Impressions from the wild: A thematic analysis of adolescents' experience on Project K's Wilderness Adventure

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Abstract

Positive youth development (PYD) programmes empower adolescents by developing youth resources and strengths in order to meet their significant potential. Project K is a PYD programme developed and implemented by the Graeme Dingle Foundation in participating high schools around Aotearoa New Zealand. Year 10 students (age 14-15 years) are selected based on low self-efficacy scores relative to their year group. Low self-efficacy indicates that these students will benefit from the PYD opportunities Project K provides. The first of the three phases of Project K is the Wilderness Adventure, a 17-day wilderness experience which provides participants with first-hand mastery experiences in a novel and challenging outdoor environment. In groups of 12, adolescents take an active role in leading the group to complete kayaking, mountain biking, and hiking expeditions. This research explored the perspectives of 23 Project K participants on their Wilderness Adventure experience. Thematic analysis of eight focus group discussions identified two superordinate themes of challenges and outcomes, with three subordinate themes pertaining to each. The three challenge themes were outside comfort zone, real consequences, and interpersonal challenges. The outcome themes were mastery, attitude, and interpersonal skills. This study informs PYD programmes, particularly involving wilderness interventions, by communicating the experience of adolescent participants, and the challenges and outcomes that were perceived to be meaningful for them.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents   Page

List of Tables and Figures

There is more to us than we know. If we can be made to see it, perhaps for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less. – Kurt Hahn

Chapter 1

Introduction

The developmental period of adolescence is famously complex, with increasing social pressures and dynamic change as people transition from childhood to adulthood. Positive youth development (PYD) is a philosophy, theory, and type of youth programming which aims to empower adolescents by supporting the development of their internal resources and strengths. One such youth resource is self-efficacy, which is defined as people's perceived ability to successfully achieve tasks or goals (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy influences how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and make decisions about their futures (Bandura, 1997). PYD programmes strengthen self-efficacy by providing young participants with lived experiences of successfully overcoming challenges. Project K is a PYD programme designed to support adolescents with low self-efficacy in Aotearoa New Zealand to meet their significant potential.

The first stage of Project K, and the focus of this study, is a 17-day wilderness experience, which is a group intervention where 12 students are taken into a novel outdoor environment and supported to achieve challenging physical expeditions (Deane & Harré, 2013). The intense and novel challenges of this intervention can cause psychological disequilibrium in participants, motivating change and growth towards a more positive self-concept (Deane & Harré, 2013). An existing body of research provides evidence that Project K has positive outcomes for these participants, and this research supplements this by adding rich qualitative insight into participants' lived experience. Thematic analysis of focus group discussions enables participants to reflect on the

Wilderness Adventure and to identify salient themes from their experience. This informs not just Project K but other PYD programmes, particularly involving wilderness interventions.

The following chapters are organised as follows. Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature on adolescence, positive youth development, self-efficacy, and wilderness interventions. This is followed by an overview of Project K and relevant research. Chapter 3 describes and justifies the procedures taken in this research. The thematic analysis process follows the framework outlined by Braun & Clark (2006). Chapter 4 comprises the presentation and discussion of findings, providing analysis of participants' responses. Finally in Chapter 5, a summary and evaluation of the research study is provided, including conclusions, limitations, and areas for future investigation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Adolescence

Adolescence is an extraordinarily dynamic and formative stage in a person's development. During adolescence, individuals bridge childhood and adulthood, prepare to leave the family home, and develop their personal identity and autonomy (Wenar & Kerig, 2011; Williams, Edwards, Patterson, & Chamow, 2011). According to Erikson's (1968) theory of development, adolescence is characterised by the major task of identity formation. Whilst every developmental stage has its demands, adolescence is marked by significant individual development and change in every context, including physical, cognitive, social, emotional and even environmental shifts as young people move to larger schools with greater expectations (Schunk & Meece, 2006; Wenar & Kerig, 2011). Adolescence is a time of intense social pressure, desire for peer acceptance, and heightened body awareness with the navigation of puberty (Williams et al., 2011). There is also considerable and dynamic development occurring in the brain, with the potential for systemic change which can be modified and influenced by the person's environment (Patel, 2013). This includes not just their physical environment but their social context.

A significant shift during adolescence is that peer groups overtake parents as the primary socialisation agent (Schunk & Meece, 2006). Social contexts broaden beyond the immediate family to include a wider network of peers who play a greater influential role in the development of personal identity and worldview. Youth self-concept can be self-perpetuating, as adolescents spend more time with and are more influenced by peer groups perceived to be more similar to themselves (Bandura, 1997; Defoe, Dubas, & van Aken, 2018; Schunk & Meece, 2006). This means that if young adolescents perceive themselves to be delinquent, they are more likely to associate with a delinquent crowd, and similarly with

prosocial attitudes. As teenagers spend less time with their immediate families and more time with their friends, their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are increasingly influenced, and sometimes pressured, by their peers (Defoe et al., 2018; Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010). Peer pressure peaks in intensity around Year 8 or 9 then gradually declines throughout high school (Schunk & Meece, 2006), which suggests that Year 10 is an important intervention time for vulnerable youth.

While there is a broad body of research on interventions for adolescents, there are opposing perspectives as to how these should be approached. Throughout the twentieth century, research on adolescence was inherently deficit-framed, describing this developmental period as one of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904), "developmental disturbance" (Freud, 1969), and "crisis" (Erikson, 1968). Contrary to this deficit-focused framing, most adolescents survive this period without serious disturbance (Bandura, 1964, 1997; Lerner, 2005). Towards the end of the century a radical perspective shift occurred, challenging the assumption that adolescence was a problematic and risky period of development.

Positive Youth Development

The positive youth development (PYD) philosophy reversed the assumption that adolescents should be viewed and treated as risks to be managed (Damon, 2004; Larson, 2000; Lerner, 2005). PYD instead framed adolescence as an opportunity, focusing on identifying and promoting the factors that were present when youth were thriving, as evidenced by positive development and social contribution (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). PYD programmes aim to empower young people by providing them with opportunities to develop internal resources and build strengths, equipping them to become prosocial and

contributing citizens (Lerner et al., 2013; Lewin-Bizan, Bowers, & Lerner, 2010a; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The major opportunity of adolescence and the central tenet of the PYD framework is youth plasticity, meaning that developmental trajectories have the potential to be moulded by people's environments and experiences (Lerner, 2006, 2007; Lerner et al., 2013; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010b). This presents an enormous societal opportunity, where adolescents can be supported and influenced towards positive contribution.

The PYD framework derives from relational developmental systems theory which emphasises the bidirectionality, or mutual influence of a person's individual development and his or her developmental context (Årdal, Holsen, Diseth, & Larsen, 2018; Overton, 2015). This means that just as adolescents are influenced by their environmental context, they too have an influence on the environment around them (Årdal et al., 2018; Geldhof, Bowers, & Lerner, 2013; Lerner et al., 2005b). This highlights the societal benefit of supporting PYD, because encouraging youth thriving develops a social resource of young people who will positively impact their communities and wider social contexts. Benson and colleagues (2006) coined the context of family, peers, and community as ecological developmental assets, and supporting these assets in turn promotes youth thriving (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005a). PYD capitalises on youth potential and plasticity, and posits that optimal youth development, or youth thriving, happens when "the potential plasticity of human development is aligned with developmental assets" (Lerner et al., 2005a, p. 10). Supporting the development of youth resources better equips young people to contribute positively to their ecology of their family, peer group and community (Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007).

The Five Cs model. The most established and empirically supported model of PYD is the Five Cs model (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009; Lerner et al., 2005b, 2013), which was first proposed by Little in 1993. The Five Cs are characteristics which indicate youth

thriving, or PYD. The Five Cs are competence (in different domains of life), confidence (overall positive sense of self), character (integrity), caring (empathy and compassion), and connection (mutually positive bonds with others and with the community) (Årdal et al., 2018; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner et al., 2013). The presence of the Five Cs correlates positively with adaptive developmental indicators such as life satisfaction and empowerment, and negatively with maladaptive indicators such as anxiety and depression symptoms (Holsen, Geldhof, Larsen, & Årdal, 2016). The Five Cs model was later expanded to include a sixth C: contribution. Researchers theorised that the development of the Five Cs resulted in subsequent positive contribution (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; Lerner et al., 2005b; Pittman, 2000). A substantial body of evidence shows that supporting the development of the Five Cs in adolescents equips youth with the resources and skills for both positive development and contribution to their communities and wider social contexts (Benson et al., 2006; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011; Jelicic et al., 2007; Lerner, 2005; Lerner et al., 2013; Pittman, 2000).

A related construct is intentional self-regulation, which reliably positively predicts the Five Cs and youth contribution, and negatively predicts risky behaviours (such as bullying, substance use, and delinquency) and depressive symptoms (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007; Gestsdóttir, Lewin-Bizan, von Eye, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009; Lerner et al., 2013). Intentional self-regulation is concerned with how people evaluate information to weigh up choices, set goals, and regulate their own actions (Bandura, 2001; Brandstädter, 2006). Information involved in making these evaluations includes people's perceptions of their own abilities, of their environments, and of their likelihood of achieving a goal (Gestsdóttir, Bowers, von Eye, Napolitano, & Lerner, 2010). Self-regulation is a continuously active process which involves monitoring, appraising, and evaluating one's own behaviour as well as elements of the environment that affect his or her behaviour (Bandura, 1991). Self-

regulation is closely linked to self-efficacy (one's perceived ability to achieve a task), and locus of control (one's perceived influence over their life circumstances) (Bandura, 1997; Fishman, 2014; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990). This is because if a person has low self-efficacy, they are less likely to attempt something, or to persevere with it (Bandura, 1986; Muris, 2002). Similarly, if a person has an external locus of control, they believe their life circumstances are outside of their personal control to change (Rotter, 1966). These appraisals of one's abilities and power to change their circumstances are involved in self-regulation. Intentional self-regulation is influenced by family characteristics, where positive parenting (including measures such as parental monitoring and maternal warmth) predicts subsequent intentional self-regulation, which predicts subsequent PYD scores, which in turn predicts subsequent youth contribution (Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010a). Intentional self-regulation, hopeful future expectations, and PYD predict active and engaged citizenship within and across adolescence (Lerner et al., 2013). These findings support the value of PYD programmes which help develop intentional self-regulation and other youth resources.

4-H study. Much of the contemporary empirical support for the PYD framework and the Five Cs comes from the large-scale longitudinal 4-H study, conducted by Richard and Jacqueline Lerner and colleagues. 4-H is a global network of PYD organisations, working with youths from a range of backgrounds and demographics. The Lerners' study examined 4-H programmes across the United States. It ran from 2002 until 2010 and surveyed over 7,000 youths from 44 states, seeking to identify the optimal conditions to promote youth thriving (Lerner, Lerner, von Eye, Powers, & Lewin-Bizan, 2011). By gathering extensive data, including student and parent questionnaires and other school- and government-sourced data, they measured individual characteristics, career goals and school achievement, as well as behavioural and psychological characteristics (Lerner et al., 2011). Overall, Lerner and colleagues found that youths who attended 4-H programmes had higher

levels of developmental assets such as mentoring relationships, reported higher academic achievement and school engagement, and were more likely to make active contributions to their communities than their control counterparts (Lerner et al., 2011).

While the 4-H study has provided a bulk of information informing successful PYD programmes, the majority of research on the Five Cs model and on PYD has taken place in the United States with American participants, and there is a need for research with a more diverse population. One study found that the Five Cs model was also valid and applicable to Lithuanian youth, meaning the presence of the Five Cs predicted youth thriving (Erentaitė & Raižienė, 2015). They found that the Five Cs had sufficient internal consistency with the exception of competence, suggesting that existing measures of competence may be more culturally relevant to American culture (Erentaitė & Raižienė, 2015). Holsen and colleagues (2016) compared Norwegian adolescents with North American participants from the 4-H study and found that the Five Cs was also valid in a Norwegian context. While these results lend support to the Five Cs model, they are sparse and by no means globally representative. There have also been limited results regarding gender differences of the Five Cs. One study found that females scored higher in caring, character and connection; and males scored higher in confidence and competence (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015). This was mostly supported by Årdal and colleagues (2018), who also found that females scored higher on caring, character and connection, while males scored higher on confidence. They found no significant gender difference for competence. The 4-H study found females to score consistently higher on all five Cs than males (Lerner et al., 2013). These results show that there is scope for further research to better understand diverse needs and create programmes that support positive development for a diverse youth population.

PYD programmes. The PYD philosophy and research serves as a framework for youth programming outside of school, such as the 4-H network or Project K. When PYD

research emerged in the 1990s, societal demographics were shifting so that it was more common for both parents to be working. As a result, more after-school programmes were established and became a common feature of school-aged youths' lives. Such programmes were an opportunity to operationalise PYD theories. PYD programmes introduce positive relationships between young people and adults or institutions in their communities, which relates to better psychological adjustment, improved school performance, and greater community contribution (Lerner et al., 2005a). Zarrett and Lerner (2008) found that participating in a range of extra-curricular activities was predictive of PYD, as each additional activity exposed youths to more opportunities to build supportive relationships and novel experiences. A recent review found that PYD interventions provided service opportunities in the community and promoted cognitive, social, and behavioural competence (Harris & Cheney, 2018). This is consistent with relational developmental systems theory where interactions are mutually influential, and community programmes supporting youth development in turn benefit the community (Lerner, 2007, 2009; Overton, 2010). The PYD framework is designed to positively skew these interactions for positive and adaptive youth development (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009), and there is a growing body of research on the elements that make PYD programmes more effective at achieving this goal.

Despite the increasing influence of peer relationships in adolescence, there is substantial evidence that the most influential ecological asset on youth development is still the family system, and in particular the parent-child relationship (Chand et al., 2013; Lerner et al., 2005b; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010a; Theokas & Lerner, 2006; Ward & Zabriskie, 2011). One study found that two of the most important predictive factors for PYD were family assets (such as household income, availability of parents, and communal activities), and how adolescents spend their time outside of school (Zarrett & Lerner, 2008). This means

that evidence-informed PYD programmes should involve the family system to maximise efficacy. Kirk and colleagues (1997) argued that sports programmes must necessarily be designed within a family context, while Pollack (2004) maintained that the parent-child relationship is "at the heart and soul" of successful programmes with youth (p. 20). Ward and Zabriskie (2011) agreed, arguing that no matter how effective an extra-curricular programme may be, the child's parents and family life are the most influential and essential developmental context. Research shows there is a reciprocal system of influence between families and PYD programmes, as the lessons taught by the programme are internalised into the family system, and the family context influences the programme (Hodge, Kanters, Forneris, Bocarro, & Sayre-McCord, 2017; White & Klein, 2008). The inclusion of the family system in PYD programme design augments and amplifies PYD outcomes.

As well as supporting relationships, PYD programmes provide opportunities for skill building and mastery experiences (McDonough, Ullrich-French, & McDavid, 2018). PYD programmes develop important life skills in youth, such as cooperation, teamwork, conflict resolution and leadership (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Holt & Neely, 2012; McDonough et al., 2018). These skills are transferable to other contexts such as school or work, and to other relationships (Anderson-Butcher, Cash, Saltzburg, Midle, & Pace, 2004; Weiss, Bolter, & Kipp, 2016). Important features for effective PYD programmes are that the programme should be long-term, should encourage the development of relationships between youth and adults and among youths, and should involve activities that build skills both as a participant and a leader (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). One type of PYD programming fosters responsibility and mastery by giving young people the opportunity and skills to be active agents in their environment (Larson & Angus, 2011; Salusky et al., 2014). An example is community garden planting initiatives, where young people contribute to their wider community, reflecting on and shaping their environment

(Delia & Krasny, 2018). Another more common type of PYD programming is sports programmes. Physical activities like sports are an important aspect of adolescents' social and school lives and are a common context for peer interaction (McDonough et al., 2018). Intentionally integrating PYD concepts and life skills lessons into a sports context is a powerful and effective strategy (Bean & Forneris, 2016; McDonough et al., 2018). A 2009 study found that adolescents who participated in sports-based activities reported greater PYD benefits than those who did no extra-curricular activities, but less than those who participated in a variety of extra-curricular activities (Linver, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). This reiterates that providing a range of mastery experiences offers more opportunities to support PYD, thereby building youth resources and positively affecting adolescent behaviour.

There is evidence that building resources such as resilience and community connection decreases young people's likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours (Harris & Cheney, 2018; Lerner et al., 2011). A review of PYD programmes found significant decreases in violence, risky sexual behaviours, school truancy, and drug and alcohol abuse among adolescent participants (Catalano et al., 2004). PYD programmes have been proven a valuable tool for positively influencing adolescent sexual health and increasing maturity to make healthy sexual decisions (Catalano et al., 2004; Harris & Cheney, 2018). Rather than having a deficit focus concentrating on reducing risky or antisocial behaviours, the PYD framework provides adolescents with the resources to make positive, health-promoting decisions, which, in turn, increases prosocial behaviours and reduces antisocial behaviours (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Harris & Cheney, 2018; Lerner et al., 2005b). Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016) propose that the future of PYD programmes need not differentiate between promotion (of positive outcomes) and prevention (of negative outcomes), but rather to view them as complementary. They propose an integrative model

bridging the traditional deficit model and the promotional PYD model, and highlight the similar mechanisms present in both approaches, such as increasing both protective and developmental assets in the family, school, and community (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Supporting the development of youth assets such as the Five Cs, rather than trying to reduce behavioural problems such as bullying and substance abuse, leads to positive behaviours and contribution to self, family, community, and broader society (Lerner, Alberts, & Bobek, 2007; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010a).

The positive outcomes of PYD programmes inspire overall optimism, however one size does not fit all when it comes to adolescent development. Considering the complexity of the adolescence period and the highly individual trajectories of development, it is unsurprising that programme effects are also variable between individuals (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). This is summed up by Durlak and colleagues (2010), who argued that there is a need for more data answering the question of "who does what to whom, in what ways, in what types of settings, within what broader context; what level of participation or engagement is needed by which populations to achieve what types of outcomes?" (p. 291). Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016) proposed that best practice for future research reviewing the effectiveness of PYD programmes requires examining the constantly changing interactions between the characteristics of the individual, the programme, and the individual's other contexts outside of the programme. Although there is considerable variation in types of programmes and programme outcomes, one encouraging finding is that youth at the greatest risk benefit the most from participating in PYD programmes (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). This in itself suggests that PYD programmes are a valuable asset for vulnerable youths. One of the youth resources promoted by PYD programmes, and closely related to the Five Cs and self-regulation, is self-efficacy, the recruitment target of Project K.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to successfully achieve tasks or goals (Bandura, 1997). This is a critical construct for youth development, because people's perceived capability can be more predictive of their behaviour than their actual ability (Bandura, 1986). How a person thinks, feels, behaves and motivates themselves is largely determined by their perceived competence, or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy stabilises to some extent with age (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995), so adolescence is an appropriate time to provide opportunities, as PYD programmes do, to develop and support self-efficacy. This is also critical during adolescence because self-efficacy plays a modifying role in making decisions about the future, with efficacy beliefs influencing what career options are considered attainable (Bandura, 1997). Young adolescents are faced with intense social pressures while developing their personal identity, and their perceived efficacy plays an important role in this identity formation.

Long-term, self-efficacy beliefs can be somewhat self-perpetuating. Bandura (1997) argues that people are active contributors to their life circumstances, and self-efficacy beliefs are "the key factor of human agency" (p. 3). People choose environments in which they feel they can cope and avoid those that exceed their perceived coping abilities (Bandura, 1989). Someone with higher self-efficacy is more likely to attempt challenges, persevere for longer, and therefore have more opportunities to strengthen and reinforce this perceived ability, which further increases his or her likelihood of taking on subsequent challenges and opportunities (Schunk & Meece, 2006). This increases the range and number of tasks that are attempted and therefore mastered, thus strengthening self-efficacy. Collins (1982) found that regardless of their actual level of mathematical ability, students with high self-efficacy performed better and persisted for longer on difficult mathematical problems. Moreover, with higher self-efficacy comes increased resilience, as failure is viewed as a

setback rather than cause to give up (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Meece, 2006). Failures are attributed to a poor performance, rather than perceived inherent inadequacy (Bandura, 1997). On the other hand, someone with lower self-efficacy is less likely to either attempt a task or to persevere when met with challenges, regardless of their actual ability (Bandura, 1986; Muris, 2002). This in turn limits their opportunities to gain enactive mastery experiences, and instead reinforces their low perceived capability.

Perceived efficacy also dictates the limits of a person's comfort zone. When people perform tasks within their comfort zone of perceived capability, their physiological stress and anxiety responses are low (Bandura, 1989). On the other hand, performing a task that falls outside of someone's perceived ability causes a physiological stress response, impairing their cognitive capacity to problem-solve and inhibiting their ability to function (Bandura, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This then reinforces their perception of poor capability. Because people's comfort zones influence not just isolated tasks but also career paths and important life decisions, self-efficacy is an appropriate focus for PYD programmes (Bandura, 1989; Betz & Hackett, 1997; Lent & Hackett, 1987). Someone with higher perceived efficacy will set higher goals for themselves and will persevere more to achieve them (Bandura, 1997; Locke, Frederick, Lee, & Bobko, 1984). The range of career options people consider can be predicted by their efficacy beliefs, so if someone has low self-efficacy at a young age they are more likely to close off future options for themselves, which could in fact be within their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). These important decisions are also influenced by young people's associates.

Adolescents' social circles are an important point of reference for developing self-efficacy beliefs. Children and adolescents choose their friends according to similar interests, abilities, and values (Bandura, 1997). Adolescents with high self-efficacy are more likely to choose prosocial friends and associates, and persevere more with school and other

prosocial endeavours (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). On the other hand, youths with lower self-efficacy are likely to be less engaged with school, more likely to associate with other adolescents who are similarly disengaged, and over time become increasingly disassociated with school and with prosocial peers (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Bergin, 1987). This indicates that self-efficacy can have a highly influential and self-perpetuating effect on adolescent success and future outcomes.

Another important reason to support self-efficacy in adolescents is that low self-efficacy independently contributes to the development and maintenance of depressive and anxious symptoms (Bandura, 1997; Muris, 2002). Low self-efficacy has been found to develop into a tendency for poor coping, perceiving challenges as threatening, and constantly scanning the environment for threats (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). On the other hand, stronger self-efficacy can be protective and perhaps play a mediating role in challenging times (Muris, 2002). An analysis of young migrants from East Berlin found that self-efficacy acted as a protective buffer against stressful life transitions, which in their case included the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of East Berlin (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). Those participants who had higher self-efficacy across the longitudinal study made more positive appraisals of their (objectively stressful) situation, and reported lower anxiety and better physical health (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). Self-efficacy acts as a protective buffer for vulnerable young people, and teenagers with stronger self-efficacy are more resilient and believe that they can overcome future challenges (Schunk & Miller, 2002). Bandura, the leading expert on self-efficacy, states that "the success with which the risks and challenges of adolescence are managed depends, in no small measure, on the strength of personal efficacy built up through prior mastery experiences" (Bandura, 1997, p. 178).

Mastery. The most reliable and potent way to strengthen self-efficacy is increasing mastery experiences, or personal experience of success, as these provide the most

accessible and applicable evidence of ability (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Schunk & Meece, 2006; Voskuil & Robbins, 2015). Mastery experiences could include having achieved similar tasks in the past to directly compare with the current challenge, and also general experiences of success. Strengthening self-efficacy is most effective when challenging experiences have increasing difficulty (Wright, Ding, & Li, 2005). Each successful experience of achieving a challenging task strengthens general self-efficacy, and provides another reference point to refer back to when faced with a new challenge (Bandura, 1997). More indirect forms of learning such as vicarious experiences of others, persuasion, and physiological responses (such as anxiety when faced with a difficult task) also provide information about one's capabilities, but have a less potent effect on self-efficacy than lived experience (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Meece, 2006). Thus, it is evident that enactive mastery experiences should be incorporated into PYD programmes, preferably with graded difficulty and including a range of experiences. One type of PYD programming that is designed to increase mastery experiences for young people is wilderness interventions, such as the Project K Wilderness Adventure.

Wilderness Interventions

Wilderness (or adventure) interventions use action-oriented experiential learning by providing challenging activities in a novel outdoor environment within a group setting (Deane & Harré, 2013; Hattie, Marsh, Neill & Richards, 1997; Somervell & Lambie, 2009; Walsh & Golins, 1976). These are empowering interventions, providing opportunities for lived mastery experiences to improve wellbeing and foster positive development (Deane & Harré, 2013; Priest & Gass, 2005; Prouty, 2007; Shellman & Ewert, 2010). This occurs by requiring participants to problem solve in real-life situations, providing lived experience of persisting with and overcoming novel challenges. This engages participants

in teamwork and encourages them to recognise and reflect on their own strengths and abilities (Hattie et al., 1997). There are many diverse types of programmes that are considered to be wilderness interventions. When interventions include therapeutic staff and a treatment plan, they are termed wilderness therapy, whereas without these two therapeutic elements the intervention is a wilderness experience, such as the Project K Wilderness Adventure. Wilderness experiences still utilise an unfamiliar outdoor setting to facilitate learning and growth, as well as group processes and novel graded mastery experiences to build confidence and self-efficacy (Russell, 2001).

There have been multiple attempts to streamline the varied descriptions of wilderness interventions into a consistent and integrated definition, and to identify what specific elements must be included in a successful programme. Walsh and Golins (1976) proposed that the novel environment, close social relationships, and challenging problem-solving required are the salient features of a successful wilderness programme. According to Kimball and Bacon's (1993) review the core components are group processes, graded mastery experiences, outdoor settings, and the requirement for reflection and self-disclosure. Weston and Tinsley (1999) defined wilderness programmes as group therapy occurring in a natural setting, with activities or experiences that involve real or perceived risk, or real consequences, in order to facilitate psychological and behavioural change. Russell's (2001) definition distils the processes of wilderness interventions into three major stages; the "cleansing" period, where participants are removed from their usual environment and learn new skills; the "responsibility" stage, where participants learn to take responsibility for their actions due to the natural consequences of being in the wilderness; and finally the "transition" back into participants' usual environments (Russell, 2001). According to Deane and Harré's more recent model for youth adventure programming, wilderness interventions

are successful because they take an individual outside of their comfort zone, facilitating a psychological disequilibrium which motivates catharsis (Deane & Harré, 2013). The core programme features for effective wilderness programming are a novel environment, challenging but attainable activities, and an intense and supportive group setting (Deane & Harré, 2013). When these three conditions are present in a wilderness intervention, participants are challenged in a supported manner to achieve graded mastery tasks.

Wilderness environment. The first essential element of successful wilderness programmes is in the name; the wilderness environment. The use of the natural environment as a setting for therapeutic intervention can be attributed to the well-known Outward Bound programme, founded by teacher Kurt Hahn in the 1930s. At the original Outward Bound school, instructors observed that students gained in both confidence and compassion when challenged in adventurous outdoor settings (Outward Bound International, n.d.). Wilderness interventions remove participants from their comfort zones and place them in an unfamiliar environment for the duration of the intervention. Therefore, they are embedded in a highly stimulating experience, with constant and immediate feedback or consequences from the natural environment (Hattie et al., 1997; Somervell & Lambie, 2009). The wilderness provides opportunities for novel activities that do not exist in participants' regular environments, and also provides natural consequences, requiring participants to take personal responsibility (Hattie et al., 1997; Russell, 2001). Because these skills are learned in real-life situations, rather than taught in a therapy room or classroom, participants acquire problem-solving tools and resources to serve them in other situations outside of the wilderness (Loughmiller, 2007). A common outcome is a sense of well-being and health which comes from the natural setting and physical nature of the wilderness activities (Russell, 2001).

Wilderness activities. While in the unfamiliar environment of the wilderness, participants are faced with novel and challenging activities, which provide opportunities for experiential learning and mastery. By completing expeditions involving real obstacles that are challenging but ultimately attainable (such as navigating over a mountain), participants have many opportunities to increase mastery experiences and build self-efficacy (Bowen, Neill, & Crisp, 2016). As discussed, self-efficacy is most effectively influenced by enactive mastery experiences, and in particular when mastery experiences are stepped so that an individual is challenged gradually, building their self-efficacy with each successful step (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Wilderness activities are structured in such a way that participants are supported to complete all tasks, resulting in the most common outcome of a sense of personal accomplishment (Bowen et al., 2016; Russell, 2001). This finding was supported by a qualitative study which found that one of the mechanisms positively affecting participants' self-concept was the experience of overcoming or mastering a challenge (Somervell & Lambie, 2009). One of the central tenets of wilderness interventions is that participants experience for themselves that they can navigate a novel situation, giving them irrefutable evidence of their own abilities (Bandoroff, 1989). For young adolescents with low self-efficacy, an intense and supportive environment with daily opportunities to master novel and challenging activities is an empowering experience.

Wilderness interventions are suited to adolescents in particular because they tend to respond better to action-oriented, experiential methods than talk-based therapies (Lambie, Robson, & Simmonds, 1997; Somervell & Lambie, 2009). Williams (2000) explains that physical challenges with clear risks and consequences are easier for adolescents to engage in than more traditional talk therapies which require abstract thinking. Williams (2000) also points to the fact that participants experience a sense of

freedom and fun on wilderness interventions, which is appealing to young people. The challenges that participants complete throughout wilderness interventions are not the salient lessons, but rather a frame of reference, and the strategies used to overcome them can be applied to other challenges and decisions (Loughmiller, 2007). Of course, they are not completing these wilderness tasks in isolation, but in a group of their peers, the third essential element of wilderness interventions.

Group setting. Because all activities in the wilderness must be completed as a group, participants are dependent on one another and must work together, building trust, effective communication, empathy and mutual respect (Jones, Lowe, & Risler, 2004; Loughmiller, 2007). Wilderness interventions provide opportunities to model and rehearse productive ways to interact, communicate and problem-solve in a group, with real consequences to reinforce lessons (Russell, 2001). For example, if the group takes too many breaks, or moves too slowly, they will all arrive at their destination late. Thus, participants learn to navigate the various strengths and abilities of the whole group, and to make decisions as a group, rather than as an individual. The experience of depending on their peers and equally being depended on has a positive effect on participants' self-concept (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). This is particularly significant for adolescents, who are increasingly concerned with and influenced by their peer groups. Beyond these three essential elements, there can be considerable diversity in wilderness interventions, and there have been numerous research studies evaluating their effectiveness.

Existing research. Unsurprisingly given the diversity of wilderness interventions, there is a broad research base investigating the outcomes of such programmes. Over several meta-analyses, wilderness programmes on average show a small to medium-sized positive effect on psychological outcomes (Bowen & Neill, 2013; Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997; Wilson & Lipsey, 2000). Cason and Gillis (1994) reported that

wilderness interventions support the development of an internal locus of control and the associated positive psychological outcomes. As discussed, internal locus of control is related to intentional self-regulation, self-efficacy and PYD. Hattie and colleagues' (1997) meta-analysis of over 12,000 participants found that wilderness programmes had a significant positive effect on self-esteem and self-efficacy. The greatest effects were found in the self-concept domain, with particular gains in independence, confidence, self-efficacy, and self-understanding. These constructs were in fact found to show even greater improvement at follow-up than at the end of the course, which is significant and rare for an educational programme. Hattie and colleagues (1997) suggest an underlying theme of self-regulation, where wilderness programmes are most effective at encouraging an internal locus of control in participants, encouraging self-regulation and self-efficacy over time. A 2013 meta-analysis of 197 studies found that wilderness therapy had a moderately positive effect on psychological, emotional, and interpersonal measures, and the authors also found that these effects were maintained long-term (Bowen & Neill, 2013). A 2016 study found moderate but statistically significant improvements in youth participants' psychological resilience and social self-esteem (Bowen et al., 2016). Another study found that participants reported positive and significant development of self-concept, as well as increasing adaptive and social skills (Somervell & Lambie, 2009). The existing body of research suggests cautious optimism about the effect of wilderness interventions, consistent with Dobud (2016) who advised that wilderness programmes should not be seen as a "miracle cure" for psychological distress, but rather as a catalyst for continued growth. Evidence shows that wilderness programmes support PYD by providing mastery opportunities and supporting psychological constructs including the Five Cs and self-efficacy.

While there is evidence for optimism about wilderness interventions, it is critical that participants are supported when they return from the wilderness to their regular lives. Existing literature shows that experiential learning experiences require active reflection to clarify the connection between the specific experience and its application to other contexts (Deane & Harré, 2013; Kolb, 1984; Luckner & Nadler, 1997). Without adequate support, participants' return to their home environments and associates may mean that any gains from the experience are lost (Dobud, 2016). Some studies note that returning home after a wilderness intervention can be more challenging than the intervention itself (Russell, 2001) as it can be difficult, particularly for adolescents, to continue to have the same confidence outside of the supportive environment of the wilderness group. Consistent with PYD research, adolescents' families should be involved in wilderness interventions in order to successfully support the adolescent on their return from the wilderness (Chand et al., 2013; Deane & Harré, 2013; Lerner et al., 2005b; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010a; Theokas & Lerner, 2006; Ward & Zabriskie, 2011). It is for this reason that Project K does not end with the Wilderness Adventure but continues to actively support participant PYD for a year after they return from the wilderness.

Project K

Project K is a 14 month, three-stage PYD programme designed by the Graeme Dingle Foundation and implemented in participating high schools around Aotearoa New Zealand by community partners. It was designed to identify medium-risk adolescents with low self-efficacy and empower them to fulfil their potential by building self-confidence, life skills and well-being (Graeme Dingle Foundation, 2016). Project K focuses on this population because there are often resources and opportunities directed towards either high-performing or high-risk young people, but this particular group often misses out and could benefit from

PYD opportunities (Deane & Harré, 2013). Due to the antecedent condition of low self-efficacy, these adolescents are less likely to volunteer themselves for extra-curricular activities, but the additional exposure to mastery experiences and positive relationships can help support their self-efficacy and other resources.

Project K is comprised of three major components: the three-week Wilderness Adventure, then a community challenge where the group designs and implements an initiative to benefit their community, followed by one year of mentoring with a trained adult from the community. The Wilderness Adventure provides participants with varied opportunities for lived mastery experiences, then the subsequent stages encourage participants to reflect on and apply the lessons from the Wilderness Adventure to their regular lives and relationships. While each stage of the programme has a slightly different focus, the overall aims are to increase self-efficacy, introduce positive relationships, build community connectedness, and learn to set and achieve goals (Graeme Dingle Foundation, 2016). These aims are consistent with research on PYD, and the Project K design follows evidence-based best practice (Deane, 2012).

Process. Annually, all Year 10 students (age 14-15 years) in participating schools complete the Project K self-efficacy questionnaire (PKSEQ). The PKSEQ is a 20-item self-report scale which was developed for Project K specifically to identify low to medium-risk adolescents with low self-efficacy (Moore, 2005). The PKSEQ aligns closely with Muris' (2001) and Bandura and colleagues' (1999) self-efficacy scales for children, with some items adapted for a New Zealand context (Moore, 2005). The self-efficacy domains measured by the PKSEQ are social, academic, and help-seeking (Moore, 2005). Social self-efficacy is a person's perceived ability to build, manage and maintain supportive social relationships (Deane, Harré, Moore, & Courtney, 2017). Academic self-efficacy is a person's perceived ability to successfully navigate educational settings; including listening skills,

ability to focus on and complete schoolwork, and complete tasks in the required time (Deane et al., 2017). The help-seeking self-efficacy domain is adolescents' perceived ability to ask an adult for help or support (Graeme Dingle Foundation, personal communication, 17 January 2018). The PKSEQ has been repeatedly tested and has strong psychometric properties. Cronbach's alphas for the total self-efficacy score is .92, and for the subscales of academic, social and help-seeking are respectively .99, .85 and .82 (Graeme Dingle Foundation, personal communication, 17 January 2018). A pool of students from each school with the lowest aggregate self-efficacy scores relative to their year group are introduced to Project K, and a group of 12 (six girls and six boys) are randomly selected from this pool.

Existing research. Since its inception there has been ongoing research examining the effectiveness of Project K on its goal of empowering New Zealand youth. Based on research findings from the last decade, overall Project K graduates consistently had higher self-efficacy than their peers on the three identified domains, and participants with the lowest baseline self-efficacy scores benefited the most from Project K (Graeme Dingle Foundation, 2018). Compared to their counterparts, Project K participants had better academic outcomes (more NCEA credits and less truancy), higher resilience, and improved sense of community and social connectedness (Leeson & Harré, 2013). In an extensive evaluation, Deane and Harré (2014) concluded that Project K incorporates best practice based on past literature for a programme of its kind, combining adventure, service, and mentoring.

The most extensive study to date on Project K was the randomised controlled trial by Deane and colleagues (2017), which found that compared to a control group the 600 Project K participants had significantly improved social and academic self-efficacy from pre- to post-programme, and that these effects were sustained a year later. These results were

more favourable than meta-analyses measuring the success of other PYD programmes. Deane and colleagues suggest that this is due to Project K's emphasis on an experiential learning cycle. This begins with the Wilderness Adventure which gives adolescents lived examples of successful mastery experiences, followed by ongoing reflection and active support for a year to reinforce these learnings and apply them to participants' lives outside the wilderness (Deane et al., 2017; Deane and Harré, 2013). They discuss the importance of self-regulation and self-reflection for successful PYD outcomes (Deane et al., 2017), which is consistent with the finding from the 4-H study that intentional self-regulation predicts the Five Cs and youth thriving (Lerner et al., 2013).

Another interesting project was a quasi-experimental study on the psychological effects of Project K, which found that Project K graduates experienced significant positive effects on self-efficacy and resilience, and improved well-being compared to their counterparts (Furness, Williams, Veale, & Gardner, 2017). Low resilience correlates with low self-efficacy and connectedness, less effective coping, and increased risk of mental illness (Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006; Furness et al., 2017). Conversely, self-efficacy acts as a buffer for times of stress, increasing people's resilience and ability to cope (Schunk & Miller, 2002). Young people with greater resilience are better able to adjust to the new environments, social challenges, and developmental changes of adolescence (Resnick, 2000). Furness and colleagues (2017) found that Project K graduates had significantly increased self-efficacy and resilience, while those of their control counterparts decreased in the same timeframe. The same was seen for well-being, where Project K participants' wellbeing increased slightly while that of the control group decreased considerably over this time (Furness et al., 2017). A possible explanation is that Project K buffers vulnerable participants from potentially detrimental psychological effects that this age group experiences. Considering it is the participants with the lowest baseline self-efficacy who

benefit most from this programme (Graeme Dingle Foundation, 2018), Furness and colleagues' research supports Project K's value.

One of the factors that moderates Project K's (and other PYD programmes') success is participant engagement. In 2013, Deane and Harré developed a Theory of Change for Project K, which located participant engagement at the centre of the experiential learning cycle, meaning that if participants are disengaged the programme will not achieve its designed aims (Deane & Harré, 2013). A recent study by Chapman and colleagues (2017) supported this, finding that getting the most benefit from PYD programmes required active engagement. They provided evidence that PYD programmes can improve adolescents' social development and thriving, if participants are actively engaged and supported in the context of PYD programmes (Chapman, Deane, Harré, Courtney, & Moore, 2017). Another recent study by Burnett (2017) explored what factors caused participants to engage or to disengage while on the Wilderness Adventure. Findings indicated that the factors influencing participant engagement and disengagement could differ between individuals, for example increased autonomy may cause one student to engage with the programme and another to disengage (Burnett, 2017). In a wilderness intervention this is an important finding, as the environment is complex and somewhat unpredictable, and the specific experience of participants is constantly changing (Caulkins, White, & Russell, 2006). Factors that support participant engagement include the environment, interpersonal dynamics, and the individual characteristics of participants and instructors (Deane & Harré, 2013). Another important participant characteristic which Deane and Harré (2013) noted is overlooked in PYD research, and indeed Project K, is cultural consideration. Given the social and historical context of Aotearoa New Zealand, this should be a relevant aspect of Project K, and of other PYD programmes.

The importance of cultural consideration was explored in a project investigating the experience of Māori Project K participants (Hollis, Deane, Moore, & Harré, 2011). Project K does no cultural or ethnic targeting; any student who falls into the lower pool of PKSEQ scores for their year group is invited to participate. However, some regions have seen disproportionately high percentages of Māori Project K participants, and there is evidence that Māori adolescents (and other indigenous peoples) are likely to have lower self-efficacy than majority cultures (Hollis et al., 2011). This is historically rooted and one of the ongoing effects of colonisation (Hollis et al., 2011). A 2007 review found that Māori Project K graduates showed significantly higher academic and career decision self-efficacy compared to their counterparts, and that this was maintained one year after completing the programme (Qiao & McNaught, 2007). Furthermore, according to Hollis and colleagues' (2011) study, Māori participants felt that their culture was not a differential factor on Project K but that everyone was treated equally, and they considered this a positive experience. Participants appreciated the high expectations Project K instructors had for them, and felt that this contrasted with the negative stereotypes and social outcomes they had previously perceived as part of being Māori (Hollis et al., 2011). This study did however also highlight a potential benefit of instructors having an awareness of Māori tikanga and culture (Hollis et al., 2011). While these participants credited Project K with their improved self-concept, this study highlights the different backgrounds students are bringing to the programme, and the need for instructors to be aware of and competent to work with diverse participants. Burnett's (2017) study also highlighted the importance of tailoring experiences to individuals' needs and strengths. The existing body of research on Project K provides evidence that it is an effective PYD programme, incorporating best practice and ostensibly achieving its aims. There are however gaps in this research, one of which is the lived experience of the participants themselves.

Current Research

This research adds rich qualitative data to the existing literature on PYD, self-efficacy interventions and wilderness experiences by examining the experience of the Project K Wilderness Adventure from the participants' perspective. There is a body of evidence that developing youth resources empowers young people and increases their prosocial contribution. Significant evidence also shows that wilderness interventions such as the Project K Wilderness Adventure are effective at increasing youth resources including self-efficacy and resilience. This research employs thematic analysis to identify and analyse salient themes from the Wilderness Adventure that resonated with participants, and the meanings they attributed to this experience. Analysis of the Wilderness Adventure experience in participants' own words provides a deeper understanding of their experience on a personal level, contributing to a more effective programme. These insights will be valuable not only to the Graeme Dingle Foundation but also to other PYD programmes, self-efficacy interventions and wilderness interventions.

Chapter 3

Methods

Design

This qualitative study employed semi-structured focus group discussions on the experience and impact of the Wilderness Adventure from the perspective of adolescent Project K participants. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate methodology because it makes meaning out of large and complex data sets by analysing and interpreting patterns, using participants' own words (Braun & Clark, 2006; Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2015). This project did not take a grounded theory approach, rather it used inductive analysis, which is not tied to an existing theory but is informed by existing literature about the PYD framework and wilderness interventions. This would result in qualitative findings to supplement the significant existing quantitative data supporting the efficacy of Project K at promoting youth thriving. The phases of thematic analysis followed the framework outlined by Braun and Clark (2006). Transcriptions of eight focus group discussions comprised the data set, and themes were identified from that data. Focus groups of three participants were chosen to encourage participants to feel supported to give detailed and honest answers. One-on-one interviews may have been considered intimidating for these students, while in a larger group they would be able to avoid contributing. It was hoped that informal discussions with small groups would enable students to feel comfortable and safe sharing their experience.

Participants

Participants were 23 Year 10 students from two Project K groups (24 students were invited but one was not permitted to leave class). These were six students from Waitakere College in West Auckland, five from Northcote College in North Auckland, and twelve from

Otumoetai College in Tauranga. Participants' demographics are presented in Table 1, where

they are identified by their chosen pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant demographics (N = 23)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	School
Focus Group 1				
Nadia	14	F	NZ European	Waitakere College
Jack	15	M	NZ European	Waitakere College
Lacey	14	F	NZ Māori & NZ European	Waitakere College
Focus Group 2				
Stephen	14	M	NZ European	Waitakere College
Jock	14	M	NZ Māori & NZ European	Waitakere College
Max	14	M	NZ European	Waitakere College
Focus Group 3				
Indy	14	F	Cook Islands Māori	Northcote College
Ella	15	F	NZ European	Northcote College
Jo	15	F	Cook Islands Māori & NZ European	Northcote College
Focus Group 4				
Oliver	14	M	NZ European	Northcote College
Blake	14	M	NZ European	Northcote College
Focus Group 5				
Aroha	14	F	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Jeff	14	M	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Tim	14	M	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Focus Group 6				
James	14	M	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Thomas	15	M	Māori	Otumoetai College
Eloise	14	F	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Focus Group 7				
Jess	15	F	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Rose	14	F	Māori	Otumoetai College
Smith	14	M	Māori	Otumoetai College
Focus Group 8				
Alexa	14	F	NZ European	Otumoetai College
Ava	14	F	NZ European	Otumoetai College
George	14	F	NZ European	Otumoetai College

Procedure

    Recruitment. Recruitment was largely outside of the researcher's control, as it followed the established Project K process developed by the Graeme Dingle Foundation. Each year, all Year 10 students from participating schools around Aotearoa New Zealand complete the Project K Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (PKSEQ) (Moore, 2005). Two teachers per student also complete this questionnaire, so that each student has three scores for each of the three domains of self-efficacy: academic, social, and help-seeking. Those with serious mental health concerns are excluded from the programme, as these students fall outside of the scope of Project K. A pool of students with the lowest aggregate self-efficacy scores is invited to an information session introducing themselves and their families to Project K, and a group of 12 for each school (six girls and six boys) is randomly selected from this pool.

    Project K coordinators for West and North Auckland and Tauranga facilitated the logistics of conducting this research, and Graeme Dingle Foundation staff provided support. Following the consent of participants and their parents, the Graeme Dingle Foundation gave permission for this researcher to invite these two groups to participate in this study. Two Project K groups from different regions were identified partly due to the timing of their Wilderness Adventures, but also because each region of Project K is managed slightly differently and this would provide a more varied data set. Two groups of 12 students would also provide rich insight into the wilderness experience. It was decided in May that Waitakere College would combine its Project K group with Northcote College, and have six students from each college in one group. For this reason, there are 12 Otumoetai College participants, and six each from the Auckland colleges.

    Research procedure. The researcher attended information evenings for each school, which were run by the respective Project K coordinator for each region. At these sessions, prospective participants and their families were introduced to Project K, and gave or

declined consent to be in the selection process. The researcher also introduced them to this study, and gave students and caregivers information sheets (see Appendices A and B) outlining the aims, procedure and ethics of the research. Caregivers were also given consent forms (see Appendix C), as this would be the only time they would meet the researcher. At Waitakere and Northcote Colleges, this was the initial information session with the pool of students with low self-efficacy, before the final random selection had taken place. At Otumoetai College, the researcher attended the later information session preparing for the Wilderness Adventure, when the final 12 Project K participants had been selected. Students and caregivers were invited to ask any questions, and were given the researcher's and supervisor's contact details. Caregivers were encouraged to take their consent forms away with the information sheets to consider, however the majority returned signed consent forms at the information sessions. Those that did not were followed up with via email prior to the focus group discussions.

The Auckland group (Waitakere and Northcote Colleges) was on their Wilderness Adventure from 28 June until 14 July, and focus group discussions took place on the respective school grounds on 24 and 25 July. The Tauranga group, from Otumoetai College, was on their Wilderness Adventure from 16 July until 3 August, and their focus group discussions took place at school on 7 and 8 August. Focus groups were held as close as possible to the end of the Wilderness Adventure (four to eleven days after), so that the experience and associated emotions were fresh and accurate in the minds of participants.

Participants were randomly divided into eight focus groups of three students each (with one student missing from Northcote College). This was organised by the respective Project K facilitators and Year 10 deans, based on the students' schedules. Each focus group was an hour long, with time at the beginning for introductions, outlining the expectations for the discussion, and obtaining consent. Participants were given an overview of the project aims,

reminded of their rights, and given the opportunity to ask questions. They were given all of the information including their rights both verbally and in writing (see participant information sheet, Appendix A), and had the option to sign consent forms and participate, or decline participation at the beginning of each focus group (see participant consent form, Appendix D). On their consent forms, participants chose a pseudonym by which they would be referred in the research, and gave the name and number of a support person to call in the case of their becoming distressed during the discussion. The discussions were semi-structured with planned discussion points (see discussion schedule, Appendix E) as a framework to keep the discussion moving, while keeping questions open and encouraging participants to speak freely about their experience. Where appropriate, questions would follow up on students' answers in order to access as much detailed information as they were willing to give about their experience on the Wilderness Adventure and the impact it had on them.

The focus group discussions were audio recorded with an Olympus DS-2400 digital voice recorder, and video recorded with a Sony Alpha a6000 camera. This was for transcription purposes only, and once the focus group discussions were transcribed, all audio and video files were deleted from these devices. This was explained to participants both verbally and in writing, and each participant gave verbal consent to be recorded. The researcher provided snacks and juice in order to make participants feel comfortable and give the discussions an informal feel. Participants were reminded that they would not be identifiable in the study but referred to only by their chosen pseudonyms, and that they could contact the researcher or supervisor at any time. No participant took issue with any of these procedures, and time was taken to ensure that each had understood this information before beginning the discussions. Participants were gifted with a $20 Rebel

Sport voucher at the end of discussions to show appreciation for their time and contribution to the study.

Ethics. Ethical approval was given by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B (Application 18/19). This study required a complete ethics submission due to the vulnerable age of participants. Careful consideration was given to ensure participants were supported and safe during and following focus group discussions, and parental consent was sought before participants could take part in this study. Advice was sought from a cultural supervisor to ensure communications and methods were culturally safe and inclusive. Participants and their caregivers had at least a month between the Information Sessions where they were first introduced to the project, and the focus groups. This gave them time to consider participation and to ask any questions, although no participant or family member made contact in that time. No student or caregiver declined to give consent or withdrew from the study. At the end of each focus group all students appeared and voiced that they were happy to have participated.

Data Analysis

The data set, comprising the eight focus group discussion transcripts, was treated according to the steps outlined in Braun and Clark's (2006) framework for thematic analysis.

Transcription. Each focus group discussion was transcribed verbatim in a Microsoft Word document using the audio recordings, with the video recordings used if it was unclear who was speaking. The transcription process involved careful triple-checking of the recordings, enabling the researcher to become familiar with the data. From the transcription process on, participants were identified only by their pseudonyms. There were three pseudonyms that were chosen by the researcher, rather than the participants.

One had chosen a cartoon name, which would have been confusing. The other two had chosen names that were the same or similar to pseudonyms already used, so these were changed for the sake of clarity.

Coding. Once the transcripts were complete and as accurate as can be expected, the next stage was to identify codes in the data. Braun and Clark (2006) explain that codes "identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst" (p. 88). This required meticulous highlighting and distilling of what participants were communicating into codes. Coding was done manually by noting potential codes alongside every piece of dialogue. It was an open coding process, where codes were developed and modified throughout, and came directly from the words of the participants (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). A single response might have had several codes attached, or it may not have had any if it was considered off-topic or meaningless (though this was rare). The transcripts were coded multiple times so that codes were consistently attached throughout the data set, and were refined as the process developed. This resulted in a very long list of potential codes, with many overlaps. See Appendix F for the complete initial list of codes. This was gradually synthesised to a more succinct list of codes that were considered the most meaningful or relevant to the study, and could be potential themes. This reduced overlap and streamlined the codes into a more manageable overview of the data. This was decided across the entire data set, for example, if a code was mentioned by only one participant or one focus group it was given less significance than those that were brought up in multiple focus groups.

Thematic mapping. Potential themes were then identified based on clusters of codes with overlapping or related meaning. Once again, this required multiple attempts and different ways of organising the codes. Themes must be distinct and coherent patterns, which together tell a meaningful story of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). As there was significant overlap between codes, it required several attempts before a final thematic map

was produced that achieved this. This process included discussion and advice-seeking with other experienced researchers. It also highlighted the inherently subjective nature of thematic analysis, as the final decision on codes and themes to be included rested with the researcher, and there were several potential options. Priority was given to codes that were discussed more frequently, by a range of participants in different focus groups, or that were considered to have significant meaning to participants.

A final thematic map was constructed, with two superordinate themes that encompassed the data set. Six subordinate themes were organised into the superordinate themes, with three pertaining to each, and the codes were clustered into these six themes. The original transcripts were then mined for excerpts that represented these themes. There were many interesting and relevant excerpts relating to each theme, and it was felt that this thematic map accurately and coherently represented the complete data set. Analysis focused on the participants' perceptions of their experiences on the Wilderness Adventure, and the meanings and lessons they took from those experiences.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the eight focus group discussions identified six major themes, which were organised under two superordinate themes of challenges and outcomes. The themes and their relationships are displayed in Figure 1. Participants' perspectives and reflections on the Wilderness Adventure were diverse, but across the data set participants mostly discussed the aspects of the experience that challenged them, and the lessons or internal changes they experienced as an outcome. This analysis communicates how participants experienced and reflected on the Wilderness Adventure, and how they made meaning from this experience.

Figure 1

Superordinate and subordinate themes
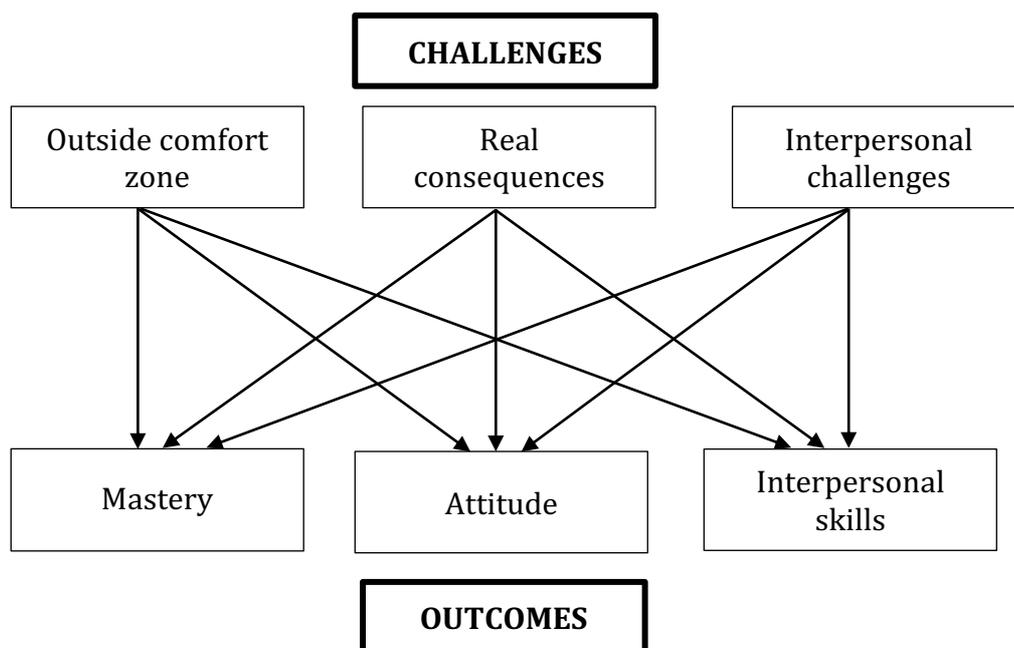
Challenge: Outside Comfort Zone

The Wilderness Adventure was a foreign experience for these participants, taking them completely outside of their comfort zones. This meant literally leaving the comfort and relative luxury of their usual home lives to spend three weeks in the New Zealand bush in the middle of winter. It also meant leaving their families and friends for an extended period of time, which was a new and emotionally challenging experience for most of them. They completed tough expeditions involving physically challenging and often unfamiliar activities. The overall experience was intense, requiring participants' mental fortitude and perseverance to complete. As Alexa put it, the Wilderness Adventure was

> not a part of my normal life. Yea, it's quite different, to kind of everything. (Alexa, Focus Group 8 (FG8))

A frequent discussion point for participants was the wilderness environment and the demands that living out in the wild required of them. Smith said it was

> like kind of rough, like a rough way to like, live for 17 days. (Smith, FG7)

This "rough way to live" meant that some participants described a lasting impression of discomfort when reflecting on the Wilderness Adventure.

> I think of like, being in a tent and away from a bed, and stuff, 'cause there's all sorts of possums and rats around. (Stephen, FG2)

> It was like, bad in time, because obviously you don't like, like you know new space, new people, you have to sleep on like the ground. (Ella, FG3)

They also talked about getting used to living without the commodities they were accustomed to in their home environments.

The food, the beds. Like, no technology. It was just, it was hard for the first couple of days but you slowly got used to it. (Jack, FG1)

We had like nothing in the bush. We didn't have a toilet or anything like that. (Eloise, FG6)

Like, we had to like, boil our water whenever we wanted warm water. But like at home you just get it from the tap. (Thomas, FG6)

Another challenging aspect for participants was having no personal space, which intensified the other challenges of the wilderness.

It was pretty hard [...] staying with five other boys, when it's just all cramped in together. [...] And there's like really no personal space, if you want to get changed, you have to like wait for everyone else to get changed. (Tim, FG5)

I mean, it gave like, a sense of – uh, what am I trying to say, like, it's you, these people, that's it, there's not like, any other option. (Jeff, FG5)

This experience is consistent with reviews of wilderness interventions, which unfailingly find that one of the essential elements of successful interventions is that participants are removed from their regular lives and embedded in an unfamiliar (though safe) outdoor environment (Deane & Harré, 2013; Hattie et al., 1997; Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Somervell & Lambie, 2009; Walsh & Golins, 1976; Weston & Tinsley, 1999). Elements of perceived risk (such as being in the bush with possums) and discomfort (such as basic sleeping and hygiene arrangements) are purposely and organically incorporated into wilderness interventions by way of the outdoor environment (Priest & Gass, 2005). The wilderness environment provides instant and authentic feedback, requiring flexibility and responsibility from participants (Deane & Harré, 2013; Somervell & Lambie, 2009; Williams, 2000). The demands of the wilderness environment also allowed participants to reflect on their regular lives from a fresh perspective (Walsh & Golins, 1976). By

exposure to these challenging aspects of the wilderness, participants could experiment with strategies and discover new strengths for overcoming challenges that they would not face in their regular environment (Deane & Harré, 2013; Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Nadler, 1993; Walsh & Golins, 1976).

Another key aspect that was outside of participants' comfort zones was being away from their families for an extended length of time, which for some caused homesickness. For many participants the Wilderness Adventure was the longest they had been away from their parents.

> I've never been that, like, far, you know, that long away. 'Cause, normally it's about a week when I'm away from my parents. But three was pretty intense at the beginning, like yea, terrifying. (Alexa, FG8)

> 17 days, like, three-ish weeks, it's too long. For like, if you're going away for the first time away from your family, 17 days is like a bit much. (Jock, FG2)

The Outward Bound schools were named for the nautical term used when a ship leaves safe harbour and heads out into open ocean (Outward Bound International, n.d.), which is analogous to the experience of participants leaving the comfort zones of their homes and families and going into the wild. Wilderness interventions intentionally create a "constructive level of anxiety" for participants (Nadler, 1993, p. 61), in order to motivate growth. This is seen in the comments of the participants, who were anxious about being separated for so long without contact from their families. This means participants are motivated to adapt and experiment with coping strategies (Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Nadler, 1993), and also have a freedom to experiment that does not exist within their regular environments (Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Williams, 2000). One of the shifts of adolescence is increasing autonomy from the family system (Wenar & Kerig, 2011), and

this experience provided a lived example of participants' ability to cope away from their families. Oliver demonstrated this when he commented,

> I was scared to leave my family for 17 days, but then I kind of just got used to not being with my family, and it kind of just grew on me, and I kind of started to like it. I mean like, I was with my family for like, 13, 14 years of my life, so like, being out for 17 days without them was kind of cool. (Oliver, FG4)

Being away from their families for an extended period of time was intimidating and distressing for some participants, and added to the experience of being outside of their comfort zones, however this discomfort motivated them to adapt and grow.

The participants were not just outside of the comfort zones of their homes and families, but were also challenged daily by the wilderness activities. The Wilderness Adventure was divided into lengthy kayaking, mountain biking and hiking expeditions, and the Auckland group also did abseiling. Participants had different levels of experience with these activities, and described how the expeditions pushed their limits. For some, the physical demands were far tougher than they had expected.

> It was like, really hard, like the physical stuff. [...] I cried so much, I'd just be walking and start crying. (Ella, FG3)

> Like, I didn't know what tramping[1] was, I just thought it was just like, walking across mud and that's it, but, it's even like, more. (Indy, FG3)

> Oh yea tramping. Yea I found that challenging, hard and frustrating sometimes, yea. (Smith, FG7)

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[1] Tramping: New Zealand word for hiking.

As well as the overt physical challenge of the expeditions, participants discussed the mental fortitude required to persevere through the experience. Of these two Project K groups, one participant did not complete the Wilderness Adventure, and she explained that the mental aspect was tougher for her than the physical challenge.

> Um, well the parts I was there for it was like, wasn't that hard to do like physically, but mentally I couldn't really handle it. [...] It was actually pretty good it was just like, overwhelming I guess. (Jo, FG3)

Other participants spoke about needing to "dig deep" (Oliver, FG4) and "push" or "power through" (Jack, FG1; Thomas, FG6; Jess, FG7; Alexa, FG8) in order to complete the wilderness activities.

> Like with abseiling no one wanted to do it. [...] And we all just powered through, and we all did it. (Jack, FG1)

> Me personally I hit a wall. Around like the second or third day. And I really started wanting to go home. But then after that you just kind of think, it's only a couple of weeks, and you'll get through it, it's not forever. (Jeff, FG5)

The wilderness activities are designed to test participants, which they did, but also to be ultimately attainable, which (with the exception of Jo leaving early) they were, motivating a powerful sense of accomplishment and mastery (Bowen et al., 2016; Deane & Harré, 2013; Russell, 2001; Shellman & Ewert, 2010). These participants described their lived experience of "digging deep" to complete these physically and mentally challenging activities. This is consistent with work on experiential learning, where Kolb (1984) argues that it is a continuous and holistic process affecting the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social facilities (Deane & Harré, 2013; Hopkins & Putman, 1997; Luckner & Nadler, 1997). By completing challenging activities each day, participants had daily opportunities to experiment with and rehearse the skills to overcome these challenges,

providing lived examples to refer to in future challenging situations (Hattie et al., 1997). This lived experience is particularly powerful in wilderness interventions because participants are isolated from their comfort zones and embedded in a highly stimulating and intense environment with real consequences (Somervell & Lambie, 2009).

Challenge: Real Consequences

Participants discussed being engaged and motivated by the Wilderness Adventure, because it was up to them how each day played out. They took an active role in planning each day, organising their belongings, and helping each other to achieve each task. If they did not do these things, the consequences were real and affected them personally, for example if they managed their time poorly they would arrive at their destination late. The environment also provided natural consequences, for example if it rained they would get wet. Participants described the experience of being "stuck" out in the wilderness, and having no choice but to continue forward. They also learnt that it was in their collective interest to work together, because everything they did was a group activity and if one person failed they would all fail. The environment and activities provided real-time lived consequences, motivating participants to take responsibility for experienced outcomes.

Participants discussed having greater expectations on them in the wilderness than in their usual lives, and feeling the need to "step up" (Jack, FG1). For these adolescent participants, taking an active role in planning and decision-making was novel, because as Jock said,

> We tend to rely on adults a bit, because they're older and they're more experienced. (Jock, FG2)

Time management was a significant part of daily planning, and had very real consequences for the participants.

> Our practice tramp [...] we ended up walking in the dark. From how slow we were. (Thomas, FG6)

> The more breaks we take the more, like, less time we actually have to get there. (Tim, FG5)

> You'd have to hike and do stuff in the dark. Like set up tents and cook. (Smith, FG7)

Part of the time management challenge was that participants also took responsibility for the logistical requirements of camp.

> [We learnt] better time management. [...] Just like, when we were packing up in the morning. Like packing our tents down, like cooking breakfast and stuff. (Max, FG2)

> Like, if you just had porridge, your like oats and everything would be really hard to scrub off. You'd just have oats stuck in your thing. (Jock, FG2)

Although instructors guided the groups on their expeditions, the day-to-day decisions were made by participants, and the consequences of these decisions were lived by them.

> Yea it was good, 'cause, eventually we have to – well we should be doing that now but, [...] you like decide what's going to happen in terms of, like say, what time will you get there, what time you wanna have breaks, all that stuff, it all comes down to time management. (Jock, FG2)

Research has shown that having real lived consequences makes wilderness interventions effective at motivating self-awareness and responsibility in participants (Hattie et al., 1997; Russell, 2001; Somervell & Lambie, 2009). The consequences of the wilderness environment and activities are authentic, engaging participants and motivating them to "step up" (Deane & Harré, 2013; Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Somervell & Lambie, 2009).

Participants' responses provide evidence that they felt responsible for and able to influence the outcome of the experience. This is consistent with research showing wilderness interventions to be effective at improving self-control via increases in independence, internal locus of control, and decision making (Hattie et al., 1997). The natural environment of the wilderness created demands, and provided instant and natural feedback, requiring participants to actively consider and reflect on their actions, and to respond in real time (Russell, 2001). By being faced with real decisions, perceived risks and direct consequences, participants felt ownership over their success or failure in the programme.

As well as the consequences provided by the wilderness environment and activities, participants described the impression of being completely embedded in the experience. This increased their engagement in the experience, because they felt that the only way out was to keep moving forward and finding solutions.

> I kind of just knew that, like, no matter how hard it is, you're in the middle of nowhere so you have to keep pushing. (Jess, FG7)

> You have to do it. Like once you start, you have to do it to finish. (Max, FG2)

> 'Cause there's like, there's no other way out, you're gonna have to get through because you can't go back […] you still have to walk out, either way. (Jock, FG2)

Comments like these show that participants were engaged in the experience, and felt that the consequences of their situation were real. It also shows that they felt committed to the experience, and were driven and motivated to find strategies to succeed. This "real-life" experiential learning is more effective for adolescents than traditional therapy styles which require abstract thinking (Lambie et al., 1997; Somervell & Lambie, 2009; Williams, 2000). There are clear connections between participants' actions and future

(often immediate) consequences (Wojcikiewicz & Mural, 2010), which give participants the lived experience of strategising effective ways to succeed. These decisions and actions did not just affect the individual making them, but the whole group.

A significant challenge of the Wilderness Adventure and a common topic of discussion was that every activity had to be completed as a group of 12, and therefore decisions and their subsequent consequences affected all of them. Within the groups people had differing levels of experience and ability, and they had to learn to navigate working together and taking responsibility for the outcomes of the group.

> I've already like, done tramping and stuff, but like, doing it with a big group of people was much harder. 'Cause when you're like with your dad, you got two people, you pack up your tent and you're gone but 12 people takes about an hour. (Blake, FG4)

> Like you gotta always stop and check if everybody's here. Like you can't just walk off and expect everybody to be behind you, [...] if a person's missing then you've got to go and find that person. (Rose, FG7)

> It's hard though 'cause like, you'd be paddling, and then sometimes your friend would get, like your partner would get tired. And so then you'd have to stop. And then wait for them. (Thomas, FG6)

Participants described finding strategies to get the whole group to the end of each day, and realising they needed to take responsibility for the group rather than just themselves.

> If we got to a destination before everyone else we'd have to wait for them, and then do everything we needed to do so, if people were behind we'd make sure they'd be up front and we'd be supporting them. (Smith, FG7)

Everybody realised we needed to stick as a family and work as a team. Like, we're gonna get nowhere if it doesn't work. (Rose, FG7)

If everyone's working in a group, then you're most likely to get it finished faster. (Alexa, FG8)

These comments show participants adjusted their thinking and behaviours to benefit the whole group, not just themselves. Previous literature shows that wilderness interventions are effective because they require participants to continually use group processes to evaluate and problem-solve in real-life situations with real consequences (Loughmiller, 2007). This is consistent with the experience of these participants. Each member of the group is incentivised to take an active role in problem-solving and in the whole group completing tasks, as the consequences are relevant to all of them (Loughmiller, 2007). Having real and authentic consequences for their actions and decisions engaged participants in the wilderness experience and motivated them to "step up" and take responsibility for their success and for that of the group.

Challenge: Interpersonal Challenges

Wilderness interventions by definition are experiential group interventions, and the interpersonal dynamic was a common theme brought up by each focus group. The group setting also provided significant challenges. Participants discussed the difficulties of being in a group of (usually) strangers without respite for nearly three weeks. This, coupled with the already intense and demanding environment and activities, understandably led to tensions of varying degrees. Another novel aspect of the Wilderness Adventure was that participants took turns acting as leader of the group, and this resulted in mixed impressions, relating to the group dynamic. Participants learned

that it was in their mutual interest to work together to achieve mutual goals, and this lesson took markedly different trajectories between the two groups in this research.

One of the most challenging elements of the Wilderness Adventure for some participants was being stuck together all day every day, without respite.

Being with each other for ages was probably like not a good thing? 'Cause we were like – had to do everything together, everything. *(Whispers)* everything! That probably wasn't like, a good thing I guess. (Ella, FG3)

If you stick the same people for like, two weeks, […] they start to get on your nerves. And you've also got nowhere to go. (Tim, FG5)

There were times when this lack of space from each other had negative outcomes on the group dynamic.

Everyone kept getting annoyed with each other, and then they would stop listening to each other, so we'd kind of just separate. (Ava, FG8)

Ava would advise future Project K participants to

take, like bits of time for yourself. […] Because, it was kind of hard when you'd have everybody, and then you'd kind of just wanna escape for a little bit. (Ava, FG8)

Aroha similarly said that her solution was to remove herself and find some space when other people

just get really annoying and you kind of just give up […] I kind of just walked away and sat by myself for a bit. And just had my own time. (Aroha, FG5)

The groups were together all day every day, and participants like Ava and Aroha found this to be overwhelming. They overcame this by actively removing themselves from the group, an effective strategy. Wilderness interventions are designed so that the individuals

in the group are mutually interdependent, and require teamwork to achieve their goals (Hirsch, 1999). While this provides the opportunity for positive interpersonal interaction, the intensity of being together without respite can lead to conflict (Deane & Harré, 2013). There were occasions during both these groups' experiences when frustrations from the constant interaction escalated into conflict.

Each focus group described interpersonal tensions at certain points during the Wilderness Adventure, however there were noticeable differences in how these progressed between the two Project K groups. Although the Auckland group was made up of two different schools, they described group tensions as minor and dissipating organically, without escalating.

> Yea there was a bit of like um, like tension sometimes, but naturally not too bad. (Oliver, FG4)

> At the time we were like, "I hate them, I'm not talking to them", and at the time we would think we were serious? But then like, ten minutes later we would forget about it. (Ella, FG3)

In contrast, the Tauranga group described significant tensions to the point where their teamwork broke down and there was conflict and nastiness among the group.

> Some people were talking behind other people's back and other people wanted to fight other people. (Eloise, FG6)

> There was a song that was made up about all of us. Yea, but, wasn't very nice. (Aroha, FG5)

> There was like distinct people that people would pick on. Like certain people, people would be, like talk about behind their backs. (Jess, FG7)

As the team dynamic declined, Aroha explained that they "kind of just gave up on each other", requiring the Wilderness Adventure instructors to intervene.

> Halfway through the thing, we made up some rules. Um, what everyone wanted the group to be like […] like no talking behind other people's backs. (Thomas, FG6)

While it was an unusual measure for the instructors to step in, Tauranga participants described a positive group dynamic after this intervention.

> At the start we were like in separate groups and like, some people would talk about us, and then some people would talk about them. But then, coming towards the end, we like, became more of a family. (Thomas, FG6)

> Pretty much no one worked together at the beginning. Like I don't wanna do it I'm not doing it. […] But towards the end we kind of just were like, well, we're now like family so we kind of all have to. (Jess, FG7)

While the majority of the Tauranga participants recalled an overall positive group dynamic after the instructors' intervention, this impression was not the case for all participants. Tim commented that he would not want to have a similar experience with friends or family because it would ruin their relationship.

> 'Cause if you go with a friend, your friendship would slowly start to like, tear apart. (Tim, FG5)

The interpersonal conflicts experienced by this team left Tim with a lasting negative impression of teamwork, however this was not the case for the majority of his Project K group. Through the particular challenges they experienced, addressed, and resolved as a group, they describe a particularly close connection, with many participants describing the group as a "family" (Thomas, FG6; Jess, Rose, FG7). Wilderness experiences such as this have been likened to an "experimental social laboratory" (Hopkins & Putnam, 1997, p. 13), where participants are in an intense and inescapable social environment with

consequences to provide feedback on their behaviours. Just as the wilderness environment and challenging activities may create anxiety, so too does the constant group setting, which in this case showed itself through interpersonal conflict (Deane & Harré, 2013; McKenzie, 2000; Walsh & Golins, 1976). Unlike in other situations such as school, when conflict arose, participants couldn't avoid each other, so they had to find a way to resolve it and continue working together. Being mutually dependent on one another to achieve their mutual goals, it was in all of their best interests to resolve any conflict (Deane & Harré, 2013; Hirsch, 1999; McKenzie, 2000; Walsh & Golins, 1976), and from the impression of most of these participants, this resulted in a positive group dynamic.

There was another aspect of the interpersonal dynamic that participants found challenging, and where a significant difference between the two groups was apparent. Participants took turns acting as leader in the wilderness, which was a novel and challenging experience for them. The Auckland group had mixed, but generally positive impressions from this experience.

> Like, before we actually went, I didn't plan on being a leader as much as I was. […] If I put my mind to it and like, work hard, I can control a group and get tasks done. (Jock, FG2)
>
> It felt, weird like, I dunno, I don't like having authority over people. (Oliver, FG4)
>
> In the future if we ever do something where we have to lead a group, we know what to do, we know how to lead. (Jack, FG1)

The experience participants had as leader was intimately related to the group dynamic, and the interpersonal difficulties the Tauranga group described resulted in their experiences of leading the group being predominantly negative. Tauranga participants

described the leadership experience as "frustrating" (Thomas, FG6; Smith, FG7), challenging" (Tim, FG5), and "horrible" (Jess, Rose, FG7), and almost all said that the group "did not listen" (Aroha, Tim, FG5; Thomas, FG6; Rose, Jess, FG7; George, Alexa, Ava, FG8).

> You'd ask somebody to do something, and they would just act like your voice ain't there, some people. (Thomas, FG6)

This experience of being ignored caused several participants to conclude that a successful leader needs to be loud and assertive.

> I feel like when you're a leader, you have to be like, kind of angry, […] they don't listen to you if you're not like, kinda like, angry, I dunno. (Smith, FG7)

> If you were a loud person people listened but if you weren't – so like a few of the quiet ones – which there were quite a few, they wouldn't – they would just ignore you, people would ignore you. (Tim, FG5)

While overall Tauranga participants described a negative experience of leading the group, as the group dynamic improved so too did the leaders' experience. They attributed this to the fact that everyone had several opportunities to be leader, and in time participants learned that it was in their own interests to respect their peers who were leading.

> After time, they kind of realised that they were gonna be leader one day too. So then they decided to listen I guess. (Aroha, FG5)

> If people ask you to do something then do it, 'cause you know how it feels. (Eloise, FG6)

Participants' comments suggest that the experience of both being a leader and being led improved their cooperation with one another, which is consistent with previous research (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). This experience offers an example of the social laboratory the

wilderness experience provides, where participants have the opportunity to experiment with different social roles, behaviours, and interactions (Hopkins & Putnam, 1997). Project K participants have antecedent low self-efficacy, and the experience of leading their peers was not familiar to them. Because they were "stuck" in an intense social setting which provided constant feedback, participants were able to rehearse and gain confidence in their ability to interact in a diverse group (Deane & Harre, 2013). The Tauranga group in particular provided an example of how they addressed interpersonal conflicts, adjusted their behaviours towards one another (for example listening to the acting leader), and resolved issues in order to work effectively as a group.

Wilderness interventions such as the Project K Wilderness Adventure purposely provide intense and challenging environments to create a sense of anxiety (Nadler, 1993), dissonance (McKenzie, 2000), or disequilibrium (Deane & Harré, 2013) in participants. This was certainly experienced by the participants in this study, who described leaving their physical and psychological comfort zones, being physically and mentally challenged by novel activities with real consequences, and doing so constantly in a group of their peers. They articulated these challenges, and also described the lessons and positive outcomes that they experienced as a result of this discomfort. Almost all (20/23) considered that overall the Wilderness Adventure was a positive experience.

Outcome: Mastery

When participants reflected on their experiences in the wilderness, most spoke with surprise, confidence and pride at what they had achieved. The wilderness environment provided them with significant challenges, and they overcame them. They described lived experience of experimenting with strategies to motivate themselves,

acquiring new skills, and overcoming challenging situations. Without exception, participants described the ways they had exceeded their expectations for themselves on the Wilderness Adventure. This experience allowed participants to master significant physical, psychological, and interpersonal challenges, and their comments support the notion that lived mastery experiences have a positive influence on self-concept.

In order to successfully complete the wilderness expeditions, some participants described different strategies that they used to motivate themselves.

Just like having a strong mind. Just keep like, if you like, say fall over, just tell yourself keep going, it's almost over. Even though it's not but it's like, you can say that it's almost over. (Jack, FG1)

I just motivated myself. […] Just in my head I was like you can do this you can do this you can get through the steep as hills. I made it. (Rose, FG7)

I just thought about sleeping, like when you get back to like, your destination you set up the tent and then, like, rest. So that's what made me go faster, or try. (Smith, FG7)

They also described ways that the group motivated and encouraged each other to complete expeditions.

Like, we worked on like strategies together to keep us going. Like, orders, like walking orders and stuff, and then, like […] telling jokes, riddles. Just things that kind of just get the brain away from all the walking and stuff, just like more like, focusing on funny stuff I guess. (Oliver, FG4)

Other people, like, just their support, kind of helped. […] Yea, just the fact that I knew they had my back and stuff. (Jeff, FG5)

I think it was better in a group 'cause we all like, motivated each other. And we all had like, different assets which made us all one, you know? (Nadia, FG1)

Several participants also mentioned they were motivated by the thought of making their families proud.

Um, just, thinking about decent food when you get home. Um, thinking about sleep and like, how proud my parents will be. (Max, FG2)

I was thinking about them like, do it for them. (Smith, FG7)

One of the more unusual motivation strategies was "thinking about chicken nuggets", which Nadia (FG1) explained,

helped me heaps because when I was upset I would just think about it and it made me happy.

Participants described innovative and insightful strategies they used to stay motivated to master the wilderness activities, providing evidence that they were engaged in the experience and committed to succeed. Previous research has shown that the intensity of wilderness interventions encourages participant engagement (Somervell & Lambie, 2009), and these descriptive and varied motivation strategies point to participants' holistic engagement in the experience. They were not simply completing tasks because they had to, they were actively experimenting with different strategies to successfully overcome challenges.

Participants frequently talked about the feeling of successfully completing activities and overcoming challenging situations, and the positive effect that this experience had on them. They discussed the new skills and abilities they had gained as a result of the Wilderness Adventure.

Like, if we ever do like, camping, or like, doing a camp at school, we'll know everything and like, teach everyone else what to do, which would be pretty cool. So like if you're ever, say broken down somewhere, you know how to survive kind of. (Jack, FG1)

I can interact with new people better, 'cause, yea. You learn the skills to like, meet new people and get to know them better. And like, definitely skills from tramping and how to pack your bag and all that. (Jock, FG2)

Participants found that over time, difficult and novel tasks became routine as their abilities improved and their confidence increased.

After the first tramp, you know what's supposed to happen, like all the procedures. So it just feels like, I've already done this I can just do it again. […] If you do something like, the same thing, over and over again it just gets easier. You get better at it. (Jock, FG2)

[It] got easier like, at the start when we were setting up our tent, the first night, we didn't even know what we were doing. Like we were missing like, some of the pegs and stuff, but then, like each day we'd get better at it. (Thomas, FG6)

I mean, it felt easier, the more it went on. Like less challenging, 'cause like, I dunno I just kind of adapted to the challenge, so like, it felt easier I guess. (Oliver, FG4)

It is well researched that the most effective way to increase self-efficacy is through lived experience of success (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Schunk & Meece, 2006). These participants discussed examples of their successful mastery of wilderness tasks, from long hiking expeditions to everyday tasks such as setting tents up. This type of varied, repetitious mastery experience has been shown to build a "robust belief in one's personal efficacy" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). This improved self-efficacy can then increase participants' perseverance and resilience in subsequent challenging situations (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1997) argues that it is the reflection and processing of successful mastery experiences that internalises the experience and increases self-efficacy. Participants in this research not only gained new experiences and skills as a result of the Wilderness Adventure, but adjusted their self-concepts, as evident from their descriptions below.

Most participants' achievements on the Wilderness Adventure exceeded their expectations. They described surpassing their perceived limitations and adjusting their previously held beliefs about what they were capable of.

It like gave you a chance to like, push your limits and see what you can actually do […] yea, like, never thought I could do that much exercise. *(laughs)* But I did. (Jess, FG7)

I'm stronger physically than I thought I was. (Jo, FG3)

I don't like tramping, but like, I, if someone had said can you tramp for nine days I could be like yea. Where before I would be like no. (Ella, FG3)

I'm capable of more things than I think. (Alexa, FG8)

When asked what his lasting impression of the Wilderness Adventure was, Tim's response was "accomplished".

'Cause, for me I've never actually really, done this before. (Tim, FG5)

Participants' comments indicate that this sense of accomplishment had been internalised beyond the specific wilderness activities. They recognised new strengths that they did not associate with themselves before the wilderness experience. When asked what the biggest change they had noticed in themselves was, many participants used the word "confident" (Nadia, Jack, FG1; Max, Jock, FG2; Oliver, FG4; Aroha, Jeff, FG5; Alexa, FG8), and they had a variety of other positive and insightful responses.

Knowing that I have the strength to carry on. Whenever like, I'm upset or like, fall over. I just get up and carry on. (Lacey, FG1)

I learnt that I can see the funny side of things and have a laugh, which is something I didn't really do as much before. (Stephen, FG2)

That I'm stronger than I thought. […] Like not physically. […] It was just more like mentally. Like, being away from home and, being in the bush. (Oliver, FG4)

I'm more, I guess, willing to do things, like if someone says – well, my Mum, for example says, "I'm walking the Mount do you want to come?" I would say yes, and I used to just say no, and that's changed. (Jeff, FG5)

Participants recognised that they had achieved something significant and they were proud of their achievements.

If anything's like real hard, I can be like I did Project K I can do this. You know? Like it's a good thing to compare to. […] 'Cause like, parts of the Wilderness, all the tramping and stuff, like, I would like just tell myself I couldn't do it, but then I would end up doing it like every time. (Ella, FG3)

It felt, um, at the time it was like, hard, and then afterwards it feels like, wow I actually did that. (Stephen, FG2)

These reflections support findings that wilderness programmes motivate a sense of empowerment in participants (Shellman & Ewert, 2010). Participants' comments are consistent with literature on wilderness interventions, which suggests that by providing participants with challenging and ultimately achievable tasks they experience lived mastery experiences, which are the most effective way to affect self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Bowen et al., 2016; Deane & Harré, 2013). It is through reflection that accomplishments are internalised and participants reappraise their self-concepts (Bandura, 1997; Deane & Harré, 2013). Through the changes participants have noticed

in themselves, they describe a sense of personal accomplishment, which is also consistent with existing literature (Bowen et al., 2016; Russell, 2001; Somervell & Lambie, 2009). As a result of the wilderness experience, participants discovered and evaluated new physical and internal strengths and resources, which can serve them in subsequent challenging environments (Hattie et al., 1997). Research on successful PYD programmes shows that they contribute to the development of important life skills in adolescents, including leadership, cooperation, and conflict resolution (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt & Neely, 2012; McDonough et al., 2018), and that these skills are transferable to other contexts and relationships (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004; Weiss et al., 2016). Participants' comments indicate that they experienced these life skills in the context of the wilderness environment, and that their self-concepts are more confident, competent, and empowered as a result.

The challenge themes described previously resulted in an empowering experience of increased mastery for participants. Throughout the data set they reflected on their enhanced skill set and described positive changes to their self-concepts. Because these students were outside of their comfort zones and embedded in an intense, unfamiliar and demanding group environment, they were required to adapt. They described experimenting with new strategies and behaviours to motivate themselves and each other to achieve tasks that they did not believe achievable. The real consequences of this environment required participants to take responsibility for themselves and for one another. The group setting added another dynamic, as interpersonal challenges needed to be resolved in order for the group to meet their mutual goal, allowing them to rehearse and master interpersonal skills. These challenges required participants to "dig deep", discover and strengthen a new skill set, motivating growth and change. They discussed

feeling more competent and confident, and the impression that they had exceeded their perceived limits. This provides evidence that their experience was consistent with previous research showing that successful PYD, wilderness, and self-efficacy interventions provide opportunities for lived mastery experiences, resulting in a more positive self-concept.

Outcome: Attitude

Another striking outcome participants recognised in themselves was a perceived attitude shift. Several participants described how adopting a positive attitude affected their experience and even their success in the wilderness. They found that this was also true of the group, and encouraging each other and maintaining a positive attitude improved the overall group dynamic and meant participants feel supported. They discussed applying this to their lives and relationships outside of the wilderness by adjusting their attitudes towards school, home, and their futures. A recurring outcome participants discussed was feeling more grateful for their families and lives, and they attributed this to the experience of being outside of their comfort zones. The wilderness experience gave them space to reflect on their lives from a new perspective, and they felt that this would make it a beneficial experience for other people too.

When reflecting on their wilderness experience, participants described the effect their attitude had on their enjoyment of the experience and also on their ability to successfully complete the activities. Several students commented that their attitude influenced their achievements more than their actual abilities did.

We believed we couldn't do it. But we did it anyway, 'cause we just thought happy thoughts and we encouraged ourselves. (Lacey, FG1)

What do you think had the biggest effect, your abilities changing or your attitude?

(Researcher) Attitude. Attitude. It was attitude. (James, FG6)

Participants described how their attitudes changed over the course of the Wilderness Adventure, as they became accustomed to the demands and expectations of this environment.

Attitude was a pretty big one for me. [...] Like, it was going from, no, I don't want to do this, it's going to suck, to just being, just do it, get with it and keep going. (Jeff, FG5)

At the start I would always be like, I hate this, I wanna go home. But then like, I learnt like, that I just have to try find the positive things like, there's no way I'm going home. I have to be out here for 17 days, so I may as well enjoy and like have fun. (Ella, FG3)

They described how this finding was also true of the group, where having a positive attitude and encouraging each other enabled participants to feel supported, and fostered a positive group dynamic.

We made everything turn into like a happy moment. (Jack, FG1)

To actually treat people how you would want to be treated. [...] It sort of did help, if you treated people nicely and they would treat you nicely, 'cause you don't want a camp full of just, negativity, 'cause you've got to be with them for like ages. (Tim, FG5)

I think it kind of felt – 'cause it's like, you fall, but then everyone else is not laughing at you but they're kind of laughing with you. Because like, I think everyone fell over at some point. So it's like, "oh, it's your turn to fall" kind of thing. (Ava, FG8)

Participants reflected on the influence their attitude had on their experience, and on the group dynamic. This is an important finding because they also showed evidence of internalising this lesson and applying it to their lives outside of the wilderness.

Some participants described a change in both attitude and behaviour outside of the wilderness, when they discussed taking greater responsibility for their actions and decisions once they returned home. Blake described how his attitude has changed as a result of the Wilderness Adventure, and how this has affected his behaviour both at home and at school.

> Like, not arguing with my brothers, as much. [...] I just, don't start it you know? [...] Like, attitude towards class like, towards school work. Like just putting my head down and doing it. [...] 'Cause, not everything's like, easy. I know now. Just that, you can't just do everything and just get away with it. (Blake, FG4)

An improved attitude towards school was echoed by several participants.

> At school I've started, like – 'cause before Project K I would always like, I just couldn't be bothered. But now I've started [...] thinking like I'm actually going to try. (Ella, FG3)

> I try do better, in school, like to do all the work on time. (James, FG6)

This shift was a result of considering the consequences and future implications of their decisions and behaviour.

> If you don't pay attention then you don't know what you need to do, [...] and you fail. (Oliver, FG4)

> I gotta pass the year and I don't want to get not achieveds. (James, FG6)

> Like you start thinking ahead and then coming back to like, the subject selection, is right now. And that's kind of, makes you think as well. (Jeff, FG5)

This increased personal responsibility was also seen at home. Nadia said that the biggest change since the wilderness was her behaviour at home, and she directly attributed this to the expectations and consequences they experienced in the wilderness.

> Being organised and be on time I guess. And then, um, I feel like I'm more helpful as well, like um, my Nan asks me to do a job or I just see a job opportunity to do and I just do it, instead of like complaining. […] It's 'cause we had to get jobs there too, without complaining. (Nadia, FG1)

Some participants described a more considered and mature attitude in general.

> I used to like, be like naughty and stuff with my friends, like drank and stuff. And I kind of learnt now that like, […] there's not really any point doing it 'cause like - hard to explain but like, there's better things I could be doing than that. […] I learnt that that's just not the way to go, like being like in the nature and stuff I was like, nah all that's bad. (Ella, FG3)

These comments show evidence of self-awareness and self-regulation. Participants attributed these experienced attitude shifts to the Wilderness Adventure, where their decisions, attitudes and behaviours had direct consequences affecting not only them but their teammates. Participants discuss actively adjusting their attitudes and behaviours to positively impact their futures, which suggests an internal locus of control as they believe they can influence and control outcomes (Skinner et al., 1990). This finding supports Deane and Harré's (2013) youth adventure programming model, which highlights outlook and attitude change as a likely outcome of successful wilderness programmes. They concluded that the presence of the essential programme elements (novel physical environment, challenging activities, and a group setting) motivates a reorganisation of participants' attitude regarding themselves and their usual environments (Deane & Harré, 2013; Walsh & Golins, 1976). The discussions with these participants are

consistent with this model. While on the Wilderness Adventure, participants were tasked with the daily responsibilities of camp, with real consequences if they did not meet these responsibilities. There is a difference between a personal sense of responsibility and an external responsibility, which is bestowed on someone (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011), and participants' comments suggest that they have internalised the external responsibilities of the wilderness and are feeling a personal sense of responsibility for their attitude and behaviour. Having the space for reflection while being in the wilderness led to another significant attitude shift of increased gratitude.

In every focus group the theme of gratitude was raised by participants as an outcome of the wilderness experience. Being taken outside of their physical and social comfort zones allowed participants to reflect on their regular lives and inspired an increased recognition of and appreciation for their families and home environments.

> When I was at camp I learnt that I was a lot more grateful for things. And that's one of the things that I learnt like, I was like, I'm gonna be so grateful for like, everything now. Grateful for a bed, grateful for my parents, grateful for my house. (Ella, FG3)
>
> It makes you really appreciative of like, the people around you. And it like, made me closer with the people at Project K and also the people that weren't there. (Jo, FG3)
>
> I dunno just, being out there, you can like realise what's like actually around you. (Jess, FG7)

The challenge of being away from their families caused some participants to want to show their appreciation to their families when they returned from the wilderness.

Be nice to your family. And like, 'cause it was like hard being away from them for so long. Just like, be grateful for the food that your mum makes and stuff, like, your caregivers make. (Jack, FG1)

I never used to like go sit out with my family. I just used to sit in my room on my phone. And now like, after this it's kind of made me, forget about my phone, not having it. And like, I'm not on it as much and I'm doing stuff with my family now. (Aroha, FG5)

Like Aroha, several participants described adjusting their priorities since the Wilderness Adventure to reflect their shift in attitude and increased gratitude.

Sometimes you don't need the things that you thought you needed in your life. Like your phone and like, I dunno, TV. (Alexa, FG8)

I would always be like, asking for stuff that I don't need. So, now I don't really do that, I just ask for things I need, not want. (Smith, FG7)

Many participants discussed recommending the Wilderness Adventure because they believed that others would experience a similar shift in perspective to themselves, and they considered this to be a positive outcome.

If they're not an outdoor person like, they're always inside on their phone and stuff it will like, teach them how to be grateful for the things they have. […] 'Cause then it would like, make them like, think of all the stuff they have at home and appreciate it. (Aroha, FG5)

People who like, […] have more money than others, I reckon they would benefit from that camp. Like, just like learning to appreciate everything. (Jess, FG7)

The experience of living outside of their comfort zones also encouraged participants to recognise that others are less fortunate than them, and motivated a more empathetic attitude.

We didn't have like, anything [...] And like I usually take that stuff for granted. And I learnt that like, I shouldn't. 'Cause people actually like have to live like that, like without what I have, like without beds, without houses, limited food, just like stuff like that. (Ella, FG3)

Kurt Hahn made the same observation at his original Outward Bound school, finding that the unfamiliar and challenging natural environment motivated compassion in students (Outward Bound International, n.d.). As discussed, caring is one of the Five Cs of PYD, and supporting the development of these resources in adolescents is shown to predict the sixth C, contribution (Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2003, 2005; Pittman, 2000). Participants' responses indicate that the disruption of the Wilderness Adventure motivated them to reflect on their lives, encouraging gratitude and empathy, and a more responsible and positive attitude. Existing research suggests that gratitude plays an important role in enhancing adolescent emotional and social wellbeing, and later positive contribution (Duthely, Nunn, & Avella, 2017; Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010), consistent with a PYD approach. Gratitude was a recurring theme across the data set, which was unexpected as it had not been prevalent in previous research on Project K or other PYD programmes. Participants' comments indicate self-awareness and maturity, and suggest that Project K can affect a more positive and appreciative outlook in adolescents.

Outcome: Interpersonal Skills

Despite the group setting being highlighted by participants as one of the more challenging features of the Wilderness Adventure, they also considered the interpersonal aspect to be a significant benefit. Completing the experience as a team allowed participants to rehearse interpersonal skills which they felt confident to apply outside of the wilderness, such as the ability to find common ground and interact with new and

diverse people. They described their experience of learning to work as a team and of resolving interpersonal conflict, and these social skills were perceived to be relevant and valuable for participants. Overall, they described developing positive group dynamics and a close connection with each other throughout the wilderness experience.

> It's just kind of sad because like if I ever went on like another tramp or like camp or whatever, it just feels different because it's not with the same people, it just doesn't feel the same without them. (Oliver, FG4)

One of the major lessons participants took from this experience was learning to work with a group of strangers. In most cases even those from the same school did not know each other before Project K. While challenging, this provided a lived experience of learning to interact and find common ground with new people.

> Seeing a group of people that, like, barely knew each other, like, became, you know, […] family, at the end, really. (Tim, FG5)

> We all had like some things that were similar and some things that were completely different. So we had to kind of figure out what each other liked, and what we could talk about. (Ava, FG8)

> When you were like, cooking dinner and stuff you'd like, just talk to people. And I guess people kind of just, found like the common ground. (Jess, FG7)

Several participants mentioned feeling more socially confident around new people since returning from the wilderness. For example, some commented that sharing their impressions in focus group discussions would have previously been intimidating or "terrifying" (Alexa, FG8), whereas now they felt more comfortable interacting with an unknown researcher.

Your social behaviour definitely changes, 'cause you interact with other people a lot more, so you take that, and you just, do what you did with them, 'cause you feel more confident. (Jock, FG2)

Um, it sounds weird but like, talking to adults is easier now. And I think before I was like, I don't wanna do that like, shopping or anything I won't, you know, have a conversation with the cashier or anything. But now I can do that when I got back. (Stephen, FG2)

Um yea, definitely more self-confidence. Like in front of, like groups and talking to different people. [...] Like, I usually wouldn't talk to like, most people in my class, but I talk to lots of them now. (Max, FG2)

They attributed this social confidence to the experience of getting to know their teammates on the Wilderness Adventure.

Don't be afraid of like talking to other people and stuff, 'cause I was at the start. [...] We were like forced to interact with different people so we, just did it. And then it didn't seem as bad. (Stephen, FG2)

Since we had to make friends with Waitak [Waitakere College students] really quick it's like, easier for me to make friends now. 'Cause usually I'm like awkward. (Jo, FG3)

Jock commented that being in a group with people from a different school was beneficial because

it teaches you ways you can actually interact with new people and become friends with them [...] You learn the skills to like, meet new people and get to know them better. (Jock, FG2)

He recognised that this was a useful skill to master and apply to other situations in his life, commenting,

> If you go to a different place of work and you are going to need to learn to work with new people. (Jock, FG2)

These comments indicate that participants have a greater perceived ability to interact with others, suggesting improved social self-efficacy. This is consistent with previous research on Project K, which found it to have the greatest positive effect on social self-efficacy, and this increase was maintained one year after completing the programme (Chapman et al., 2017; Deane et al., 2017). Other evaluations have found that Project K graduates have significantly improved ability to form and maintain relationships, improved sense of community, and significantly increased connectedness (Chapman et al., 2017; Leeson & Harré, 2013; Qiao & McNaught, 2007). Other PYD programmes have been found to promote social bonding and competence (Harris & Cheney, 2018). Considering adolescents spend increasing amounts of time with and are more influenced by their peer groups (Defoe et al., 2018; Schunk & Meece, 2006), the ability and confidence to interact with a diverse range of people is a valuable skill, and one which will serve them in different contexts (as Jock noted). As Deane and colleagues (2017) state, "given the ubiquity of social relationships to almost every aspect of human life, this domain should be considered crucial for youth development programmes" (p. 518). Based on their comments, these participants felt more socially competent and confident interacting with new people due to their experience connecting as a group in the wilderness.

Another interpersonal lesson participants gained from this experience was that people can surprise them and they should not judge others based on first impressions. This lesson related to participants' teammates exceeding their expectations.

Some of the people that went on the camp, I didn't like get along with them. But that's 'cause I didn't know them. Like once you actually get to know them – they're not that bad. (Jess, FG7)

It's kind of just taught me that like, don't really judge them, 'cause I didn't know them at first, and I thought they were like, weird or I thought they might be different. But then after I got to know them, like just by talking to them, just, like they were awesome. (Oliver, FG4)

You got to make a lot of new friends that you wouldn't think about talking, like, approaching before the project, so, yea. (Smith, FG7)

For some participants, this was a lesson that they wanted to apply to interactions outside of Project K.

I kind of learnt not to be too, like, as mean to people. Like, I used to be really mean to people, but not as mean anymore. [...] If there's someone that's like, annoyed me or something like I give them a second chance. (Jess, FG7)

Others looked at it from a different perspective, using the experience to inform how others might appraise them.

I just feel that people don't judge you as much as you think they do. (Alexa, FG8)

Participants recognised that sharing such an intense experience brought them closer, and forced them to resolve conflicts and learn to work together.

I dunno I guess just like, being with people like, you can't just exactly walk away from them. And you get annoyed so you kind of have to work through it. [...] Yea, and like, if you're just nice to people you just get along with them more. (Jess, FG7)

When reflecting on the Wilderness Adventure, there were several examples of quiet, ordinary moments of togetherness that participants highlighted as particularly

memorable and meaningful. These descriptions demonstrate the authentic connection and cooperation of these groups.

> Dinnertimes, 'cause we always laughed and everything at dinnertimes, just cooperated with everyone, had a good time. (Jack, FG1)

> Or like, when we were like, in our tent and then we're just laughing at random stuff. (Indy, FG3)

> Campfire. [...] Because it was just like cool, listening to everyone talk. [...] And we like, sung songs and stuff, [...] roasted marshmallows. (Oliver, FG4)

In the wilderness participants had no choice but to work together, and they found that this was a surprisingly positive experience, resulting in a close bond. This motivated them to interact in a more positive and forgiving way with others, as Jess described. Wilderness programmes provide goals that require teamwork and interdependence, so that it is in participants' collective interest to work as a team and problem-solve together (Jones et al., 2004; Loughmiller, 2007; Russell, 2001). This may explain why wilderness interventions are effective at building trust, empathy, and communication skills (Eggleston, 2000; Hattie et al., 1997; Somervell & Lambie, 2009). These participants also described how the wilderness experience affected the way that they interact with others outside of the wilderness. The Wilderness Adventure provided participants with lived experience of a group of strangers learning to interact in a positive way and forming an authentic connection. As previously discussed, this process followed different trajectories between the two groups, though they both had a positive lasting impression of their team dynamic.

There was a significant difference between the two Project K groups, because the Auckland group was made up of two different schools while the Tauranga group

comprised just students from Otumoetai College. Both groups thought that their experience was preferable. The Auckland group considered the mixed group to be a positive aspect of their experience.

> If it was like just our school going, I feel like it would be different because we wouldn't have people to really get to know. 'Cause like when we first showed up, we were like in two different groups, like Waitak and Northcote. And then after, after like a few couple days we still had some, like merging together. Then we just started, started from there, just started to make some good friends. (Jack, FG1)

They also found it more motivating being in a group with strangers, because those strangers had no pre-existing impressions or expectations for them.

> Even though they barely know you they'd still encourage you to keep going. Even though they don't know what's before Project K. (Jack, FG1)

> I think it was better when we had um, two separate schools because we actually got to know some people. And like, if they believed that we could do it, then we could do it. 'Cause, they don't know like, us and that, like Jack was saying like, they don't really know us. But they still believe that we can do it. (Nadia, FG1)

On the other hand, the Tauranga group thought it was beneficial all being from the same school. Despite having "ups and downs" (Tim, FG5; Rose, FG7) in their teamwork (as discussed), they described a strong connection by the end of the experience.

> I think I couldn't've asked for a better group to go with. (Alexa, FG8)

> Spending day and night with the same people, you made more of a stronger connection. (Jeff, FG5)

> We just worked, worked as a group. Encouraged and supported each other. (Thomas, FG6)

The Tauranga participants predominantly thought it would be difficult to reach the same level of connection if they had this experience with students from a different school.

> Meeting the group was, felt better. Like, at the start, knowing everyone, and then going away. Instead of just going away first, not knowing anyone. (Alexa, FG8)

> Like all of us pretty much knew, like, of each other. […] So it was like, easier to get along. But I mean if, if we had to like, go with strangers, it'd be harder 'cause you'd have to like, make that connection with them, you'd have to like go on from there. (Jess, FG7)

> I think it would have changed the cooperation. I think there would have been less cooperation if we didn't know the person. […] We wouldn't have talked as much, to help each other through. (George, FG8)

This Auckland Project K group being made up of two schools was an anomaly, but provided an interesting contrast between the two groups. Based on the participants' comments, there were perceived benefits to both ways of forming groups. When they all came from the same school, they had at least some connection to begin working together. On the other hand, participants from the mixed group found it motivating being with strangers, because the students from the other school had no preconceived ideas about them. Regardless of what school they went to, both groups were able to rehearse interpersonal skills while they got to know each other. This is an important youth resource which PYD programmes aim to develop (Lerner et al., 2013); and one of the goals of Project K is to introduce positive relationships and build community connectedness (Graeme Dingle Foundation, 2016). By providing participants with the opportunity to form close bonds with peers in their school or wider community that they may not otherwise talk to, participants gained important interpersonal skills. Wilderness interventions have been shown to increase connection (e.g. Draper, Lund, & Flisher,

2011; Russell, 2001; Somervell & Lambie, 2009) as a result of the small group setting and the skill building required (e.g. communication, conflict resolution), and the comments of these participants support this finding. Both groups formed close bonds, and talked about maintaining their close group dynamic via group chats.

Despite the prerequisite low self-efficacy these participants had to be selected for Project K, they gave thoughtful and insightful reflections during focus group discussions, demonstrating confidence and maturity. Although they experienced interpersonal challenges through the intense social experiment of the wilderness experience, overall these participants described gaining interpersonal skills, social confidence, and a strong and positive group connection. By leaving their usual environments and being forced together, they had no option but to resolve tensions and find ways to work together, due to their mutual goals and interdependence. They were responsible for each other, because they could only complete expeditions as a group, and it was therefore in their best interests to work together or face the consequences. They overcame a variety of interpersonal challenges, and this experience gave them greater confidence and empathy when talking to new people outside of the wilderness. These findings provide support that the Project K Wilderness Adventure supports positive youth development by providing opportunities to strengthen interpersonal skills, an essential youth resource.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore adolescent participants' experiences on the Project K Wilderness Adventure from their perspective. The findings highlight the challenges participants faced and the outcomes they experienced as a result of the wilderness experience. The major challenges participants highlighted, which were being outside their comfort zones, facing real consequences, and navigating interpersonal challenges, are consistent with existing literature (Deane & Harré, 2013; Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Walsh & Golins, 1976; Weston & Tinsley, 1999). Participants described experimenting with strategies to complete wilderness expeditions, taking responsibility as a result of the real consequences of the wilderness environment, and finding ways to resolve interpersonal conflicts in order to succeed.

By reflecting on these challenges, participants recognised meaningful outcomes they experienced as a result. Project K is explicitly designed to promote increases in mastery experiences, responsibility, and interpersonal skills, and participants' comments suggest these aims were accomplished (Graeme Dingle Foundation, 2016). Additionally, participants' comments provided evidence that the Wilderness Adventure promoted the Five Cs of PYD, with explicit mentions of increased competence, connection, confidence, and caring. They also highlighted a recurring theme of a more positive attitude and increased gratitude, which is not discussed in previous research and could be an interesting avenue for future research on wilderness interventions and PYD. There was also an interesting comparison between the two Project K groups where one included students from multiple schools, which participants found to be a positive and motivating factor. This too provides an opportunity for future investigation.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the sample size is limited to only two Project K groups. Thus, findings reflect the experiences of these participants and may not be representative of others' experiences on the Wilderness Adventure. This design and these groups were chosen for logistical reasons, but a larger study encompassing more Project K groups would offer a more indicative exploration of students' experiences. Another limitation relates to holding discussions in focus groups, which explore collective, not individual, phenomena (Robson, 2002). Participants were likely influenced by each other's presence and responses. On the other hand, participants appeared to be stimulated by others' responses, and focus groups allowed for interesting interaction and stimulated discussion. It is also possible that the researcher affected responses, in that participants contributed according to their levels of comfort. Participants may have felt compelled to give positive responses about Project K, even though it was made explicit that the researcher was external to the Graeme Dingle Foundation and their comments would remain anonymous. It should also be noted that the researcher was at the time volunteering as a Project K mentor with another school, and had a previous personal experience on a wilderness programme, so may therefore have held pre-existing beliefs about wilderness interventions and Project K.

A final limitation relates to the inherently subjective nature of thematic analysis. This project in particular had one researcher who conducted the focus group discussions, coded and analysed the transcriptions, and made the final decisions on which themes and excerpts were relevant and why. This required interpretation, and while each step was discussed with a supervisor, the process was predominantly the work of one person, with the associated biases and experiences that could have unwittingly influenced this interpretation. Also, considerable research on this topic was done prior to the analysis

process, so the researcher may have been influenced by confirmation bias and interpreted responses to confirm existing research.

Notwithstanding these limitations, findings from this study contribute to our understanding of adolescent participants' perspectives on a wilderness experience, providing interesting insights and offering future avenues of research. They also provide support for Project K as a valuable programme for New Zealand youth. This study informs PYD programmes, particularly involving wilderness interventions, by communicating the experiences and outcomes of adolescent participants. Participants reported feeling challenged by the wilderness experience and motivated to achieve more than they had believed possible. They discovered new strengths and values, and described more positive self-concepts and outlooks as a result. Participants found the Wilderness Adventure to be extremely challenging, motivating, and empowering.

It ended up being one of the best experiences of my life. (Blake, FG4)

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TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Impressions from the wild: A thematic analysis of adolescents' experience on the Project K Wilderness Adventure

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

Kia ora, my name is Madi Jones and I am working on completing a Masters degree in Psychology at Massey University. I grew up in the Bay of Plenty and now live in Tauranga. I am currently mentoring a Project K participant from Mount Maunganui College, which got me interested in researching Project K for my Masters thesis. I also did an Outward Bound course in 2014, which is a similar experience to the Wilderness Adventure.

Project Description and Procedure

This research will explore how the Wilderness Adventure is experienced from your perspective, to help make Project K a better and more effective experience in future.

I will be holding discussions in small groups, where we will talk about what this experience was like for you. If you agree to participate in this research, all that is required is an hour of your time to talk about your experience with a few of your Project K peers and myself. I will hold focus group discussions at school the week after you return from the wilderness. I will be recording the conversations for my research, but you will only ever be referred to by a fake name of your choice. After the discussion, nothing more will be asked of you. I will provide snacks and drink during the discussion and a small gift as a koha for your time and contribution to my research.

Even if you agree to participate, you can pull out at any time between now and November, when the final thesis will be submitted. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. You are welcome to get in touch whenever you like if you have questions or concerns.

Data Management

The recordings of our discussions will be kept securely on private computers, and only accessed by my supervisor and I. As these are group discussions, the transcriptions may not be edited. I will keep the recordings until they have been transcribed, and your consent forms securely for five years. After that time they will be deleted or disposed of.

Participant Rights

While I hope that you will agree to participate in my research, you do not have to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any questions;
- withdraw from the study any time before November;
- ask questions at any time;
- have your name and personal details remain confidential;
- receive a summary of the project.

You are welcome to contact myself or my supervisor at any time if you have any questions about this research:

Madi Jones: █████████████████

Dr Tatiana Tairi, Massey University School of Psychology: T.Tairi@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for your time and consideration, good luck on the Wilderness Adventure, and I look forward to meeting with you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/19. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

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102

Impressions from the wild: A thematic analysis of adolescents' experience on the Project K Wilderness Adventure

PARENT/CAREGIVER INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

Kia ora, my name is Madi Jones and I am working on completing a Masters degree in Psychology at Massey University. I grew up in the Bay of Plenty and now live in Tauranga. I am currently mentoring a Project K participant from Mount Maunganui College, which got me interested in researching Project K for my Masters thesis. I also did an Outward Bound course in 2014, which is a similar experience to the Wilderness Adventure. I am being supervised by Dr Tatiana Tairi from Massey University, and collaborating with Julie Moore from the Graeme Dingle Foundation.

Project Description and Procedure

This research project will explore how the Wilderness Adventure is experienced by participants. I will be holding small group discussions with two Project K groups, from Otumoetai College in Tauranga and Waitakere and Northcote Colleges in Auckland, to reflect on their experience. Their insights and opinions will help us to better understand their experience of the Wilderness Adventure and how to make it more effective and beneficial in the future.

If your son or daughter wishes to participate in the research, it will mean taking an hour of their time in the week following the Wilderness Adventure to discuss their experience with a few of their Project K peers and myself. I will be recording the conversations for my research, but no names or personal details will be included in the final thesis; your child will only ever be referred to by a pseudonym. If you wish you may receive a summary of research findings once it is complete.

As their parent or caregiver, you are able to give or decline consent for your child's participation in this project. They do not have to answer any questions they do not want to, nor do they have to participate if they do not wish. They can pull out of this research at any time up until November when the final thesis will be submitted. After the hour-long focus group discussion, nothing further will be asked of you or your child. You are welcome to get in touch if you have any further questions or concerns.

Data Management

The recordings and transcriptions of the focus group discussions will be kept securely on private computers, and only accessed by my supervisor and I. As these are group discussions, the transcripts may not be edited. Consistent with Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct, I will keep the recordings until they have been transcribed, and their consent forms securely for five years. After that time they will be deleted or disposed of.

Participant Rights

While I hope that your child will be included in my research, you are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If they decide to participate, they have the right to:
- decline to answer any questions;
- withdraw from the study any time until November;
- ask questions at any time;
- have their name and personal details remain confidential;
- receive a summary of the project.

You are welcome to contact myself or my supervisor at any time if you have any questions about this research:

Madi Jones:

Dr Tatiana Tairi, School of Psychology, Massey University: T.Tairi@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for your time and consideration.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/19. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

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Impressions from the wild: A thematic analysis of adolescents' experience on the Project K Wilderness Adventure

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM: PARENT/CAREGIVER

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that the opinions and experiences my child discusses in the focus group conversations will be included in the final thesis, under a pseudonym.

I understand that my child's personal information will be kept confidential.

I understand that my child's views and opinions will be respected by the researcher and by other participants.

I understand that in the unlikely case that my child becomes distressed as a result of these discussions, a support person of their choosing will be contacted.

I give permission for my child to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: …………………………………………………… **Date:** …………………………………

Full Name – printed ………………………………………………………………………………………

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Impressions from the wild: A thematic analysis of adolescents' experience on the Project K Wilderness Adventure

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of this study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree not to talk about anything discussed in the Focus Group with other people.
I agree to respect the views and opinions of other participants.
I understand that my name and personal information will be kept confidential.
I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: …………………………………………………… **Date:** …………………………………

Full name – printed …………………………………………………………………………………

Chosen pseudonym …………………………………………………………………………………

Please provide the name and contact number for a support person, who can be contacted if this discussion causes you any distress.

Name & number:…………………………………………………………………………………………

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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Introductions
Each focus group will start with introductions/whakawhanaungatanga.
We will then establish the "ground rules", which include the following:

- Participants are to respect one another and their opinions;
- What is discussed in focus groups does not leave the room;
- One person talks at once, and all must allow that person to finish;
- Participants can decline to answer any questions at any time;
- Every participant is equal and every opinion is valid, there are no wrong answers;
- If they have further questions or concerns following the focus group discussions, participants are welcome to contact the researcher or supervisor at any time.

Participants will each choose a pseudonym by which they will be referred, and be able to ask questions, raise concerns, or pause the discussion at any time. It will be explained that the discussions will be transcribed verbatim, and they cannot edit these transcripts given it is a group discussion.

Example discussion prompts for focus groups:
What was your experience of the Wilderness Adventure?
        What was positive/negative?
What are some words you would use to describe the WA / how you feel about the WA?
How do you feel about yourself, having completed the Wilderness Adventure?
What was a specific experience on the Wilderness Adventure that stood out to you?
What was it about that experience that stood out?
What were your expectations prior to going on the Wilderness?
How will you apply your experience on the Wilderness Adventure to your life now?
If your friend was going on the Wilderness next week, what advice would you give them?
How has the way you think about yourself changed from before the Wilderness Adventure?
What is something you learnt about yourself that you didn't know before?
How was life before the Wilderness, and what has changed?

Appendix F

Initial List of Potential Codes

Outside comfort zone
Self-confidence
Talking to new people
Away from regular life
Confidence around adults/stranger
Gratitude
Loss of usual comforts
Interacting with new people
Perseverance
Challenging
Achieving challenges
Applying self in school
Got easier
Satisfaction
More helpful
Confidence
Blood sweat and tears
Positive attitude
Achievement
More inclined to take on challenges
Trying new foods
Changes since WA
Social skills
"feel different"
Don't listen to negativity
Less shy
More socially confident
Mastered new activities
Paying attention in school
Positive behaviour
Thinking about consequences
Taking ownership of behaviour
Responsibility
Not arguing with siblings
Confidence in decision-making
Trusting self
Family relationships improved
Encouraging others
Treat people better
More capable than expected
More motivated
Saying yes to opportunities

Differing opinions
Less time on phone
Appreciating siblings
Conflict in group
Keeping relationships positive
Learnt tolerance
Mutually dependent
Appreciation for what you have
Taking responsibility (for self, for others)
Time management
Everyone is equal on WA
Planning for emergencies
Shift in attitude
Shift in values
Making own choices
More patient
Changes from WA have continued
More organised
Wanted to go home
Leadership
Thinking about others
Homesickness
New/novel experiences
Giving people a second chance
Different to regular life
Leadership strategies
Empathy
Didn't want to quit
People are better than expected
Gratitude – for experience, for family
Real consequences on WA
Preparation, research (with new challenges)
Appreciating home luxuries
Taking things for granted
Learnt to be kind
Realising others go without
Removed from usual circles
More helpful (had to help on WA)
Sharing the load
Team dynamic

Humour (motivator, team dynamic)
Feeling supported by team
Group humour
Turning a negative into a positive
Wouldn't want to go with different group
Group challenges
Tensions (between schools, between genders)
Instructors stepping in to resolve tensions
Arguments dissipated
Learning to get along
Good/real conversations
Tensions resolving over time
Motivation
End point as motivator
Making family proud
Humour/riddles/singing/music
Distractions from challenging tasks
Only way out is through (no choice, no way out)
Teamwork
Wanted all to finish
Forced to work together
Mutually responsible
More efficient when working together
Different strengths
Common goal
Disparate groups becoming one
Expectation
Trepidation
Excitement
Fear
Too long leaving family
Exceeded expectations (for self)
Abilities greater than expected
Abilities less than expected
Wilderness environment
Seclusion
Basic setting

Natural environment (positive)
Trying different strategies
Group motivation
Problem solving
Thinking ahead
Mealtimes special time
Cooperation
Breaking challenge into steps
Physical challenge
Injuries/illness
Pushed beyond limit
Make the most of it
Life skills
Stepping up
Distraction
Power through
Instructors part of the group
Instructors supportive
Strong mind
Self-doubt
Meeting new people
New friendships
Keeping it alive
Easier to approach new people
Different schools
Initial judgements (about people) wrong
Strangers more motivating than friends
Took time for group to become close
Self-belief
Fun
Courage
Practical skills
Insecurity before WA
Overcoming challenges
Emotional challenge
Tough conditions

Long time
Application to normal life
Fitness
Gained more than expected
Proud of self
Achievement
Facing fear
Avoiding fearful experience
Attitude improved (positive trajectory)
Thinking as a team towards end
Didn't want to leave
Repetition (activities)
Attitude affected behaviour
Abilities improved (mastery)
Attitude changed more than ability
Family letter emotional
Leaving home/family (negative)
Reflection
Overwhelming
Learn by doing
Stuck together
Have to resolve tension
Had to learn to get along
People surprise you
Doing everything together
Mutually reliant
Strong connection to e/o
Finishing as highlight (activities and whole camp)
Pressures/stresses of regular life (removed)
Adolescence challenges (school, interpersonal, social media, pressure)
Removal from friend drama
No phone a positive
Tough returning from WA (adjustment)

Positive outcomes
Better with two schools
Forced interaction
Stronger than expected
Risky behaviours before
Rethinking life choices
Unfulfilled potential
Basecamp as happy place
Campfire happy time (together)
Differing abilities (challenging)
Alone time, finding space
Self-motivation
Bad attitude made it more challenging
Exceeded expectations (WA)
Positive trajectory (getting used to it)
Challenges of teamwork
Engagement: ups and downs
Lack of personal space
Activities were achievable (felt supported)
Novel activities
Giving up on each other
Leadership frustrating
Teamwork breakdown (OC)
Beliefs about leadership (have to be loud/assertive/strong)
Conflict resolution
Bonding in tent
Respect
Group accountable for e/o
Food groups an equaliser
Finding common ground