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**Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder:  
Student Perceptions of Transfer in Experiential Education**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of:

Masters  
in  
Education

at Massey University, Palmerston North  
New Zealand

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**2002**

## Abstract

Underpinning the notions of experiential learning and transfer are a complex series of assumptions about the way people relate and use understandings across a broad range of life settings. This thesis presents a study into student perceptions of the nature and transferability of understandings developed through their involvement in an outdoor education programme. The thesis describes the approach and techniques used to collect data about participant's perceptions prior, during and after participation in the programme.

The thesis considers the advantages of planning for transfer before a programme begins to assist students to buy into the goals of the programme and also contribute to the learning objectives. The use of metaphor as a cognitive link to transfer understanding within the programme found some acceptance with students, however, the use of metaphor to assist transfer of learning beyond the programme was limited. As such, the research clearly showed that transfer is much more likely to occur when students create the cognitive frameworks and reasons why learning might transfer from one domain to another. Transfer that did occur within and beyond the programme was interwoven with, and somewhat dependent upon emotional responses and personal relationships.

The strong personal bonds that developed between participants through the focus group research approach resulted in a feeling of trust and sharing of understandings. As such, the thesis considers the Focus group approach as a useful educative tool to focus student learning and transfer prior, during activities, and after experiential programmes.

Emotional terms of reference used by participants to accord meaning to experiences provided significant insight to the ways people transferred learning. In addition, transfer of understandings beyond adventuresome activities is more likely when the experience is shared and discussed with others, and may be highly dependent on personal relationships. Replication and modelling of personal relationships beyond the immediacy of experiential learning settings may contribute much to the ways people successfully identify common factors when participating and using existing understandings in new domains.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is a collection of thoughts founded on the trust of the participants involved and the tremendous support of those who encouraged and supported me. Without a doubt, the work contained within belongs more to them than it does to me. In particular, I want to gratefully acknowledge:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Ali Wright -          | my constant critic, mentor and unfailing supporter.   |
| Alison St George -    | for always asking the hard questions, but also patiently guiding me to find the answers (or more questions).                          |
| Jenny Poskitt -       | for always focusing me on the light at the end of the tunnel, even when the engine ran out of steam every now and then.               |
| Nick, Tim and James - | for understanding when Daddy couldn't come out to play because, "He's writing his book again".  |
| Neville Kennedy -     | for providing that all important sounding board for ideas and encouragement during the arduous stage of planning and data collection. |
| The participants -    | for honestly sharing their joys and fears; their beliefs and disappointments; and their learning.                                     |

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