

2008

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

Valerie E. Nicholls
University of Wollongong

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

University of Wollongong

Copyright Warning

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

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Recommended Citation

Nicholls, Valerie E, Busy doing nothing: researching the phenomenon of "quiet time" in a challenge-based wilderness therapy program, PhD thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, 2008.
<http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/132>

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

NOTE

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

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

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

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

**BUSY DOING NOTHING: RESEARCHING THE PHENOMENON
OF “QUIET TIME” IN A CHALLENGE-BASED WILDERNESS
THERAPY PROGRAM**

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

VALERIE E. NICHOLLS

L.C.S.T. (Kingdon-Ward, London)
BFA (Hons) (University of Tasmania)

Faculty of Education
2008

DECLARATION

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

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

Signed

Date

VALERIE E. NICHOLLS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

To my family, Pete, Nick and Emma I say a heartfelt thank you. United in their belief in my capacity and respectful of my passion, each in their own way has contributed to

keeping this thesis 'afloat'. Thanks Em' for your delight in my achievement, the sushi eraser, the pencils, and all the stationery gizmos that have made sitting at this desk more fun. Thanks Nick for your support across the miles and giving me the strength of the pounamou. Dear Pete, I so often take your support, patience, unfaltering love and belief in me utterly for granted. Thank you. Thank you. Time to balance solitude with noise and action - lets get out and have some raucous adventure!

In closing, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dear pal Kate. In life she inspired me to embark on this journey and in death she inspired me to bring it to completion. Thank you Kate, you are in every page.

ABSTRACT

Wilderness therapy programs are increasingly regarded as an effective alternative to more traditional forms of therapy for people identified as ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ (Gass, 1993). Despite substantial evidence to support the use of wilderness and adventure experiences to promote attitudinal and behavioural change, much remains unknown about the process of change and the experiences of participants.

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

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

Based on the findings a theoretical model of the phenomenon of *Quiet Time* was deduced and a number of propositions for practice and research advanced. The research findings identify *Quiet Time* as a ‘sense’ of solitude that, contrary to understandings of solitude as an objective and external condition, is defined by the four co-occurring subjective and internal conditions: a sense of being alone; a positive mind frame; a personal time perspective and focussed attention. Further analysis led to an

understanding that *Quiet Time* was typically brief, participant initiated, and inclusive of experiences of “being alone together.” Participants utilised *Quiet Time* as an opportunity to focus on nature, reflect, and to engage in authentic and heartfelt conversation. The outcomes of *Quiet Time* were found to impact positively on participants’ immediate experience and processing of the wilderness therapy program. The study also indicates that the incidence and use of *Quiet Time* may be facilitated or constrained by a number of conditions including environmental factors, leadership styles, levels of group development and the individual needs, strengths and limitations of the participant. Among a number of outcomes found to extend beyond the duration of the program was, for some, the taking up of a habit of *Quiet Time* as a deliberate self-help and life enhancing strategy. Unexpected findings included the potential for *Quiet Time* to arouse feelings that may overwhelm and confuse participants.

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title Page	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables	xv
CHAPTER 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
The Research Problem	2
Aims of the Study and the Research Question	3
Research Methodology	4
A Personal Note	5
Definition of Terms	7
Structure of the Thesis	8
CHAPTER 2 CHALLENGE BASED WILDERNESS THERAPY	9
Introduction	9
Defining Wilderness Therapy	9
What is Wilderness?	10
Is it Therapy?	11
What is Wilderness Therapy?	14
The Foundations of Wilderness Therapy	15
Experiential Education	15
Therapeutic Use of Wilderness	18
Therapeutic Use of Adventure	19
Wilderness Therapy: Current State of Play	22

Shifting Paradigms	24
Characterising the Wilderness Challenge Model	26
Small Group Format	27
Full Value Contract	27
Mastery of Demanding Challenges	28
Challenge by Choice	28
Journeying Through an Unfamiliar Environment	28
Metaphoric Use of Outdoor Activities	29
Developing an Environment That Supports Pro Social Values	30
The Study Site: Project Hahn	31
History	32
Participants and Referrals	32
Programs	33
Standard programs	33
Follow-up programs	34
Specialist programs	35
The Mountain Challenge	35
Summary	36
CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW	37
Introduction	37
Wilderness Therapy and Solitude	38
The Solitude of Wilderness	40
Doing	42
Being	44
A Restorative Environment	46
A Transformative Environment	49
A Transactional Relationship	52
A Typology of Solitude	53
Vision Quest	55
Survival Solo	56
Reflective Solo	57
Extended time frame	57

Brief time frame	61
Solitude and reflection	63
Self-imposed Wilderness Time Alone	65
Alone together	66
Being alone	67
Letting the mountains speak	69
Summary	71
Research From the Field of Psychology	72
Solitude: A State of Mind	72
Solitude: A Learned Skill	74
Solitude: A Developmental Need	76
The Place of Solitude in a Healthy Life	79
Conclusion	82
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY	84
Introduction	84
Research Design	84
Grounded Theory	86
The Study Site	88
The Research Participants	88
Particular Ethical Concerns	91
Rights of the Stakeholder	91
Right to Privacy	92
A Fair Return	95
General Ethical Concerns	95
Informed Consent	95
Protection From Harm	96
Data Gathering Methods	96
Group 1	97
Interviews	98
Field Notes	99
Project Hahn Documentation	99

Group 2	100
Pre-Trip Interviews	101
Post-Trip Interviews	101
The Use of Photography	102
Participant Observation	103
Written Journals	104
Group 3	105
Group 4	106
Data Analysis	106
Phase One: Open Coding and Initial Category Building	108
Phase Two: Axial Coding and Identification of the Core category	108
Phase Three: Selective Coding	109
Phase Four: Developing a Visual Coding Paradigm Model	110
Analysis of Transcripts and Text	110
Analysis of Written Journals	111
Analysis of Photographs	111
Analysis of Field Notes and Observations	112
Analysis of Project Hahn Documentation	112
Memoing	112
Trustworthiness	113
Theoretical Rigour	113
Methodological Rigour	114
Interpretative Rigour	114
Ethical Rigour	116
Rigorous Reflexivity	116
Summary	118
CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS	119
Overview	119
Phase One: Building the Foundations Through Open Coding	120
Open Coding Category One: Being Me	122
Before the Bridge	122
Feeling like A Drug Addict	123

Trying to Find M's self	124
Open Coding Category Two: Having an Adventure	125
Open Coding Category Three: Being in a Group	128
Group Context	128
Group Goals	128
Group Development	129
Leadership	129
Group as Teacher	130
Open Coding Category Four: Being in the Bush	131
Open Coding Category Five: Having <i>Quiet Time</i>	133
Phase Two: Definition of the Core Category	134
<i>Quiet Time: A Sense of Solitude</i>	134
A Sense of Being Alone	135
Positive Frame of Mind	136
A Personal Time Perspective	137
Focussed Attention	137
Summary	140
CHAPTER 6 RESEARCH FINDINGS (2)	141
Introduction	141
Phase Three: Selective Coding	142
Antecedent Conditions	142
Having Time: <i>No Rush</i>	143
Taking Time	144
Making Time	146
Summary	147
Strategies: The Ways in Which Participants Utilise <i>Quiet Time</i>	149
Responding: Letting Nature In	149
Savouring Experience	150
Processing Experience	151
Unexpected Consequences	153
Reflecting	156
Monitoring Progress	156

Roles and Responsibilities	157
Relating	159
Col's Story	162
Summary	163
Consequences: The Outcomes of <i>Quiet Time</i>	166
Developing 'Tools'	167
Mateship	170
Confusion	170
Summary	172
Context: The Specific Conditions in Which <i>Quiet Time</i> Takes Place	173
A Legacy of Addiction	174
Wanting to Change	176
Having an Adventure	178
Being in the Bush	179
Summary	181
Intervening Conditions	183
Individual Needs, Strengths and Limitations	184
Environmental Factors	186
Leadership Styles	189
Levels of Group Development	191
Summary	196
CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION	197
Introduction	197
A Grounded Theory for Understanding <i>Quiet Time</i>	197
Comparisons to the Literature	203
Solo, Solitude, and <i>Quiet Time</i>	204
<i>Quiet Time</i> : Close Focus	207
A Sense of Being Alone	208
Positive Frame of Mind	209
Focussed Attention	210
Personal Time Perspective	210
Utilising <i>Quiet Time</i>	211

Outcomes	213
Influences	215
Summary	216

CHAPTER 8 IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

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

REFERENCES

229

APPENDICES

256

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

LIST OF FIGURES

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

LIST OF TABLES

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