by discussing a historical perspective on outdoor education assessment in New Zealand. This is then followed by perceived issues in the assessment of outdoor education, leading to the clarification of the research question and sub questions.
- **Chapter 2** describes the outdoor education sector and its complexity, while placing the study in a context. This chapter also provides a literature review around issues that arise from the context.
- **Chapter 3** reviews literature on assessment.
- **Chapter 4** outlines the research methodology and design of the research study, describing the research methods used and the limitations.
- **Chapter 5** reports the findings.
- **Chapter 6** discusses the findings.
- **Chapter 7** concludes the research, makes recommendations, suggests future research, and offers several concluding thoughts, including a reflection on the research methodology.

Following the final chapter, the references are presented along with the various appendices, which are numbered sequentially in the order they are referred to in the body of the thesis.