Boys Go Bush: Lived Solo Experiences at Tihoi Venture School

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Abstract

*Boys Go Bush* elucidates the lived experiences of adolescent males encountering a two-day, two-night solitary experience (solo) in the New Zealand bush. A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry framework (van Manen, 1997) was utilised to capture the essential qualities of the solo ‘as lived’, guided by the question: “*what is the meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School?*”

Pre-understandings to the Tihoi solo were acknowledged via an ethnographic socio-historical chapter before nine ‘lived’ solo experiences were scrutinised by means of pre- and post- interviews, underpinned by ‘44-hour solo timeline’ experience sampling records. Of relevance was what soloists did, felt, and thought about during solo and the meanings their lived-experiences came to represent. Solo interviews proved methodologically and pedagogically significant, with the solo timeline providing a low-tech experience sampling method (ESM). The analysis of written work arising from solo, including poetry, journal entries, letters to family and friends, and letters to ‘self’, provided further insight to individual experiences. Thematic statements and linguistic representations emerged from the nine solo experiences, speaking to the complex and dynamic qualities of each solo as a unique multi-dimensional experience.

The lived solo experiences represented dimensions of positive and negative solitude (Long, Seburn, Averill, & More, 2003). Moments of sadness, loneliness, depression, and anxiety accompanied lived experiences of stress, tension, and fear. Darkness and the sounds of the bush at night accentuated soloist’ anxieties related to stranger danger and aspects of the unknown or supernatural. Moments of lived freedom, contentment, pleasure, boredom, and enjoyment paradoxically emerged during daylight hours when soloists were more active in body, mind, or spirit.

Solo experiences were further scrutinised using a ‘solo lifeworld inquiry matrix’ oriented around the four lifeworld existentials of ‘lived time’, ‘lived space’, ‘lived relation’, and ‘lived other’ (van Manen, 1997). An interpretive synthesis revealed a complexity of essential qualities integral to the solo experience, with five plausible insights emerging of pedagogical
significance to adventure education. While soloists had interest and engagement with the solo environs, the emphasis upon programme reflection and the energy spent coping with apprehension and uncertainty inhibited the deepening of nature relationship. Nights were laced with anxiety and fear for most, whilst the days provided insightful reflective space and complexities associated with boredom that paradoxically led to personal insight. The adolescent solo was deemed to be an adventure that was inclusive of the classic perceptions of risk and uncertainty as well as educational opportunity, insight, embodied aesthetic experience, playful activity, and fun.

*Boys Go Bush* deepens understandings of the overnight solo for adolescents, highlighting a different experience from the spiritually-rewarding and deeply insightful moments promoted in the solitude literature for adults. Solo for adolescents was a challenging personal time that was endured more-so than enjoyed.
Publications arising from this thesis

Book chapter

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Dedication

To my three beautiful sons, Sam, Tom, and Will:

May your lives be full of pleasure and adventure!
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Chapter 1, Introduction: GOING BUSH

The tree had a firm grip on the earth and he longed to share its feeling of committal to this place. It had a comforting air of permanence, so different from the camp and the life he knew. Yes, it would be his fine-day tree, when he didn't want to swim or go walking. He would sit here and think and dream and perhaps some of the tree's vitality would come through to him; he would learn to share its feeling that this was his place too, he would learn how to beat that sudden strange urge to hide; and that would help him through the rough places.

Hilliard, Power of Joy (1965, p.138)

One of my favourite novels is Noel Hilliard’s Power of Joy (1965), a Huck Finn-type adventure set in rural New Zealand during the depression years. It is Paul’s story of growing up as the mostly-ignored only child of a dysfunctional marriage, living in poverty, and having to fend for himself much of the time. Paul has no close friends and should be an unhappy, lonely child. Yet his late childhood and adolescent years are filled with adventure as he discovers a love for nature and secret hideaway places where his creativity and imagination can run wild. He finds solace in climbing trees and mucking about in furtive natural places. So when Paul moves to a new community with his parents, he scopes out new trees to climb and places to venture well before attempting to connect with other kids his own age. The bush is his companion and Paul is mostly joyful in his solitude there; time alone for Paul is a time for recreation and self-definition. Czech philosopher Erazim Kohak (1984) speaks of solitude as a gift and our need to reclaim that gift if we are to become fully realised humans; a gift that Hilliard’s character Paul happily and innocently accepts during his growing-up years as a crutch to lean on in times of adversity. Power of Joy is a celebration of the gift of nature-based solitude for young people.

When speaking of solitude, Kohak (1984, p.39) refers to “the condition of being alone in the presence of a living, familiar world, being willing to listen to it, to see and to understand it..., sharing in its feel and meaning.” It is a definition that merges solitude and the human condition with the natural world and which reflects my own passion and bias as an educator. Essentially this study explores the three central facets of Paul’s experiences in Power of Joy: his
years of male adolescence\(^1\), his solitariness, and his interactions with and immersions in nature. *Boys Go Bush* documents a journey into the experiences of nine adolescent males as they have lived a forty-four hour ‘solo’ experience while in the New Zealand bush. Those experiences have been embedded within an innovative educational programme at Tihoi (*Tee-hoy*) Venture School, a five-month residential experience in a remote rural setting for year ten (Y10) students (aged fourteen to fifteen years) from St. Paul’s Collegiate School in Hamilton, New Zealand.

As an outdoor educator, I have long been fascinated by the programme at Tihoi Venture School and as a budding academic with pedagogical and ecological interests within outdoor education Tihoi presents as a site worthy of significant research attention. From the outside Tihoi appears to offer an exciting blend of curriculum studies and outdoor activities that present a significant level of challenge and relevance for young New Zealand adolescent males. Tihoi thus represents a curriculum-based programme for adolescent males that is unique within New Zealand; an educational experience complemented in no small way by its longer-term (five month) residential emphasis and its locale in and adjacent to the Pureora Forest Park and the mountains, lakes, caves and rivers of the Central Plateau on the North Island of New Zealand.

This phenomenological project documents and elucidates the lived experiences of nine soloists participating in the forty-four hour solo at Tihoi Venture School, New Zealand. My central question is *“what is the meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School?”*

Whilst ‘solo’ is a key programme element utilised in adventure and wilderness therapy programmes worldwide (*Bobilya, McAvoy, & Kalish, 2005; V. Nicholls, 2009; Russell, 2000*), there is sparse empirical research into the lived experiences of school children with nature-

\(^1\) I speak of male adolescence here, for the exploration of the lived solo experiences of Tihoi Venture School students is fundamentally about boys (or young men). Throughout this work all references to ‘adolescence’ or ‘adolescent’ are masculine.
based solitude. Yet solo experiences are incorporated into many educational programmes worldwide, and adventure leaders, outdoor education teachers, and wilderness therapists are staunch in their belief of the power of solitude (see Knapp & Smith, 2005, for example). There appear to be assumptions, perhaps built upon the experiences of adults with solitude, that suggest children and adolescents will not only be able to cope with solo but that they shall thrive in an educational sense.

There is scope to better understand the experiences of young people with structured solos and to inform a pedagogy of solitude within outdoor education. As Allison & Pomeroy (2000, p. 97) state, as outdoor educators “we pride ourselves on learner-centred practice and then engage in research that treats the learner as a ‘subject for study’ and ignores their accounts of their experiences.” This study has at its core the goal of illuminating the lived solitude experiences of students at Tihoi, thus contributing to the body of knowledge and understandings related to a pedagogy of solitude within outdoor education.

**Solitude**

The ‘solo’ is but one of a myriad of challenges presented to the Tihoi students during their five month experience; indeed the programme is packed with place-based curriculum, physical challenges, and adventurous endeavour seven days a week. *Wilderness solitude* is the term most widely utilised internationally to describe the deliberate experience of being on one’s own in a natural place. Yet the term *wilderness* has an uneasy fit in the Aotearoa/New Zealand educational context, with the more colloquial term ‘bush’ being more widely utilised.

Solo can be generalised as “a period of time away from other human beings in, as far as possible, a natural (wild) environment” (Mortlock, 1998, p. 1). Such experiences are typically facilitated by an outdoor educator, instructor, or guide who manages planning processes, oversees the solo experience from a distance, and assists solo participants to draw meaning from their solitude experience.
Many cultures and religions have through history utilised solitude for a variety of educational and life changing ends (Colegate, 2002; Knapp, 2005a) and today there are a range of solo types, objectives and durations. Solos may be static in nature or involve a journey of some kind (Mortlock, 1998). I am aware of solos that have been programmed for reflective and contemplative ends, others with a survival emphasis, some with an ecological orientation, and still others set to examine specific issues within a corporate context (Angell, 1994). I have personally experienced and professionally led a diversity of solo experiences, ranging from structured short duration solos of less than fifteen minutes through multiple-day ‘static’ solo experiences to lengthy solo expeditions.

Interestingly as a child I was often given a ‘time-out’ by my parents, away from peers or siblings, to moderate my behaviour, just as solitary confinement has historically inferred the worst form of punishment for prison inmates (Buchholz, 1999; Long, More, & Averill, 2006; Storr, 1988). Yet paradoxically, and with life experience, I have come to appreciate solitude not as a punishment but as a retreat and rejuvenation from the stresses of everyday life. My rural upbringing brought with it an affinity with nature and natural processes, as well as opportunities for solitary explorations within the patches of bush on our farm. Those formative experiences have undoubtedly contributed in my later life to a deep affinity for remote, natural places which are received on an intimate and sometimes spiritual plane. With my life experience thus far has emerged a deep personal affinity for solitude and nature, and as an educator I am especially interested in the processes that might lead others to similar realisations.

A wealth of philosophical and research-oriented writing on solitude has emerged from the fields of psychology, health/wellness, humanistic geography, counselling/therapy, and theology. Psychology especially views solitude and alone time as fundamental developmental and biological needs, and that solitude and attachment are complimentary rather than mutually exclusive notions (Buchholz & Catton, 1999; Larson, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003). Solitude is also by nature a social phenomenon that needs to be understood within the broader context of society (Long, et al., 2006), and there are likely to be cross-cultural differences in the solitude experience. Certainly in the western world many people appear to
view time alone and solitude with trepidation and fear, while connection and attachment to others appears much less scary. The word ‘solitude’ often carries with it the connotation of loneliness; as if going solo is a negative. Thus aloneness tends to infer the negative of attachment and brings with it a social questioning (Buchholz & Catton, 1999; R. Turner, 2002).

Most significant nature writers since 1900 (such as Abbey, Dillard, Leopold, Lopez, Muir, Olson, Snyder, and Thoreau) have written about their reflective ‘alone’ experiences in and with nature. There are similarly many narrative accounts of adventurers in the popular literature who have deliberately chosen to challenge themselves through solo expeditions with or against nature, and most of these works present wonderful insight. These all deal with the interaction of a single human with the natural world, and provide profound accounts of journeys with the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ self. Solo journeys have referenced the spiritual, the existential, the emotional, the philosophical, the interpersonal, and the intrapersonal, suggesting time alone in nature is indeed a powerful phenomenon. While such narrative accounts are fundamentally ‘solo’ experiences, albeit for male adults mostly, I am particularly interested in solos that are deliberately structured into outdoor education programmes for adolescent participants. An assumption is the outdoor leader, instructor, therapist, guide or facilitator should deliberately challenge participants to undertake a solo experience for some programmed educational end; that some meaningful pedagogical purpose exists for a solitude experience within educational programmes.

Whilst a wealth of experientially-derived literature surrounds the adult ‘solo’, few texts or articles specifically examine nature-based solos as an educational tool for youth. One exception is a publication produced for New Zealand school teachers (Kelk, 1994, p. 1) which describes soloing as “one of the greatest experiences that teachers can give students.” The resource goes on to suggest the experience of being alone with nature teaches self-reliance and addresses issues in self-concept, awareness and risk taking. Also listed are fourteen positive outcomes for solo participants, promoting structured nature-based solitude experiences as a simple yet powerful medium for the personal growth of adolescents. Unfortunately the resource does not address any potentially negative implications of the solo experience for students, nor does it reference research studies underpinning either the
content or purported outcomes of solos. Like much of the solo ‘outdoor education’ literature that exists, Kelk writes from the stance of the teacher / practitioner not as a researcher. There exists academic opportunity to better understand the meanings and significance of nature-based solitude experiences for adolescents, including the specific relevance of solos for youth in the New Zealand context.

That a practitioner like Kelk (1994) extols the virtues of solos is not unusual in outdoor education discourse. Outdoor educators and instructors who have facilitated solo experiences typically eulogise the virtues of solo. Knapp & Smith (2005) present a collection of twenty two such chapters within their edited book *Exploring the power of solo, silence, and solitude*, reflecting the intuitive, gut beliefs held internationally around the efficacy of reflective-type solos for self-reliance, self-confidence, self-regulation and independence. The inherent belief and assumptions within most of those chapters is that the act of placing students in a special solo spot shall naturally promote these ‘self’ virtues. Yet surprising little has been written about the inner work of quiet time or solitude (Nicholls, 2008) beyond the processes brought into play by the solo facilitators / leaders themselves. There is only a smattering of academic literature surrounding the lived experiences, significant elements, and deeper meanings of solos for participants of educationally oriented outdoor programmes.

Of significance is that most solo literature and solitude research attention has focussed upon the ‘adult’ experience. There is very little research relating to solitude for children and emerging adults, and there are significant gaps in the literature relating to formalised nature-based solitude experiences within educational programmes (and especially for school-aged outdoor education participants). Educationally-oriented research about solo has yet to successfully explicate the deeper meaning or significance of programmed / structured (nature-based) solos for children or adolescents. There is certainly no research evidence to date that has examined solos for children and young adults in the New Zealand outdoor education context.
My Research question

As Keith Ballard, one of my graduate study Professors, once shared “sometimes the most exciting thing about qualitative research is discovering the research question” (1999, personal communication). From the solo literature and my own prior understandings of both solo and Tihoi Venture School has evolved a desire to better understand the experiences of solo participants. As an educator I am interested in what might be occurring at Tihoi for soloists in a pedagogical sense; what those students may be experiencing physically, cognitively, emotionally and spiritually, and how those experiences might resonate with the wider Tihoi programme educationally. As the solo occurs late in the Tihoi experience, and is both promoted by Tihoi management (C. Furminger, 2002) and recognised by students as a significant programme element, the ‘reflective’ pedagogical emphasis of the solo appears significant.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) note that the questions researchers ask determine the insights that will be exposed through the research process. They promote an exploratory, descriptive focus that is ‘general’ rather that ‘specific’, and advocate an emergent design that shall ensure that what is important is not missed. My stance as a researcher recognises that humans all draw meaning from their experiences differently and from within their own unique cultural and historical contexts. I recognise that I shall not be finding or discovering new knowledge necessarily but rather constructing and reconstructing it. Thus the process of research shall ultimately become that of constructing and reconstructing the experiences of participants, in light of my own new experiences as a researcher, to better illuminate meaning and significance pedagogically (van Manen, 1997).

This study investigates “the meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School?” utilising a hermeneutic-phenomenological framework. Chapters Four and Five of this work specifically detail the philosophical, ontological, and methodological decisions that have been made to best capture the essence of the Tihoi solo experience from a pedagogical perspective. In short I have chosen a hermeneutic-phenomenological research approach (van Manen, 1997, 2000) to best explicate
the lived experiences of Tihoi students during their solos, with the intent of bringing to consciousness the essential qualities and preliminary meanings arising for students’.

**Motives for Researching Solitude**

In 1993, as part of a graduate course in outdoor environmental leadership, I selected a natural place and visited that place many times to record various thoughts and perspectives on nature. The writings I produced from those micro-solos were quite profound (if I might say so myself). One account, for example, was a nine page descriptor of a pine cone from the perspective of all of my senses. It acknowledged the authentic commitment given to a simple ecological question posed during a solo experience and highlights the potential for human–nature interaction during a solo period with appropriately posed questions.

Through the process of repeated solos at that ‘natural space’ I was able to acknowledge and refine my own ecosophy, or my personal philosophy, wisdom and relationship with nature. Integral to my (then) understandings of natural processes was the role of adventure. My journeys and experiences had taken me to many special places, in New Zealand and overseas, and the reflective process highlighted that I had rarely slowed down enough to come to know those places in any seriously emotive way. This was a turning point for my adventure spirit, and it had taken a process of solitude experiences to bring my emerging nature-adventure philosophy to light.

There have been many other influences upon my ecosophy in the resulting years, especially the sharing of adventures with individuals with a passion for natural places and understanding their motivations and commitment to preserving those places from destruction. I have also gained much from adventuring in areas of widespread devastation, especially through areas impacted by clear-cut forestry and oil and gas exploration in North America. I recall a month of sea kayaking in the Pacific North West, for example, experiencing three weeks or so of pristine coastline before paddling adjacent to a forestry clear-cut of massive proportions. As I sat alone one evening upon the stump of what was once a majestic western
red cedar the tears welled from within. It was like I had somehow lost a close friend. Similar feelings of despair I have seen evoked in my students while tramping the Catlins coastline in New Zealand. On one trip we had rambled for six days along the coast before discovering an area of serious native deforestation. The students had undertaken a number of micro-solos on that trip, each time spending 15 minutes or less on their own when I felt it appropriate. I am convinced that those solos had contributed to the degree of connection my students developed with their surroundings, and also to the vocalised despair and loss as felt to the deforestation.

Graduate study in Canada during the mid-1990’s provided opportunities to interact with and to work alongside Native Elders from a small Cree Indian community in Northern Alberta. There I was able to gain insight to the struggles of a culture dominated significantly by a corporate giant harvesting timber from traditional lands. The Elders felt it extremely important to gift many traditional activities to their youth as a crutch to utilise in the difficult times they foresaw. I observed and celebrated the achievements of many young people undertaking solo experiences as a form of connecting with the creator. These were no overnight experiences with plastic sheets and packets of raisins for sustenance but traditionally-modelled solo-fasts of three days and three nights that incorporated many traditional activities and rituals. They were the culmination of a significant period of traditional teachings by the Elders and formed but one part of an elaborate rite of passage process (Maxted, 1997).

I have since my early years as an educator been fascinated by the human – nature nexus and the potential for young New Zealanders to come to know themselves and others through outdoor experiences. I am an advocate for natural places and spaces, and much of my passion for outdoor education lies with connecting humans to their surroundings in significant and meaningful ways. The subtle use of solo experiences has infused my teachings since 1987, and I have discovered the power of short-duration solitary moments or quiet time (V. Nicholls, 2008) for focussing upon specific issues, for broadening perspectives, for enhancing awareness of natural processes, and for appreciating the aesthetic qualities of our natural world.
Many New Zealanders appear to be alienated from nature, and so assisting humans understand their home-place through interaction with it is important for humans as well as for the landscape (Abbott, Ruru, & Stephenson, 2010). My belief is that one’s sense-of-self and sense-of-place are closely related, and I am a proponent of using time alone in local places for enhancing such understandings of place. Thus I am particularly interested in the human-ecology aspect of solo experiences and the potential for fostering enhanced connections for humans to natural places.

I too am an advocate for low technology outdoor recreation and adventure, for self-reliance utilising basic outdoor living skills, and for celebrating living simply as a learned art. Solo and other forms of outdoor education have the potential for bringing together these self-reliance skills in a meaningful way (Cuthbertson, Socha, & Potter, 2004; MacEachren, 2004; Wattchow, 1993, 2001). Traditional technologies, if utilised authentically, facilitate direct and meaningful connection with the natural world (Cuthbertson, et al., 2004). I know from personal and professional experience that the living simply ethos of solo is enormously empowering.

I regard outdoor education as an opportunity to seek the naturalness that exists within ourselves (T. Smith, 2005b). Spending time in wild, remote places provides opportunity to unravel cultural baggage and to examine oneself as a fully fledged organism; identifying ourselves as someone not superior or dominant to nature or other humans but clearly a part of natural processes (Devall & Sessions, 1985; W. Fox, 1990; Metzner, 1995). This self awareness takes time and maturity, and the solo experience appears to provide some insight to knowing oneself ‘as nature’ (Greenway, 1995). Yet much of the existing solo literature is centred upon the connections possible with ‘self’ as-human and only sporadically is there reference to the ‘self’ in relation to nature or the larger Self (Naess, 2008) of place and universe.

Indeed the term ‘wilderness solo’ infers a visit to a place separate from ourselves; wilderness as a place we visit temporarily before returning home (Harper, 1995; Light, 1995; Miles, 1990). Horwood (1991) challenges humans to understand themselves as a part of nature and not separate from it. He claims the antidote to our alienation from others and natural
places lies in knowing oneself and one’s place in the world. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, *Turangawaewae* in Māoridom relates to the place where one stands tall, where one has an identity, and a place which one can call home (Karetu, 1990). Central to *Turangawaewae* is a spiritual, emotional, and physical connection to *whenua* or land (Everson, 1993; Park, 1995; Patterson, 2000; A. Smith, 2010). The fostering of a compassionate sense of place and belonging for youth in Aotearoa New Zealand is important to me, and this in itself is a worthy motivator for this project.

**Outdoor Adventure Education in Aotearoa New Zealand**

The use of the term Aotearoa New Zealand is deliberate and acknowledges Māori as the tangata whenua of New Zealand or people of the land (Patterson, 2000). Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand, translated loosely as ‘land of the long white cloud’ in reference to the offshore vista the first Māori were provided of the islands they arrived to following their ocean journeys from Hawaiiki. There is a rich history of human contact and immersion deeply into (and with) landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand; relationships that have emerged from an adventurous and pioneering history. Not surprisingly adventure and outdoor pursuits continue to feature prominently in outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Haddock, 2007; Kane & Tucker, 2007; Lynch, 2006; Maxted, 1999).

A confusion of terms surrounds the emergence of formalised outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Boyes, 2000; A. Hill, 2010), despite more than a century of curriculum enrichment utilising the out-of-doors (Lynch, 2006). School camps have been an accepted part of the annual school calendar of most New Zealand secondary schools to the present day, though as an ad-hoc addition rather than a central curricular focus and not without economic and political pressures (A. Hill, 2010). Despite the emergence of the Ministry of Education’s ‘Education Outside The Classroom’ (EOTC) initiative in 1980 as an attempt to broaden the received view of outdoor education, Lynch (2006) notes that outdoor education has continued to be understood as outdoor adventure pursuits designed to foster social and personal development.
Despite the inclusion of outdoor education as a key learning area in the Ministry of Education’s (1999) Health & Physical Education Curriculum document, neoliberal forces have dominated outdoor education in the past decade to privilege outdoor adventure pursuits and skills instruction, and associated risk management understandings, within outdoor education. The evolution of the National Certificate for Educational Achievement in the early 2000’s saw the adoption of assessment processes as developed by the Sport, Fitness, Recreation, and Tourism industry training organisations, which were fundamentally outdoor pursuit oriented. Thus a neoliberal legitimation of outdoor education as outdoor adventure pursuits for the purposes of personal and social development has emerged (Haddock, 2007; A. Hill, 2010), as the curriculum has effectively aligned with vocational training.

These recent developments correspond with a decade or more of outdoor education discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand focussed upon risk and risk management and legislative changes in terms of health and safety. These developments have all presented teachers of outdoor education in schools and outdoor centres with complex administrative demands. As Zink & Boyes (2006) noted, the costs of delivering quality outdoor education has presented barriers for many schools (in terms of staff time - for training, administration, and assessment, managing large class sizes while managing participant safety, and the accountability upon schools in terms of safety management). Despite the mandate for outdoor education clearly within the curriculum, many schools have struggled to deliver (Haddock, 2007; R Zink & Boyes, 2006). Residential outdoor education centres once shared by a community of schools have closed due to economic constraints, and outdoor centres have been faced with significant industry compliance demands that have increased costs for participating schools. As Hill (2010) acknowledges, the barriers to the delivery of quality outdoor education programmes and experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand remains complex.

Solo at Tihoi Venture School: Some emerging questions

One New Zealand school which has steadfastly held to their philosophy and belief in outdoor education for more than three decades is St. Paul’s Collegiate School based in
Hamilton. All year ten students (age range 14-15 years) from St. Paul’s are required to attend two consecutive school terms at Tihoi Venture School. Thus almost five months of their second year of secondary (high) schooling is spent at a remote, residential campus where mainstream curriculum is augmented with challenging physical activities including outdoor pursuits. One of the outdoor experience weekends late in the Tihoi experience involves a solo in the local bush for two nights and two days.

From my primary research question “what is the meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School?” emerges a number of associated considerations, based upon solo appearing to contrast with the other programme components at Tihoi Venture School in at least three significant ways giving rise to other secondary questions.

Firstly, solo is a static experience whereby students are asked to remain in one location and on their own for the two days and two nights. It contrasts with the pace of the balance of the programme, especially in terms of the level of physical activity demanded, and this promotes opportunity for participants to connect with and to place a deeper focus upon other aspects of themselves. It has been suggested that solo provides students at Tihoi significant opportunity for reflection (C. Furminger, 2002), and so this assumes students have the skills to adequately reflect and also the propensity to remain in a reflective state rather than keeping busy on other tasks. Interestingly Bevington (2005, p. 75) also states that “Solo is good. It provides guaranteed reflection”. There is inference that reflection is not only automatic but that soloists might obtain something of a universally positive solo experience; both of which demand critique (Nicolls, 2008).

Secondly, while all of the other outdoor components of the Tihoi programme are led by professional leaders who provide a presence always, the solo gives students the impression that they are on their own and thus forced to make decisions for themselves. There is a significant ‘self-reliance’ aspect to the Tihoi solo experience; students have to make choices leading up to and throughout solo that influence their experience.
Finally, the solo locations allocated to students are some distance from other soloists and typically in ‘bush’ settings. Thus solo contrasts with other Tihoi activities in that there is no interaction with, or immediate presence of, other humans. The students are on their own for two days and two nights, away from the social fabric that has been carefully constructed around them during the balance of their time at Tihoi. Nature thus becomes home for the students, whether they like that or not, and they become surrounded and immersed in the sights, sounds, smells and feel of the bush.

Solo at Tihoi is also not a voluntary activity. Students have little or no opportunity to say ‘no, I am not doing a solo’. While the ethos of challenge by choice employed at Tihoi is not dissimilar to many other outdoor and adventure education programmes worldwide, it is nevertheless open to critique (M. Brown, 2008a; Carlson & Evans, 2001; Lissen, 2000). Students in reality have relatively little choice but to accept the challenge of solo. There exists a high degree of compulsion, despite some of the rhetoric around student choice.

There is similarly assumed some pedagogical good for solo being included in the Tihoi curriculum by virtue of its compulsory nature. The inference is that ‘solo will be challenging but will be good for you’, and that participation will bring tangible rewards (J. Furminger & Furminger, 2001). Thus solo, like other Tihoi experiences and especially the out-of-classroom opportunities, tends to serve the interests of the school.

Solo is but one of many experiences that build upon the specific ideas of masculinity promulgated at Tihoi. There is an ‘arrive to Tihoi as a boy and leave as a man’ metaphor that is utilised by St. Paul’s Collegiate School and this appears somewhat problematic. Despite the phrase being downplayed by former Tihoi Director John Furminger (interview 1), it remains in use as a pedagogical and marketing strategy.

**Phenomenology**

As I have briefly described, at the centre of this work is the direct investigation and description of solos as experienced at Tihoi using phenomenological reflection and writing. I
have chosen to explicate the meanings, structures and essences of the lived experience (van Manen, 1997) of nine Tihoi student soloists. My intent is to examine the perceptions, feelings, judgements, memories, meanings and stories arising from solo, with my interpretation of these lived experiences occurring through a deliberate description of experience into textual form. Thus I shall be utilising a ‘phenomenology of practice’ process that has also been referred to as an experiential, applied, or a lifeworld phenomenology (van Manen, 2000). My aim through such a process is to bring to being the lived solo experiences at Tihoi, and to take the reader on a journey through which we may ‘see’ aspects of the solo that enrich our understanding of it.

Inquiry Overview

In terms of mapping the journey of inquiry, the strategy for data collection utilised multiple methods in three strategic impulses. The first was a contextual ‘ethnographic’ visit to Tihoi Venture School and involved the gathering of institutional information related to solos, interviews with programme staff and management, and observation of the solo process in action. The second inquiry impulse involved further pre- and post- observations of a second solo experience with another intake of Tihoi students some six months following the initial visit and included a personal solo experience by the researcher during the period students were in the field. The third impulse involved tracking the experiences of nine solo participants. This involved semi-structured pre- and post- interviews utilising a solo timeline tool as an experience sampling strategy to aid post-experience recall. Also aiding experiential understandings of each solo were the personal journals, workbooks, letters to self and others’, and other written material including sketches and poetry made available by each soloist.

Chapter 2, Background: TIHOI SOLITUDES presents data obtained from the first and second inquiry impulses. Using a socio-ecological and socio-historical emphasis, the wider Tihoi experience, and thus the Tihoi solo experience, is presented as an ethnographic account (Spradley, 1979). As such, the chapter provides an important contextual ethnographic foundation to the deeper examination of the phenomenon that is solo. Remaining true to the
philosophy and intent of hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1997), my intentions via Tihoi Solitudes are to capture the interest of the reader, to orient to the phenomenon of the Tihoi solo, and to acknowledge the uniqueness of the Tihoi programme and its geographical relatedness.

Chapter 3, Literature: THE LANDSCAPES OF SOLITUDE presents a snapshot of the historical and contemporary uses of solitude. Other literature relevant to the adolescent (male) solitude experience further frames the inquiry, as well as insight into the use of solitude within the outdoor adventure education context.

A detailed discussion of the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology is presented in Chapter 4, Methodology: WISDOM OF THE PHILOSOPHERS. This is followed by a detailed description of the methods employed in Chapter 5: Methods: MAP AND COMPASS. Both chapters are necessary to frame the chosen mode of inquiry, particularly in terms of being able to represent the voices of Tihoi students in an authentic manner.

Chapter 6, Results Part A: ALONE IN THE BUSH, introduces the nine students as participants in this study. Presented as nine separate cases, each student is introduced before a detailed descriptor of each solo experience is made. A set of ‘theme statements’ and ‘linguistic transformations’ (van Manen, 1997) are then presented in table form for each solo participant, before those experiences are synthesised utilising the four lifeworld existentials of lived time, lived space, lived body and lived other (van Manen, 2000).

Student experiences are further examined in Chapter 7, Results Part B: INTERPRETIVE SYNTHESIS, with a series of ‘plausible Insights’ presented that shape the key strands of the following discussion. Chapter 8, Discussion: SOLITUDE SPEAKS TO US, elucidates the plausible insights presented in chapter seven in relation to the academic literature and situates the findings pedagogically within outdoor, adventure education. Chapter 9, Conclusion: SOLITUDES WITHIN ultimately draws the inquiry pedagogical and methodological threads together.
Chapter 2, Pre-Understandings: TIHOI SOLITUDES

The experience of life in the outdoors for six months, coupled with modern teaching methods and traditional values such as honesty, respect, care, and understanding, is what sets the Tihoi Venture School apart.

St. Paul’s Collegiate School brochure (2008)

The activities would be a medium for something, the achievement of difficult challenging things, and the conquering of fear. I think a lot comes out of being scared, being afraid. Certainly we were scared when we set up Tihoi and the first boys arrived!

Mike Shaw, Inaugural Tihoi Director (Personal communication, November 15, 2002)

A written invitation to investigate the solo experiences of secondary school students at Tihoi Venture School arrived in my work mailbox in mid 2001. It was a hand written letter from the then Co-Director of Tihoi, John Furminger, and accompanying the letter was a photocopy of a student journal entry that had been written on solo. The eloquent prose and poetry integral to the journal was quite special, speaking volumes to the experience of solo for that young student as well as his capacity to not only make meaning from his experience but also to transform that meaning to written form. At that time I was seriously considering doctoral study, with the intent of better understanding the experiences of participants (and facilitators) of nature-based solos. A year or so earlier I had co-led a safety and educational audit of the solo programme at Cobham Outward Bound School for Outward Bound New Zealand and so I was fully intending to base my research there. However, the Tihoi invitation changed that, and ultimately led me on a significant journey into the lifeworld of students and staff at Tihoi and ever-deeper into the lived experiences of solo for Tihoi students.
This chapter provides an important ethnographic backdrop to the experiences of solitude at Tihoi Venture School\textsuperscript{2}. Those experiences are embedded into the wider programme at Tihoi, which in turn is a significant educational component of the St. Paul’s Collegiate School experience itself, and so solo cannot easily be separated from the wider school context. Ethnographic information has been gleaned from a variety of sources. These include:

1. A series of semi-structured interviews with various St. Paul’s Collegiate School management and staff (including the Headmaster, Chaplain, Director of Student Welfare, the inaugural Director of Tihoi, the year-ten Dean, and the Chair of the Old Collegians’ Association). Each of these interviews were recorded and transcribed;

2. Content analysis of various St. Paul’s Collegiate School resources and documents (including the school web pages, Old Collegian Association *Network* magazines, school curriculum documents, and annual reports);

3. A six day preliminary site visit to the Tihoi campus provided rich insights as both a participant observer into the preparation and leadership aspects of solos (involving observations of the solo process from briefing through review; attendance at Tihoi staff meetings, and preliminary insights into the experiences of students) and as research interviewer (involving semi-structured interviews with the co-Directors of Tihoi, a focus group interview with Tihoi teachers and instructors, and informal conversations with staff involved with supporting student solos). Interviews and focus group meetings were recorded and transcribed;

4. A second site visit to Tihoi six months later provided further opportunity to observe the solo process in action and for myself, as researcher, to undertake my own solo experience in parallel with the students. While my solo experience provided insights

\textsuperscript{2} Ethical approval was granted by the University of Otago Research Ethics Committee in April 2002. According to the conditions of that ethical approval all references to students were to be treated so as to ensure anonymity. Chapter two, *Tihoi Solitudes*, was crafted with the consent of management staff of St. Paul’s Collegiate School and the Tihoi co-Directors John and Christine Furminger to have their names explicit in any published findings.
to the possible experiences of the students, no specific ‘data’ from that personal solo was explicitly utilised in the study. Rather the notes made during my personal solo assisted with better understanding the solo process generally and supported the development of the solo lifeworld inquiry matrix (see Appendix 2). Thus my personal solo assisted with the framing of questions for students and staff at interview.

A culture of openness, led by co-Directors John and Christine Furminger, meant I was also able to access internal Tihoi documents that included safety procedures and policy manuals, solo teaching resources, and a pile of photocopied solo reflections as written by former students while on solo. The preliminary visits provided an incredibly rich and somewhat varied range of perspectives on the solo process at Tihoi, including the vicarious experiences of students as solo participants, and an insight into how solo might articulate with other outdoor pursuit and curriculum elements. Subsequent to the first site visit I was able to access various additional resources that have shed light on the experiences of students at Tihoi. These have included two television documentaries, a radio documentary, a published book on St. Paul’s Collegiate School, electronic ‘blogs’ to various social networking sites by current and former students, and email correspondence with former Tihoi staff.

The chapter heading ‘Pre-Understandings: Tihoi Solitudes’ reflects the phenomenological tradition of acknowledging that which is known surrounding the phenomenon under inquiry (van Manen, 1997). To enable a detailed examination of the experiences of solitude has required the careful expose of the context in which the solo experiences are enmeshed. Ethnographic sources of information are therefore integrated throughout this contextual chapter, reflecting the first phase of research. There are occasional quotes from tape-recorded discussions with school management and Tihoi staff, and these have been referenced as interviews to enable comparison with published material. Other material has been derived from exhaustive field notes arising from my participant observation of the solo process at Tihoi as well as my personal experiences with solitude whilst on location. Such a presentation of ethnographic data without a detailed methodological prognosis may infer a break from academic convention yet it has been a deliberate strategy for engaging the reader to the phenomenon that is the solo experience.
What follows is an overview of the historical development of outdoor education at St Paul’s Collegiate School leading to the establishment of Tihoi Venture School, before detailing the philosophical emphasis of Tihoi and giving overview to the wider Tihoi experience. Finally, and most importantly, preliminary insights specific to solos at Tihoi are presented and reflected upon.

The Tihoi Venture School Solo Experience

Tihoi is a satellite school like no other in New Zealand; a half-year course of studies for young teenage boys where adventure, challenge, and communal living is used to complement the year ten curriculum and foster social and personal responsibility. Tihoi is “the jewel in the crown” of St. Paul’s Collegiate School, according to the school Headmaster Mr. Greg Fenton (interview 1: November 15th, 2002). The venture school at Tihoi has been in existence since 1979 and from its modest roots as a former native timber milling village it has emerged to become home to one of the more innovative and effective outdoor educational programmes in New Zealand (C. Furminger, 2002).

All year ten boys from St. Paul’s Collegiate School are required to spend two concurrent terms at Tihoi (the equivalent of four and a half months of schooling), where they are engaged in the standard year ten curriculum by day and live communally in basic houses by night. What differentiates the ‘Tihoi’ experience from the typical ‘away from home’ boarding experience is the management of the houses by the boys themselves, including cooking, cleaning, and heating. There is also a special ‘remote’ feeling to the Tihoi campus with the immediacy of the Pureora State Forest (G. Fenton, 2007). Students are exposed to challenging, typically adventurous activities throughout their two terms at Tihoi, and it is these pursuits that capture the imagination of most students. Stories of kayaking, rock climbing, sailing, caving, bush-craft and snow-craft endeavours are passed from one generation of St. Paul’s students to the next.

At a mid point in the typical Tihoi experience the boys are challenged with a six hour solitude experience, where they are placed in a bush location and encouraged to reflect upon
their time at the school. It is a contrast to most Tihoi endeavours, for the student is on his own and requested to remain stationary and silent. That solo time is a precursor to a longer solo held towards the end of the Tihoi experience whereby all students are challenged to spend two nights and two days on their own. For many students, according to Tihoi co-Director Christine Furminger, “the ‘forty-four hour’ is the experience they are most apprehensive about prior to getting to Tihoi” (interview 1, November 15th, 2002).

St Paul’s Collegiate School

St Paul’s opened in 1959 with a roll of 60 boys, realising a ‘venture in faith’ (Cordery, 1979) for the Waikato Anglican Boys College Trust. St. Paul’s grew from the desire of interested local businessmen and Anglican clergy to establish an Anglican Boys’ boarding school in the Waikato, and in 1957 the Waikato Anglican Boys College Trust was established. Taking advantage of prosperous economic times the Trust fundraised widely to establish a School campus on the present school site in Hamilton East (Hamilton, 2009).

St Paul’s today is a thriving and successful independent school with a reputation for high standards in academic and sporting achievement. The St. Paul’s Board of Trustees remains governed by the original Deed of the Waikato Anglican Boys College Trust, with some amendments, and there remains an Anglican flavour to the school. Today St. Paul’s caters for both day students and borders, and since 1985 the school has opened its doors to year 12 and 13 girls (Hamilton, 2009). This required an amendment to the original Trust Deed, and ultimately a change to an Act of Parliament followed in 1987 (Cordery, 1979). The school roll in 2006 was 629 students (I. Hill, 2006) and has remained relatively stable during the decade 1998 – 2008 (Hamilton, 2009).

Upon arrival at the school one cannot but be impressed with the immaculate and expansive grounds, the excellent sporting facilities, the mature European trees bordering the coloured concrete and sealed driveway, and the impressive modern Chapel. The classrooms and administrative areas are of a similar design and appearance and there appears, without
doubt, an ‘English’ influence to the school. On first impression St. Paul’s has an exclusive feel. There is clearly a WASP’ian (white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and male) look to the student collective, with a sprinkling of students appearing of Māori, Pacific Island and especially Asian origin.

The yearly school fees at St. Paul’s are significant – between $21,000 and $25,000 for students in year ten who will attend Tihoi (G Fenton, 2008a). One can thus assume that the students must all come from fairly privileged socio-economic backgrounds. Yet, as Tihoi co-Director John Furminger (interview 1, November 16, 2002) acknowledges:

*There is an assumption there are fairly privileged kids coming from the upper quartile of the socio-economic group but there are also some families that really believe in St Paul’s and Tihoi, with mothers and grandparents working very hard to get their kids here.*

Whilst most students are from urban Hamilton, the North Island regional farming community has historically provided a good number of students and an increasing number are boarders from Auckland. There has also been a regular stream of international students in the past decade, and the inference is that those international students are particularly wealthy. However, discussions with teaching staff at Tihoi (focus group, November 17, 2002) acknowledge that “the internationals are often the chosen ones from their family, sent to NZ as the chosen ones to get a decent education while their siblings stay at home”.

Whilst one reality is St. Paul’s Collegiate School is an independent school that charges significant annual school fees, another is that the Tihoi Directors, teachers, instructors, and tutors have little background information on their client students. As John Furminger (interview 1) summarises, it is irrelevant from a staff member’s perspective whether the boys at St. Paul’s come from wealthy homes or not.

Perusing the various images of ‘busy’ students in copies of the school magazine *Network* (as published by the school’s Old Collegians Association), and viewing the state of the art ‘extra-curricular’ facilities and equipment on campus, it is obvious there are boundless opportunities for a broader education at St. Paul’s. Sports in particular but also music, drama, and arts appear well supported and popular. As the Headmaster Greg Fenton shares (interview
1), there is an expectation that all students will take advantage of these broader educational opportunities:

*St Paul's sets high academic standards for its students and it expects them to be met. Life at St Paul's is all-encompassing, for boarders and day students alike. All students are immersed in activities and programmes which develop their spiritual, physical and emotional well-being as well as their intellectual and academic competencies.*

St. Paul’s Collegiate School’s *Network* magazine has consistently reported excellent academic achievements throughout the past decade. This achievement has not gone without notice by the Ministry of Education’s ‘Education Review Office’ who recognises St. Paul’s academic achievements as quite exceptional in national terms:

*The board, headmaster and staff share high expectations for achievement and provide impetus and commitment for success through an extensive range of learning opportunities. Students perform significantly above decile 10 schools in all levels of NCEA qualifications (I. Hill, 2006).*

Through this academic achievement comes a broader education for life and a commitment for the graduates of the school to contribute to society, as the St. Paul’s 2008 statement of intent (G Fenton, 2008b) reads:

*We are dedicated to encouraging our students as individuals to strive to reach their potential, prepare for the challenges of life, and play a constructive part in the world at large.*

Whilst sport, culture and the arts provide the St. Paul’s student with a broad education today, it is sport that has played a particularly prominent role in the school’s wider curriculum since its first beginnings, as evidenced from the headmasters address at prize-giving 1959:

*From a Roll of 58 boys three cricket teams, or two football teams and one hockey team competed every Saturday, with teams playing in competitions three days after the school opened. Except for the awkward time between cricket and football almost every boy represented his school every Saturday (Cordery, 1979, p. 48).*

Today all staff members at St Paul’s are expected to coach or coordinate sports and / or other recreational and creative pursuits. The sports pavilions are decorated with photographs
and memorabilia that speak with pride of many national titles in rugby, hockey, tennis, cricket, rowing and soccer. More recently *Network* magazine has reported national and international achievements in other emerging activities including mountain biking, triathlon, chess, debating, snowboarding, and moto-cross. St. Paul’s certainly has an enviable record of sporting achievement.

Evan McCulloch, of the St. Paul’s Collegiate School Old Collegians’ Association, speaks with enormous pride of the schools sporting successes. Yet it is the school family feeling at St Paul’s that he finds most fascinating and “something he cannot quite put his finger on” (interview 1, November 15, 2002). McCulloch is delighted with the high numbers of old boys retaining connections with the school through the collegial network, the long-term friendships that evolve, and the regular old boys’ gatherings that take place around the country. It is, as McCulloch suspects, a somewhat special connection between day boys and boarders that has its roots in some common experiences that include living for five months together at Tihoi and being a part of a proud sporting tradition.

There is obviously some magic at St. Paul’s Collegiate School that has parents paying more than $20,000 per annum for their sons (or year 12 / 13 daughters) to attend when the reality is a ‘public’ school likely exists down the road for most. Tihoi Director John Furminger (interview 1) speaks of academic success being:

*...a huge pull criteria, where parents want their son to pass School C and University Entrance and Bursary, and so they look closely at those pass rate figures from St. Paul’s.*

The St. Paul’s Collegiate School experience and the Tihoi experience have together proven capable of straightening out wayward kids according to Tim Smithells, St. Paul’s Collegiate School Director of Staff and Student Welfare (interview 1: November 14, 2002). Tihoi co-Directors Christine Furminger (interview 1) and John Furminger (interview 1) independently speak of boys being regularly sent to St. Paul’s by parents who are determined to move their child from their existing peer groupings. Tihoi has a significant enrolment-pull factor, which John Furminger (interview 1) believes “challenges and typically exceeds academic success as the motivator for enrolments at St. Paul’s.” It is a perspective echoed by the
Headmaster and all of the staff I spoke to at St. Paul’s, including Tim Smithells, Director of Staff and Student Welfare (interview 1):

*People come here (St. Paul’s) because we have Tihoi and they want their boys to experience an extraordinary live-in and learn-work-share experience. It’s experiential learning, I think, and it is best for these kinds of boys.*

Tihoi is indeed regarded as one of the jewels in the crown of a proud, highly successful school, featuring prominently on the St. Paul’s web pages and within the school prospectus. The emphasis is clearly about developing the broader young male (G Fenton, 2008c):

*Based in Hamilton, New Zealand and having an adventure school support campus at Tihoi in the Taupo District, which boys attend at Year 10, St Paul’s is well placed to serve its students both in their academic endeavours and their physical development. The unique environment and programme of the Tihoi campus provides students with a “rite of passage” in which they are safely able to physically and spiritually grow from boys into young men.*

On the Tihoi page of the St. Paul’s website there are insights into what contributions Tihoi might specifically make to the broader education of students, and how boys might spiritually and physically grow towards manhood:

*In this unique and challenging environment, through the medium of community living, a quality academic programme and wide ranging outdoor pursuits we aim to provide the best possible opportunities to promote the personal and social development of our students (Tihoi-Venture-School, 2008).*

**Early Outdoor Education at St Paul’s Collegiate School**

There is little mention of outdoor education in St. Paul’s formative historical material, though former teacher Vic Matthews (1979) writes of groups of 5th and 6th form students providing community service activities in the National Parks in the mid 1960’s and early 1970’s. Projects of consequence included the construction of walking tracks around Lake Waikeremoana, and along the Whakatane River from Ruatahuna (Urewera National Park), work around the then-new Whakapapaiti Hut, construction of a swing bridge below Alex Bivvy (Tongariro National Park), and track and hut (demolition) work on Rangitoto and Motutapu
Islands (Hauraki Maritime National Park). These outdoor excursions provided important kudos for St. Paul’s Collegiate:

> The value of these working parties over the fourteen years has been at several levels. It has been a first class community service with some work being done which would have taken several more years to complete without the advantage of voluntary labour, and it has been an exercise in good public relations from the school’s point of view. For the more than three hundred pupils who have given their labours freely there has developed a greater awareness of the worth of our national parks and an appreciation of the need for money and labour to maintain them as a public amenity. The many staff involved have also been able to appreciate qualities in pupils not always apparent in the normal school situation, and this factor has undoubtedly given impetus to our new Tihoi Venture School which opens in 1979 (Matthews, 1979).

In addition to the annual 6th form ‘service’ camps, for those students who were accredited with University Entrance, all 4th form boys were to undertake tramping excursions in and around Tongariro National Park (Matthews, 1979). These ‘4th Form camps’ appear to have commenced around 1968, according to the inaugural Director of Tihoi Mike Shaw (interview 1, November 14, 2002), coinciding with a developing interest in outdoor education camps and activities within New Zealand (Stothart, 1993). However, two key publications detailing the historical development of outdoor education in New Zealand (Lynch, 2006; Stothart, 1993) do not explicitly recognise the programmes or activities of St. Paul’s.

Whilst seemingly not of interest nationally, there was remote international acknowledgement of the early outdoor education endeavours at St Paul’s. An extract from a letter (dated 3 October, 1975) to the St. Paul’s Collegiate School Board Chairman, Mr J. B. Mortimer, from Viscount Cobham in England attests to this (Cordery, 1979, p. 221)...

> ...I am also delighted to learn that your thoughts are turning towards adventure training. I was for some years Chairman of Outward Bound over here.

> Yours sincerely, Cobham

Former St. Paul’s teachers Vic Matthews and Mike Shaw were the drivers of these community service projects and the 4th form tramping excursions (Cordery, 1979), and both had a passion for adventure and the outdoors. Mike Shaw had arrived to St. Paul’s Collegiate
from two years at the ‘Timbertop’ residential school, an alternative educational campus set deep in the Australian bush. All Geelong Grammar School fourth form students attended Timbertop for their entire school year (Gray, 1999) and the programme had been made famous through the attendance of Prince Charles in the late 1960’s. During his experience at Timbertop Mike Shaw had been exposed to the virtues of community service and also to the philosophy of Kurt Hahn, a German-born educator who went on to influence the establishment of various International programmes such as Outward Bound, The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, and the United World Colleges. Shaw’s experience at Timbertop would prove to be significant for St. Paul’s Collegiate School (Hamilton, 2009).

**Tihoi Venture School: Early beginnings**

**The Dreaming**

Whilst the vision for Tihoi is said to have evolved from the dreaming and longing of Tony Hart, Headmaster of St. Paul’s during the period 1970 through 1979 (Hollingsworth, 1999), the initial impetus came from a series of talks Mike Shaw gave around Hamilton in the late 1960’s. Shaw spoke of the experiences of St. Paul’s boys on their various outdoor service projects and of his experiences at Timbertop in Australia. As he mentions (interview 1), a number of St. Paul’s board members were present at one such meeting:

...and one of them said oh hell that sounds a hell of a good idea, so John went to Tony Hart and said hey Tony we’ve got a guy here who worked at Timbertop so how about we set up the thing here?

It was a seed that quickly germinated and grew into a vision for (then) Headmaster Tony Hart:

*A residential venture school offered what, as a boy (and later as an overgrown boy), I had longed for. A sort of desert island where you could build your house, cut your own wood, cook your own food and see how you really could survive on your own two feet, to sleep out in a tent, paddle a canoe, climb a hill and lie exhausted in the grass on the top (Hollingsworth, 1999, p.5).*
Ray Hollingsworth, himself a former Tihoi instructor, traced the genesis of Tihoi via content analysis of early writings and memorabilia to produce a celebration of Tihoi Venture School appropriately named “Let a Boy Spread his Wings” (1999). It was a title that captured Tony Hart’s dream of having a place that was an alternative to the claustrophobia of the classroom and which would assist the boys at St. Paul’s to live and spread their wings. For Hart, as an ex-English teacher there were important formal educational motivations for establishing a residential outdoor centre to provide real experiences for boys to write. As Hollingsworth (1999, p. 5) states, Hart thought that Tihoi “might produce actual happenings to write essays about”.

Such was Tony Hart’s dream that it soon caught the imagination of John Mortimer, then Chairman of the St. Paul’s Board of Trustees. Tony Hart continues:

It was a sort of longing within me and by a stroke of luck a man in many ways much more effective than I responded. John Mortimer, whom I regarded as a tough and not always easy Chairman of the Board, loved the idea, pushed hard at the right moments, converted the whole Board and when the chips were down, chaired the fund raising committee. It is the only fund raising I have ever enjoyed because of his unflattering support. I came to deeply respect his drive and efficiency. Funds came in well beyond our expectations (Hollingsworth, 1999: 6).

According to Hamilton (2009), a forth visionary joined Shaw, Hart and Mortimer in actively supporting the ‘venture camp’ concept in the mid 1970’s. Dr. Michael Selby was a colleague of Tony Hart’s from Christ’s College in Christchurch, where he had initiated and run a small venture group that had culminated in a two week field camp. Upon accepting a Professorial Chair in Earth Sciences at Waikato University in 1973 Selby quickly assumed a role with the St. Paul’s Board of Trustees.

Options were investigated through the 1970’s for a residential centre on the Coromandel Peninsula, on Great Barrier Island, near Raglan in the shadow of Mt. Pirongia, in the Kaimanawa’s, Karioi near Oakune, and Waikeria in south Waikato (Hamilton, 2009). But it was the closing of an old timber mill at Tihoi in 1976 and the abandonment of the houses that
made up the Tihoi mill village that presented greater promise (Neville, Neville, Jones, & Dunn, 1992).

Professor Selby had visited Tihoi as a part of a soil erosion research programme in 1976, returning soon afterwards with Board of Trustees Chair John Mortimer. His report to Headmaster Tony Hart made for promising reading (Hamilton, 2009, p. 161):

*Three miles from a main road and shop; on a creek with water and electricity laid on; some eight houses; rooms for two classrooms and a cookhouse; near some good rock for climbing and abseiling, near forestry land for planting, bush for tramping in, water for canoeing and snow for skiing; within an hour of a hospital and hot pools... I should be glad to know of your reactions to the scheme.*

**Tihoi: The Place**

Tihoi was then, and remains, a remote outpost in the central North Island of New Zealand, accessed via a short side road off State Highway 32 which runs along the western shores of Lake Taupo. Tihoi in Māori translates to “to wander” (Moorfield, 2006), which may reflect the location of the old mill village close to an established Māori route across the central North Island (Neville, et al., 1992). Adjacent to the Tihoi site is the Pa Tu Takamoana, which had become well known in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s as the site of regular battles between feuding Māori brothers. The Government of the day intervened in those sometime bloody battles, confiscating an area of land that included the Pa site and duly called it the Tihoi Buffer Block (Neville, et al., 1992).

In the early 1940’s that Tihoi block was sold to a Taumarunui farmer for the purposes of developing a timber mill under contract to the Government. Some twenty four years of milling native timber followed before a third twelve-year contract was not renewed due to increasing opposition to native timber milling (C. Furminger, 2002), resulting ultimately in the gifting of much of the land in 1976 to the Pureora State Forest and the on-site auction of the village houses. Some divine intervention occurred at the auction, as local farmer Hilton Burgess explained (in Hollingsworth, 1999, p. 7, brackets in original):

*I bought one of the houses at the auction in 1976; another guy bought four. I was filling up with gas at the Trading Post when the other guy said he couldn’t...*
move them [because of a change in the housing code] and did I want to buy them? There was something I hadn’t experienced before: I felt a ‘divine push’ to buy these things, and bought them on the spot. A few weeks later St. Paul’s approached us.

It was only natural for Mike Shaw, with his experience at Timbertop and his passion for outdoor education and community service, to shape what would eventually become Tihoi Venture School. Shaw assumed the role of inaugural Tihoi Director; a post he ultimately held from 1979 through 1981. Great care was taken with establishing the overarching philosophy and intent of Tihoi prior to the first intake in 1979. As Shaw acknowledges (interview 1):

*Timbertop was an excellent working model in this regard but some fine-tuning was required... ...we sat down and devised basic plans and routines for Tihoi and that was based on Timbertop, then we had to stamp our own version on things.*

**The Beginnings**

Unlike Timbertop, Tihoi could not physically house all of the forth form (now year ten) cohort and so the decision was made to split the year group in two, with half attending regular classes at St. Paul’s while the other half attended Tihoi, and vice-versa. The half year concept was more ideal for Mike Shaw, who viewed the year long Timbertop programme as excessive (Hamilton, 2009).

Thus the forth form academic syllabus would be taught at both campuses, but with the lessons at Tihoi somewhat more condensed and related to the local environment wherever possible (Mike Shaw, interview 1). Come the end of each half-year period all of the boys would sit identical exams, but in addition to their studies the Tihoi students would also have to cope with challenging outdoor experiences, daily physical fitness, and basic student accommodation. The boys themselves would do most of the food preparation, would cook some of their meals on wood-fired stoves, and would have to manage their house in terms of wood-chopping, cleaning, and maintenance. They would also have to learn to cope living with peers, after being removed from familial support and the comforts of city living.
So was born in 1979 a social and educational experiment at Tihoi. The question on the minds of the St Paul’s Board of Trustees back then must surely have been, ‘would the academic capabilities and spirit of adolescent males suffer or be enhanced by a long-term, remote, residential experience?’

Four key aims of the Tihoi ‘scheme’ were articulated to parents via a school newsletter in August, 1976 (Hamilton, 2009, p. 161):

*To develop initiative, stamina, determination, self-reliance, and an awareness of the natural surroundings of New Zealand.*

*To give a chance to those less gifted in ball sports, who nevertheless have qualities to develop on other schemes.*

*To integrate dayboy and boarder more closely in conditions of hardship.*

*To enable a boy to find his own strengths and weaknesses matched against natural forces, and so help him to reach a balanced view of himself.*

It was obvious from those early aims that the personal and social learning opportunities at Tihoi featured more prominently than academic performance. What was also missing was the ‘devil in the detail’ in terms of how those aims might be realised in practice, and Mike Shaw had his own thoughts on what Tihoi would be about (interview 1):

An opportunity to experience challenges and hardships in the quest of fostering character and spirit......all of the activities would be......would be a medium for something, the achievement of difficult challenging things, and the conquering of fear. I think a lot comes out of being scared, being afraid. Certainly we were scared when we set Tihoi up and the first boys arrived!

Great faith was placed in the Director to get on with making things happen at Tihoi, and certainly a lot of trust was placed by the parents of the boys arriving in the first few intakes. As Mike Shaw describes (Hamilton, 2009, p. 168), the physical environment of Tihoi was not especially conducive:

*When the first parents arrived on Monday morning with their dear little sons the place still looked dreadful – houses not painted inside or outside, blackberry and broken glass everywhere. Some of the mums and dads were murmuring about turning around and taking their sons straight back to St. Paul’s in Hamilton. It took a lot of persuasion...... to convince the doubting parents that this place...*
would work and that their sons would not die of malnutrition or some other sort of deprivation. Tihoi forever owes a massive debt of gratitude to these initial parents who just had to trust these unknown ‘bushmen and outdoor fanatics’ because no one knew what was going to happen. Their faith was incredible, without it Tihoi might never have seen the light of day.

The first intake of fifty four boys was looked after by three Tihoi teachers: Mike Shaw as Director, Bill Holden as Assistant Director, and Judy Shaw as part-time Teacher. There were also three Tutors, (Grant Eyre, Steve Tracey, and Phil Kearney), all who had recently graduated from St. Paul’s Collegiate and had completed a course at the Outdoor Pursuits Centre in the summer holidays (Hamilton, 2009).

In terms of the Tihoi programme, many formative decisions needed to be made and, as Hollingsworth (1999) attests, that first intake set the tone in terms of establishing the rules and day-to-day routines of Tihoi; most of which have been enduring. Mike Shaw (interview 1) details how the first rules were established:

When the first lot of boys arrived I said this is the plan: These are the routines, but there are no rules. As things go wrong we will make a rule to fix it up. You make a mistake, do something wrong we will decide how to fix that. Then the next intake came along, I outlined the rules we had developed, explained that they had come about cause things had gone wrong, and we developed a few more rules that intake, and so that was a good learning for them too. Living with each other you need to have a few rules... anyway it was our own philosophy that evolved in the end.

As Mike Shaw reported (interview 1) “…there were a few critical experiences right from the first intake” that included the teaching of formalised school subjects, the basic routines of family life in the houses, and weekly changes in the leadership systems of the houses whereby students got to experience being both leaders and being led. Daily fitness routines were established that mirrored those of Timbertop, as did some of the inter-house challenges like the Inca races, tugs of war, and power-pole carries.

The outdoor education activities on the other hand evolved, with tramping, yachting, kayaking, abseiling, and skiing to the fore (Hamilton, 2009). Mike Shaw speaks of the early developments and the development and maintenance challenges:
The first few years at Tihoi we blazed lots of tracks through the bush ‘cause there was nothing there to speak of... we built the first kayaks out of fibreglass after first building our own moulds... then we built some plywood yachts... the activities evolved as we went. Boys were involved with maintenance of houses, especially scraping and painting... there was lots of orienteering in those days which was great for compass bearings and of course being in the bush (interview 1).

The successes of the first few intakes are a testament to the dedication pioneering spirit of the staff, and the challenges in developing Tihoi into a living, breathing educational community were massive (Hamilton, 2009). Steve Tracey, a Tutor in the first Tihoi year, hints at some of those early successes (Tracey, 1979, pp. 69-70):

Tihoi is a symbol of the energy and faith of the pioneering spirit. From it we can evaluate the significance of adventure and hardship in people’s lives. Clearly the Tihoi Venture School does not aim to turn boys into blind conservationists or hardy bushmen, nor just to give a ‘taste of the outdoors’, but rather to enable the individual to appraise his value in the environment and the worth of his fellow man... Probably the most far reaching and valuable experience for all the boys at Tihoi is the tolerance, cooperation and self reliance necessary for enjoyable community living... every boy should learn to accept responsibility with pride and confidence, and by being able to give orders sensibly, learn to accept them himself... one has to have actually experienced the Tihoi life and realise that the value derived is entirely personal and indefinable.

Early Solos at Tihoi

Conflicting information surrounds the timing of solo being introduced at Tihoi. Christine Furminger (2002) reports in her Master’s degree dissertation “Voices of the Past: Students of Tihoi Venture School” that two of her research interview participants had not undertaken a solo while at Tihoi as solos had not then been introduced to the programme until the early 1980’s. Similarly Grant Eyre, who was a Tutor at Tihoi in the first year, remains convinced that solos were not a part of the curriculum in 1979:

During the first year we were trying to find our way through the bush and make some tracks for the boys as it was mostly virgin bush that we were in. I’m sure that the solo experiences came later when the area had been mapped so that they know which direction to send the boys off in and knew where they were...
the first year it was all very primitive! I kept a fairly detailed diary of the year I was at Tihoi and there is no mention of solo trips during that time (personal communication, 17 March, 2009).

Both Hollingsworth (1999) and Hamilton (2009) report that the Tihoi programme was expanded during the tenure of Directors Brian and Jan Neville (1981 – 1992) to include new activities including bush survival, mountaineering and solo. Yet it is clear from discussions with inaugural Director Mike Shaw that solos were integral to the Tihoi experience from reasonably early beginnings: “Solos, we did them for every intake, but probably not the first intake” (interview 1).

Mike Shaw speaks of the influence of a solo at Outward Bound upon his niece and how her experience had motivated staff at Tihoi to promote the boys spending time alone in the bush:

*Outward bound, yeah my niece had been through there and she spoke in praise of solo and how great it was... my niece said she got a lot out of it, she sat down and had a lot of thoughts, and we thought yeah that is what we need here... and we thought well they are really only boys but we will try it with them and so we did it pretty carefully that first time and it was good (interview 1).*

For Mike Shaw solo was a special activity for the students, and one he valued in the programme. He speaks of the virtues of such time alone:

*See when you are on your own, when you have nothing else to do but have a piece of paper and a pencil, well you sit down and think things out pretty well. All the rest of the clutter of the day, well it is gone, you don’t have a watch either so don’t know the time, so no radios nothing like that... and the time would just go so slow sometimes, and they would just have to clear their minds and sit there and think. A lot of them did, they also listened to the possums and the wild pigs and they got frightened some of them. I don’t think it does anyone any harm being frightened in the bush... ...we used to go up there and stay with them of course, have our own bivy’s along the track not far from the boys, and every now and then we would wander along the track and ensure everyone was OK. The big thing was how rowdy the bush was at night, how long the night actually was (interview 1).*

One gets the sense that for Mike Shaw it was the uncertainty of solo that made the experience:
The other thing we used to do was spring solo upon the students... we’d pick them up in the truck and head out to a bit of bush, then give them a sheet of plastic, and they’d have their pen and bit of paper, and we’d tell them what was going to happen. We didn’t bother with food, that was part of it, except there was a severe diabetic, a diabetic kid once so we thought we better look after him. He was the only one in the know as to what was going to happen. They didn’t know what they would have to do, when we first took them up in the truck... ...I think there were merits in the uncertainty of it, because suddenly they were being dropped off the truck and told that was their spot for the night, see you at lunchtime tomorrow and there were some horrified faces and as I say, we told them that if there was a problem then put their red tape out on the track and we’d come and check up on them. We would patrol up and down but the guys didn’t really know when we were coming (Mike Shaw, interview 1).

Those early solos at Tihoi appear to have been single overnight bush experiences in self-constructed shelters, during which time students went without food, were stripped of their watches, and were expected to write and to reflect. The surprise element meant participants had little time to contemplate their forthcoming experience and so may not have been especially well prepared physically and/or psychologically. Not having a watch was an attempt to live by ‘natures clock’ but also an opportunity to create a little uncertainty for participants (Mike Shaw, interview 1).

Solos may well have been lost in the directorship transition following Mike and Judy Shaw’s departure from Tihoi in 1981, or promoted from a casual programme element to a more formalised learning opportunity by their successors. Regardless it seems evident that solos were at least experimented with sometime during the period 1980 through 1981, though certainly not during Tihoi’s first year in 1979. According to written history solo was ‘introduced’ in the Neville era, initially as a 24 hour experience and then extended into a forty-four hour experience (Hamilton, 2009). The solo experience back then:

gave them [students] time to reflect on their direction in life, their relationship with others and, if nothing else, a chance to experience being bored, lonely and maybe just a bit scared (Hamilton, 2009, p. 278).
Tihoi Venture School Today

Remaining True to Philosophy & Method

One of the last comments made by Mike Shaw when interviewed in November 2002 related to the enduring philosophy of Tihoi. It was an acknowledgement reflecting enormous pride in the collective achievements of those formative years at Tihoi; that he himself was part of a caring and personal educational legacy:

*Things have changed at Tihoi sure, but philosophy is pretty constant really, the Directors are passionate about educating the whole person, they are outdoor people, interested in people (interview 1).*

That statement was also a compliment to the Directors that have superseded Shaw and to the enormous changes that have taken place at Tihoi in the intervening years. Hollingsworth (1999) acknowledges the significant contributions of Brian and Jan Neville as Tihoi Directors (1981 – 1992). Their era was one of growth and stability, with some teaching staff remaining at Tihoi beyond the historical one year of service and sometimes up to five or six years. In terms of outdoor education especially, the retention of staff provided for an enhanced range of outdoor activities and more exciting end-of-course expeditions (Hamilton, 2009). These developments were supported with the provision of staff training and the modernisation of equipment and some buildings.

Tihoi was, despite the isolation, an attractive place to work for teachers with a passion for things ‘outdoors’ (Hollingsworth, 1999). However, the lifestyle was all consuming and sometimes sheer hard work. Many of the developments in the Neville era occurred as the result of some challenging ‘low’ years. During 1987 and 1988 particularly, rumours and stories were circulating about bullying within the Tihoi houses coupled with a culture of non-disclosure amongst the boys (Hamilton, 2009). There too were concerns, from parents especially, about excessive discipline strategies and the safety of students while participating in some of the outdoor activities. A comprehensive external audit followed, and central within the Berkett Report (Hamilton, 2009) were recommendations relating to better supporting the boys who were dealing with homesickness and addressing cases of bullying in the houses.
Recommended were opportunities for regular house meetings and having a suggestion box where boys could air suggestions or concerns. These suggestions and others related to staff welfare were widely implemented into Tihoi life.

Brian Neville as (then) Director also initiated a programme external review / validation as a strategy for Tihoi to build and grow. The first audit was conducted in 1980 by New Zealand adventurer and pursuits educator Graeme Dingle, who is said to have fallen in love with the Tihoi concept for teenage boys and so produced a stunning report (Hamilton, 2009). Other external audits were undertaken by Directors of the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council and the Outdoor Pursuits Centre of New Zealand. Visits by Neville to other outdoor centres affirmed to him that Tihoi was not only on the right track but also a leader in the New Zealand outdoor community. Such external audits and self review became part of a culture of openness to feedback and growth, and as a form of reassurance to parents and St. Paul’s board members (Hamilton, 2009).

As Hollingsworth (1999) reports, John and Christine Furminger assumed the leadership of Tihoi in 1992 and set about enhancing the social education emphasis across all facets of the programme while continuing to provide students with a wide gamut of experiences. Their tenure (1992 – 2006) witnessed significant capital expenditure with the construction of new houses, along with a new kitchen and dining hall, effectively rebuilding Tihoi from the ground up. The Furmingers also facilitated responses to legislative changes with respect to health and safety, seriously documenting for the first time the systems and processes that have become Tihoi (ibid). Tihoi obtained the Outdoors New Zealand ‘OutdoorsMark’ award in 2004; an important validation of its safety management systems and processes (Hamilton, 2009).

The Furminger co-Directorship provided significant and sustained leadership and programme stability through fifteen years. Their social education approach was centred upon boys needing “…time, structure, male role models and activity if they are to make their best progress” (Hamilton, 2009, p. 348). The social living and outdoor programme emphasis, according to John Furminger, presented opportunities for fostering self reliance and confidence and created an important social awareness. At the heart of their approach was
employing staff as quality role models, which became less about the gender and more about respect:

*the issue really is about staff being respected, respected for their ability, their enthusiasm, and their care… they [the students] want genuine people that care, that is the role modelling aspect of Tihoi (interview 1).*

That said, for John Furminger having male staff was definitely a significant advantage:

*You couldn’t run this place if there was all females, you need a mix but there are boys that do need strong role models, who need the presence of good men in their lives because they haven’t had it for so long and had trouble relating to themselves, and to masculinity without role models.*

*There is a huge need, oh do we want to go there, a huge need for boys to get approval of their Dad, it is unbelievable, and that is so sad. I think they need that, I don’t think it is sexist to say that they possibly get it from their mother, that approval in [silence]. Some boys miss out from both parents, but to generalise it is boys missing out on approval from their Dad that is so sad (interview 1).*

Under the leadership of John and Christine Furminger a daily programme of reading was implemented, utilising books of particular interest to the boys and iconic New Zealand bushman-writer Barry Crump became especially popular (Christine Furminger, interview 1).

Similarly writing was promoted as central to the Tihoi experience with daily journaling and the writing of prose and poetry on their experiences, as described by Christine Furminger (interview 1):

*Every kid has to write, it is an essential part of [silence] …and some really get passionate about it and write screeds. …They do have lots and lots to write about here at Tihoi. We’ve had kids come in who have never really written much before and suddenly there is so much to write about, it is just wonderful.*

*I’ve got them writing about their whole Tihoi experience, really thinking about their experience, what it has been like, how they have changed or if they have not changed why not, what they have actually got out of it… …Typically kids are quite pedestrian and go through the motions around reflecting, talking about the highlights and their outdoor skills, their fitness, and then occasionally you get a real celebration of their life at Tihoi, kids who write very deeply and meaningfully, how Tihoi might influence their future, things that have happened in their life maybe some of the profound achievements they have had.*
In early 2007 Chris Wynn and Cynthia Smith assumed the leadership of Tihoi. Wynn was a former student at St. Paul’s and had experienced Tihoi while under the Directorship of Brian Neville. At that time he is reputed to have told Neville that he wanted his job (Hamilton, 2009); this Wynn achieved after stints as a tutor, instructor, teacher, and deputy director inter-spersed with University study and teacher training. Cyn Smith similarly was a trained and experienced teacher, with teaching experience that included a year as teacher / instructor at Tihoi and a two year stint as an instructor at the Outdoor Pursuits Centre (ibid).

2008 saw the construction of the last new building at Tihoi, according to the redevelopment plan (Hamilton, 2009). By the end of 2008 the new buildings had been complimented with a landscaping makeover, with the widespread planting of native trees and shrubs, removal of invasive weeds, and the development of a ‘village green’ incorporating a cricket oval. Thus the campus that was Tihoi now bears little physical resemblance to the one that greeted the first intake of St. Paul’s students in 1979. Yet one gets the real sense that the original philosophy and spirit of the Tihoi experience remains.

In recent years systems and processes have been formalised, documented, refined, and audited, yet little has fundamentally changed from the structures and day-to-day routines established during the Shaw’ Directorship. Tihoi stands proud of its basic simplicity and the overarching commitment to making the most educationally out of the experiences that are presented to the boys (John Furminger, interview 1), and remains true to its original intent (Hamilton, 2009).

**Public Exposure & Research Attention**

For an educational programme that has been operational since 1979 and which incorporates many innovative and unique elements that are rewarding and memorable for participants (C. Furminger, 2002; Hollingsworth, 1999), Tihoi remains mostly outside of the public consciousness. There had been only a smattering of newspaper articles and one television piece produced on Tihoi during the first two decades, and there were no serious accidents at Tihoi to bring media attention despite the countless student learning days involving exposure to potentially hazardous situations. The remote location of Tihoi may have
contributed, or perhaps the day-to-day realities giving little time for promotional endeavour, as one hilarious account of a visit from a journalist to interview Director Mike Shaw underlines:

*On one occasion I was... waist deep in Gill’s septic tank. A car pulled up and out got a smart young lady in high heels and city attire. She wobbled her way across the road and over to the tank where I was working and asked if I could direct her to the Director of the place. One is not at ones best up to the waist in the proverbial and I did not really feel like conversation. I asked her what she required the Director for. Her reply was one that would obviously be directed at a very low form of humanity, to the effect that it was none of my business. But if I had to know she was a reporter from the Herald in Auckland and wanted to find out what this new venture school was all about. I confessed that I was the person she was looking for, whereupon she turned tail, huffed it to her car and drove off, interview over (Hollingsworth, 1999, p. 8).* 

Tihoi hit morning television in 1998 with three short snippets for Television New Zealand’s ‘Breakfast’ show, and in 1999 former Instructor Ray Hollingsworth published *Let a Boy Spread his Wings*. While this was a ‘coffee table’ quality book with colour images and delightful excerpts from past students and staff, it has remained generally within the St. Paul’s community. More recently has been produced *Boys Go Bush*, an hour long Television New Zealand documentary that followed an intake for half a year. The documentary was screened on prime time television in 2006 and provided a somewhat contrived view of Tihoi life (Hamilton, 2009), including insights from boys who were homesick, who had been subjected to bullying, students not coping well with daily routines, and many students who were thriving on the discipline and physicality of their educational experience.

Further exposure came with a 28 minute documentary on Radio New Zealand’s *Country Life* programme in 2008, which tracked a number of boys through their Tihoi experience from day one. *Country Life* focussed particularly on the lifestyle of Tihoi: the living conditions, daily routines such as cooking and cleaning, the letters written home, chilly winter weather, the daily morning exercise regime, discipline processes, and some of the outdoor activities (Stiles, Murray, & Kentish-Barnes, 2008). A shorter video documentary also screened in late 2008 on Television One’s *Close Up* programme. This emphasised the uniqueness of the Tihoi experience for boys’ education including Tihoi’s commitment to providing clear rules, boundaries, and consequences. With the 7 pm screening of *Close Up*, Tihoi and St. Paul’s Collegiate School,
were provided with invaluable public exposure. The school has incorporated a video link to the Close Up programme into their website via You Tube hotlink.

In terms of public accolades, in 2003 while under the Furminger’s Directorship, Tihoi was honoured by Outdoors New Zealand as the outdoor education ‘Programme of the Year’ (Hamilton, 2009). The irony was that the programme was little different to any of the years immediately preceding it. But it was national recognition none-the-less; without doubt the biggest public accolade given Tihoi in its long history. A second honour followed in 2007 with the Outdoors New Zealand ‘Best Outdoor Facility’ award (ONZ, 2009), reflecting the investment St. Paul’s had made to upgrading buildings and to the landscaping and planting efforts of the Wyn’s in their initial period as Directors.

Despite these accolades Tihoi still remains little known as a residential education provider unique to New Zealand, and may well remain as “...perhaps the best kept secret of outdoor education in New Zealand” (John Furminger, interview 1). No record of Tihoi exists in Stothart’s (1993) A Chronology of Outdoor Education in New Zealand 1849 – 1992, nor in Lynch’s (2006) Camping in the curriculum: a history of outdoor education in New Zealand schools (though Tihoi was acknowledged for providing images of outdoor education activities in the latter publication). Even the New Zealand Education Review Office, notorious for examining schools in minute detail, have felt little need to visit the Tihoi campus beyond a brief inspection in 1981 (Hamilton, 2009). Tihoi does get mention in their 2002 review of St. Paul’s Collegiate School, with comments complimentary though derived from third person account:

Conversations with students and staff indicated that the programme for Y10 students at Tihoi is an important component in the school curriculum... This programme is well planned for core curriculum delivery and for self reliance and personal development training through outdoor education. The school is aware of the difficulty that a long break from some subjects, such as languages, can have for students and has experimented with a number of strategies to deal with this. The vast majority of students appear to benefit from the Tihoi programme over the long term. The personal growth that occurs was commented on by all students and staff. It is also noted that ensuring the safety of students in all activities at Tihoi is a priority for all staff (Education-Review-Office, 2003).
Further ERO comment follows in 2006, but still there was no site visit: “A strong feature of the Year 10 student programme is an eighteen-week outdoor learning experience at the extensively upgraded Tihoi satellite campus” (I. Hill, 2006).

There has also been a definite lack of recent research attention to aspects of the Tihoi experience. Preliminary work in the early 1980’s by former St. Paul’s student Grant Henderson is an exception. As an undergraduate-honours student of Physical Education at the University of Otago, Henderson conducted pre- and post- tests examining self concept and physical development. He concluded from pre- post- measures that significantly greater changes in both self concept (G. Henderson, 1983) and the physical development of students (G. Henderson, 1985) resulted from Tihoi participation, though no control groups from conventional schools were employed. He identified “…the diversity and intensity of activities, the high motivational aspects (intrinsic and extrinsic), and the social, physical and environmental interactions” (1985, p.22) of Tihoi as significant, though his personal experiences at Tihoi might well have assisted him towards such conclusion.

There has been little follow-up to this work, excepting Christine Furminger’s qualitative project examining the significant retrospective experiences of former students. In that study she examined how the experiences of six boys attending Tihoi between 1979 and 1994 might have influenced them in later life, ultimately highlighting an educationally-enduring quality to the programme. Tihoi was, for all participants in her study:

*The most significant experience they remember from their school... ...an experience that has stayed with them, something that no one can take away (C. Furminger, 2002, p. 87).*

The Tihoi experience manifested in later life in many diverse ways:

*Giving them self-confidence and belief (p. 87) ...developed a positive attitude to life and a desire to make the most of every moment... (p.87), ...developed self-discipline and today work to finish tasks, set goals and achieve them (p. 88), ...the social living and outdoor experiences developed the ability to face fears, accept challenges and tolerance of others.... ...cooking skills, cleaning and house management skills transferred to living with strangers and dealing with conflict (p.88), ...prepared the participants for challenging times in their lives (p.88), and*
the Tihoi experience continues to empower them (all participants) in their lives (p.89).

From Furminger’s (2002) study one can surmise that Tihoi fosters self efficacy and cultivates a readiness for adult life in terms of being equipped to deal with social, educational, and vocational challenges. Of special interest to this work was the identification of solo as one of four key outdoor experience components at Tihoi that enhanced facets of self concept. Solo was implicated in promoting self esteem, respect for nature, independence, and strength to face challenges and fears: all factors contributing to a belief in ‘self’. One is left wondering what the actual recipe is; that is, how might the Tihoi programme, including solo, work to foster these significant ends?

**The Experience that is Tihoi**

When searching for a Tihoi ‘recipe’, the organisational mission statement provides some insight:

*In a unique and challenging environment we aim to promote the personal and social development of our students through the medium of community living, a quality academic programme, and wide-ranging outdoor pursuits (J. Furminger & Furminger, 2001).*

In reality education never works to a recipe and the outcomes are never the same for any two individuals. There are many complexities to the life-world of the adolescent male, and situations demand reflexivity for all involved: staff or student. There is no generic Tihoi experience and no recipe that might replicate the experiences for any two Tihoi students. However, one can paint a picture of what the Tihoi experience might entail, and this illustration has been created. Ray Hollingsworth, as a past Instructor at Tihoi, shares his experiential picture in the ‘Tihoi Explained’ section from his book *Let a Boy Spread His Wings* (Hollingsworth, 1999, pp. 39-41):

*To live in a close knit community, surrounded by forest and farmland, for half of a school year, provides opportunities that few adolescents will be lucky enough to experience... Tihoi is a residential wilderness school for boys, sited on the edge of the Pureora Forest Park, west of Lake Taupo in the Central North Island. The fourth form (usually 14 or 15 years of age)... is divided into two groups: each*
group will spend half of the school year living in the houses of what was once a thriving saw milling village. Here they work closely with adults to develop and maintain a lifestyle that encourages self-reliance, initiative, and teamwork in every sphere of activity – academic, recreational and domestic.

A full academic program is packed into four and a half days per week, with regular study time every night and exams at the end of the intake. On the two and a half day weekend, the boys are exposed to a variety of challenging outdoor pursuits, including sailing, kayaking, rock climbing and bushcraft. Each house is independent: the boys learn the skills of cooking on a wood stove, chopping firewood, cleaning their own house, and coping with their new house mates. All tasks are shared equally and a high standard of personal behaviour and fitness is encouraged.

No uniform is worn at Tihoi. Instead the boys are taught to dress appropriately for the conditions, which can be extreme in any season. While members of staff supervise each house, the boys are ultimately responsible for managing their own living conditions... A graduated fitness program builds the strength and stamina essential for safety in the outdoors: the students work through a fitness circuit after school each day, and twice a week undertake cross-country runs.

Students have an important role in the running and maintenance of the school. Each house has a community task... Twice a week everyone but the house cooks are rounded up for a major ‘school job’ project... Individual and group skills are fostered in the outdoor program. With such a wide range of activities being presented, each student has the opportunity uncover talent and discover much about themselves... A high calibre staff ensures a high safety standard, and the emphasis is on participation, rising to the challenge, and team work...

The academic program takes advantage of Tihoi’s unique setting, while field trips throughout the region complement the work in the classroom... Individual and group projects, home work, and examinations are facts of life at Tihoi. For each intake... one of the greatest challenges is in dealing with the intensity of the place. For staff and students alike, there is little break from the many day to day activities and demands. Living conditions are basic and absolute privacy a rare commodity. The weeks are full and the weekends strenuous – for the boys there are new challenges to be met; for the staff there are safety standards and satisfaction to be measured. But, year after year, students rejoice in achievement and the self-confidence that comes with it; they revel in the spirit of the place, its history and landscape: and they discover that cooperation within a community brings satisfaction. There is a special quality about Tihoi, a spirit and a joy that touches all who come into contact with it.
Hollingsworth’s is an excellent synopsis of the Tihoi experience generally. There are, however, two important coats of epoxy that strengthen and protect the wider experience that I believe Hollingsworth has likely assumed but not discussed: the depth of care and commitment from staff and especially the directors towards every student, and the use of journaling and letter writing to complement and assist students’ make sense of their experiences. Both of these coats of epoxy are discussed below.

No long-term residential programme involving sixty or more boys would be easy to facilitate, and Tihoi is not immune from hardships, homesickness, conflicts amongst students, and other random events. Tihoi has well established practices for resolving such issues. An example, as Director John Furminger articulates, occurs during the initial stages of every intake when parents struggle to leave their boy at Tihoi:

[There is] a fear of separation between the parents and their boys... ...like the ripping of the umbilical cord, and kicking and screaming both ends and mainly at the mother and father end (interview 1).

John Furminger is adamant that such a separation from parents is necessary for teenage males, as he describes on the Television New Zealand documentary Boys Go Bush:

It is not a very natural thing or traditional thing for parents to do but it..., I find it is a critical to do really at this age. Some boys are still quite clingy to their mother especially [and] while I’m not saying it’s a good thing to separate Son from Mother I think it’s an important thing to do for a short period of time. They’re looking to be part of strong peer group and underneath they still want to hold their own values. It’s like a critical point in their lot when they do get away from their parents and they do get those values reinforced by other people who become important to them (TVNZ, 2006).

The Tihoi staff is well supported to deal with separation issues, homesickness, and other sorts of events such as bullying, and ultimately the practices employed remain the intellectual property of the School. The important theme is the ethic of care that seems to permeate across Tihoi, and no programme overview could adequately detail how this might evolve for each intake. There appears an ethic of care exhibited by the staffing collective, and especially by the Directors, which suggests a genuine interest in the journey of every lad through Tihoi.
Journal and letter writing is something that has occurred throughout Tihoi’s history, arising originally from one of Tony Hart’s original intentions of Tihoi to get boys writing and being creative (Hollingsworth, 1999). Tihoi was, and remains, about giving the boys something to write about according to Christine Furminger (interview 1):

Certainly literacy is a strength of the Tihoi experience; students are writing about their experiences and making sense of them. They are given guidance on how they might frame their work, and the intent is to have students expressing their feelings and analysing their behaviours. Journals are read regularly and as non-judgementally as possible, providing a good outlet for students when necessary.

The inference is that via their journals the students might articulate issues and challenges, so that the journal is one of many avenues at Tihoi where boys can cry for help and have any serious problems addressed. Christine Furminger provides a personal insight into the seriousness of the journals for keeping in touch with students (interview 1):

The journal also allows them to write about things that are not going right, and I’m quite guilty if I haven’t kept up with very recent events in their lives. So they are brilliant for assisting the staff understand the students, or for talking about other kids that might be having issues.

Students take great pride in their journal, as John Furminger reports (interview 1):

The vast majority of ex students would know exactly where their journal is, they have put so much time and energy into it, they treasure it. It is one of their favourite possessions, and they read it again and again.

Letter writing is a routine at Tihoi that parallels the journal writing expectation, and students come to value receiving mail from family and friends. For many boys it is really the first time they have written letters with any seriousness. As St. Paul’s Headmaster Greg Fenton reflects from the experience of his own son attending Tihoi (interview 1), “the first few letters back were a bit of a joke, but there was a real maturity in the writing towards the end. We have something of a Tihoi chronicle now”.

Letters are another way for boys to record their feelings and come to make sense of their experiences. John Furminger (interview 1) reports on how such letters home can sometimes create other challenges:
Boys who are homesick usually write to their parents at their lowest ebb, and of course everything is dramatised and made worse, and so parents get a really emotional letter and that is usually immediately followed by another letter that’s full of life and enthusiasm. So that is a sign that we are reasonably good at being in touch with students and the parents appreciate that.

**Tihoi: Insights and Outcomes**

Internet searches within social networking and blog sites highlight that the camaraderie of St. Paul’s Collegiate School is alive and well, and that Tihoi is without doubt a living memory for many. Many former students have specifically named Tihoi as separate to St. Paul’s Collegiate when detailing their schooling history on the Old Friends website (http://www.oldfriends.co.nz/), and associated comments are especially positive. In subtle contrast, the recent radio and television documentaries on the Tihoi experience have provided something of a ‘warts and all’ view (Hamilton, 2009) with more balanced insight into the very real challenges for many boys. In *Boys Go Bush* the narrator introduces some of the warts:

*The Furminger’s are dealing with homesick boys, bullying, and generally trying to get to know the boys…. Ben’s suffering, he’s homesick, and he’s in a house with a boy that’s bullied him for years* (TVNZ, 2006)

On *Close Up*, insights are provided to the discipline at Tihoi that would unlikely be endorsed:

*Narrator: It’s simple at Tihoi, play by the rules or be punished… and these guys are embracing it…*

*…who wants to throw these guys in? (Voice of Tihoi staff member followed by footage of student being thrown into a deep creek).*

*Chris Wynn, Tihoi Co-Director: We’re OK with throwing a kid into the creek at 6.30 in the morning if they are late for morning surprise… or having them out running at 8 or 9 o’clock at night if they are talking when they shouldn’t be* (TVNZ, 2008).

The *Country Life* documentary similarly highlights some of the challenges associated with living in an intensive community like Tihoi.
Narrator: What is it that these kids struggle with; the ones that would rather not be here?

Cyn Smith (Co-Director): Some of them struggle living with their peers and not having time alone, it’s quite an intense community environment to live in, others struggle without their families, without their Mums and Dads, often it’s the first time they have been away from home for an extended period of time, so often it is just a period of adjusting to that and the routines, and the odd boy doesn’t like the physical aspects of the programme which obviously makes it very difficult if they are not that way inclined but generally they will find one of our pursuits they really enjoy and will make the most of that (Stiles, et al., 2008).

In response to viewing the Close Up documentary, former St. Paul’s student and internet blogger Hatwell (2009) reflects on Tihoi as “…a dank little burg… …an unremarkable place that could easily be mistaken for a small cult.” Hatwell criticises the television programme for being little more than a glorified advertisement for the school than actual reporting:

the TV spot focused on a bunch of grinning boys pontificating on just how valuable they already feel their Tihoi experience had been, how lucky they are to have had the opportunity, and (in vintage St. Paul’s fashion) just how much better than everyone else the venture has made them (ibid).

The reality was quite a different picture in his intake, according to Hatwell, where “…kids broke down, tried to run away, injured themselves, pleaded to come home, or just suffered in silence. A good time was not had by most.” Hatwell continues, being particularly scathing of Tihoi’s broader social education ideals:

So don’t mistake those grinning idiot faces trotting so gaily across your television for healthy, adjusted young men that faced adversity and overcame. They didn’t learn to coexist with others, they didn’t learn hidden special truths about themselves, and they didn’t rise above. They were beaten until they broke, until the only way to continue was to convince yourself that you were finally becoming a Tihoi Man, and that it was what you wanted all along.

Want proof? Go and track down almost anyone who has been out of Tihoi for a few years. They will have completely shed any and every positive attribute that TV One’s ridiculous little program ascribed to the school’s influence, because they went back into the world and had to re-learn that there isn’t just one singular way of being, and that excelling at your chosen (or coerced path) doesn’t make you better than anyone else. The more thoroughly they have learned this lesson - the more thoroughly they have un-learned Tihoi - then the
happier, healthier, and more loving person they tend to be (in my experience) (Hatwell, 2009).

The blogger Hatwell might well have been one of the boys Tihoi Co-Director Cyn Smith was discussing when she suggested some boys were not inclined towards physical activity and adventure. Hatwell continues by placing the experience that was Tihoi into the perspective of his own life:

*I wasn’t a very physical kid back then, didn’t much care for nature or health, and can’t say there was much in the Tihoi curriculum that had instant appeal to me. You might think that looking back now, with my vegetarian diet, environmental outlook, activist tendencies, and general predisposition towards self-reliance and communal co-operation that I might see the Tihoi experience as one of the roots of who I am now. I don’t. Because the fact is despite their ‘great outdoors’ and ‘social development’ rhetoric that was never what Tihoi was about. Sure, the setup would have been the perfect opportunity to instil in kids an appreciation for our limited resources, an awareness of the ecological damage we inflict, a drive to live a less corporate-reliant life, and an experience in mutual aid over competition. But that’s not what the camp was there to do. The Tihoi Venture School was there to make you a man. Because a man is something you need to be made into.*

Back in 2002, one of the questions I posed to all of the Tihoi staff I met with was “What harm might the Tihoi experience be causing students?” It was a question that brought thoughtful response. Former Director Mike Shaw speaks of his time at Tihoi (interview 1):

*Well I honestly didn’t see boys leaving Tihoi in anything other than a positive state, there were no negative aspects; we didn’t harm boys physically or emotionally in those early days. No there was nothing but positives. Boys learning how to be independent, boys learning to cope with adversity, boys learning to cope with people’s differences, tolerating other people’s differences which I think is a very important thing for 4th form boys to learn. Also to learn that you are not the person you are ‘cause you can catch or kick a football or hit a hockey ball... to learn that the person them-self is more important than any physical ability. It’s what is in here that is important (points to heart).*

John Furminger (interview 1) was quick to point out the lack of hard evidence in terms of research around what Tihoi might or might not do for students. His own gut feeling was (in terms of ‘takeaways’ from the programme):
It is different for every lad. I don’t think every boy goes away with the same things......we definitely encourage them to be caring and supportive of others, and I do think they take that away ...but I think there is a big blank slate really (in terms of research needs and opportunities).

John Furminger speaks of (co-Director) Christine Furminger’s Masters’ thesis as being the first verification of a held belief by staff in the outcomes of Tihoi, particularly from a long-term outcomes perspective (interview 1):

I’d like to think the impacts of Tihoi are long lasting in a positive way... ...and I think it is only Christine’s study that has started to infer the longevity.... ...I always say to the boys that they will take skills away that are about how you bring up your sons, how you work on your marriage when it needs work, that sort of thing.

Examining a file of ‘Tihoi Reflections’, copied from forty-four-hour solo booklets throughout the past five years\(^3\), one gets a fascinating insight into the short-term value of Tihoi from the perspective of the students themselves. There is a consistent pride in completing the many and various physical challenges and a corresponding delight in strength and other fitness gains. Most reflections speak in some positive fashion of the outdoor weekends and their newfound skills. Some celebrate the enjoyment inherent in the outdoor component of the programme, while others speak of overcoming personal barriers and hardships during the outdoor weekends. Most reflections speak to the lessons arising from living in the houses with their peers, many speak of the initial hardships socially and the camaraderie that later evolves, and a few boys reflect upon how they have dealt with real personal difficulties. Many boys explicitly appreciate the care, respect and skill of their teachers and instructors. Of interest is

\(^3\) These ‘Tihoi Reflections’ were photocopies of student writing undertaken whilst on solo prior to 2002 and were kept on file at the Tihoi campus. The reflections typically did not reference the solo experience itself, but rather provided an outlet for writing about the Tihoi experience more broadly. The criteria for selecting those reflections as-photocopied were unknown, and none of the reflections in the file presented insight into any negative dimensions of the Tihoi experience. A detailed content analysis was not undertaken, however general themes have been reported along with occasional verbatim sections of student work.
the depth of understanding the boys have of themselves and their willingness to acknowledge they have somehow changed. Most speak of themselves being somehow changed for the better by the Tihoi experience, though no boy could seemingly articulate exactly how those changes have occurred. I quote one of many such reflections to highlight the degree of ineffability:

Some of the things I have achieved at Tihoi are: learning to work as a team, my goals I set like learning how to sail, kayak and rock climb, living in a house with 7 other 4th formers. These are just a few things I have achieved at Tihoi, there are many more things that I have achieved but cannot find the words to write them down. More important that what I have achieved is what Tihoi has given to me. It has given me numerous things ranging from fitness to confidence. Tihoi has had a huge impact on me all though it may not be noticeable as there are certain things it has changed deep down inside of me.

When reflecting on my time at Tihoi as I am doing now I must take into account my friends and family, not just at Tihoi but back at home. Friends here have encouraged as well as challenged me to do things. It is great having Jack _____ in the house as I feel I am able to talk about anything with him and not be judged because of it. Mum, Russ, Nigely, Gran, Grandad, and the Whytes have all kept in touch with me through the mail and I will respect them more and become closer to them when I return.

I'm finding this reflection time very interesting as well as emotional as the good times and feelings come flooding back to me. I have wanted to used my time at Tihoi to its full potential and benefited immensely because of this, but I think the real awards and rewards are to come when I return to the real world a lot wiser than when I left it. My hole life is in front of me now and I am in charge of it because:

'I am the master of my fait,'

'I am the captain of my soul'

THANKS TIHOI

(Unknown student, intake 2001-2, original spelling & grammar)

From a social education perspective, the residential ‘house’ living aspect appears significant. Conversations with staff point to some of the very real ways the boys might be extended within their houses at Tihoi. John Furminger reports (interview 1):
A number of kids have come in being very selfish, having never shared a room and just for that to happen, the learning there in the house around being flexible and compromising are lessons for life. I’m sure you can’t be in this programme for that amount of time and not have something impact upon you.

Tim Smithells, Director of Student Welfare for St. Paul’s Collegiate School, provides other insights (interview 1):

One of the critical elements is the social education daily around the house. Yes, where they are learning to live together, to iron out the situations that might otherwise be sticky, learning to communicate. Um many of the boys having been to Tihoi become relatively skilled communicators, relative to other boys who have not been to Tihoi who arrive after Tihoi – we notice the difference.

Both John and Christine Furminger report that boys occasionally arrive at Tihoi with behavioural issues, and that there is the growing awareness that Tihoi and St. Paul’s Collegiate has been successful with turning those individuals around. Tim Smithells (interview 1) explains how Tihoi might ‘turn around’ such individuals:

…we help youngsters who have had family troubles or behavioural troubles. And many of those youngsters turn around. Tihoi, for some of those boys who come in the 3rd form, is the difference between life and death for these boys. Because they go down there and try their well-worn disruptive habits at Tihoi and it doesn’t work there. They ah, they fundamentally reach a point at Tihoi where they have to make a decision – do I get stuck in here and contribute and learn and share or do I fold my cards.

Smithells also highlights the many instances of less-dramatic changes brought about by Tihoi (interview 1):

There are also many more boys who have regarded Tihoi as a major impact in their lives - youngsters who come back to school and are a different and changed person. And the changes to me appear permanent and long lasting.

It seems that Teachers at St. Paul’s do indeed notice changes in boys pre- and post- Tihoi. For Director John Furminger Tihoi is about creating the conditions whereby the boys are affirmed in a genuine sense relative to who they are, regardless of the individual concerned (interview 1):
They might be behaviourally challenged or a top academic achiever that they are able to... ...to develop a sense of self value, a sense of inner strength, a sense of purpose. Success at something for all boys appears the key. One of the reasons I have maintained the range of activities as broad as I can is that everyone has a chance at success. You got the big rugby guys held up as heroes at St. Paul’s every assembly and they struggle on the rock climb and you’ve got the small wiry kid who scarpers up the rock, and the guy who succeeds at kayaking when the rugby guy with the big upper body is always falling over, and it is a leveller. Everyone has a chance to be held up... the guy who comes out of the woodwork and is the top shot with shooting ... everyone can at some point be able to stand up, to be held up as successful.

Perusing student’ ‘Tihoi Reflections’ one cannot help but accept that the affirmation process has been hugely successful in terms of the boys being able to internalise what their strengths are, what they have achieved and are proud of, some of the things they might have learned and, for some, where they are heading in life. Some of those personal gifts and strengths are externally affirmed on the last night at Tihoi, where every boy in every house is affirmed and recognised, as Tim Smithells (interview 1) explains:

...while some boys win special awards, the more important part of the whole process is that every tutor who runs a house stands up and affirms each boy in the house – often in unusual and humorous ways, but the message is clear: you are valued, you are a member of both of a house, of a family and of a community, and you have played your part and I find that just lovely. I’m someone who believes that everybody really needs affirmation and encouragement... ...it is what happens publicly for the boys, so that they come back here and they have a sense of self value and inner strength, they come back with the sense of having been affirmed – about who they are, what they can do, and where their contribution might be made in life.

There is a metaphor bandied about St Paul’s and Tihoi that ‘Boys arrive to Tihoi and they leave as Men’; that the Tihoi experience is about some masculine journey, as the St Paul’s website (G Fenton, 2008c) attests:

The unique environment and programme of the Tihoi campus provides students with a “rite of passage” in which they are safely able to physically and spiritually grow from boys into young men.

Certainly Mike Shaw accepts that metaphor as holding true from his time as Tihoi Director (interview 1):
Yeah definitely they left as young men, they couldn’t not help grow up more knowledgeable about themselves able to relate with others, were a lot stronger and physically able. Yes, they were young men for sure by the time they left. They were themselves; they had immersed themselves in the natural world, and had worked hard with others.

For John Furminger there is unease with the boys to men metaphor. He is an ardent believer that Tihoi accelerates social learning but that in this day and age the metaphor is not only inaccurate but also unhelpful. According to John Furminger “an alternative bi-line would be viewing Tihoi itself as a metaphor for life” (interview 1), whereby every experience can be in some way transferred to everyday situations. As he states on a Television New Zealand news story (TVNZ, 2002), “I hope they take these skills with them. I hope they take them and apply them to all of life, be it marriage, be it work, or be it school work.”

John Furminger acknowledges (interview 1) that the notion of ‘letting the mountains speak for themselves’ is not that effective when it comes to the boys reflecting upon and transferring experiential lessons to future situations: “…fourteen year old boys, they have to be spoken to, they have to be shown what the mountain is saying.” Thus when it comes to Tihoi being a metaphor for life, Furminger tells of the need to make the connections for the students. He shares a couple of examples (interview 1):

Well if you are late then you miss out. If you don’t turn up to work on time, if you don’t front up you don’t get paid...

If you finally get that ultimate job after lots of hard work, you have been to varsity, worked really hard to get there, and then you get there and there is this really horrible person there who you don’t like. Are you gonna walk away again, or are you going to work on it, make the communication happen?

Despite the discomfort John Furminger has with the ‘boys to men’ metaphor and his intent on promoting an alternative expression that is more about independence, ‘boys into men’ is what many of the boys appear to hear. Hatwell (2009) shares his perspectives, derived from his time at Tihoi towards the end of the Furminger era:

The Tihoi Venture School was there to make you a man. Because a man is something you need to be made into. You might think there are infinite different examples of what a man might be, you might think that every way of
experiencing life has value regardless of how different it is to your own. Hell, you might not even think that being a man is really that important as to how you define yourself. But according to Tihoi Venture School you would be wrong. There is a singular vision of how a young man should develop and if you diverge from it you will be punished until you get it right.

The theme is perpetuated through ongoing reference in the public domain:

*Close Up (TVNZ, 2008):* At St Paul’s they say the students are sent to Tihoi as boys and come home as men.

*Country Life (Stiles, et al., 2008):* Chris Wyn, current Co-Director: One of the age-old philosophies or theories at Tihoi, ever since 1979 from the first intake, is that Tihoi, you come to Tihoi and Tihoi will turn you into a man....

*Boys Go Bush (TVNZ, 2006):* Narrator: They’re just regular fourteen year old teenage boys from a private school in Hamilton but these boys are being sent back to basics, to a forest camp where the teachers’ mission is to make men of them. Narrator: (Since Tihoi’s inception) Boys have been coming here ever since for their initiation into manhood....

*St. Paul’s Collegiate School website (G Fenton, 2008c):* The unique environment and programme of the Tihoi campus provides students with a “rite of passage” in which they are safely able to physically and spiritually grow from boys into young men.

Belgian Anthropologist van Gunnep (1960) coined the phrase ‘rite of passage’ to represent a three stage process: of separation from a familiar social world, the transition from an old state to a new state, and a re-emergence into the original social structure. In the case of Tihoi the transition from home and St. Paul’s Collegiate School to the Tihoi Venture School experience then ultimately returning back to St. Paul’s and home might represent such a rite of passage journey. Neill (2004) outlines that such a ‘rite-of-passage’ journey is usually psychologically, physically and spiritually intense, and involves some ritualistic celebration particular to a culture. Tihoi-as-experience involves many activities that collectively contribute to a distinct learning culture and, as John Furminger discusses (interview 1), it is the ‘group-journey’ dimension that is important:

*I think Tihoi is a rite of passage... ...the journey of removing from the trappings of civilisation, removing from parents and other support groups, I think going with a group of your peers to Tihoi, yes it is a rite of passage and I think you’ll find...*
that there is more around groups of boys doing things together in terms of a rite of passage at the same time, and leaving existing conditions to something new, and then ultimately returning.

For John Furminger (interview 1) it is the solo component of the programme that is best placed to assist each student make some sense of the journey they have collectively been on:

So to me it (solo) is crucial… …it helps bring it (the experience at Tihoi) all together, and one hopes that on solo and also on expedition they have the chance to think about all the things at Tihoi, they have their journals and can think of their house, who has been great in the house, and I’m thinking of a couple of houses who have really had to work just so hard to get everything together in the house and to make it run well…. On solo I hope they can sit and think about that process, all they have done, the relationships in the house, the hardships, the celebrations.

The Tihoi Solo

While solo in Mike Shaw’s formative era seems to have been a short overnight occurrence with the students ‘surprised’ into the experience of being alone in the bush, the forty-four hour solo in the Tihoi programme today appears far more structured. This section provides descriptive insights to the solo at Tihoi, as derived from personal observations, insights from the Tihoi staff, and from written student work from previous solo experiences. From my observations, an immensity of preparatory work is undertaken prior to the actual experience, and staff work hard to ensure that students feel well prepared logistically, physically, and psychologically.

Armed with two quality sheets of plastic and enough food to easily cope for the duration, the soloists are well supported from a distance. They are oblivious to the behind-the-scenes organisation and support, and spend their forty-four hours in the bush thinking they really are alone. The challenges are very real: building a decent bivy, coping with the bush and the dark (and perhaps the images that are conjured within), encountering the boredom, and coping with one’s own company. Solo is a challenge different to most at Tihoi; students are on their own, self sufficient, and away from the teachers and instructors whom have become their new
support network during the past five or so months. They are not only expected to cope, but they are there also to reflect: on their lives, their moments at Tihoi, and on their futures.

**Solo Intent**

As the Tihoi instructor handbook describes (J Furminger & Furminger, 1998), the forty-four hour solo philosophically exists to challenge students and to provide individual reflection time so that they may examine their experiences and set goals for the future. The specific aims include:

*To provide opportunity to be alone (which is a contrast from everyday life at Tihoi); to give students opportunity to reflect on their Tihoi experience; to offer occasion to self-examine in terms of the changes that they have been through during Tihoi; to make available time to write a letter to ‘self’ to be read sometime in the future; to promote opportunities for students to set future goals, and; to focus students towards leaving Tihoi.*

“Perhaps the defining moment of Tihoi happens right here”, says John Furminger, in reference to student solos for an early television documentary about Tihoi (TVNZ, 2002). Solo sequentially follows nicely behind the practical skills training, bush experiences and survival training. But as John Furminger outlines (interview 1), there is far more than just outdoor skills contributing to solo:

*I run Tihoi in three stages: stage one lasting about 5 to 6 weeks when we walk in front of the students and show them how to do things; we almost do things for them. The second five to six weeks we walk beside them and they do it and we support them, and in the last six weeks or so we hope that we can walk behind them as we do on student led (tramp) and on our fitness type stuff. So that’s kind of the philosophical platform. And of course solo fits into that last six week period where they have got the practical skills, the bush craft skills to cope fine. And on another level they have the confidence in themselves, that’s self-efficacy, that they can do it. You know, ‘I’ve done my abseil, I’ve overcome my fears of that, I’ve been in the bush and I’m OK with that, and I can put up a tent I can look after myself, so I’ve got that confidence in myself’. So then possibly the most powerful part of the programme is around building in a number of motivational talks, making sure all our weekends are briefed and debriefed well, (getting students knowing) that we believe in them as well, and on top of that teaching the boys uhm teaching the boys to be reflective. So in their journals as well, we constantly get them to look at what they have done, to look at their behaviours, the things they feel good about, the things they don’t feel good
about and that gives them the power and chance to reflect. And along comes solo and there is two nights and really three days to do that, and that is why solo it kind of epitomises Tihoi in that it is a mini Tihoi in three days.

So is there general agreement around the intent of solos at Tihoi? The Tihoi teachers and instructors interviewed as a focus group were well informed of the objects of solo; there was a consistency across the staff to the challenging, reflective intent of the experience. There were also other ends that one teacher especially felt was important: “The boys don’t get much free time in the programme, not enough time to enjoy, to unload, to take the layers off and reflect a bit, just a time out” (focus group 1).

There was an acknowledgement from staff that while the boys were very young to be doing a lengthy solo they did seem to cope, though it was typically quite challenging for most boys. That said, the Tihoi staff were less convinced about the achievement of the reflective aims of solo, with questions asked about whether the boys could actually reflect adequately and with the depth that was expected of them. As one teacher mentioned:

Staff don’t read or access the journals, so it is hard to get any deep insights from the boys and their experiences. It’s really hard to know if students actually reflect on things, we don’t see it really… ...but then the final night celebrations often use journal excerpts and their journals seem to be powerful (focus group 1).

From my outsider position the journal is one of the handrails for students to achieve many of the desired ends for Tihoi, and this appears definitely true for solo. As Christine Furminger highlights (interview 1):

Journals are an essential process tool for students... ...they provide opportunity to document student experiences and to start thinking about those experiences. Journals provide me insight into the personal world of the students.... ...I do a lot of counselling from the journals, and it is very important to read every word and to provide feedback.

The teachers gave high praise for the work of Christine in being the Tihoi mum, keeping in touch with students via their journals. But they considered their role as house tutors as even more important for keeping in touch, and felt there was a need to really understand what students might be going through better. However, while there were unresolved questions
about the appropriateness of sharing student’ journals across the staff, there remained a general leaning toward the status quo.

Of significance was the general scepticism by the Tihoi staff (focus group 1) that the boys could actually extract any significant, deep revelations from their experiences. The one exception was an Instructor who felt that “the boys do get lots of work on how to reflect on their experiences via their journals, and that builds up to solo and expedition.” However, for two of the staff especially, they felt the students were lacking in life experience and unable to adequately draw lessons from their experiences. For those two the belief was that the real lessons from solo, if not the whole Tihoi experience, would likely unfold years later.

Certainly solo was regarded as an opportunity to be reflective by the participants of Christine Furminger’s (2002) masters’ research project:

*Solo was a significant experience as it provided a personal and mental challenge for the participants in contrast to the other outdoor activities, which had been physical, and in a group. While many feared the loneliness and boredom, probably the main aspect that was forthcoming from participants was that solo was a time for reflection on all factors experienced at Tihoi, this reflection being necessary for personal growth (C. Furminger, 2002, p. 67).*

In terms of facilitating the reflective process during the forty-four hour solo, students take their journals to read and are expected to reflect upon their documented experiences. They are also expected to write about aspects of those experiences through the medium of letter writing and the completion of a solo booklet. The booklet is A5 size and full of quotes, graphics, suggestions for passing the time, and with structured places to write. There are three main components for students to complete:

1. Three essentially blank pages are headed ‘Reflections’ and these have the instructions and questions:
   
   *Cast your mind back to the beginning of the year. List your achievements. What would you do better? What are your values? Who do you admire? How do you want to be remembered?*

2. The second section is the ‘Me Tree’ where the metaphor of a tree is used to assist the student identify their good traits. The roots represented basic values and personal
qualities (such as fairness, honesty, loyalty as depicted in the exemplar), while the trunk represented skills (such as singing, listening to others, creating things with my hands), and the branches or canopy reflected the directions you wanted your life to take (do better in science, be a good public speaker). With the ‘Me Tree’ the students were to place words in the corresponding areas of the tree that best represented their good traits.

3. The third section for each student to complete was a ‘Goal Setting Signpost’. Signposts with the headings ‘education goals’, ‘career goals’, ‘health goals’, ‘leisure goals’, ‘relationship goals’, and ‘other goals’ had spaces to outline two goals for each section. The inference was these goals would assist with the development of the ‘letter to self’ to be written on solo where the goals would be articulated.

**Getting Set for Solo: Staff Insights**

Instructional policy and guidelines for solo are comprehensive, clearly articulating with the general policy for all outdoor activities, with eleven policies and seven guidelines specific to solo (J. Furminger & Furminger, 2001). These acknowledge that things can go wrong on solo and provide staff with very clear working parameters. All seem relevant to maximising the health and welfare of students while on solo so that they are able to focus upon the educational aspects of the experience. They also provide workable systems for participants in the instance of some incident or accident surfacing. One of the other strengths of the safety and educational documentation was the sharing of solo philosophy, objectives and some of the relevant procedural aspects in a handout for students. The boys and the staff are on the same page in terms of what the experience is meant to be about, as well as what needs to happen on an hour-by-hour basis and in the event of something unexpected.

Whilst students are party to three briefings leading up to solo, what they do not see are the behind the scenes events: obtaining landowner permission for site access; mapping specific sites then allocating those sites to students based on their requests and need; organising equipment, organising food, preparing booklets and handouts; touching base with
anxious students, establishing a staff duty roster and ensuring staff are well organised and adequately briefed.

The allocation of solo sites is a classic exemplar of the level of planning and organisation that goes into the solo experience. It is a process that takes about two hours to finalise. A staff member opens the box with the site requests inside, another reads the forms out and a third types the requests into the computer: “far away”, “close to Tihoi”, “1-2km’s in the bush”, “as close as possible”. Those students who are potentially disruptive or who perhaps cannot be trusted are identified and placed first, before staff attempt to accommodate the wishes of all. It is obvious that staff know their students incredibly well, as comments recorded during the process highlight:

*He’s just a gorgeous kid isn’t he? Oh, he’s lovely, a bit of a hard man though...*

*...What about Geoff, where shall we put him? Where’s a nice site?...*

*...What about John, what about his med stuff? He’ll have to be close...*

*...What’s going on with that nice boy? He’s getting disorganized, in trouble...*

*...Oh I’m getting a few rough guys here all in a row, lets change that....*

*...He’s really, really scared though, lets put him there by the gate and keep an eye on him... ...Jack, I don’t think he will be very happy out there, what about in a bit closer?*

*...Darling little Rex, oh he could easily get scared eh?...*

By the end of the allocating sites session the trouble makers are left close to Tihoi, the students who have requested specific spots have been allocated them, scared or apprehensive boys are allocated ‘nice’ spots, friends are separated well apart, and those who have been identified as potential wanderers placed well away from others.

A master map details all the solo sites and each site is allocated a number correlating to a specific student, with the sites in four general clusters. A staff member then takes responsibility for a cluster throughout solo, coordinating staff to conduct regular site checks.
Notebooks are allocated to each of the clusters, and these are used as a checklist throughout. Lists of reminders for staff are inside the notebooks, but the main purpose is to ensure that all students are regularly accounted for. Throughout solo each of the four coordinators is required to update a white board back in the staffroom. It is an elaborate system, well thought through, and obviously field tested and refined over the years. Despite being left alone, Tihoi students are obviously well cared for during solo.

**Getting Set for Solo: Student insights (1st person)**

During the preparatory phases of solo I immersed myself into gleaning insights to what was going on for the students: what they were thinking, feeling, and doing leading up to their experience. What follows are insights to the preparatory aspects of solo, written in first person narrative with the intent of placing the reader within the experience but without speaking on behalf of any or all student soloists. The section has been developed from exhaustive field notes, including: observations of the solo preparation phases; extensive notes of key phrases used by Tihoi staff, questions asked by the students and staff responses, and; written solo material as supplied by Tihoi:

After writing up our journal for the student-led tramp, Mrs. Furminger talked a little about the forty-four hour solo: what it was all about and how it was basically a mental exercise as we had done all of the training – the bush survival weekends, bush craft, tramping. She gave us the chance to write a note for the silver box about the forty-four-hour Solo. If we wanted to do our solo in a special place, such as where we went for our six hour or really close to Tihoi or far away, we could request it. It was good to know we had a little choice about where we could go again. We could also write a note if we were really feeling scared or apprehensive. I would say lots of people are, ‘cause there were heaps of notes in the silver box. Some of the guys were tired I guess or maybe a little apprehensive about solo coming up, as there was a couple of fist fights this afternoon, which is not normal here really. Sure there is heaps of aggro between guys but hardly ever fights. I guess we have had quite a bit of time since the student led; way more than normal so that we can plan for expedition. By the looks a couple of the guys might be sent home to do their solos.

The day before solo Mrs. Furminger talked to us again about the forty-four-hour challenge... “solo is a time for you, to get to know you”. Mrs. F. made it sound like it would be a cruise compared to the kayaking, caving and climbing and abseiling challenges... “Solo is really, really easy physically. It’s a mental
challenge: Can you sit alone for forty-four hours? She then asked us to think about what we might do for forty-four hours... “Ask yourself how you will fill in time, what will you do?”

Of course then Mrs. F set the tasks. We were to build our own bivouac and some sort of mark near the track so they will know exactly where we are. The bivy would have to be wind and waterproof, and I reckon I’ll be able to do this as I nailed the survival weekend. We also had to take our journals, and in it we had put a blank letter for writing to ourselves. This would be something we would get sent around our 21st birthday. Mrs. Furminger asked us to imagine what it would be like to receive a letter from ourselves in six years or so, maybe the type of music we are into, our social life or friends, or our goals for the future. I thought this was kind of a cool concept!

There were solo rules: NO TREE CLIMBING, NO VISITING OTHERS, NO FIRES, NO CANDLES, NO KILLING LIVING TREES, NO KNIVES, NO SWIMMING, SUNBATHING ONLY IF WE HAD SUNSCREEN ON, NO BOOKS EXCEPT OUR JOURNALS. The list went on and on. Mrs. F. was adamant we shouldn’t take anything to read, saying it would not really be a solo as we would be in someone else’s story. What we could take in was the usual camping / tramping gear, lots of food (supplied), spare warm clothes and raincoat, 4 litres of water, our survival kits (without matches), our journal, a torch, our forty-four hour solo booklet, paper for letter writing, pens, our pillow (if we really needed it) and spare plastic bags. Things we had to leave behind were: watches, knives, matches, girls, and books.

“Solo is about making friends with you”, Mrs F went on in poetic mode... “Solo is an interesting thing: this might be the only time you might take the time to sit alone in the bush by yourself. You are going to spend a long time with yourself so you may as well get used to it.” “Get mentally prepared for forty-four hours alone in the bush with just you.” “This is a test of you. It is going to be you and you know you can do it; you’ve had all the training. This isn’t a physical challenge, it isn’t taxing physically.”

And there were safety instructions... we were to make some kind of Martiner next to the track and then make a clear path to our bivy from the track. This was to assist the Teachers or Tutors find us when they did their regular checks. By the sounds of it they would be checking us visually every few hours but not chatting to us. We would also be given an orange flag and if we had some sort of problem could put that out on our Martiner then they would come in and check us out.

The emergency instructions were pretty straightforward...If there was a serious emergency we would blow our whistles. We would know where the first aid kits
were left and would easily be able to get the attention of our neighbouring soloist. Other students could help us back to the centre or else run back for help.

When Mrs. F asked us for questions there were quite a few laughs and comments about random stealth visitors, like the Tihoi Slasher. She took the comments seriously, even though we were all joking, and told us to talk to strangers if they visited, to tell them what we were doing, and that a Tihoi staff member would be coming along very soon. She also said it was fine to talk to staff if we needed to, especially if we were feeling sad, fearful, or feeling like we can’t do solo. Going to your neighbour was also OK if something was not right. And so seeking help would not be a fail, nor would returning to the centre if we weren’t coping well (so long as we checked straight in with staff there). But disturbing the solo of someone else meant a fail, and I think Mrs F was serious when she said that. “This is your chance to prove you can be alone with the tasks set” she said, “we don’t want you walking around.”

Later Mrs F. asked us what we might be scared of for solo. A few of the guys mentioned being hungry, or being bored, and maybe that our bivy might leak if it rained. Then she asked “how many of you don’t think you will be able to finish the forty-four hour solo?” and maybe just fewer than half the guys put their hand up. That was a bit of a surprise to me as I thought more of the guys would be OK about doing solo. Then she asked “who will find solo a real challenge but will finish?”, and about the same number indicated they could do it, maybe 40%, and I nearly put my hand up too. Anyway then she asked “who will find it a cruise?”, and so I put my hand up with about five other guys.

Mrs F. mentioned that we were right to be a little concerned about our bivy getting wet as the forecast was for wet and cold. She told us we would get two sheets of plastic, some string, and that we needed to be sure we had scissors in our survival kit and for us to pick up a few smooth stones off the driveway for making button-holes in our plastic sheets. Her advice was to get straight into building our shelter. “All of the sites were in cool places and have been used by Tihoi students before” she said. Her point was that there would be other guys doing solo next intake and that we needed to keep the site looking natural. We would be practising minimum impact (just like every instructor had shown us in every activity we’d done so far). That meant digging a little hole to bury our toilet waste.

The next morning after breakfast we had to take our packs down to the truck, then mid-morning we met in the dining hall where Chris gave us a review of different shelter construction techniques and how to use stones as button-holes for joining the plastic sheets together. It was the same as we had done on survival weekend but it was great to revise it again. After that Mr. F gave us the run down on exactly what would happen from here... we’ll go over the rules
again, and then head up to the rock wall for a solo sermon from Reverend Peter visiting from St. Paul’s. After lunch we would be put into four groups, we would be given the plastic sheets and string, and then we would pack up our food and get out of here.

Mr. F used lots of ‘what if?’ questions to get us thinking about the right response to things that might need to be managed on solo. It was all common sense really. It was also obvious that solo was an activity with just as many risks as the other outdoor weekends, because of the number of rules set. Actually most of the guys were very quiet, taking things seriously, so Mr. F. lightened things up. He talked about not needing to be afraid of animals in the New Zealand bush...

“...small boys aren’t very tasty to eat. They smell bad and besides any self respecting bush dweller wouldn’t be seen dead hanging out with 4th formers.” Then later he talked about ways of using time wisely and started singing that Pink Floyd song “Ticking away the moments that make up a dull day, you fritter and waste the hours in an off hand way...” Anyway, I thought he was funny.

Up at the rock wall Reverend Peter told us ‘we were heading off for a grand experience’ and ‘that we couldn’t help but be influenced by a forty-four hour solo’. He talked about the use of solitude within spiritual practice, especially some of the solitary monks and how Jesus himself had spend 40 days and nights on his own in a cave without food. He told of a solitary woman who had meditated mostly alone for twenty five years, and then told a story of the vision pit and a Lakota Sioux Indian boy who had four days and nights alone in order to have his vision and attain manhood. ‘Solo is designed to look inside your self’ he said, and ‘don’t be afraid of spiritual voices and insights’... My mind drifted all over the place as the Reverend was talking, mostly thinking about how I’ll build a bivy, then next thing we were off for lunch.

That lunch was massive – roast pork with heaps of roast veggies, followed by desert. After cleaning up we got into our groups, and I found out I was heading up the AB track to the place where I did my six hour solo. We collected our two sheets of plastic and string, had our gear checked, then went in and got our food: half a loaf of bread, 4 muesli bars, 4 cheese slices, 5 margarine sachets, 6 jam and peanut butter spread sachets, 3 fruit, 2 slices of ham, and 6 of those awesome tuck biscuits that can last you half a day.

So off we went as a small group, but not before having our watches taken off us. There was a silence as we walked up the AB track; no one was into saying anything, or maybe we were all too full of lunch. I was struggling with the four litres of water in my pack and all my gear. Eventually we were given our spots, and asked to set up our mailbox first before starting on the bivy. After maybe an hour Pieke was back checking up on me. She made sure I knew about the 5 metres circle around my bivy, went over all of the rules again, and even
suggested I fine-tune my bivy a little. She left about the time the drizzle started, so I set up inside my home for the next 43 or so hours and listened to the sounds of the forest and of light rain on plastic.

**On Solo: Staff Insights**

The boys have been allocated their solo spots, their bivy shelters have been built (some better than others), the ‘return checks’ on each boy have been completed, and the Tihoi leaders have returned back down the track for a scheduled late afternoon meeting. **So what are the boys doing now I ask?** The (focus group 1) response is almost orchestrated… “SLEEPING”, then silence, “…or maybe shitting themselves” one of the team suggests. On the first night it sounds as though the boys mostly set up their shelters and sleep as best they can. ‘The biv’ is something the boys like to spend time on, and there would be fine-tunings on the shelters to channel the drips away from body and possessions. Some would also be apprehensive about the approaching darkness.

Christine Furminger speaks of the positive qualities of the bush setting, suggesting that the uncertainty of the forest adds to the allure (interview 1):

*I think the bush offers a mystique, some apprehension, some fear for the kids; so solo in another environment is maybe not so powerful, not so challenging.*

The programme staff provide insights to the apprehension being faced by some of the boys (focus group 1):

*I had a couple scared they couldn’t build their bivy and then realising there was no one there to help them that they would need to be totally self reliant... that really scared them... ...students get used to all the control and supervision for other outdoor activities, then hello, this time they are on their own.*

As one of the leaders goes on to highlight (focus group 1):

*I see the solo as THE big thing for many guys at Tihoi, so a lot of them just feel it is about survival. A coping thing... a sense of accomplishment... of being able to survive the loneliness ... it really depends on the students themselves and what they want to get out of it.*

By the sounds once that first night has been endured (by the nervous or apprehensive) or slept through (by those feeling more at home in the bush) then the real challenges begin;
dealing with what to do with all of the alone time. In their forty-four hour solo booklet students do get some pointers to coping with fears, anxieties, and boredom:

Solo: The most boring or the most productive time you can spend. For many of you there are many fears and anxieties as you now sit alone in the forest. Remember nature is your friend. Think of ways you can show this or experience this... make up a game; noughts and crosses make a pack of cards and play patience use rocks and play knucklebones what a perfect time to learn to juggle and still the day lingers on write a poem you choose the topic write in your journal (catch up your journal); do some weaving with the plants around you; remember the cairn competition; don’t use growing vegetation; make a message using leaves or sticks; write your poem on the ground using stones / sticks or anything you can find; make the best bivvy; think of ways you could improve it; find a piece of pumice and carve it with a stick; but most of all take time to reflect; take time to plan your destiny; you are in charge

Exactly what students do after the first night remains somewhat of a mystery, and staff observations during the routine checks bring to light a variety of endeavour (focus group 1):

...sleeping, I’ve seen a few writing, some building bivys better, some wandering around. Survival instincts are strong for most, but some of the guys would just curl up and hope for the best... ...most of the boys are pretty tough, but not all – we do a good job at knowing who those ones are.

The insights from the Tihoi co-Directors are similar to those of their staff in terms of what the boys will do on solo. Christine Furminger first (interview 1):

I think they get hell-bored most of them, they throw rocks, they would, oh some of them have amazing calm, they work on their bivys they work on their tasks, they sleep, they eat, they write letters.

Then John Furminger (interview 1):

A lot sleep, some get very bored, a lot write letters which is reflection in itself, and some will be throwing stones and mulling on things... ...Sometimes I walk past them and they are sitting and thinking, or they are just sitting... ...either way that is OK.

The programme staff accept that boredom is an issue for some students, and that there are temptations to push the boundaries physically and psychologically (focus group 1):

Yeah we say five metres knowing that they will move further from their bivy than that... ...students know they are not allowed to swim and most don’t ‘cause
it’s usually too cold… they know they are not allowed to climb hard out things but some do, they are out there pushing the boundaries… …they wouldn’t knowingly put themselves at risk, though they do make decisions to break some of the rules… …we probably don’t know the half of it, last year I saw this guy just sprinting over the hill away from me.

Whether it arises from boredom, loneliness or some other factor, boys do occasionally wander from their sites. Christine Furminger reports (interview 1):

I think boys do wander, they have that natural instinct to wander around, to climb trees, then again we had that cold weather last year and some of the boys built their biv, crawled in, and didn’t re-emerge. Some go on a mission which is a real, real worry. Yeah like first intake there was a boy who would just go bush. We just have to trust the students in those cases… Then there are kids who will move just a small distance to find some sunshine, finding the sun is the key, guys will wander to find patches of sunshine.

Programme staff know that the occasional boy will move from their solo site, and so like to keep the timing of their checks a mystery to diminish those occurrences. They also back their preparations: “Sure there are boys visiting each other, sure. But we know them and can avoid that; a lot of energy goes into placements by staff before they go out” (focus group 1).

The solo experience seems strongly influenced by the weather and location, and may have a bearing whether solo becomes a survival episode or an opportunity for reflection. Christine Furminger reports (interview 1):

…the weather really affects that (what students do on solo), whether they are wet and cold, or in the sun. Last year we had some of the coldest weather for July on record, and the boys just hibernated, it was all about completing, surviving… …then again when it is wet they can spend a lot of time in their bivys writing, in the end it comes back down to the person.

The Tihoi leaders confer (focus group 1):

…fine weather typically means more introspection, cooler weather and it is more survival but it’s not always like that… …the location of sites sometimes dictate experiences.

I next ask, do students reflect while on solo? John Furminger (interview 1) suggests that the boys can and do reflect but that their reflective efforts need to be channelled carefully:
... we talked about letting the mountains speak before, I don’t think these lads could be let go alone on solo without some real direction... ...and so I think that is a key element of solo, having the booklet and a few key things to focus on is essential really.

He goes on to qualify the statement by acknowledging the preliminary work leading up to solo (John Furminger, interview 1):

Come solo I think the students can reflect... ...they are hopefully well past that, that Christine has worked hard with them to get well past that point (where they can think about their experiences) by the time they get to solo. They do a lot of reflection in their journal, on their trial solo, during some of the weekend debriefs... ...so on solo even if they are just sitting there it doesn’t matter does it. Even if they are sitting their mind is doing something. The significance might come later on.

Christine Furminger appreciates the time on solo that feeds into the mind space; the thinking time that sometimes leads to important realisations for students (interview 1):

I think solo is a really challenging time for a lot of boys, issues for them become apparent, they have time by themselves and they start to reflect. In some ways it is a bit scary in that you are opening a box and you don’t know what is going to pop out, and a lot of boys have a lot of baggage they have never worked through and so we are taking them through this process of looking at themselves and reflecting. And when they get on solo the issues become very very real for them, and a lot of the guys come around to thinking ‘I’m ready, ready to deal with things’ and so solo is quite a turning point for some of them in their lives. Some kids, they take the chance to talk about those things (via their writing), and solo becomes a time to really crystallise their thoughts.

Whilst an advocate for students writing about their experiences, there is an acceptance by Christine Furminger (interview 1) that reflection does not necessarily require putting pencil to paper:

I think solo does really allow boys to reflect on their experiences at Tihoi, because we don’t let them take anything they just take their journal and even if they just read the journal, even if they don’t write anything I believe that the boys cannot help but think about their experience during solo. Because they are just sitting... ...in the end there is a lot of time to fill in.

Christine Furminger is adamant that the boys do actually write a lot on solo and that the process of writing cannot help but be reflective. She holds a privileged position in that she
ultimately peruses all of the forty-four hour solo booklets and the journals, and so knows better than anyone the creative work that can and does take place. Christine acknowledges that most of the reflections appear shallow but that underlying the words can occasionally be some deeper understandings, and very sporadically there is a boy who has the writing skill to articulate that depth of thought:

*Every kid has to write, it is an essential part of solo, and some really get passionate about it and write screeds, ten or twelve pages sometimes. They do have lots and lots to write about here at Tihoi... We’ve had kids come in who have never really written much before and suddenly there is so much to write about, it is just wonderful... I’ve got them writing about their whole Tihoi experience, really thinking about their experience, what it has been like, how they have changed or if they have not changed why not, what they have actually got out of it. Typically kids are quite pedestrian and go through the motions around reflecting, talking about the highlights and their outdoor skills, their fitness, and then occasionally you get a real celebration of their life at Tihoi, kids who write very deeply and meaningfully, how Tihoi might influence their future, things that have happened in their life maybe some of the profound achievements they have had (interview 1).*

So is the experience of solo significant for the participants? I ask. That is, are the boys learning something from the experience or is solo just one of a collection of experiences for students? Are there pedagogical or personal outcomes from solo that I have yet to identify? John Furminger’s initial response (interview 1) is typically philosophical:

*...so what are they learning from it, firstly they are very fortunate... I don’t know many adults that have been given two or three days to just spend time alone... the chance to sit and think for a period like that is a privilege... what they take away from that is incredibly personal... There will be some that will walk away with a lot less than others... if you would like to think that solo is life changing I don’t think solo is at all life changing but that the process might cap it off. For example, one of the things they do on solo is that they write letters to themselves to be delivered later, some choose to have that in the seventh form, some for their 21st, and so I’ve had guys ringing up wondering where their letter is, and so that is something that doesn’t leave them. If they have bothered to put that down, I’m writing this for when I am 21... you would think that is one of those little things that helps them think about the future, it is just one of so many things here that we use to just chip away. It’s not one bolt of light, one revelation, or moment of epiphany, but just chipping away.*
Christine Furminger similarly acknowledges solo as a significant Tihoi element, deeply embedded into the wider Tihoi experience. Yet with that rootedness there is also the acknowledgement of achievable, specific, and personal outcomes via solo. She highlights self efficacy and independence as two such ends (interview 1):

Well let’s talk about self-efficacy for a start, a lot of kids don’t think they can do it (solo) at the start of Tihoi, they honestly don’t, when they come back and they have done it the aura around them is amazing, it’s amazing, even when they return from the little solo that they have this aura around them, it’s quite an amazing thing, quite hard to describe, they are so pleased to have achieved it. Some of them are just so scared of solo, we had a boy last year who I spent a lot of time talking about it, preparing for it and he came back and said ‘it wasn’t that hard’. All that apprehension and fear, then he was so proud to have done it...

Then what about independence, they have to organize themselves, come time for solo we don’t really need to hold their hand. ...Every group and every kid is different and I believe on solo the kid has to be responsible for everything, and then when they are out there they have to plan their day... respecting their own abilities”.

One is left wondering how solo might manifest in terms of independence and self efficacy for the students currently alone in the Tihoi bush. Certainly it is the belief of the Tihoi staff that time is very necessary for the boys to make some sense of their solo, and indeed to the whole Tihoi journey (focus group 1, [square brackets separate multiple voices in conversation]):

I reckon they won’t even realize it (the significance of what they have done) for at least four weeks... [Yeah they’ll not even think about solo afterwards till months later.] I think they take away a lot of skills from Tihoi... social skills, outdoor skills, cooking skills, coping skills... just living away from home... ...yeah a sense of achievement... [Regarding solo some will think ‘I’ve survived’, others will say ‘yeah this has been massive’.] Some really leave here physically fit, raring to go full of like physically fit, onto it, ready for action. Most will be a little more outgoing and confident with interactions with staff, other peers and a different view of adults... ...they get a perspective of being an adult... ...that sense of value as they are talked to and regarded not as kids but as humans. Some will realise they don’t like some things, that is great learning too... [They get the skills to hang out, to be social, after first not knowing how to play together, what to do in free time... ...they make some good friends if nothing else, they appreciate
others, open their eyes to other views and ideas. But yeah, the meaning of it all will come clear eventually).

**Summary**

The presentation of ethnographic data early in this work has been a deliberate strategy for engaging the reader to the phenomenon of solo and to the contextual experience that is Tihoi. This chapter has acknowledged the socio-historical and pedagogical context for investigating the lived experiences of solitude for programme participants at Tihoi, and has provided important insights to the solo experience itself. The vicarious insights provided by Tihoi managers and staff to the student solo experience are fascinating and, coupled with the written insights of former Tihoi soloists, point to an experience of potential personal and pedagogical significance embedded within a carefully crafted, innovative educational programme. These preliminary ethnographic insights also bring forth many unanswered questions and ideas associated with the solo experience at Tihoi that need to be explored.

*Pre-Understandings: Tihoi Solitudes* acknowledges the ethnographic backdrop and contextual understandings of the Tihoi solo. The following chapter *Pre-Understandings: Solo, Nature, Adventure* similarly provides important academic background to the phenomenon that is the adolescent nature-based solo. Ultimately, however, I must turn to the actual lived solo experiences of the students at Tihoi; to bring to being via an experiential phenomenology of practice (van Manen, 2002, 2006) the actual lived experiences at Tihoi that might deepen and enrich our understandings of adolescent, nature-based solitude.
Chapter 3, Pre-Understandings: SOLO, NATURE, ADVENTURE

_The first great thing is to find yourself and for that you need solitude and contemplation... or at least sometimes. I tell you, deliverance will not come from the noisy centres of civilization. It will come from the lonely places._


A wealth of literature addresses the concept of solitude, and from a variety of academic perspectives including psychology, health and wellness, and counselling / therapy. Similarly the disciplines of theology, recreation and leisure studies, eco-psychology, humanistic geography and the various sub fields of ecology all provide insights to alone-time in nature. Yet there appears a lack of consensus and understandings to the experience of being in solitude, with a variety of meanings across cultures and through time.

This chapter is separated into two key sections. The first is a discussion of the literature associated with solitude generally, with specific interest in matters related to adolescents in solitude. The second section details the use of wilderness solitude within outdoor, adventure education where the experience occurs in and with nature / the outdoors / wilderness.

van Manen (1997, 2000) notes that the emphasis of phenomenological work resides with capturing the essential qualities of an experience ‘as-lived’. The pre-understandings a researcher brings to the research process are an amalgam of personal experiences and interpretations of relevant literature and other information gleaned from the lifeworld. Additional insights emerge from the experience of the research process itself, as the researcher engages with the phenomenological question. What follows therefore are pre-understandings on ‘solo’ emerging from the literature rather than an exhaustive review. As the essential qualities of experience emerge from the study so too shall additional insights from the literature.
Part One: Solitude

The Semantics of Solitude

Much has been written on the phenomenon of solitude, particularly within psychology and religious studies, providing variety to the definitions that exist. The etymological roots of the word Solitude, from Vest (1987), are solus (alone) and tudo (abstraction as characterised by mental processes such as contemplation). Thus solitude etymologically reflects a “soul mood” that is related loosely to the natural world away from others (p.306). In examining these etymological sources, Vest presents solus as holding two variants. Firstly solus implies a ‘seclusion and loneliness of life’ from other humans, inferring a retreat or withdrawal from everyday life and particularly in the case of monks hermits and recluses (Bobilya, 2005; Colegate, 2002). Here solus resonates with the Platonic notion of anachoresis or a flight, retirement and withdrawal to enable purity of thought without distraction. This speaks to the potential of transcendence from the solitude experience. Secondly solus may imply a derogatory image of nature as being of limited usefulness for humans, as being without habitation or improvement, or it may intimate wildness and the pristine (Vest, 1987).

The conception of solitude as ‘soul mood’ provides glimpses into the tacit connections between solitude and nature. Indeed a variety of dictionary definitions of ‘solitude’ include the term ‘wilderness’. Vest (1987) suggests soul mood is derived from religious observance; of being with and in natural places in the presence of God. Soul mood is meditative and contemplative and fosters wilderness associations by virtue of definition. As an environmental philosopher Vest has sought to define soul mood via a deconstruction of the term into four themes: solitude as interior; solitude as sublime; solitude as sole, and; solitude as rapture. While Buccholz (1994, p. 308) infers that Vest’s deconstruction of solitude as a term is “splitting hairs”, there appears some usefulness in examining each of the themes for the purpose of exploring links between solitude and wilderness.

Vest (1987, p. 312) states “we are compelled to go to the Interior (wilderness) to find the soulful interior (self)” (italics and capital in original). Thus Solitude as Interior assumes nature provides a backdrop for the meditative and contemplative aspects of solitude, whether that
natural place be regarded as lonely, uninhabited or pristine. Aspects of the wild (such as
birdlife, flora and fauna, and geological forms) and our reactions to such wilderness provide
opportunities for ecological connection and knowing, or what Vest (p. 312) terms “ecological
discovery and moral attentiveness”. Lying deeply within the solitude of the interior is ‘nature’s
solitude’ and an acknowledgement of a need for wildness to flourish alone and free from
human influence or control. Solitude as Sublime and Solitude as Sole both refer to the aesthetic
qualities of nature, requiring some form of aesthetic valuation of surroundings. The Sublime
may involve ‘positive’ notions of joy and exaltation and ‘negative’ feelings of fear, trepidation
or desolation. The aesthetics of Sole relate to beauty and the interesting and profound aspects
of nature and the cosmos. In Sole the emphasis lies with an aesthetic contemplation of
wildness in solitude. Solitude as Rapture infers a soul mood state that could be regarded as a
peak experience, a transcending of the ego, the giving of solace or recognition of ‘at-one-ment’
with ones surroundings; a state Vest implies is rooted in traditional conceptions of religious
rapture.

Solitude, according to Morgan (1986), is the willing choice to be with oneself and this
motivational dimension to solitude appears a defining characteristic. Morgan stresses the
choice inherently is a decision to not only consciously embrace solitude, silence, and stillness
but also to remain in solitude and embrace deep inner work; to move beyond simply
recharging batteries or escaping the busyness of life. As Merton, in his classic work Thoughts in
solitude, describes (1958, p. 258) “The silence of the woods forces you to make a decision
which the tensions and artificialities of society may help you to evade forever. Do you want to
be by yourself or don’t you.”

Whilst the etymological roots of solitude connect wilderness with solitary human
experience, some philosophers suggest an outdoor context for solitude may not be a necessity.
Storr (1988) draws a strong philosophical picture of solitude in the contemporary world
without reference to the wilderness, the outdoors, and only scant reference to nature. He
argues that society has become preoccupied with intimacy and interpersonal relationships as
the source of personal happiness. Thus Storr promotes solitude as an organic need and that to
experience solitude positively is a learned art, but that wild nature is not necessarily a
requirement. Koch (1994) similarly promotes solitude as the capacity to be alone for the purposes of self discovery and self realisation, emphasising social disengagement combined with contemplative reflection as the essential ingredients. Whilst Koch does not necessarily place solitude in the woods, the bush, or the wilderness, he does promote the virtue of ‘attunement to nature’ that is available with solitude. Here Koch resonates with Vest (1987) in suggesting solitude presents opportunities for enhanced depths of meditation and contemplation when the backdrop is nature. It is the polarity against our daily preoccupation for social engagement that creates the real opportunities inherent in solitude (Hollenhurst & Jones, 2001), and for Koch (1994) nature has the potential for facilitating a deeper level of meditative insight.

The philosophical emphasis upon reflective processes with solitude, Buchholz (1999) suggests, deems solitude as an adult term. Aspired states of solitude require both an intimate knowledge of one’s populated world as well as the capacity to reflect deeply on that world once one turns from it; skills Buchholz suggests are beyond the experiences of most children or adolescents. Yet Galanaki (2005) reports that children and especially adolescents are well able to distinguish between the concepts of aloneness, loneliness, and solitude without the life experience of adults to call upon. Whilst younger children were highly likely to associate being alone with feeling lonely, Galanaki’s work highlights the developing propensity (with age) of young people to acknowledge what she terms ‘beneficial aloneness’ arising from voluntary solitude. Like Buchholz (1999), Galanaki promotes ‘alonetime’ as a more inclusive term that provides a positive quality to time alone rather than the typically-negative associations from the word solitude.

Knapp & Smith (2005) use the terms solo, silence, and solitude to present as broad a definition as possible to encapsulate the range of experiences available for those seeking to go outside to then go inside themselves. As they state (p. vi),

*there is clearly a connection between going out to nature’s various ecosystems and going into our mysterious mind. Sometimes in order to go inside ourselves, we need to go outside; and sometimes in order to go outside ourselves, we need to gather the strength and courage needed for the challenge.*
In is clear that Knapp and Smith (2005) speak to the inner and outer realms of solitude. Bobilya (2005) similarly discusses solitude as a state of being alone but not lonely, as a state of privacy rather than isolation. Later I provide a typology of solitude as relevant to the field of outdoor adventure education, highlighting a number of other conceptions of solitude that exist specific to the primary intent of the experience. But first I shall traverse some of the literature related to the historical, psychological, and ecological dimensions of solitude generally.

**Historical Insights to Solitude**

The central meaning of the term solitude in the Bible relates to a place away from society and typically relates to the desert (Aitken, 1998; Bobilya, 2005; Burton-Christie, 2006). The Old Testament infers a Judeo-Christian interpretation of solitude as a wasteland and place of evil spirits. Yet paradoxically it was Moses and the Israelite nation who, during their forty-year exodus wandering in the wilderness, sought to commune with God. Arising from such wilderness God speaks to Moses from the burning bush, the chosen people are spared from Egyptian slavery, and the laws for the new nation of Palestine are revealed. It seems apparent that the wilderness was indeed a place of mysticism more so than a place of evil (Colegate, 2002).

In the New Testament, Jesus sojourns alone into the wilderness to commune with God and to affirm his faith, which at one time included a solitary experience of forty days and forty nights (Buchholz, 1999). After the crucifixion of Christ the Christians remained a persecuted people, and in the third and fourth centuries many Christians fled to the deserts once again. This escape from persecution fostered the ‘eremite ideal’, which has been suggested as the birthplace of monasticism (Colegate, 2002), with an estimated 5000 hermits seeking solitude and faithful communion in the desert (Suedfeld, 1982). Such Christian monastic life developed into a complex series of orders, promoting various levels of seclusion, solitude and community support (Bobilya, 2005).

A richness of writing speaks to solitude as a consciousness-enhancing process, with occasional opportunities for transcendence. Vest traces early classical references to solitude, whereby Plato introduces in his play *Phaedo* the first “locus classicus of solitudinarians” (1987,
p. 308). This journey to true wisdom was via self denial and separation from bodily pleasures, of withdrawing from the body and being alone with oneself. Plato utilised the term *anachoresis* to infer such solitude was a flight from the political and social, an escape to the countryside as a means of getting away from it all. It was Plotinus, according to Vest, who fused *anachoresis* with the notion of solitude, suggesting a mystical purpose to his solitude. Thus solitude became a route to transcendence, and in terms of Greek mysticism, presented opportunities for achieving “...Absolute Beauty, Perfect Good, and ultimate Oneness...” (Vest, p.309).

For Plotinus solitude held an explicitly religious purpose. However, in terms of Platonic (educational) ends, Socrates saw no value in *anachoresis* beyond the mystical... “You must forgive me, dear friend; I’m a lover of learning, and trees and open country won’t teach me anything, whereas men in town do” (Plato, in Vest, 1987, p. 308).

Suedfeld (1982) detailed the history of solitude over time. He shares how individual experiences in / with nature have characterised the education of youth within cultures throughout the world since first beginnings. He further described how major religious innovators have utilised alonetime in natural settings to commune with their higher God(s), and that subsequently thousands of hermits, monks, anchorites, mahatmas and mystics have utilised solitude in wild places for similar ends. Interestingly, Suedfeld highlights the honour and esteem espoused upon such individuals over time from throughout both eastern and western cultures.

Solitude practices are found in most societies and religions, suggesting there is both a human capacity and desire to seek such experience. Buccholz (1999) and Colegate (2002) also detail the solitude associated with hermits, monks, mystics, anchorites, mahatmas and prophets, with Buccholz (1999) celebrating the importance of solitude and meditation common to most world religions. Indeed James (2008, original 1902) related solitude to not necessarily being alone but rather to being alone with God. There James (p.27) defines religion as “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude.” Merton (1958, p. 38) similarly speaks with eloquence of solitariness and God: “It is in silence, and not in communion,
in solitude and not in crowds, that God best likes to reveal Himself most intimately to men.”

These religious traditions throughout many cultures and societies have given honoured roles to the contemplative or inspired individual pursuing enlightenment (Suedfeld, 1982).

Many tribal cultures have incorporated periods of solitude into the life experiences of their young people and sometimes with their elderly. As Suedfeld details, “adolescents passing into adulthood would, after appropriate purifications and ceremonies, leave the community to wander alone in the desert, mountains, forest, or prairie” (1982, p. 59). These may be overnight experiences or involve months of separation from the community, may involve quite culturally distinctive ritual and ceremony, and with various end goals. However, in all cases there was an expectation upon the individual to grow and to reach higher levels of consciousness.

With respect to early Greek literature, it was the wastelands, the deserted islands and the open seas that represented the dangerous, forlorn ‘ermenia’ (Buchholz, 1999). Here Prometheus was banished to a lonely crag on an isolated island in the Scythian wilderness, left to become solitary ‘eremos’ and obliged to live outside society. The punishment was social banishment accentuated with aloneness in wilderness (Colegate, 2002; Paige, 2005). Thus solitude came to represent both a negative, in the form of a banishment to a scary place alone, while further holding some positive qualities in terms of personally-derived growth (Storr, 1988; Watson, 1993).

History suggests that when solitude is freely chosen rather than forced upon an individual it presents deeper opportunities for spiritual enlightenment (Dowrick, 1997; Kohak, 1984; Timms, 2001). Yet time alone as a punishment and/or a temporary social withdrawal has been common across many societies (Buchholz, 1998; Storr, 1988), and this includes western parenting strategies of quiet time / bedroom time / mat time for children to spend brief periods alone. At the other end of the spectrum, solitary confinement in prisons and concentration-style camps has been the focus of much socio-cultural and psychological research (see Smith, 2006, for a comprehensive review). A general theme emerges that while prison-based ‘solitary’ is experienced differently by individual adults, the adverse psychological, psychiatric, and physiological (health) effects are substantial (P. Smith, 2006;
Yet when researching aloneness as a healing experience, Suedfeld (1982) reports that solitary periods in prison provide opportunity for personal study, for thoughtfulness, for self rehabilitation, for religious conversations, and for personal problem solving. It seems that there is a human capacity to embrace solitude even when it may not necessarily be freely chosen.

Despite some recent inferences that solitude can be a socially-negative construct (Buchholz, 1998; Buchholz & Catton, 1999; V. Nicholls, 2008), the conceptions of the term solitude have not shifted far from the puritanical notions of the sublime, sole, interior and rapture that Vest (1987) speaks of. Indeed, most philosophical solitude literature is inherently positive. However, Long & Averill (2003) discuss that negative solitude experiences are often characterised by loneliness, and a deeper examination highlights ‘loneliness’ as a significant-though-separate construct that is addressed within the psychology literature and which leaves the more positive aspects of solitude to stand on their own.

**Psychological Insights to Solitude**

Psychological ‘solitude’ studies have been to the fore in recent decades. Peplau & Perlman’s (1982) edited book *Loneliness: a sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy*, provided a platform of research-informed discourse examining notions of solitude, aloneness, and loneliness and the therapeutic implications of each term. While not outdoor or wilderness oriented, the text provided important research insights into the relevance of solitude across the lifespan and the individual preferences / capabilities for constructively managing time alone. Earlier work from Maslow (1971) located time alone as a key developmental need and that humans had an inner drive to balance the quest for connection with other, in terms of relationship and companionship, with the quest to connect with the self. Thus coming to understand self in solitude becomes understood as a developmental need for humans (J. Barbour, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Larson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Graef, 1982; Long & Averill, 2003).
Psychological research suggests that a person typically spends progressively more time alone as they travel from childhood through to old age (Larson, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003). It appears that individual differences in the preferences for solitude may begin at a very young age (Burger, 1995), with infancy being a critical time when the child experiences solitary play and exploration in the presence of the mother (Long, et al., 2003). Yet it has been suggested that solitude does not play any significant part in the life of a child in terms of psychological benefits (Long & Averill, 2003), with late adolescence being the time when individuals become more receptive to time alone and better able to handle the solitude (Larson, 1997).

Larson (1997) acknowledges that the developmental requirements for an individual to come to appreciate and enjoy solitude are multifaceted. Building upon some of his earlier research (Larson, 1990; Larson, et al., 1982) he recognised the complex interplay of three factors that were conducive to healthy and enjoyable solitude: the successful negotiation of attachment processes in infancy; the development of advanced reasoning skills, and; the capacity for reflexive thought, thus the ability to grapple with aspects of identity formation and socialisation processes. Not surprisingly, adults become better equipped to deal with solitude than children (Larson, 1997) and tend to commence receiving solitude more favourably in late adolescence (Long & Averill, 2003).

Despite the emerging affinity with solitude for adolescents, solitude is not necessarily a pleasant experience. Of all the social and personal contexts adolescents operate within, being alone is viewed the least favourably and typically received as a painful experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Long & Averill, 2003). Indeed the capacity for adolescents to appreciate and enjoy solitude is a learned one, requiring the transformation of “a basically terrifying state of being into a productive one” (Larson, et al., 1982, p. 53).

Adolescents spend upward of twenty five percent of their awake time alone through social isolation and through choice (Larson, 1997). Sleep for adolescents is also a solitary experience that is both thrived upon and needed (Buchholz & Catton, 1999). Indeed Buchholz & Catton describe sleep as the ultimate solitude which, when combined with awake-time alone, means that adolescents spend a lot of their teen years in relative solitude (Fuligni,
Not surprisingly adolescence can be a difficult and challenging time as adolescents deal with this solitude and other aspects of their life-world (Molina, Coplan, & Younger, 2003).

Buccholz & Catton (1999) conducted an exhaustive analysis of literature examining childhood and early adolescent experiences of solitude. What emerged was a lengthy discussion on the virtues of constructive solitude, but with a seemingly reluctant admission that time alone was not construed positively by many adolescents. Indeed Larson (1997) states that solitude for adolescents is a far more lonely experience than solitude for adults, especially when the solitude is not freely chosen. While there is a developing affinity for solitude through adolescence (Marcoen & Goossens, 1993), adolescents’ emotional states tend to be more negative in solitude than they are when with others. As Larson reports, teenagers are more likely to report feeling lonely, weak, and unhappy when alone than when with their peers and so the experience stands in contradiction to the “poetic image of healthy solitude as a blissful transcendental state” (Larson, 1997, p. 91). That said, the period immediately following time alone promotes for the adolescent mood states far higher than everyday experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984).

**Social Insights to Solitude**

It seems unusual to acknowledge solitude “as a vital social phenomenon” (Long & Averill, 2003, p. 21), yet humans hold biological needs for attachment and sociality which have potential to emerge from solitude (Dowrick, 1997). Some of the reflective, mental processing that can be an important aspect of the solitude experience arise from human capabilities to reflect upon their lived world; a lifeworld that can be grounded in social situations and representations (Fenwick, 2000) deeming the solitude experience as social as any other experience.

The meanings humans construct from time alone are deeply embedded within the associated norms and societal expectations of their culture. Many examples exist of the accepted role of solitude and solitude-ritual for emerging adolescents within First nation and
Indigenous cultures (Knapp, 2005a). Such an experience typically involved time with an Elder / mentor followed by a period of solitude and abstinence from food or drink. Deemed a ‘Vision Quest’ by Nineteenth century Euro-American anthropologists, these early forms of solos were the culmination of months of planning and guidance, and were designed to lead youth towards a vision regarding ones role or life purpose (Angell, 1994). The re-emergence of such experiences into many First Nation communities today is testimony to the potential power of such traditions for youth (Henley, 1989; Maxted, 1997).

Within the contemporary western world solitude for adolescents is often negatively associated with unnecessary risk-taking, antisocial behaviour, and loner-behaviour (Buchholz, 1999). Being alone is rarely perceived as a healthy state or a desirable way of life (Buchholz & Catton, 1999; Suedfeld, 1982). Yet solitude as a means of enhancing social awareness provides an interesting paradox. Buchholz (1999) reports of the enormous benefits of time alone and how such time strengthens (not weakens) attachments. She identifies the need to be alone and the need for social attachment as equally essential for human happiness and survival. Larsen (1997) specifically evaluated developmental changes in the experience of (non-nature based) solitude between late childhood and early adolescence. He concluded that adolescents, but not preadolescents, who spent an “intermediate amount of their time alone were better adjusted than those who spent little or a great deal of time alone” (p.1). It was also concluded that solitude had a positive effect on the emotional state of adolescents more-so than for preadolescents and that solitude has an important and constructive role as a “strategic retreat that complements social experience” (p. 1).

Among the benefits potential available from solitude is relief from social situations, relationships, and challenging group situations (Buchholz, 1999; Dingman, 1992; Dowrick, 1997; Hollenhurst & Jones, 2001; P. Koch, 1994). Solitude motivated by social anxiety or depression, on the other hand, may well contribute to the problem rather than relieve it (Long & Averill, 2003). Other dangers of solitude have been identified along social lines, including the potential for a decreased interest in the concerns for others’ leading to a more full social withdrawal.
Recent uptake of electronic social networking technology including cell phones has both diminished and contributed to the time adolescents spend metaphorically alone (Reid & Reid, 2007), and may well be a response to the extended periods adolescents spend alone. Such communication technology coupled with a trend of cafffeinated drink consumption in recent years has progressively robbed the contemporary adolescent of quality solitude via reduced sleep quality and quantity (Calimaro, 2009). Thus social pressures to communicate and conform, and marketing pressures to consume, may well be influencing contemporary solitude experiences.

The notion of both voluntary and enforced solitude being beneficial in a social sense has historical and philosophical support (Bobilya, 2005; Colegate, 2002; P. Koch, 1994). As Bobilya (2005) acknowledges, the spending of time alone has served communities well, allowing for the realisation of individual potential to then contribute to a caring and productive community. Yet it is the retreat from community that is central to this work, and much of the solitude experience literature is specific to a nature-based or wilderness solitude experience.

**Ecological Insights to Solitude**

While philosophically the experience of solitude provides opportunity to attune with nature and natural processes (P. Koch, 1994), much of the contemporary solitude literature is devoid of an ecological context beyond the human. The quest for understanding solitude and loneliness, in the psychology literature especially, seemingly separates the solitude from nature and natural processes. Yet, as I have highlighted, the etymological roots of the term solitude are deeply embedded with the word wilderness and in the context of outdoor adventure education the term ‘wilderness solitude’ is predominant. No discussion of solitude would be complete without reference to the term wilderness. Further, there is recognition of pre-historical genetic responses to nature, as well as the possibility of evolutionary responses to nature experience that have emerged within the scientific literature. This section places the solitude experience within an ecological realm.
Wilderness began as the reference for the cognitive space that was not civilisation (Light, 1995; Nash, 1982; Oelschlæger, 1991). Light (1995) suggests two predominant conceptions of wilderness have emerged: The *classical* view promotes wilderness as something to be feared (“an area of waste and desolation inhabited by wild animals, savages, and perhaps even supernatural evil” (1995, p. 195)) while the *romantic* view interprets wilderness as an “untouched space that human contact corrupts and degrades” (p. 195) and a “place to be revered, a place of deep spiritual significance, and a symbol of earthly paradise” (p. 196).

Both the romantic and classic views of wilderness have been captured with the institutionalising of the term wilderness via legislation. For example, the US Wilderness Act (1964) denotes wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (Miles, 1990, p. 325). Similarly New Zealand’s Conservation Act (1987) determines wilderness as “wild lands designated for their protection and managed to perpetuate their natural condition and which appear to have been affected only by the forces of nature, with any imprint of human interference substantially unnoticeable” (Higham, 2008, p. 63). Thus wilderness places must be both biological intact and legally protected, leaving little place for humans beyond experiences in wilderness as visitors (Abbott, 2008).

Widespread critique of the term wilderness exists (see, for example, Cronin, 1995a; Nash, 1982; Oelschlæger, 1991) due partially to the assumptions that humans are somehow clearly separate from wilderness. Such cultural constructions that dismiss culture from landscape, negate the historical connections held by indigenous native peoples (Light, 1995), render humans as merely visitors (Abbott, 2008; Cronin, 1995b; J. Turner, 1996), and privilege some natural places as more important than others (Cronin, 1995a; Pollan, 2003). The term wilderness is all pervading in the western world, though remains contested ground.

The ‘wilderness solitude’ literature is rich with insight from the Transcendentalists, including Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) who both spent extended periods of time alone surrounded by nature. For Emerson nature became the “symbol of the spirit” (Nash, 1982, p. 85) that allowed for gains in insight and intuitive
knowledge (Walle, 1997). Thoreau, in his 1854 classic text *Walden; or, a Life in the Woods* (Thoreau, 1995) documents his two-year sojourn to Walden Pond where he wished to live simply and deliberately at his cabin and to learn what nature had to teach. The experiences of Emerson and Thoreau pointed to the power and influence of nature while living a simple life in gaining personal insight, continuing a tradition arising from the sojourn of monks and hermits into nature for spiritual awakening and insight (Bobilya, 2005; Colegate, 2002; Walle, 1997).

An activity such as a solo in a natural place provides opportunity to engage with the wilderness within (T. Smith, 2005a); acknowledging and reminding participants that humans are in fact nature and belong as a part of natural processes. There are evolutionary and biological imperatives for the merging of human experience with nature. The Biophilia hypothesis (Wilson, 1986) points to the instinctive bond that exists between humans and other living organisms. Coined by Fromm (1968), ‘Biophilia’ has come to represent the psychology associated with being attracted to all that is alive and vital in the world around us. Inherent is the term ‘love’; a construct not often utilised in biological sciences. Biophilia points to a biological drive for immersion and bonding experiences with nature. As Henderson (1999, p. 440) challenges outdoor and environmental educators, “we should not think of learning how to acquire, to instil, to produce, a relationship with nature.” Biophilia infers the relationship already exists.

Naess (2008) affirms that, with maturity, all humans cannot help but identify with all living beings. The maturity of the self, Naess argues, has traditionally and contemporarily involved three stages: from the ego to social self and from the social self to a metaphysical self of being and knowing. Buber (1971) promotes the *I-Thou* relationship as an extension of the self to ‘other’. That is, a person is at all times engaged with the world in either a mode of ‘interaction’ or of ‘being’. An ‘I-Thou’ mode of ‘being’ is a relationship of mutual existence, whereas ‘I-It’ acknowledges presence of other objects or artefacts devoid of intimate relationship. It is the maturity of identification with ‘other’ that Naess (2008) speaks of as the ‘ecological self’; a self awareness that transcends the human to embrace identity with nonhuman living beings. It is not dissimilar to the childhood memories of psychologist Carl
Jung, when sitting alone on a rock at age seven or nine: “am I the one who is sitting on top of the stone, or am I the stone on which he is sitting?” (cited in Louv, 2008, p. 293).

Such self realisation is enhanced through the fostering of the ecological self and contributes to the human condition in terms of “the meaning of life, and the joy we experience in living” (Naess, 2008, p. 82). In the context of the solo experience, understanding the solo ‘place’ as a lived and mutual experience with the non-human ‘other’ reflects a maturity of self that enhances both quality and meaning of experience. The maturity of identification with ‘ecological other’ that Naess refers is certainly not limited to adults, though children and adolescents might have different conceptions of identification (Chawla, 2002) and there is growing realisation that a lack of nature experience is detrimental for young people in the modern world (Louv, 2008).

Sections of the philosophical solo literature are especially upbeat about the ecological meanings of ‘self’ potentially available from nature immersion (Storr, 1988; Timms, 2001), with others suggesting that this is a nature-based spirituality (R. Fox, 1997, 1999; Frederickson & Anderson, 1999; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992). As Frederickson and Anderson (1999) describe in their research examining spiritual antecedents within week-long women’s outdoor journeys, nature “spoke to the participants at a very deep level, and left them open to perceiving the place as more of a transcendent reality” (p. 37). They report several of the participants experienced something of a ‘religious experience’, which typically entails “sudden illumination of individual consciousness” and a “heightened recognition of the interrelatedness of all life forms”. While these studies are exclusively reporting on adult experiences, phenomenological studies into the spiritual experiences of children acknowledge the potential for experience to evoke deep feelings of spirituality for children and adolescents (Hyde, 2004, 2005, 2006). Louv (2008) acknowledges the qualitative work of Robert Coles into the spiritual life of children: “most fundamentally, it now appears undeniable that some of us (perhaps far more than we suspect) have undergone tremendous peak – even mystical – experiences during our early years” (Coles, 1990, as cited in Louv, 2008, p. 294). The upshot is that a variety of transcendent experiences in nature are possible during childhood which, from the work of Coles, can be triggered by heartfelt prayer, aesthetics, and nature immersion experiences.
When natural affiliations to nature are not allowed to fully develop during childhood or adolescence, an aversion to aspects of nature may evolve. ‘Biophobia’ is the term that describes such a disconnect with nature, and may take the form of fear and discomfort in natural places through to an outright discomfort or rejection of matters that are not human-made (Orr, 2004).

Louv (2008) has collated insights from studies highlighting the importance of direct exposure to nature as essential for the healthy physical, emotional, and cognitive development of the child. Coining the term ‘nature-deficit disorder’ Louv speaks to the broken bond between most children and nature. The fields of environmental education and earth education are rich with experiential modes for reconnecting children and nature (see, for example, Cornell, 1979, 1989; Knapp, 1999; Van Matre, 1990). Eco-therapy similarly has a lot to offer adventure education in healing its anthropocentric ideals, and programme possibilities have been well articulated by therapists such as Michael Cohen (M. Cohen, 1989, 1997a, 1997b).

**Part Two: Solo in Outdoor Adventure Education**

*Outdoor Adventure Education*

A variety of terms emerge from the ‘solitude’ literature to capture the essence of a range of outdoor-oriented programmes that have solo experiences as an integral component. These include adventure education, adventure-based learning, adventure recreation, challenge-based wilderness programmes, outdoor education, outdoor recreation, wilderness education, and wilderness therapy. While these terms represent a semantic confusion (Boyes, 2000; M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Straker, 2010; R Zink & Boyes, 2006), there is a developing appreciation for solos as an integral programme component regardless of the programme name (Bevington, 2005; Daniel, Bobilya, & Kalisch, 2006; Knapp & Smith, 2005).

Through this section I have followed the lead of Brown & Fraser (2009) and T. Smith (2005a) in utilising the term ‘outdoor adventure education’ to broadly encapsulate the variety of programme terms where solitude might occur. As Priest & Gass (2005) report, traditional
adventure education is a branch of outdoor education concerned with interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, and adventure education programmes will typically incorporate challenge-oriented tasks designed to extend participants cognitively, affectively, and physically. There is a significant body of literature related to the concept of adventure education, and the term adventure permeates across many disciplines and is defined according to a variety of perspectives representative of the research interests of each standpoint (Varley, 2006). Some common threads emerge across those ‘adventure’ perspectives. In short, adventure is a deliberate choice to participate in an activity that is typically not a part of everyday life and which involves some degree of risk (Ewert, 1989; Loynes, 1996; Simmel, 1971; Walle, 1997).

As Ewert (1989) highlights, traditional outdoor adventure education typically incorporates outdoor pursuits. Participation involves exposure to risk for participants, and this is the point of difference between ‘adventure’ and ‘outdoor’ recreation/education. Such risk attributes to an uncertainty of outcome, so that “in outdoor adventure pursuits there is a deliberate inclusion of activities that may contain threats to an individual’s health or life” (Ewert, 1989, p. 12). It is this promotion of risk that is the defining characteristic of outdoor adventure education (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Priest & Gass, 2005; Wurdinger, 1997), and the pedagogical assumption is that through the dealing of such risk an individual and the group shall reap the potential benefits. Indeed much has been published related to the psychological-emotional challenges experienced during outdoor adventure experiences, and there is a widespread held belief in the value of heightening risk perceptions in adventure education settings to enhance learning (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Gass, 1993; Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Panicucci, 2007; Priest & Gass, 2005; Schoel, 2002).

The use of psychological – emotional perceptions of risk to build stress and anxiety as a way to enhance the adventure learning experience has been subject to recent critique (M. Brown, 2008a; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; R. Zink & Leberman, 2001). As Brown & Fraser (2009) acknowledge, the current reliance on a paradigm of outdoor adventure education that is centred upon the allure of risk may be appealing but also limited in the ability to serve the needs of an increasingly diverse society.
Placing solitude within the challenge-adventure nexus appears somewhat incongruent, particularly in terms of the assumed contrast between solo (requiring only limited leader–supervision) and other more adventurous components of outdoor adventure programmes (where a leader or leaders might take a lead role in managing the use of technical equipment and negotiating the group around hazards involving height, speed, or water in various forms). Thus the classical features of the solitude experience, such as physical isolation and social disengagement (P. Koch, 1994; Storr, 1988) appear to have uneasy fit with the group challenge, adaptive dissonance and collective problem solving emphasis of outdoor adventure education as promoted by Priest & Gass (2005). Solo appears to expose participants to lower levels of physical risk than many of the other outdoor adventure education programme components, which would deem it as outdoor recreation or education rather than adventure (Ewert, 1989). Certainly there is little evidence of negative solo experiences within the outdoor adventure education discourse, nor exemplars published suggesting solo is a risky adventure experience. Rather the solitude literature is especially upbeat to the positive virtues and qualities of the solo experience.

Solo is regarded as an important component of adventure programmes internationally, as evidenced by the incorporation of solo into programmes such as those delivered by Outward Bound (OB), the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), and the proliferation of other programmes modelling themselves upon them (Bevington, 2005; T. Smith, 2005a). As James (1980) and Richards (1990) acknowledge, it was the philosophy of Kurt Hahn that saw solos integrated into Outward Bound programmes. As an adolescent Hahn was deeply affected by a bout of sunstroke, and this required remaining inside for a period of a year. Not surprisingly Hahn later became a proponent of periods of silence and solitude, which served him well in terms of opportunities for reflective practice during his own enforced solitude. As the co-founder of Outward Bound, Hahn’s philosophy became a living one (Richards, 1990).

A feature of traditional outdoor adventure education is its use, and potential marginalisation, of adventure places. As Priest & Gass state unabashedly in their resource text for outdoor instructors, school teachers, corporate trainers and adventure therapists, (2005, p. 19) “secondary aims may relate to the environmental relationships, but the product of most
adventure programs is people who understand themselves more fully and relate to others more effectively.” The outdoor-nature-context where adventure occurs is briefly referenced by Priest & Gass (2005) as ‘Environment’ in an section called ‘Trends and Issues’ late in their text. Such a theoretical approach is clearly human centred, or anthropocentric (Seed, 1988), effectively limiting opportunities for human to non-human nature engagement via adventure. For solitude to be incorporated into these forms of adventure programmes may well miss entirely the inherent opportunity to attune with nature during a solo experience (P. Koch, 1994). Further, solitude promoted within an adventure framework that maintains a ‘human’ orientation must surely marginalise the very places where the solo takes place (Brookes, 2003a, 2004). As Simpson (1999) suggests: “we might learn more about ourselves by truly experiencing nature rather than using it as a backdrop (for intra and inter personal growth via adventure)” (p. 119).

Thomas Smith (2005a, p. 5) states “most outdoor adventure education professionals think of solo as a solitary experience in the wilderness”, and the outdoor context for solo appears pedagogically important. Yet as McKenzie (2000, p. 20) notes in her review of the mechanisms supporting the achievement of adventure education outcomes, “although a number of sources suggest that the physical environment is important to achieving adventure education program outcomes, little, if any, research has explored this relationship.”

Much has been written by practitioners on the issue of student’ readiness for solo (Angell, 1994; Kelk, 1994; McIntosh, 1989). McIntosh (1989) is especially critical of institutionalised programmes not assessing the needs of students and placing them ‘in the woods’ without due regard to their ability to cope let alone achieve programme objectives. He reports that while many solo programmes have moved away from an emphasis on survival towards an emphasis on personal reflection, they still continue to challenge participants with minimalist equipment and far too little food. The challenge of reflection is also problematic for adolescents unless there are pre-solo training experiences that might cultivate necessary reflection skills (ibid).
Other dimensions of the adventure education paradigm are worth considering in relationship to the solo experience. Challenge by choice has been promoted as a cornerstone of adventure programming (Panicucci, 2007). Originating from the work of Rohnke (1984), challenge by choice is an empowerment strategy commonly employed by facilitators of adventure challenges that hands over aspects of power in terms of participants determining the level of challenge, risk, and competence they might be comfortable engaging with. Thus challenge by choice is a group agreement that provides the individual participant opportunity to be supported in choosing the level of challenge they are willing to accept (Priest & Gass, 2005). Interestingly, challenge by choice as related to the solo experience requires the individuation of experience away from the balance of the group during solo, taking away the support framework that challenge by choice is designed to provide (Lissen, 2000) and leaving participants in-situ when there may be barriers to retreating from the experience (Wallia, 2008).

Much has been published regarding the experiential modes of knowing / learning underpinning outdoor adventure education. Those modes include the provision of experiences coupled with opportunities for reflection upon those experiences during which the participant / learner makes sense and meaning of the experience in relation to their own life (M. Brown, 2009; Luckner & Nadler, 1997). Wurdinger (1997) highlights how an adventurous experiential approach can be traced historically from Socrates [“experience is vital when it comes to claiming knowledge” (p. 1)], Aristotle [“in our transactions with other men it is by acting in the face of danger and by developing the habit of feeling fear” (p.5) and Plato [“young men learning virtue from taking part in risky activities”]. Thus risk taking and physical activity are promoted as pathways towards knowledge, providing an historical rationale for exposing learners to risk.

As Seaman (2008) describes, the experiential learning process incorporates a raft of contemporary influences, with various theoretical models evolving to best articulate the process that essentially include stages of action/experience and reflection (Beard & Wilson, 2002; Fenwick, 2000, 2001). The ‘reflective’ stage of the various theoretical models in adventure education is often referred to as processing (Luckner & Nadler, 1997)
general terms is a mediated process to extract lessons from the adventure experience (Fenwick, 2000; Panicucci, 2007). Quay (2003) highlights the ‘stepwise’ process of reflecting on experience that is widespread in outdoor adventure education, as evidenced by times allocated for sequenced doing and for sequenced reflecting. This mechanistic model has been subject to critique (Bell, 1993; Brookes, 2000; M. Brown, 2009; Loynes, 2002; Seaman, 2008), particularly in terms of being overly simplistic, reductionist, and linear.

With careful forethought and philosophical planning, the fields of adventure education and ecotherapy have potential to merge. As Henderson (1999) has suggested, an extension to the intra-personal dimension of adventure could easily mean soloists considering themselves in relation to all that is alive and vital around them on solo. That is, if the solo is framed with an appropriate ecological-self emphasis, the intrapersonal relationship becomes one of self to place to universe. This orientation places the ecological self (Naess, 2008) central to the adventure education understandings of the intra-personal (Haluza-DeLay, 1999; R. Henderson, 1999).

**A typology of (wilderness) solo within outdoor adventure education**

A variety of wilderness solitude experiences exist within outdoor adventure education, which Mortlock (1998) categorises as fundamentally either **dynamic** multi-location journeys or **static** single location experiences. The dynamic solo Mortlock suggests emphasises notions of self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance, and inherent is the potential for all manner of learning and satisfaction. The opportunity to experience spiritual or peak moments, if facilitated appropriately, may lead to participants recognising themselves as a part of natural processes. Paradoxically Mortlock also recognises the potential, especially with media hype, for individuals who have experienced successful solo journeys to develop increased self-centredness, a large ego, and associated arrogance.

McIntosh (1989), while writing about solos for young offenders, is somewhat critical of the dynamic solo experience suggesting that the journey’s adventurous nature is enhanced
through travelling alone to the point of intensifying unnecessary fear. Like Gibbens (1991), McIntosh believes solos should not be engineered to promote a struggle or to pit oneself against nature. Both authors promote static solos where opportunities exist for developing qualities of awareness: “Physical and mental stillness provide the shelter in which the seeds of insight can grow (Gibbens, 1991: 23).

Facilitated dynamic solo experiences are rare in New Zealand outdoor adventure education. More common are static solo experiences, providing participants the challenge of remaining in a small natural place for the duration of their experience. Such single location solos tend to promote environmental awareness and / or have a survival emphasis (Mortlock, 1998) and require specific skills on the part of the solo facilitator / guide / educator to draw meaning from the solo experience post-experience.

Static solos, Mortlock (1998) advocates, can be enhanced through participants having a high degree of choice regarding solo timing and location, having available basic food, clothing and shelter needs, and participants being comfortable with their own outdoor living skills and weather interpretation. The environmental awareness solo can be enhanced through participants having a basic knowledge of, and passion for exploring, natural process and places. Survival solos are oriented towards coping with minimal resources and food, and Mortlock suggests a number of solos are required before any sense of efficiency is won in terms of survival self-reliance.

Mortlock (1998) believes wilderness solo can increase social awareness and lead to recognition of one’s need for others. He suggests some of the greatest potential benefits for participants include the contrast between solo and everyday realities, the merging of self with nature, and the increased intensity of a solo experience compared to an experience with companions. Such intensity, Mortlock believes, “…increases the potential for learning, enjoyment and satisfaction” (1998: 1). He balances these ends with the recognition that solos can potentially go wrong physically and psychologically, suggesting students must be mentally stable and personally motivated to undertake a solo.
Angell (1994) is a self professed wilderness psycho-spiritual guide and educator who has explored solos through personal experience and while facilitating similar experiences for women. She writes of solos being significant for fostering her own self worth and she promotes a range of solo activities designed to foster a heightened awareness of ‘self’ for women participants that have the potential to lead towards heightened degrees of self esteem, self-love, self confidence and self reliance. Angell broadens Mortlock’s static solo distinctions into four solo forms: the VisionQuest, the Reflective Solo, the Survival Skills solo and a Self-imposed Solo.

Angell’s (1994) experiences of solitude appear significantly influenced by North American First Nation wisdom and rite-of-passage activities. Training and spiritual guidance from Elders would culminate in a student seeking out a natural place, remaining there for a number of days without food or sleep, and ultimately obtaining a vision regarding one’s role and purpose in life (T. Smith, 2005a). Thus the ‘VisionQuest solo’ Angell (1994) discusses is all about self realisation and transformation, and aims to enhance the consciousness of the solo participant.

The Reflective Solo (Angell, 1994) highlights is centred upon the needs of the individual and is a fully facilitated experience designed to focus upon dealing with specific issues facing one’s life. Angell’s Self Imposed Solo is said to assist develop participants’ connections with Nature and for acknowledging aloneness and independence. This form of experience is self directed, requiring no external support, facilitation or counselling. It is presented as a useful form of solitude whereby the participant just gets away from everyday realities and is at one with self; being rather than doing. Finally Angell’s Survival Solo identifies with the individual being presented with the challenge of coping on one’s own with minimalist equipment or food.

Mortlock (1998) suggests that while a ‘static’ solo experience presents valuable introspection time its major value must lie with looking outside of self and fostering an awareness of connecting with ones natural surroundings. Wattchow (1993) earlier promoted the static solo as an opportunity to come to regard nature as both a part of ourselves and also as an extension of community. He reports that such an end objective is enhanced when participants have significant prior outdoor living experience: “We go simply, baring down to
life’s essentials, to avoid distraction. We go as a group, solo in physical separation, but recognise that we are a member of a community seeking personal and ecological understanding” (p.2).

In *The Bliss of Solitude*, Gibbens (1991) utilises sections of prose and poetry to craft an historic overview of solitude as a training or educational endeavour. Many of the examples presented highlight the moral, philosophical, and mystical/religious benefits of solo. He identifies the profound opportunities solo presents for discovering a *oneness* with the natural world and for better understanding the interrelatedness of all natural beings (including humans). Gibbens states that if solo is to be taken seriously as a training technique or educational activity, then it needs to be “far more than a self-indulgent or escapist interlude” and suggests that the solo must seek to win some “…moral, philosophical, mystic or religious benefit” (p. 22). He promotes the need for carefully crafted experiences, with participants well supported with pre-solo training and post-experience debriefing at an individual level.

*Soloing, a resource for New Zealand teachers* (Kelk, 1994, p. 1) promotes (static) solos “…as one of the greatest experiences that teachers can give students”, surmising that the solo is more about teaching self reliance and addressing issues in self-concept, awareness and risk taking. Interestingly these are many of the identified growth opportunities Mortlock (1998) suggests are reserved for a dynamic solitary journey. Yet it is obvious from the *Soloing* resource that Kelk (1994) writes with a tacit understanding of the significance of solo for children and adolescents. For Kelk being alone in an unfamiliar natural area coupled with periods of darkness presents students with a journey that can resonate with seven levels of the self, all of which have potential to influence self concept: the spiritual self, the existential self, the emotional self, the extended self, the interpersonal self, the philosophical self and the private self.

In a workshop discussing wilderness solos Mortlock (1998) asked the question: “At what age should children begin to experience solos?” The question provided some wonderful dialogue but few conclusions. However, Gibbens (1991) challenged adventure practitioners not to assume that the riches of solos are accessible only to older, more articulate and intellectual
students. He highlighted the various Earth Education programmes worldwide (see Van Matre, 1990; 1972) as profound example of constructive solitude within ecological education for young children.

Solos with a *survival* emphasis appear to stand separately from other forms of solo presented in the literature. Both McIntosh (1989) and Bevington (2005) highlight that many outdoor programmes utilising solos have modelled themselves upon the Outward Bound approach, which were initially regarded as a survival challenge and later began stressing the importance of personal reflection.

Others have provided alternative labels to the static solo experience. Dingman (1992), for example, utilises the term *profound solitude* to denote a voluntary, static retreat of at least four and ideally ten days or more in a remote wild setting. Atchison (1998) explored the experience of *restorative solitude*, inferring the opportunities for rejuvenation, replenishment, renewal and release possible with a variable period of solitude in nature. She suggests the experience of restorative solitude is very individualistic and that “inner quiet and the ability and desire to go within” (p. 201) are essential characteristics.

**Research insights to solo in outdoor adventure education**

A wealth of popular press literature exists speaking to the many spiritual, existential, emotional, philosophical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal virtues of nature-based solo experiences. Yet the body of empirical ‘solo’ research is particularly limited within outdoor, adventure education, with much of the published literature being derived from anecdotal evidence and promoted by practitioners-as-researchers (V. Nicholls, 2008). It appears that the personal solitude experiences of outdoor adventure practitioners combine with their held experientially-derived practitioner ‘solo’ understandings to promote an intuitive belief in the power of solitude within outdoor adventure education (see, for example, Knapp & Smith, 2005).
I have provided an overview earlier to some of the psychological, sociological and ecological contributions to solitude studies generally, and this section provides an insight to specific research endeavours that examine the ‘static’ experiences of solo participants in outdoor settings. These have focussed almost exclusively upon the experiences of adults with solitude.

The past decade has seen research endeavour to examine the efficacy of solitude experiences within broader adventure programmes, with solo gaining empirical credibility as an important course component (Bobilya, Daniel, Kalisch, & Lindley, 2009; Bobilya, et al., 2005; Campbell, 2010; Gassner & Russell, 2008; V. Nicholls, 2008). Daniel (2003, 2005) retrospectively examined the long-term outcomes of a spiritually-oriented course delivered in an Outward Bound- style programme for University students over a 25 year period. Of interest was that solo was highlighted as the most significant course component in all 25 years of the programme, and that solo out-ranked other course components 2:1 in relation to long-term course impacts. Other studies examining ‘official’ Outward Bound courses internationally highlight the role of solo in supporting reflective processes, participant motivation, and programme effectiveness (McKenzie, 2003), nature awareness, perseverance and determination (Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005), and complementing the final expedition (Gassner & Russell, 2008).

Bobilya, et al. (2005) explored the perceptions of university students to their solo experience, and focussed upon the influence of the soloists themselves, the influence of instructors, and the influence of the solo setting in relation to the held perceptions. Using surveys, then smaller group interviews, and one on one interviews Bobilya, et al. concluded that the solo enhanced personal growth and learning, and was accompanied by a sense of peace for many.

The research of Campbell (2010) similarly examined the responses of university-age participants to a five day static solo whereby the students were empowered to make choices regarding the nature of their own solo experiences. That is, rather than rules and safety systems being imposed by the Instructor / leader the participants were encouraged to develop
their own strategies. The intent was to provide a freedom dimension to the solo that would assist with decision-making and ultimately the outcomes of the experience. Not surprisingly, results highlighted that those participants with positive pre-solo ideals were most likely to gain more positively from their experience. Of particular interest for outdoor adventure education practitioners were two facets within the programme Campbell researched not typical of most solo experiences. Firstly, the managerial philosophy employed in terms of students taking responsibility for setting their own solo policy contrasts with most programmes where policy and procedure is set prior to the experience. It was an empowerment strategy likely only possible due to the outdoor skills and relative maturity of the participants, yet this presents some promise for younger soloists such as those within the Tihoi programme nearing the end of a sustained outdoor-oriented programme. Secondly, the length of experience was significant, with five days in one location on the upper end of the solo duration spectrum and contrasting with most formalised educational solos internationally.

At the other end of the solo duration spectrum, Nicholls (2008; V. Nicholls, 2009) examined the use of Quiet Times as a sense of solitude within adventure therapy programmes. Quiet Times are brief participant-initiated moments of either reflection or reflective conversation which, as Nicholls (2008) alludes, have the potential to evoke positive experiences of being alone with others in special places and without the need to be truly alone. Nicholls research and practice highlights the potential for such solitary episodes as potentially habitual in terms of self-help and life enhancing endeavours beyond the adventure or adventure therapy programme.

Earlier studies (Dingman, 1992; Hoffart, 1995; Richley, 1992) have sought to better understand the experiences of solo participants, utilising a variety of qualitative methodologies to access lived-experiences. Dingman’s (1992) research utilised a heuristic framework to investigate the experiences of himself and four others prior to, during, and following a ten day wilderness experience. The process of ‘profound solitude’ was characterised by Dingman as involving initial periods of psychological distress and adjustment, long periods of self examination and awareness to natural processes, and the re-emergence of original anxieties and thoughts immediately prior to returning to civilisation.
Richley (1992) utilised a phenomenological approach to explore the significance of the solo experience for Canadian adults with a background in adventure education and guiding. Participants were provided a static environmental, reflective experience over a three-day, two-night period. Interviews conducted immediately following the experience suggested solo time in natural settings provided for enhanced appreciations of place, an attunement of the senses to the natural world, and an enhanced awareness of ‘self’ in relation to time and place. Later interviews reflected the development of a closer connection to a range of natural places for some participants and general feelings of being more relaxed in nature generally.

Hoffart (1996) conducted a phenomenological investigation to the experience of solitude for ‘healthy’ nine and ten year old children from a rural community. Through weaving eleven identified themes together Hoffart developed a ‘metatheme’ that viewed solitude as a tool for the children to find meaning in their lives, for them to explore various roles of interest to them, and to separate themselves when they needed to maintain or retain emotional control. Interestingly Hoffart suggests the use of solitude by children in everyday life tends to be similar to that described by adults in the literature.

To summarise, in the field of outdoor adventure education much has been written of the significance of the solitary nature-based experience for personal growth, spiritual insight, and creative renewal. The outdoor-adventure literature acknowledges the multi-variable aspect of solos and suggests time alone in nature is potentially a very powerful educational and recreational phenomenon. Yet the body of empirical research is limited, with much of the solo literature within outdoor adventure being based upon anecdotal evidence (V. Nicholls, 2009). Apart from Hoffart’s (1996) study, described above, researchers have focussed almost exclusively upon the experiences of adults. There are wide academic gaps in the literature surrounding the experiences of adolescents with solitude. There has been a lack of discourse around the potential for ‘negative’ solo experiences or descriptors of negative experiences as-lived, with studies exclusively promoting the positive qualities associated with the solo. Most of the writers and researchers contributing to the solitude-in-adventure-education literatures have been insiders to the field, and are often researching and reporting on their own programmes.
Chapter 4, Methodology: WISDOM OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

Phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret those meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness... ...to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld.

Van Manen (1997, p.11)

Enter into the world. Observe and wonder; experience and reflect. To understand a world while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from them.

Patton (1980, p.121)

My aim with this work is to illuminate the lived solitude experiences of students at Tihoi Venture School, utilising a research process that engages deeply with the student experience and which brings to consciousness the significant meaning, structure and essence of the solo as lived (van Manen, 1997). There are challenges to capturing and interpreting the feelings, emotions, perceptions, judgements, memories, meanings, stories, perils and pleasures related to an experience such as the Tihoi solo. Such aspects of human life and experience resist quantification. In my eyes they are best expressed through the words, meanings, and actions of the students themselves, which demands theoretical and practical sensitivity on the part of the researcher and the adoption of a methodological style that captures the richness and essence of the lived Tihoi solo experience.

To best explicate the solo experience ‘as lived’ requires an acceptance of research as being far more than a technical data collection exercise (L. Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2000). It demands a human-oriented research process that is about intimately understanding the Tihoi experience, with the knowledge that such understanding is informed by how we as researchers view our world, what we take human understanding to represent, and the status we might give to that understanding (Crotty, 2010). Underlying the primary research question related to solos at Tihoi are the ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises I bring to the project and the lens through which I (as-researcher) view the world.
I have chosen to address the question, *what is the meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School?* utilising a hermeneutic human science approach to phenomenology as outlined by van Manen (1997) and with a professional practice orientation that makes the inquiry a pedagogical act. The traditional hermeneutic phenomenological philosophical perspective is constructivist-interpretive in orientation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a), deriving essentially from the philosophy of Husserl (1982) and the work of Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962), and Gadamer (1989). Hermeneutic Phenomenology holds considerable opportunity and potential for better understanding human lived experiences, and for addressing concerns with respect to the textual representations of human experiences ‘as lived’.

This chapter provides a rationale for a human science approach that is fundamentally constructivist in orientation. It explores the philosophical, historical, methodological and experiential underpinnings of a hermeneutic (existential) phenomenological research process that might best capture and describe the ‘lived’ solo experience at Tihoi. The held ontological assumptions, subjectivist epistemology, and the methodological challenges associated with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach are surveyed. These assumptions affirm that, through my eyes as researcher, multiple realities exist in the world, that knowledge can only ever be co-created by a researcher and respondent(s), and that there are naturalistic modes of inquiry available (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a; Guba & Lincoln, 2008). An exploration of the ‘quality’ criteria associated with hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry highlights that alternative measures of relevance exist for such a subjectivist approach, and these need to be made explicit for the reader. Of significance to hermeneutic phenomenology is the centrality of the researcher in all stages of the inquiry process, and so the role and scope of the ‘researcher as instrument’ (Crotty, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 2008) must also be made explicit.

**A Human Science Orientation**

So how best to explicate the meaning, structure and essence of a two day, two night nature - solitude experience for a young New Zealand male; an experience embedded within a
broader educational programme that is the Tihoi experience? Any such research challenge is approached utilising a methodological framework and toolbox of methods that invariably represents the lens through which the researcher views the world (Crotty, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 2008).

Most introductory research method texts commence with a discussion on research paradigms and the key ontological, epistemological, and methodological considerations of each paradigmatic approach. Essentially a paradigm is composed of three parts: the ontological, the epistemological, and the methodological (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). In simplistic terms, ontology asks of ‘the nature of reality’ while epistemology asks ‘how we as researcher know what is known’ or the ‘relationship between the inquirer and what is known’. Methodology is concerned with ‘how we come to obtain knowledge about the world’ (Crotty, 2010; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Many and various qualitative research approaches have emerged during the course of the 20th century and beyond as a response to, and rejection of, positivism and post-positivism as guiding research paradigms for the social sciences. As Denzin & Lincoln (2008a) highlight, the two positivist traditions hold to naïve positions regarding reality. The positivist paradigm assumes that one truth exists and that realising that ‘truth’ should involve experimental methodologies to capture and understand that fixed reality and thus form theory about the nature of things. Postpositivism similarly relies upon multiple methods to capture as much reality as possible, but with the understanding that reality can never be fully apprehended. These ‘natural science’ approaches view human behaviour as fundamentally mechanistic, quantifiable, and causally determined. Thus, ontologically, a positivist metatheory or paradigm assumes that reality is external, separate, and can be isolated into independent parts to best understand the whole (K. Henderson, 1991; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Epistemologically, in terms of the relationship between the knower and the known, positivism and postpositivism both assume that the researcher can stand outside of the process in an objective manner whereby their values can be suspended throughout and without influence.
Denzin & Lincoln (2008a) describe eight overlapping though interconnected historical moments of qualitative research that acknowledge positivist methods as “...but one way of telling stories about societies or social worlds” (p. 15). A distinctive turn away from positivistic research approaches towards a more intuitive knowing has occurred within the social sciences during the past two decades (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). This tendency towards post-modern, interpretivism and criticalist research practices has brought with it new research directions, alternative standards of relevance, and different measures of research quality (Reason, 1994; Schwandt, 2000). These, Denzin & Lincoln (2008a) report, are now very well established and “...at least equal to the legitimacy of received and conventional paradigms” (p. 256).

Prior to the rise of the scientific revolution the process of knowing was a more emotional, internal act than is typically portrayed in western science today. Berman (1989) states that the senses were primary in this period and pervaded over reasoning, whereby “...the facts were first and foremost what happened on a psychic and emotional level” and that “...the essential truth was an interior one” (p. 111). A person came to know something by being deeply and intimately connected to it. It was a knowing that was somatic and emotional, connecting learning strongly with the body. Somatic, psychic and emotional engagement was critical to ‘knowing’, and any lack of personal identification with subject was regarded as strange and less acceptable in that era of science (Heshusius, 1994). Interestingly, prior to the scientific turn of enlightenment humans did not know objectively, and thus were unable to know subjectively either; that is, in the manner represented in mainstream science today (Heshusius, 1994; Kohak, 1984).

With the rise of the scientific revolution came a primacy of reason at the expense of a diminished sense of intimate connection (Abram, 1996; M. Berman, 1989). Thus evolved what is now regarded as the Cartesian mind-body split, where the knower and the known are separate and distinct. In privileging reason, the purity of the mind overcame the sensations of the body... ...somatic and emotional knowing, then, came to be regarded as unreliable, biased, and ‘only’ subjective, a mode of knowing that may be useful for our intimate personal lives, but not for claiming knowledge about the world” (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996, p.5).
The diminished value placed upon somatic and emotional knowing is, as I view and experience the world, counter-intuitive to understanding a lived experience such as the Tihoi solo. For humans to suspend their lived experiences, and all of the richness of feelings and connections related to those experiences, in order to produce a scientific world view is similarly counter-intuitive. Like philosopher Erazim Kohak (1984, p. 6) I intuitively know that knowing requires the very opposite, “...to suspend effort, to let be and listen, letting (the experience) speak.”

I find myself more interested in qualitative research approaches, where the emphasis is on the quality of a social experience and how that social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a). ‘Human science’, ‘naturalism’ and ‘interpretivism’ are umbrella terms that capture a variety of research approaches and orientations (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; van Manen, 1997) whereby qualitative methodologies are utilised to actively explicate meaning from some human endeavour or experience lived (Dilthey, 1989). Ontologically, multiple realities exist in the world for the constructivist social scientist and so multiple perspectives can be gained through the employment of a variety of data collection strategies. There exists an acknowledgement that those multiple realities are socio-psychological and socio-cultural constructions and can only be understood as such. Interpretive social scientists therefore acknowledge the difficulty in remaining objective and, as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, choose to highlight their own positions, experiences and perspectives (K. Henderson, 1991; Lincoln, 2002).

van Manen (1997) attributes the distinction between ‘human science’ and ‘natural science’ to Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911), who drew from the philosophic work of Plato, Kant, Aristotle, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard amongst others. Dilthey (1989) resisted the domination of learning by the ‘objective’ natural sciences, instead he sought to establish a more ‘subjective’ science for the humanities. He outlined the European and North American influences upon the field of human science as an alternative to the predominance of the natural sciences paradigm, distinguishing between naturwissenschaften (the natural or physical sciences) and the human world as characterised by Geist (the thoughts, feelings, values and emotions as represented in the arts, languages and held beliefs). For Dilthey, human-related (social) phenomena were so
fundamentally different to a natural phenomenon that any research endeavour seeking to

genuinely understand aspects of the complexity that is the human condition demanded an

alternative approach. van Manen (1997, pp. 3-4) perhaps best summarises Dilthy’s

perspective:

At the risk of oversimplification, one might say that the difference between
natural science and human science resides in what it studies: natural science

studies ‘objects of nature’, ‘things’, ‘natural events’ and ‘the way that objects

behave’. Human science, in contrast, studies ‘persons’, or beings that have

‘consciousness’ and that ‘act purposefully’ in and on the world by creating

objects of ‘meaning’ that are ‘expressions’ of how humans exist in the world.

Researching Lived Human Experience

The notion of embodied experience is a central pedagogical element within outdoor

adventure education, and the solo at Tihoi Venture School is unlikely to be an exception. The

inclusion of solo in the Tihoi curriculum is based on the assumption that it provides some

pedagogic and / or personal good. From the perspective of understanding the experiences of

participants in outdoor education, and the Tihoi solo especially, phenomenology holds much

promise. Phenomenology at its most simplistic form is about researching lived experience, and

assumes that experience is the basis for all human knowledge about the world. The aim of

phenomenological inquiry is to record the world as immediately experienced (van Manen,

1997, p.36)

...to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such

a way that the effect of the text is at once meaningful: a notion by which the

reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience.

For van Manen ‘lived experience’ is both the start point and end point of

phenomenological inquiry. As researchers we are drawn to ask, what is the nature of such

‘lived experience’? Lived experience has both pre-reflective and reflective aspects. van Manen

(1997, p. 35) suggests pre-reflective awareness:

is an implicit consciousness about experience; a non-thematic, non-reflective

quality that precedes any reflective element related to the experience... ...in its
most basic form experience involves our immediate pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself.

There is also an awareness of experience that is reflexive, recognisable in reflection as a certain quality or essence. For van Manen, lived experience presents a linguistic structure, and he suggests a hermeneutic significance arises from experiences as we give memory to them. Lived experiences are also “soaked through with language” (p.38), thus giving a linguistic structure capable of interpretation. Thus to understand lived experience vis-à-vis van Manen is both a phenomenological and hermeneutic process: phenomenological in that it is the descriptive study of lived experience (phenomena) and hermeneutic in that there is an interpretive effort towards “…the expressions and objectifications (texts) of lived experience in the attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them” (1997, p.38).

Yet no such interpretation can fully and completely capture in textual form the richness of a lived experience. There are ineffable elements to all experiences and limitations with language to adequately articulate a lived experience such as the Tihoi solo. Phenomenology as a human science, however, does provide opportunity for the researcher to orient strongly to the phenomenon, to immerse oneself to the essential structures of an experience, and to delve deeply into the experience as lived through relationship with participant and phenomenon. Lincoln & Guba (1985) coined the phrase ‘human-as-instrument’ whereby the researcher is the central data collection and analysis mechanism, and the phrase has come to represent the methodological approach utilised for most qualitative research generally. The human is, as Maykut & Morehouse (1994, p.27) acknowledge, “… the only data collection instrument which is multifaceted enough and complex enough to capture the important elements of a human person or activity (p.27).”

Heuristic phenomenologist Clark Moustakis promotes the notion of ‘Being-In’ as immersion of the researcher into the lived world of the other, providing opportunity to watch, to listen, to attend, “Being-In the world of the other is a way of going wide open, entering in as if for the first time, hearing just what is, leaving out my own thoughts, feelings, theories, biases…” (Moustakis, 1994, p.82). Being-In embraces Michael Polanyi’s (1966) notion of
The phenomenon of indwelling as the phenomenological posture, “to indwell means to exist as an interactive spirit, force, or principle, and to exist within as an activating spirit, force, or principle” (in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p.12, italics in original). Thus to indwell is to know what participants might think, feel and see regarding an experience such as solo, as well as being positioned to ‘know’ what solo participants may not know in the traditional sense; that is, the tacit pre-reflective aspects of consciousness related to solo. Indwelling and Being-In both acknowledge the researcher clearly as the instrument of inquiry, with Moustakis believing that the researcher is able to suspend all prior perspectives and beliefs related to the phenomenon while Polanyi is encouraging of the researcher to fully ‘participate’ in the inquiry utilising held understandings.

Maykut & Morehouse (1994) discuss two forms of knowledge that assist us to know the world: explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is that which is known, is understood, and which can be written down as words, maps or formulas and recorded in field notes. Tacit knowledge is a term typically attributed to Polanyi (1966) as that range of beliefs or gut instincts that one intuitively feels but cannot yet articulate. As Greenwood & Levin (2008, p.66) articulate, “tacit knowing connotes the ‘hidden’ understandings that guide our actions without our ability to explicitly communicate what the knowledge is.” It is the knowing that we know but cannot yet tell (Polanyi, 1969); our immediate pre-reflective consciousness (van Manen, 1997).

Tacit knowledge is accessed through indwelling (Bishop, 2008; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), allowing the researcher to see ‘things’ emerging into existence. Polanyi (1966) was resolute that all knowing involved a skilful action whereby the knower knowingly participates in all acts of understanding. The notion of ‘objective’ knowing, as detached and independent of human action, was not one acceptable to the philosopher determined to show the common structure underlying all kinds of knowledge... “All knowing is personal knowing – participation through indwelling” (Polanyi & Prosch, 1975, p. 44).

Heshusius (1994) discusses the feelings associated with ‘indwelling’, promoting a ‘participatory mode of consciousness’ that is all about moving from a stance where the researcher is kept separate from that which is known to an alternate stance that recognises
the relationship between self and other (and therefore of reality). The crucial role of the body in the act of knowing is a persistent thread in the philosophy of Polanyi (Clark, 2001, p. 85), who believed our contact with the world necessarily required our somatic senses in a kinaesthetic way:

Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to those impacts. Such is the exceptional position of our body in the universe.

An intimate relationship between self and other as a mode of knowing has been referred to as ‘somatic’ or ‘bodily’ knowing (M. Berman, 1989) or ‘tacit knowing’ (Polanyi, 1966). As Heshusius describes (1994, p.627):

In a participatory mode of consciousness the quality of attentiveness is characterised by an absence of the need to separate, distance, and to insert predetermined thought patterns, methods and formulas between self and other.

Denzin & Lincoln (2008a) speak of the third moment of qualitative research as being one of ‘blurred genres’; a moment more receptive to integrative approaches to inquiry than a rigorous holding of epistemological and ontological tenets. Heshusius & Ballard (1996) explored the blurred genre notion and examined the stories of scholars who had made a shift from positivism to interpretivism (and beyond) as their paradigm of inquiry. Commencing with their own stories, the authors acknowledged the importance of a somatic knowing that preceded the rational that emerged as a fascinating theme across research participants. Heshusius & Ballard state (1996, p. 2):

When we started to consciously reflect on how we had changed our most basic beliefs, we had to acknowledge that we knew, before we could account for it intellectually, that we no longer believed in what we were doing... That is, while the dominant assumptions still made sense rationally in terms of how things are done, they no longer made sense somatically and affectively. Something felt wrong. Our bodies told us so.

Strengthening their ‘blurred genres’ of research thread, Denzin & Lincoln (1998) discuss the metaphor of the Bricoleur; the French handyman or handywoman who makes use of all available tools for craftsmanship. The Bricoleur pieces together a “…close knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation” (p. 3) that has potential to draw
upon somatic and other forms of knowing beyond what positivistic science has come to accept as the rational. The product, a *Bricolage*, becomes, “a complex, dense, reflexive, collagen-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (p. 3). The *bricolage* also becomes the practice of bringing together whatever works best in a given research context (Lincoln, 2000) and represents a blurring of the genres in an interdisciplinary way (Kincheloe, 2005). In social research the *bricolage* not only has potential to enhance the quality of inquiry but also to benefit humanity in a pedagogical way:

*Thus the bricolage is not only a dynamic of research but operates in the connected domains of cognition and pedagogy as well. In the epistemological and ontological deliberations of the bricolage, we gain insight into new modes of thinking, teaching, and learning* (Kincheloe, 2005, p.347).

The interpretive researcher-as-*bricoleur*, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2008), understands “that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity” (p. 8). The researcher utilises research “tools that can provide important insights and knowledge” (p. 9) and which ‘fit’ the nature of the question(s) being asked. As Denzin & Lincoln then share, the research design would with flexibility connect the theoretical paradigm with the determined strategies of inquiry and also connect to the methods to be employed. The qualitative researcher as *bricoleur* thus deploys the investigative strategies that are at hand to match the specifics of a complex situation (Cheek, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a), inventing or piecing together new tools and techniques as required.

By way of a synopsis thus far, intimately examining a human experience such as a ‘lived’ period of solitude can involve a researcher, as *bricoleur*, operating in a somatic, embodied, and deeply personal manner. Such an effort towards a *participatory mode of consciousness* (Ballard, 1997; Heshusius, 1994) places the researcher himself or herself clearly as the primary analytical tool, and able to deploy some reflexivity in best meeting the research agenda. This seemingly subjective approach to accessing the essences related to a phenomenon such as a nature-based solitude experience requires elaboration. What follows is an exploration of the
historical and philosophical underpinnings of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigating an experience ‘as-lived’.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research is essentially about understanding the lived human experience related to a particular phenomenon. Yet the widespread use of the term phenomenology is somewhat problematic and potentially confusing for researchers seeking to engage with it for the first time (Caelli, 2001). Phenomenology has been described as a philosophy, a paradigm, and a methodological approach (Moran, 2000; Seamon, 1982). Indeed Spiegelberg (1982) suggests there may well be as many meanings of and approaches to phenomenology as there might be phenomenological researchers, to the point where the widespread use of the term phenomenology has confused its very meaning.

As much qualitative research work is oriented to seeking to understand the human experience, it has often been portrayed as phenomenology. Thus phenomenology has at times been poorly generalised in the wider qualitative research literature as synonymous with qualitative methods or naturalistic inquiry (L. Cohen, et al., 2000; Morse, 1994; Morse & Field, 1996; Paley, 1998). Indeed there are some texts that utilise the term phenomenology as interchangeable with qualitative methodology generally (see Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, for example). To complicate matters, some phenomenological work has been written up in article format whereby editorial space limitations have restricted the writer to fully articulate the philosophical and ontological underpinnings of the work (Kerry & Armour, 2000). This has created the perception that the work has not necessarily been phenomenological when in fact it may have been.

For the ‘new’ researcher there are challenges to determining what might be representative of a quality research piece deriving from a phenomenological approach (Caelli, 2001). There are also challenges to embracing a seemingly ‘new’ language, whereby many of the terms utilised have European and particularly German roots. As Koch (1995) highlights,
phenomenological research is sometimes identified by the techniques and procedures utilised without an exploration of the theoretical or philosophical underpinnings of those methods. Difficulties emerge for young researchers perusing ‘phenomenological’ accounts in articles and texts when the philosophical position of the work is not highlighted. It seems apparent that a ‘methodological clarity’ (Lowes & Prowse, 2001) arises from a clarification and explication of the philosophical position underpinning any research, which provides a necessary academic rigour. Phenomenological researchers are thus challenged to clearly articulate their philosophical stance, which in turn guides decision making with respect to methodology and method.

To generalise and to summarise, phenomenological research per se is a purposeful, deliberate and structured process of information gathering that is defined and characterised by the philosophical stance taken by the researcher(s) as related to the phenomena under investigation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Kerry & Armour, 2000; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Moran, 2000; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Phenomenology becomes the examination and description of phenomena with regard to their essential qualities (essences) as revealed through authentic experiencing (Hay, 2002). There are pre-reflective and retrospective qualities to experience that present themselves to consciousness, for which phenomenology as a human science demands an ‘attentive practice of thoughtfulness’ (van Manen, 1997) to explicate the very essences of the lifeworld. It is an attunement to ‘the very things themselves’ (Husserl, 1982) that allows for the emergence of ‘plausible insights’ and a ‘pedagogical competence’ of relevance to humanity through the careful practice of writing (van Manen, 2000).

**Philosophical Traditions**

As van Manen (2000) outlines, for researchers interested primarily in applying phenomenological inquiry to their professional practice, it is entirely appropriate to “take an eclectic approach to the tradition of phenomenology” (p. 1). Yet this subtle promotion of the researcher as *Bricoleur* to best elucidate the lifeworld has caused some methodological concern. At issue is the failure of some phenomenological researchers to distinguish between
the various philosophical, ontological and epistemological tenets of upon which their inquiry has been based and the methods of inquiry employed. This has evoked widespread criticism (see, for example, Kerry & Armour, 2000; T. Koch, 1995; LeVasseur, 2003; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Paley, 1997, 1998). However, as Lincoln (2000) suggests, the *Bricoleur* should work in a manner that remains respectful of the research context and correspondingly communicates that a “borrowing of tools, methods, and traditions is occurring” (p.246). Thus it seems that an understanding of philosophy and tradition across all potential elements of the *Bricolage* is critical, and that researchers need to acknowledge such philosophical underpinnings in the interests of rigour.

The philosophical history of phenomenology is particularly complex, and over time there has evolved various phenomenological schools, styles and research emphases (Seamon, 2002; van Manen, 2000). As a philosophy Phenomenology has been influential in the fostering of many related philosophic traditions, not the least including poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism, and existentialism. van Manen (2000) reports that influential contemporary theorists, such as Foucault, Derrida and Rorty, find inspiration in the philosophical works of the early phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur amongst others. As well as being a philosophy, phenomenology is also a human science approach and method, and it is this emphasis that is of particular interest to this work. For the purposes of best understanding the philosophy and tradition of a hermeneutic phenomenology of practice I turn to the eminent philosophers themselves, primarily Husserl & Heidegger and also Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer.

**Edmund Husserl**

Phenomenology as a ‘human science’ emerged at the end of the 19th century as a fundamental rejection of positivism. Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), often referred to as the father of phenomenology (T. Koch, 1995; Laverty, 2003; Moran, 2000; Seamon, 2002), opposed the ‘borrowing’ of methods from within the physical sciences to research matters related to human issues (Laverty, 2003; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Of concern for Husserl were the different objectives of human science compared to physical science.
Husserl promoted aspects of the ‘lebenswelt’ (lifeworld) or ‘lived experience’ (T. Koch, 1995; Laverty, 2003) and the need to prioritise the ‘senses of life’ over capturing the data. For Husserl, experience was the ultimate source of knowledge and phenomenology signified a return to the things themselves (T. Koch, 1995; Laverty, 2003). Husserl’s phenomenology thus became the examination and description of phenomena with regard to their essential qualities as revealed through authentic experiencing (Hay, 2002). It was both a philosophy and a method centred upon the world as lived by a person rather than their world or reality treated as something separate from them. This central issue of Husserl’s philosophy, that humans are seen as having an indissoluble connection to the world and living a relationship of co-constitution, was a definite retreat from the Cartesian dualism of reality being something ‘out there’ and separate from the individual that Husserl attributed to positivistic inquiry. As highlighted by Moran (2000, p. xiii) Husserl strove to free philosophy from the “abstract metaphysical speculation” that had come to represent positivistic science.

Husserl regarded human experience in its variety of forms as being underpinned by certain structures of consciousness, which he claimed the phenomenological method could identify (Seamon, 2002). He portrayed himself as the founding pioneer of a radically different genre of research into human experience (Moran, 2000), believing his approach was the only genuine philosophy as it was a science of the essences of human experience (Kerry & Armour, 2000). Consciousness and its essential structures represented to Husserl “(a) pure region separate from the flux of specific experiences and thoughts” and so “his style of phenomenology became known as ‘transcendental’” (Seamon, 2002, p.2).

Husserl embarked upon a series of ambitious projects examining the ‘everyday’ lifeworld, gathering together students to perform in Moran’s words (2000, p.60), “a science of the essential structures of pure consciousness.” Husserl wished to illuminate the structures of human consciousness, which he termed the ‘essences’, and to explore the role of those structures in determining the meaning of a human experience (Kerry & Armour, 2000). A second fundamental of phenomenology acknowledged by Husserl was that consciousness always has an object, meaning that we as humans are always conscious of something (Osborne, 1994, p. 169):
"...if consciousness is our primordial window on the world, then an understanding of human knowledge would be best based upon an understanding of human consciousness.

Husserlian (Transcendental) Phenomenological Method

The fundamental tenet of a Husserlian phenomenological stance is that experience is the basis of all human knowledge of the world. Husserl promoted a descriptive psychology that would return to taken-for-granted experiences and re-examine them (Kerry & Armour, 2000; T. Koch, 1995), thus subjectively discovering the essences of experiences via a systematic and disciplined approach (Husserl, 1982). Three key traditions define Husserl’s phenomenological method: the structures (essences) of experience; an intentionality of consciousness (phenomenological stance), and; phenomenological reduction (bracketing).

Husserl’s phenomenological method commences by describing an event or situation in everyday life. The researcher seeks descriptions of the experience lived, adopting a phenomenological stance that allows an openness to live that experience in a total sense, preventing judgements from interfering with their openness to the description (Giorgi, 1985). Husserl’s phenomenological reduction dictates that beliefs in the phenomenon under investigation be suspended or bracketed. That is, there would be a ‘parking’ of all preconceived notions - how an individual in everyday might naively see something or as philosophers might interpret it – so that prior thoughts, conceptions and judgements related to the phenomenon are placed in epoche. As van Manen (1997, p.175) describes, phenomenological reduction “is an act of suspending one’s various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world.” Laverty (2003) highlights such bracketing for Husserl was far more than a suspension of belief and more oriented to “a cultivation of doubt to help open one’s self to the work at hand” (p. 6). The research process following epoche would then commence afresh, untainted by previously held suppositions to see the phenomena as it really is (Kerry & Armour, 2000; Osborne, 1994).
With respect to investigating the lived experience associated with a particular phenomenon, Husserl promoted the two important terms *noesis* and *noema*. *Noesis* is an interpretive act directed upon the phenomenon under investigation (the *noema*) (van Manen, 1997) and relates to the way in which a phenomenon is consciously experienced or the act of experiencing (Moustakis, 1994). For Husserl the *noesis* involves a series of gathered descriptions, which ultimately provide an insight or essence to the experience as lived.

Husserl encouraged the adoption of a phenomenological stance that promoted an *intentionality of consciousness*, understood as the direction of our consciousness toward the world (Husserl, 1982; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Said differently, an intentionality of consciousness brings forth some meaning from all actions, gestures and habits. Husserl felt that our own conscious awareness was the one thing for which we should be certain, and thus our knowledge of reality should start with such conscious awareness (T. Koch, 1995). Such *Intentionality* indicates the inseparable connection of the human being to the world:

*This means that all thinking (imagining, perceiving, remembering etc.) is always thinking about something. The same is true for actions: grasping is grasping for something, hearing is hearing something, pointing is pointing at something. All human activity is always oriented activity, directed by that which orients it. In this way we discover a person’s world or landscape* (van Manen, 1997, p.182).

Consciousness, through intentionality, is the mechanism for attributing a deeper essential meaning to experiences (Husserl, 1982; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Thus, for Husserl, the challenge for researchers lies with analysing the intentional experiences of consciousness in an attempt to determine how the meaning a phenomenon or experience is given meaning and to arrive at the essence(s) of the phenomenon.

*Intentionality* focuses upon the lived concrete experience and describes how the specific experience is constructed which, when combined with bracketing or *epoche*, provides for the phenomena to be seen ‘as they are’ through intuitive consciousness (Laverty, 2003). Husserl promoted the expose of the essences of conscious experience through the act of careful description, leading to him defining phenomenology as “*the descriptive science of the essences and actions of consciousness*” (in Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 285).
**Husserl and illusions of objectivity**

A researcher adopting a pure Husserlian phenomenological stance, employing intentionality and epoche as strategies to abandon the consciousness of all objects and ideas about some external reality, effectively stands outside the research process at some distance and assumes a sense of objectivity. However, there remains debate to the present day whether researchers and philosophers might be able to bracket their prior beliefs, values and knowledge related to a phenomena (see Lowes & Prowse, 2001, for example).

The Husserlian phenomenological reduction was a first step in the elimination of all preconceived notions (T. Koch, 1995); an approach that involved a bracketing of not only the outer world but also the individual consciousness. Thus many phenomenological studies have seen researchers examining, acknowledging and ‘parking’ their preconceptions and beliefs in the interest of defending the validity and objectivity of interpretation against the self interests of the researcher (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). Bracketing has been used as a strategy for controlling bias in reflection on experience yet such an effort, through my lens on the world, conflicts with the Husserlian ideal of phenomenology opposing the tenets of empiricism and positivism in the natural sciences. Husserl claimed phenomenology as the only rigorous science untainted by subjectivity (T. Koch, 1995; Laverty, 2003; Lowes & Prowse, 2001), yet embracing bracketing suggests an objective reality existing separately from the researcher and therefore (at least partially) reflects positivism.

I argue that any interpretations premised upon the Husserlian notion of the phenomenological reduction do not adequately address issues of trustworthiness (rigour). Nor can a researcher claim to be able to lay aside all preconceptions and presuppositions in totality; epistemologically acknowledging the connection between the knower and the known is critical. Ontologically multiple realities exist in the world, and a researcher cannot discount his or her own experiences and history from the interpretive act. It is for these reasons that I cannot embrace phenomenology from a Husserlian orientation. Critical questions have emerged from Husserls’ work about the meaning of phenomenology and whether a transcendental phenomenological reduction is possible (Kerry & Armour, 2000), and this has
led to the development of new branches within phenomenology. And so I turn to the philosophy of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer for their influences upon Hermeneutic (existential) Phenomenology.

**Martin Heidegger**

In direct contrast to the Husserlian concept of bracketing, Heideggerian (hermeneutic) phenomenology embraces prior understanding on the part of the researcher / interpreter. Acknowledging one’s background, in terms of the preconceptions that are brought to the research table, is one of the distinctive differences between the philosophy of Heidegger and that of Husserl. Lowes & Prowse write (2001, p. 474):

> *Heideggerian researchers maintain that participants’ experiences and interpretation of ‘being-in-the-world’ are embodied in a background of linguistic and cultural traditions that can only be understood and interpreted by another ‘being-in-the-world’ – the researcher.*

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), while never a student of Husserl, worked with him and was trained in the processes of Husserlian phenomenology. Ultimately he became an exponent of the Husserlian tradition but upon receiving a professorial chair, with the support of Husserl, Heidegger abandoned the Husserlian endeavour (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger reacted against Cartesianism and built upon Husserl’s work by examining its ontological basis (T. Koch, 1996). Whilst remaining focused upon the lifeworld, or experiences as lived, it was the notion of ‘embodied knowledge’ and the critical role the knowledge of the interpreter / researcher had in the inquiry process that commenced to differentiate the philosophy of Heidegger from that of his former colleague. Heidegger emphasised the *Dasein*, translated as “the mode of being human” or “the situated meaning of the human in the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 7), whereby all knowledge originates from people who are already in the world. He criticised the concept of theory being generated by an outsider-as-observer as well as the notion that understanding can evolve without being tainted by the interpreters own view of the world (T. Koch, 1995; Lowes & Prowse, 2001).

Two intertwined philosophical threads define Heidegger’s philosophy of inquiry: a *historicality of understanding* and the *hermeneutic circle* (T. Koch, 1995). To explicate these
two notions I shall follow the lead of Koch (1995) and Kerry & Armour (2000) in describing four other associated tenets of Heideggerian philosophy: Background, Pre-understanding, Co-constitution, and Interpretation.

With regard to **Background**, Heidegger assumes that one’s background skills, practices, and meanings cannot be fully made explicit, yet they are a critical element of the hermeneutic circle. An individual’s background and history is culturally loaded, learned from birth, and so assists one make some meaning of the world. It is a basis for understanding what is real for a person, and Heidegger was adamant such history cannot be bracketed. Heidegger viewed such background as the basis for interpretation (Lowes & Prowse, 2001).

The term **Pre-understanding** describes the “meaning and organization of a culture (including language and practices) which are already in the world before we understand” (T. Koch, 1995 p. 831). For Heidegger such pre-understanding exists within our collective understanding and so is required to be brought into focus. It is a ‘being-in-the-world’, as discussed earlier, whereby participants’ experiences of ‘being-in-the-world’ are embodied in a background of language and culture. Those experiences can only be understood and interpreted by another ‘being-in-the-world’; that being the researcher (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). Being-in-the-world is, according to Spiegelberg (1982), the most critical and defining aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Heidegger’s use of the term **Co-constitution** refers to the unity between a person and their world; a key Heideggerian assumption (Kerry & Armour, 2000). We construct our world based upon our own experiences and background, just as we are constructed by the world in which we live. Any division between person and the world is unacceptable to a Heideggerian philosophy (T. Koch, 1995) and so co-constitution renders bracketing as irrelevant.

Heidegger’s **Interpretation** connects the notion of being-in-the-world with understanding. That is, “understanding is no longer conceived of as a way of knowing but as a mode of being” (T. Koch, 1995, p.831). For Heidegger, humans are self interpreting beings from birth and correspondingly there is no detached position from which to know the world. We are constantly interpreting, so understanding is always a mode of being. Thus for Heidegger (1962)
no experience can be encountered without reference to a background of understanding and every experience involves an interpretation based on the persons background; its ‘historicality of understanding’. The ‘hermeneutic circle’, as metaphor for describing the process of moving dialectically between the part and whole while being-in-the-world (T. Koch, 1996), implicates the researcher intimately into the process. Understanding becomes a reciprocal relationship, like a conversation, between person and world.

**Hermeneutical Phenomenology**

Phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when method becomes interpretive (van Manen, 2000, 2006). Once the theory and practice of interpreting biblical texts, Hermeneutics was broadened to embrace all aspects of the human condition, so that contemporary hermeneutic endeavour involves the analysis of texts while acknowledging that preconceptions and prejudices do shape the interpretive process (T. Koch, 1996; van Manen, 2000). Heideggarian phenomenology is sometimes referred to as hermeneutic phenomenology, existential phenomenology or, following Gadamer (1960/1998), philosophical hermeneutics.

Like with Husserlian phenomenology, the central aim of hermeneutic phenomenology remains to explore the lifeworld, or lived experience, utilising sometimes similar methods to capture responses to questions oriented to the phenomenon. Both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology emerged as a fundamental rejection of the mind-body Cartesian split and as recognition of what has been lost through the use of empirical methods to study human phenomena. Both approaches arose from a similar tradition, with philosophies traceable to Husserl and his work at the German school Freiberg (Kerry & Armour, 2000; T. Koch, 1995). As briefly discussed earlier, these philosophic traditions have contributed to the development of various philosophical movements including existentialism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and feminism (van Manen, 2000), as well as to a variety of phenomenological human science method orientations.
Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer (1800 – 2002) was a student of Heidegger who extended Heidegger’s work through placing an emphasis upon language (T. Koch, 1996; van Manen, 1997, 2000). Gadamer explored the utilisation of language in interpretation, without providing a recipe for the interpretive process (T. Koch, 1996), and gave an equal weighting to language within the hermeneutic circle. Dialogue, in the form of ongoing question and answer, provided an insight into the perspectives of researcher and others as related to the phenomenon of inquiry, and it was the integration of perspectives, a ‘fusion of horizons’, that allowed for understanding to emerge (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The process of interpretation thus becomes a demonstration of how such a ‘fusion of horizons’ has occurred: through careful academic writing that reflects the strategies in which the researcher participates in making data, through depicting the phenomenon within the social research context, and by discussing how the fusion of researcher’ and participants’ horizons occurred. Interpretation vis-à-vis Gadamer becomes a careful exploration of language (van Manen, 2000) and the researcher cannot help but influence the interpretive process.

Gadamer’s seminal work *Truth and Method* (1989) argued, in part, that experience, culture, and prior understanding rendered the scientific ideal of objectivity as impossible and irrelevant. Gadamer refers to the Heideggarian concepts of background, pre-understanding, co-constitution, and interpretation as the ‘Traditions’ (T. Koch, 1996), claiming that operating such traditions in advance of reflective processes means we always hold prejudices. However, Gadamer presents prejudice as a positive force, as something not to be eliminated but rather to be embraced as a technique for accessing the everyday world; “Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world” (Gadamer, in Koch 1996, p.177). As Koch maintains, we take our history and prejudices or value positions with us as researchers and these help us to understand.

Before moving on to discussing the methodological approach to be utilised for the balance of this work, it is important to summarise and to acknowledge again that differences of an ontological and epistemological kind exist to differentiate the philosophies of
transcendental (Husserlian) phenomenology and hermeneutic (Heideggarian-Gadamerian) phenomenology. Husserl emphasised the epistemological question of the relationship between the knower and the object of study. Later Heidegger and then Gadamer emphasised the ontological question surrounding the nature of reality and ‘of being in the world’. van Manen (1997) perhaps best highlights the ontological position of being in the world according to Gadamer (van Manen, 1997, p.184):

Thus, for Heidegger ... phenomenology is ontology — a study of the modes of “being in the world” of human being. Heidegger’s professed aim is to let the things of the world speak for themselves. He asks: What is the nature (Being) of this being? What lets this being be what it is?

Towards my own Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Practice

As discussed earlier, many critics have challenged phenomenological researchers to distinguish between the various philosophical, ontological and epistemological tenets of upon which their inquiry is based (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Kerry & Armour, 2000; T. Koch, 1995; LeVasseur, 2003; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Paley, 1997, 1998). Crotty (1998) also notes that the researcher as bricoleur has a particular responsibility to divulge the theoretical and methodological framework that underpins the chosen strategy, ultimately highlighting the paradigm from which the researcher is centred and the methodological pathway and methods chosen.

I have long found myself coming to understand my world through my experiences in and of that world, and I have intuitively captured knowledge in an embodied way (Bain, 1995; Todres & Galvin, 2008). My senses, my experiences, my culture, my cultural influences, and my prior understandings all stack against the notion of objectivity as a pathway towards true knowing. There are many facets of a human experience that in my eyes cannot adequately be examined by numbers and statistics. I therefore do not accept any Cartesian split between the mind and body, rather acknowledging that knowledge about my world is understood in a deeply somatic, felt way. Any attempt to state my held assumptions related to a phenomenon
and then somehow ‘parking and forgetting’ those assumptions in the interest of objectivity is not possible. So as a social researcher I have chosen to address the question “what is the meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School?” utilising a hermeneutic human science approach to phenomenology as outlined by van Manen (1997). I am interested in the meanings and significance of the solo experience ‘as lived’. I identify especially with a Heideggarian – Gadamerian philosophy of being in the world, equating to a hermeneutic phenomenology of practice. This shall see me operating in a constructivist realm as interpretive bricoleur; a mode of inquiry that is profoundly human and of particular relevance to this project.

Central to a hermeneutic phenomenology of practice is an orientation and focus upon the lived experience or lifeworld of the phenomenon investigated (van Manen, 1997). For Abram (1996, p. 40) the lifeworld “is the world of our immediately lived experience” that can be captured in its “multiplicity and open-endedness prior to conceptually freezing it into a static space of facts” (italics in original). That is, the taken for granted patterns and contexts (or essences) of the phenomenon under the researcher lens can be revealed prior to a process of conscious attention (Seamon, 2002; van Manen, 2000).

In building on the work of Merleau-Ponty especially, but also Husserl and Heidegger, van Manen (1997) presents the four fundamental existentials of lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relationships as overlapping and interwoven domains which are omnipresent in any human experience and which collectively can come to represent the lifeworld. The four lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1997) are: Lived time (temporality), which infers a temporal quality of being in the world that is perceived in a subjective sense and not necessarily ‘clock’ time; Lived space (spatiality), which details and describes the place or existential ground of our everyday experiences; Lived body (corporeality) as the phenomenological reality of being bodily in the world, and; Lived Other (relationality) as the relationship we maintain with others (and perhaps the cosmos) within the spaces that we share.

Through coming to understand these lifeworld existentials separately one might better understand the structures of a human experience in an intricate, interwoven sense. However,
as van Manen (1997) highlights, while we might differentiate the elements of the lifeworld as a part of the research process the lifeworld existentials resist being separated in the sense of the lived-world. Thus the lifeworld represents both the source and the object of the phenomenological research process (van Manen, 1997); a process that commences with the personal experiences of the researcher as related to the phenomenon under scrutiny, that investigates experience as lived from a variety of perspectives utilising the lifeworld existentials as a source of analysis, and which seeks to explicate the nature and essential meaning of experience through an hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and writing process.

Richardson & St. Pierre (2008) acknowledge the importance of the individual researcher’s skills and aptitude with writing in any phenomenological writing process. As the primary research instrument, the writer-as-researcher deems the process as deeply personal “Knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledge’s” (p. 477). Writing thus becomes a “continual co-creation of Self and social science” (Richardson, 1998, p. 349, capital in original), allowing the researcher-writer to know oneself reflexively while writing for meaning-making in a manner that is free from the monotony or homogeneity of more traditional science writing. As van Manen (2002) describes, the writing process becomes far more than externalising internal knowledge and embraces making contact with the world, “It behoves us to remain as attentive as possible to the ways that all of us experience the world and to the infinite varieties of possible human experiences and possible explications of those experiences” (p. 237).

For van Manen (1997) there exists a strong orientation between the research / writing endeavour and pedagogy. Hermeneutic-phenomenology thus becomes more than an interpretive act and potentially delves into an action-oriented process whereby the researcher and ultimately the reader makes sense and meaning of the writing in terms of their everyday practices (Crist & Tanner, 2003). The sensitive awareness and knowledge gleaned with respect to the lifeworld leads towards a ‘pedagogic competence’, which van Manen suggests is manifested not only via educational praxis but also through every day (pedagogic) theorising. As van Manen highlights (2002, p. 237) writing is validated as a way of knowing “...when a text
suddenly ‘speaks’ to us in a manner that validates our experience, when it conveys a life understanding that stirs our sensibilities, when it pulls the strings of unity of our being.”

Solitude, as a (social) phenomena, can be interpreted through a writing process that is richly descriptive and containing evocative language that allows the reader to examine the phenomenon in a fresh manner (van Manen, 2002). Such language has the potential to dispel the everyday, taken-for-granted meanings surrounding the phenomenon: “it acquires a certain transparency, so to speak; it permits us to ‘see’ the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience it describes” (van Manen, 1997: p.122). Thus the writing process requires researchers to interact deeply with and occasionally to go beyond their data (Wolcott, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology requires of the researcher a strong orientation to the phenomenon, and an active posturing by the researcher as a central participant in the inquiry process. The posture, as Husserl (1982) highlights, is a process of turning to the very nature of the phenomenon, and to attend to the core essences and structures that reveal themselves through the phenomenological writing process.

Thus hermeneutic phenomenology vis-à-vis van Manen (1997, 2002) is centered upon revealing the nature of human experiences, of grasping the essential meaning of some phenomena, and of revealing the essential thematic structures as related to that phenomenon rather than developing predictive or prescriptive theory. It (hermeneutic phenomenology) is also about influencing pedagogical practice, allowing for teachers, instructors and educational guides to make better sense of the world and ultimately their practice. That said, hermeneutic phenomenology is not a deliberate strategy for influencing practice per se and is interpretive rather than critical in orientation.

**Issues and Challenges for a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach**

Despite qualitative social research generally holding widespread acceptance relative to quantitative natural sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a), the deeply subjective posture of phenomenological work is problematic for some. Readers not familiar with hermeneutic phenomenology may question the reflexivity associated with such an approach. As Denscombe (2003) reports hermeneutic phenomenology may be seen as explicitly subjective,
lacking particularly in scientific rigour by way of its subjectivity of description, interpretation, analysis and measurement. As phenomenology tends to examine every day phenomena, some may question the relevance of research into experiences which may reflect the mundane (Eisner, 1991) or the usefulness of a project where the results may not be easily generalised to the wider population (Denscombe, 2003).

I have spoken earlier of phenomenology being generalised as synonymous with qualitative methods or naturalistic inquiry (Morse, 1994; Morse & Field, 1996; Paley, 1998), with texts and writers more than occasionally utilising the term phenomenology interchangeably with qualitative methodology or method. In part this misrepresentation of phenomenology has been due to editorial space limitations restricting the writer to fully articulate the philosophical and ontological underpinnings of their work (Kerry & Armour, 2000). Similarly, one of the tenets of phenomenology is letting the phenomenon speak to the reader in a deeply evocative and informative manner (van Manen, 1997, 2000), facilitating a personal engagement with the phenomenon. Such data representation through the written voice of the researcher brings with it challenges of authenticity, and often requires lengthy verbatim descriptions from participants to build trust with the reader. Again, editorial space in most journals becomes an issue (Kerry & Armour, 2000) and writers are left with making compromises in terms of how their work might best be written up.

On a more paradigmatic level, Geelan & Taylor (2001) acknowledge the problematic nature of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry as a dialectic between the hermeneutic concern for interpreting the social and symbolic world and the phenomenological concern for describing our ways of being in the world. Hermeneutic inquiry into the experiences of solitude within an outdoor education programme would typically be conducted with an orientation towards reconstructing participants’ intended meanings (which would then be interpreted by the researcher’s theoretical lens). Phenomenological inquiry, on the other hand, would focus the researcher (ontologically) on the immediate experiences of solitude without theoretical concern or pre-conceptions, thus allowing understanding of the essential nature of the solitude experience (Geelan & Taylor, 2001). This dialectic provides a wonderful tension (van Manen, 1997) and therefore a potential insight to the richness of the solo experience at Tihoi.
It is the posturing of the researcher as the primary inquiry instrument that allows for intuitive, subjective amendments to method as required to engage with such a tension.

With respect to the posturing of the researcher, there has been criticism of van Manen’s lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1997, 2000) as limiting for the examination of matters outside of the human. That is, hermeneutic phenomenology in its philosophical form has been reported as inherently anthropocentric or human centred (Wattchow, 2006a). It is this very tension that renders the ecosophy of the researcher as important. Wattchow himself corrects the philosophical limitations of van Manen’s work through his own embracing of encountered and embodied experiences that are inclusive of relationships in and with place, nature and non-human other. Wattchow provides depth-full insight to the experiences of river places in the mediated canoe and kayak landscape. His own ecocentrically-oriented stance as a researcher has self-mediated the tension inherent within van Manen’s work. Similarly Hyde’s toil examining the spiritual experiences of children utilising van Manen’s lifeworld existentials is mediated by his own understandings of spirituality expanding beyond the human (Hyde, 2004, 2005).

Other important hermeneutic phenomenological studies have captured the richness of more-than-human lived experiences: Kirova-Petrova (1996) explored children’s loneliness feelings; Hoffart (1995) examined children’s solitude experiences in an urban setting; Richley (1992) captured the lived solitude experiences of adventure educators in nature; Atchison (1998) delved deeply into the restorative dimensions of time alone in nature for adults, and; Fitzgibbon (1993) provided insights to adult solitude within an Outward Bound-style programme. Each of these research investigations have, as Richardson and St. Pierre (2008, p. 477) encourage, utilised a personalised phenomenological posture so that “knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical knowledges.” This intentionality of consciousness (Husserl, 1982) requires of the researcher a subjective posture.

**Ensuring Quality in Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Denzin and Lincoln (2008a) report on the dual crises of legitimation and representation in qualitative inquiry, acknowledging the many and various tensions that have surfaced and
resurfaced through the past two decades with respect to the simplistic question ‘what constitutes good human science?’ Lincoln & Guba (1985) introduced the concept of trustworthiness as a parallel to the empirical notions of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity common in the natural sciences. As Sparkes (2001) notes this parallel perspective arose in response to the problem of legitimation in qualitative social science and brought with it the alternative trustworthiness criteria of credibility (for internal validity), transferability (for external validity), dependability (for reliability), and confirmability (for objectivity). Trustworthiness was focused upon methods that would ensure that one carried out the research correctly. Thus there was an acknowledgement by Lincoln & Guba that alternative criteria were required for qualitative inquiry, and so what came about was a framework for assessing qualitative inquiry that closely paralleled quantitative work.

While these parallel criteria have been widely utilised to the present day and promoted broadly in influential texts (eg. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008b) they have also not been without criticism and critique. Some of these critiques have been of a philosophical kind; namely that techniques being advocated (such as member checks for establishing credibility and dependability audits for establishing trustworthiness) are problematic in a world of multiple realities (Sparkes, 2001). Similarly others, including the instigators of the parallel perspective themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, 2002), were uneasy with the close association of the trustworthiness criteria within positivist science. There was also an acknowledgement that research involving the researcher-as-instrument brought with it complexities in terms of quality assurance. As Lincoln & Guba (1985) noted, in the positivist paradigm the method of inquiry had primacy and so method was critical for ensuring results were trustworthy. However, rigour in terms of adherence to method was but one consideration in constructivist inquiry where attention needed to be paid to being far more interpretively rigorous.

Other perspectives counter to the parallel perspective have arisen that argue alternative criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative work (see Sparkes, 2001, for a good overview). The scope of these perspectives are beyond discussion in this work, though there is considerable debate over the nature of the knowledge being produced through qualitative
approaches and how such research should be judged (R. Barbour, 2001; Giorgi, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Lincoln, 2002; Mays & Pope, 2000; Rowan & Huston, 1997; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Notwithstanding the depth of intellectual effort being expended upon determining quality criteria for qualitative work, the notion of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has served constructivist inquiry well.

Trustworthiness and the associated language of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability have provided an enduring consistency for qualitative researchers over two decades. While there has been much dialogue surrounding the relevance of traditional standards of validity for human sciences, trustworthiness has allowed for qualitative inquiry to be funded on an alternate validity basis (R. Barbour, 2001). That said, the postmodern turn has highlighted that no single method or combination of methods can provide ultimate truth on social realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). Sparkes (2001, p. 550) further speaks to this:

There can be no canonical approach to qualitative inquiry, no recipes or rigid formulas, as different validation procedures or sets of criteria may be better suited to some situations, forms of representation, and desires for legitimation than others.

At the heart of most qualitative endeavour is the researcher / writer as human instrument, and such an approach demands reflexivity in terms of being able to reflect critically on the self as researcher. As Guba & Lincoln (2008, p. 210) report, being reflexive demands “a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself.”

Richardson & St. Pierre (2008) similarly note that writing research becomes far more than transcribing some reality. Like Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997) discuss, there are processes of “negotiating, collaborating, responding” (p. 274), and creating “Ripples on the Self/ Ripples on others” (p. 329, capitals in original). Reflexivity demands self awareness on two levels and this posits two fundamental questions of self as researcher: are we being rigorous in terms of the implementation of method?, and; are we interpretively rigorous, so that our co-
created constructions can be trusted to provide insights to some important human phenomenon? (Guba & Lincoln, 2008).

Richardson (1998) introduces *angles of repose* to help define and recognise the variety of positions from which writers might present their perspectives. Such an angle of repose develops beyond being the philosophical or epistemological stance to include the influences that shape how qualitative researchers might see the world and the interpretations in writing that arise from that seeing. As Ely, et al. (1997, p. 33) state:

*We see a complex network of belief systems and positions embedding, superimposing, and undergirding any research project, and we are making a plea to be more aware of and more upfront about how these stances are accounted for in research writing.*

Implicit with an angle of repose is the need to be explicit in detailing one’s stance and also acknowledging the reality that there is no one angle of repose that sees all. Similarly, in a response to the limitations of a triangulation of methods to validate social science, Richardson & St Pierre (2008) promote the concept of a crystal in relation to validity for postmodern texts. They highlight that there is typically no fixed point or object that can be triangulated, and that often there is more than three sides one might approach the world from. They encourage the use of a broader multi-dimensional view (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008, p. 478):

*Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallization.*

**Quality Criteria for Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing**

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry demands a strong orientation to both the philosophy and the phenomenon, and so a primary measure of quality is the depth of engagement with that phenomenon via the written word (T. Koch, 1995, 1996; van Manen, 1997, 2000). As a supporter of a Heideggarian-Gadamer informed hermeneutic phenomenology, Koch (1996) supports Guba & Lincoln’s original promotion of transferability as a key quality measure. Transferability infers some degree of similarity between two contexts, meaning that an original research context should be described adequately so that a
judgement of transfer can be made by readers. This, suggests Koch, requires the provision of sufficient contextual information to make similar research able to be read in relation. Both of these points relative to quality assurance demand an intimacy with the phenomenon and the provision of a rich contextual platform for best understanding that phenomenon.

Koch (1996) challenges the hermeneutic phenomenologist to be true to three key tenets through their writing: philosophy, rigour, and representation. Representation in hermeneutic phenomenology dictates that the researcher participates in the hermeneutic circle of inquiry (Gadamer, 1989; Heidegger, 1962; Kerry & Armour, 2000). Thus credibility is enhanced when writers describe and interpret their experience as researchers. They are actively engaged in bringing their pre-understandings and prejudices to the consciousness of the reader via their writing so that, as Koch acknowledges, there is no attempt made to hide behind the data or to disguise personal insights. It is the researcher as instrument who participates in the making of data and meaning.

Representation of philosophy further infers a trustworthiness in terms of method (T. Koch, 1996). A clear connection between philosophy and method needs to be made explicit, so to be reflexive dictates the sharing of the research process as a form of rigour. The reader of hermeneutic phenomenological writing should be able to audit the actions and decisions of the researcher so that “a trail of the decisions, theoretical, philosophical, and methodological, has the potential to clarify the research process and establish trustworthiness of the study” (T. Koch, 1996, p. 178). Representation means remaining attentive to the philosophical and the practical.

The bridge between philosophy, rigour, and representation for Koch (1996) is founded upon what Gadamer (1989) termed a fusion of horizons. That is, insights from literature, researcher preconceptions, and field data must all merge and fuse together within phenomenological writing. This promotes the researcher to utilise his or her own experiences as data, being aware of their background and pre-understandings (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Heidegger (1962) acknowledges that while our background meanings and practices can never be made fully explicit, they must be brought into being to be understood and that
interpretation occurs only with reference to ones background and pre-understandings. Koch challenges writers of phenomenological projects to show whenever possible how background and pre-understanding interact with participant stories, with the understanding that personal values and experiences enrich the research and make it meaningful. As Gadamer (1989) highlights, prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. When we take these prejudices into the research process they assist us, as writers, to understand and so communicate those understandings (T. Koch, 1995).

Responding to the challenges surrounding quality in hermeneutic phenomenology has led to decisions in terms of methodology and method. Through the balance of this work my aim shall be to:

*Retain a strong engagement with the phenomenon of solitude; working within the hermeneutic circle;*

*Be explicit about my personal experiences; detailing my pre-understandings and experiences related to solitude within the analysis process, leading to a fusion of horizons between self, literature and data;*

*Be explicit regarding method thus allowing for an audit trail through the communication of method and my role in the research process;*

*Develop a contextual chapter that grounds the investigations into the place Tihoi Venture School.*

*Strive for action-sensitive knowledge through writing, leading towards a pedagogic competence, and;*

*Acknowledge the reader as an important evaluator of quality; empowering the reader to see the phenomenon of solitude in a fundamentally new way, thus moving towards a pedagogical competence.*

**Towards Pedagogical Competence**

van Manen (1997, p. 138) asks, “Is educational research *educational* when it fails to present itself in both form and content as an educational form of life?” (italics in original). He suggests modern educational theory and research suffers from three interconnected problems
van Manen thus challenges all writers and their underlying research process to be guided by where they stand pedagogically. He promotes “maintaining a strong and oriented relation” (p. 136) to the phenomenon from a pedagogical stance; to ensure pedagogical competence. It is the underlying pedagogy within the pedagogical text that grounds the research in a manner that can inform educational practice. As van Manen states (1997, p. 143):

*Learning to understand the essence of pedagogy as it manifests itself in particular life circumstances contributes to a more hermeneutic type of competence: a pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact.*

Whereas traditional applied behavioural research in education might unfold instrumental knowledge principles (such as useful techniques or managerial policies) phenomenological research unfolds tactful thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1997) in the form of situational perceptions, insights, and deep understandings of experience. This thoughtfulness, when brought to the consciousness of the teacher (or parent, counsellor, principal) inevitably influences pedagogy in terms of what we – the teacher – come to know as intrinsic to the human experience of teaching (or parenting, counselling, leading). This pedagogical competence becomes what van Manen terms “a critically oriented action research” (1997, p. 154).

It is important to note that van Manen’s critically oriented action research differs ontologically and epistemologically from the research paradigm of critical theory. The development of an action sensitive knowledge requires the reader seeing pedagogy within the text and being influenced in a pedagogical sense through reading endeavour. Hermeneutic phenomenology is more about letting words speak rather than promoting a call to action. There is no deliberate attempt to sway or influence (Ely, et al., 1997), but rather to communicate findings’in evocative ways that may support readers with empathetically understanding what a phenomenon is like (Todres & Galvin, 2008). As van Manen (2002, p. 238) states:

(1) Confusing pedagogical theorizing with other discipline-based forms of discourse; (2) tending to abstraction and thus losing touch with the lifeworld of living with children, and; (3) failing to see the general erosion of pedagogic meaning from the lifeworld (p. 135).
The phenomenologist does not present the reader with a conclusive argument or with a determinate set of ideas, essences, or insights. Instead he or she aims to be allusive by orienting the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form.

In terms of letting words speak, Geelan & Taylor (2001) write that the dialogical text in phenomenological work is about eloquently engaging readers with vicarious experience. Those reading experiences become opportunities to teach something, likely via praxis of self reflective thought and action. Thus van Manen's (1997) four evaluative criteria for the dialogic text (orientation, depth, richness, and strength) become criteria for the assessment of research writing. Geelan & Taylor (2001, p. 1) elucidate van Manen’s four criteria in their own words:

**Orientation.** The text should be oriented to answering the question of how the researcher as educator stands in relation to life: what are the valued beliefs that shape the educator's lifeworld?

**Strength.** The text should be committed to a strong pedagogical perspective which addresses the question of how we should be and act with children.

**Richness.** The text should provide rich and thick descriptions of the exploration of experiential phenomena that cause the reader to be engaged, involved and thoughtfully responsive.

**Depth.** The text should enable the reader to explore the depthful character of their pedagogical nature beyond what is immediately experienced, to appreciate the inherent complexity, ambiguity and mystery of life.

**Summary**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a constructivist research philosophy and method that is founded upon the philosophical traditions of Heidegger, and with influence from Husserl, Merleau - Ponty and Gadamer. As described by van Manen (1997; 2006) hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry allows for authentic accounts of complex phenomena to be made accessible and which highlights some of the complexities inherent in the social world using authentic accounts (Denscombe, 2003). Phenomenology similarly permits the researcher to delve into a social situation in-depth and provide descriptions detailed enough to reflect the
complexity of the social world (Ely, et al., 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). Such social description “carries an aura of humanism” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 105) and can tell a fascinating story that becomes of relevance to educators when the writing is oriented, strong, rich, and deep (van Manen, 1997).

This chapter has acknowledged my desire for a human-science orientation to researching lived solitude experiences, and has explored the historical and philosophical underpinnings of a phenomenological mode of inquiry. I have highlighted phenomenology as a purposeful, deliberate, and structured process of examination and description of the essences related to an experience such as solo. It is an attentive thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1997) and the adoption of a participatory mode of consciousness (Heshusius, 1994) that permits the emergence of plausible insights and a pedagogical competence, through a quality of writing that speaks to the reader.

At the heart of the limitations of hermeneutic phenomenology generally, and some of the specific challenges associated with ensuring research quality, is the explicit subjectivity of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The phenomenological posture places the researcher/writer as the primary research instrument, thus demanding a strong relationship between phenomenon, philosophy and method that must be made overt. The following chapter makes explicit the detailed methods employed in the quest to reveal the significance and meaning associated with solitude experiences for the male adolescents at Tihoi.
Chapter 5, Methods: MAP AND COMPASS

An important reminder for all phenomenological research, in all its stages, is to be constantly mindful of one’s original question and thus to be steadfastly oriented to the lived experience that makes it possible to ask the ‘what is it like’ question in the first place.

van Manen (1997)

Crotty (2010) reports the pragmatics of explicating the lived meaning of a phenomenon, such as an adolescent’s experience of solitude, inevitably begins with the motivations and aspirations of the researcher related to the phenomenon in question. That is, the research process is planned with respect to investigating the research question or phenomena of particular interest to the researcher, with methods adopted that best suit that question and the particular context the phenomenon might be illuminating itself within. So the phenomenon under investigation provides a primary orientation (van Manen, 1997) and an attention to the very things themselves (Gadamer, 1989) that naturally leads towards particular strategies for inquiry. Obviously how we as researchers view and interpret our world shall shape the question(s) that we might ask (Guba & Lincoln, 2008), so that one’s theoretical position is also required to articulate carefully with the methods employed. The challenge, as Crotty and van Manen acknowledge, is to develop a unique set of methods that acknowledges our ontological and epistemological position while remaining strongly oriented to the phenomenon.

Huberman and Miles (1998) infer rigour as both methodological and methodical, and call for a transparency or shareability of data management and analysis procedures. They challenge social researchers to plan for, and explicitly detail, the strategies chosen “...for a systematic coherent process of data collection, storage, and retrieval” (p. 180). The stance of the researcher thus becomes important in terms of meaning making, reinforcing again the critical link between methodology and method in terms of rigour (Crotty, 2010).

With respect to analysis, Huberman and Miles (1998) highlight that a social researcher brings to the table preliminary processes of analysis, such as their choice of conceptual
framework, particular research questions, the sample chosen, and the instruments employed. Thus decisions’ impacting upon analysis commence well prior to data collection per se and continues during, and well after, the information is obtained. For Huberman and Miles the process of analysis requires a deliberate structure that retains an allowance for creative work. Analysis thus becomes a dance between structure and creativity: “In effect, qualitative designs are not copyable, off-the-shelf patterns, but normally have to be custom-built, revised, and choreographed” (p. 185). As Crotty (2010) notes, we the researchers must develop a unique set of methods that shall stand the tests of rigour and which shall best highlight the significance of the phenomenon in question.

There are strengths and weaknesses to any methods employed, and it is obvious that qualitative researchers are being challenged to be up-front in articulating the philosophical and pragmatic motives for their methodical strategies. What follows is an overview to the ‘method’ chosen for this work; the strategies and methods of collecting and interpreting information about solo experiences at Tihoi, and my own position as both researcher and educator that might assist the reader understand the chosen modes of data analysis and representation. Thus, the pragmatics of an existential hermeneutic phenomenology of practice follow, including an overview to the methods utilised, strategies outlined for embracing the dialectic tension between hermeneutics and phenomenology, issues of rigour and quality associated with method, and how the notion of emergent design has evolved in practice.

**Orienting to the Phenomenon: An Inquiry Matrix**

As detailed in the previous chapter, the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology infer that knowledge can be realised through the interpretation and understanding of the structures of human experiences. Thus all phenomenological human science research investigations are essentially explorations into the structures of the human lifeworld. Phenomenology seeks to provide vivid and illuminating description of a phenomena (object) based purely upon what that object is in itself (Sharkey, 2001) and prior to critical or theoretical reflection (van Manen, 1997). The taken for granted patterns and contexts (or
essences) of the phenomenon under the lens of the researcher can be revealed prior to a process of conscious attention (Seamon, 2002; van Manen, 2000).

In terms of understanding a phenomena, such as the lived solo experience at Tihoi, van Manen (1997, p. 122) acknowledges the importance of thickened language that is richly descriptive and evocative enough to invite the reader to encounter the phenomenon: “...to ‘see’ the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience it describes”. Thus to access the meaning structures of a phenomenon, such as those associated with the solo experience, van Manen promotes the use of four lifeworld existentials as guides for reflection. As I have articulated earlier, those fundamental existentials of lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relationships typically pervade the lifeworld of all human experiences, regardless of their social, cultural or historical contexts (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1997, 2000). They are presented as overlapping and interwoven domains which are omnipresent in any human experience, and separated in the following paragraphs to better articulate the key threads of each in regard to the Tihoi solo experience.

Lived time (temporality) infers a temporal quality of being in the world that is perceived in a subjective sense and not necessarily clock time (van Manen, 1997). The central question “who am I in relation to time?” might mean for the solo participant the feelings associated with a long dark night, or the processes involved with tuning into the daily cycles of nature, or recollections about people and places in other times, or the potential of time dragging with boredom.

Lived space (spatiality) relates to the question: “Where do I belong?” It details and describes the place or grounding of our everyday experiences (van Manen, 1997). In the case of a nature-solo experience spatiality might then refer to a geometric space such as the solo site, a felt or emotional place, a place of awe or mystery, a foreign or home place, or perhaps an imagined place where one might orient to other places and or people.

Heidegger (1962) reminds us that as humans we are always bodily in the world, by virtue of existing in a physical material body that is connected with the world. Thus lived body (corporeality) is the phenomenological reality of being bodily in the world. Existentially
Corporeality asks, in terms of a body-other relationship, “What am I?”, “Who am I?”, and “Where do I belong?” Corporeality is therefore about understanding one’s place in the world via subjective bodily experience, and so the solo potentially allows for feeling, seeing, knowing, and understanding one’s self in relation to other through the body. In the case of a nature-based solo experience, ‘other’ may refer to other people, to birds, trees, plants, other places, or perhaps other life events that have been experienced in a bodily sense.

Lived Other (relationality) refers to the lived relationships we maintain with others within the spaces that we share (van Manen, 1997). At the heart of relationality lie the existential questions “What is important to me?” and “Who / what do I want to be with?” Both questions query and acknowledge the quality of connectedness we share with others in our interpersonal lives. Certainly for the solo participant separated from ‘other’ humans comes opportunity to examine the lived relationships that may exist or have potential to exist with fellow humans. There is also the very real possibility of lived relations with ‘other beings’ (whether living, inert, or secular) and thus potential for awe, wonder, connection, separation, mystery, and possibly spirituality. Of interest is the limited phenomenological research in relational matters beyond the human to human. In this regard, Wattchow (2006b) is especially critical of the anthropocentric stance of van Manen and other existential phenomenologist’s in limiting relationality to human-human relations rather than embracing body-world or body-place connections. This is a thread I shall return to in due course.

For now, coming to understand van Manen’s (1997) four lifeworld existentials separately allows us to potentially better understand the structures of a human experience. However, a lived experience such as the Tihoi solo presents in an intricate, interwoven sense. Whilst we might differentiate the elements of the experience as a part of the research process, the lifeworld existentials resist being separated in the sense of the lived-world. Ultimately the lifeworld represents both the source and the object of the phenomenological research process; a process that commences with the personal experiences of the researcher as related to the phenomenon under scrutiny, that investigates experience as lived from a variety of perspectives utilising the lifeworld existentials as a source of reflection and analysis, and which
seeks to explicate the nature and essential meaning of experience through an hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and writing process.

Table 1 on the following page details the ‘Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix’ developed as a methodological and practical guide for gathering and reflecting upon the experiences of Tihoi students while on solo. The matrix is framed around van Manen’s (1997) lifeworld existentials of time, space, relation, and body, though it was initially designed to provide guiding questions for the inquiry rather than immediately highlighting the essential qualities of the experience. Beyond the interview process, the matrix is to be utilised as a reflection framework supporting the essential structures and qualities of the participant solo experiences to be made explicit via phenomenological reflection and writing.

Merging Method with Personal Philosophy

“What does it mean to be an educator and a human science researcher?” asks van Manen (1997, p. 137). As an outdoor educator and a researcher my interests are focused upon better understanding educational experiences so that educational practice might ultimately be enhanced. My intent is for my work as a teacher and as a researcher to bring forth a greater awareness and understanding of the solitude experience for adolescents.

There exists a strong pedagogical orientation to this work. Simultaneously considering both phenomenology and the phenomenon of solitude assists me to connect the research process and outdoor education pedagogy. I have been reasonably explicit in Chapter 1 with respect to my own ways of viewing the world as a researcher and educator, which I trust outline my perceptions of reality (ontology), and how I might know something to exist as ‘true’ (epistemology). In particular my past experiences of solitude, my background as an outdoor educator, and some of the professional influences I have articulated have shaped my decision to utilise a hermeneutic phenomenological mode of inquiry to better understand the experiences of solitude for adolescent males.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIVED OTHER (RELATIONALITY)</th>
<th>LIVED SPACE (SPATIALITY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Lived Other (relationality)**
  “what is important to me?” “who / what do I want to be with?”
  ≈ Reflections on the quality of relationships with others’
  ≈ Reflections on the quality of relationship with the bush
  ≈ Reflections on encounters with other humans on solo
  ≈ Reflections on encounters with non-human ‘beings’ on solo
  ≈ Reflections on God or a higher being
  ≈ Reflections on ‘being-with’ others on solo
  ≈ Reflections on self and what’s important in life
  ≈ Reflections on friends and the qualities of friendship
| **Lived space (spatiality)**
  “where do I belong?”
  ≈ Reflections on the solo ‘geographical’ space
  ≈ Reflections on the ‘feelings’ around the solo place
  ≈ Reflections on the atmosphere of the solo place
  ≈ Reflections on the ‘emotions’ associated with the solo place
  ≈ Reflections on the built space that is the bivy
  ≈ Reflections on the natural surroundings
  ≈ Reflections on ‘other’ spaces and places
  ≈ Reflections of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ at the solo place |
| **Lived time (temporality)**
  “who am I in relation to time?”
  ≈ Reflections related to the clock... the meaning of forty-four hours of solo
  ≈ Reflections on not having / secretly having a watch
  ≈ Reflections on the speed of solo
  ≈ Reflections on times of boredom, apprehension, excitement
  ≈ Reflections on past, present & future events
  ≈ Reflections on others in the past, present, & future
  ≈ Reflections on natural cycles and time
  ≈ Reflections on the words and language used about time |
| **Lived body (corporeality)**
  “what am I?” “who am I?” “where do I belong?”
  ≈ Reflections on the feelings of physically being on solo
  ≈ Reflections on connections or disconnections with surroundings
  ≈ Reflections on beliefs about ‘self’ while on solo
  ≈ Reflections on activities completed on solo
  ≈ Reflections on suggested /planned activities not completed on solo
  ≈ Reflections on being alone in the bush
  ≈ Reflections on being surrounded by things / separate from things
  ≈ Reflections on feelings of contentment / discontentment |
Fostering and articulating a harmony between hermeneutic phenomenology as a method and my deep interests in adolescent solitude as an educator is important. I have designed this inquiry to embrace van Manen’s challenge of utilising research to “…help bring up and educate children in a pedagogically responsible manner” (1997, p. 139). My choice of methods reflects a pedagogical commitment to “maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon” of solitude (p. 31).

From Field Experience to Field Text

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) promote the term field texts as a catchall reference to what is typically deemed as data in most research processes. Field texts would include journal entries, field notes, interviews, recorded conversations, letters and other strategies typically employed by a qualitative researcher to explore aspects of lived experience. This section makes explicit the strategies used for capturing data as field texts, for managing those field texts throughout the collection and analysis process, and for reducing and displaying those field texts ultimately as research texts representative of experiences as lived (van Manen, 1997). I have taken up the challenge presented by Huberman and Miles (1998) to articulate my processes of analysis. That is, my processes of field text (data) capture and management, field text reduction and representation, and field text transformation in terms of conclusion-making and verification. The section includes aspects of emergent design and concludes with an acknowledgement of the strengths and limitations of the methods employed.

Field Text Collection and Management

In terms of the data collection strategies utilised, multiple methods have been employed during this project in three main impulses:

1. a contextual pilot visit to Tihoi that involved the gathering of institutional information related to solos, interviews with programme staff and management, and observation of the solo process in action that included shadowing Tihoi staff prior to, during, and following the solo experience;
2. the pre- and post- observation of a second solo experience six months after 1. above, including a personal solo experience by the researcher during the period students were in the field, and;

3. tracking the experiences of nine solo participants, involving: semi-structured pre- and post- interviews; viewing and analysing written insights from solo (personal journals, solo workbooks, letters written to family, letters written to self during solo (which the institution would send out to the participant on their twenty first birthday), and; ‘Solo Experience Timelines’ completed by the student at the request of the researcher.

The first two data collection stages provided significant contextual information and assisted with developing situation-specific questions for later interviews. Insights arising from those impulses were recorded in two hard-cover field notes journals and annotated from notes to typed text as soon as possible following those experiences in the field.

As a part of the third data collection impulse, the 18 student interviews and conversations with four school staff were recorded on tape and ultimately transcribed to text, though this process took many months. Prior to transcription, tapes were listened to repeatedly and preliminary researcher interpretations recorded as hand-written text into the second field notes journal. Student journal entries and other personal writings were photocopied in instances where the student gave consent and collated for later case-specific interpretation. The ‘My 44 hour Solo Timeline’ was an experience sampling reflective tool, developed from the work of Kelk (1994), as a method to assist participants recollect moments from their solo during the second interview (see Appendix 2). These timelines were also retained for later review. The solo timeline was not an especially invasive intervention; however it did require soloists to briefly record key moments, events, and feelings during their solo. Those recordings, in the form of an X on a laminated card and an associated label, provided important points for post-solo discussion at interview.

With respect to information management, all field generated notes were contained in the hard covered notebooks and stored with all of the interview tapes. Rather than these being
stored in a locked cabinet, they remained visible on my desk and closer to consciousness. Tape recorded interviews and discussions were played over and over, with crude ‘researcher’ notes drafted into the second hard cover field notes book. The visibility of the tapes and notes brought an intimacy with the data-as-captured and provided the impetus for ongoing reflection and analysis on the meaning of the individual solitude experiences on a day-by-day and week-by-week basis.

Once interviews were ultimately transcribed and verified against each of the tape recordings, two copies were printed of each transcript and the researcher notes were then handwritten at relevant points into ‘my’ copy of each transcript. The second copy was sent to each of the student participants in the study for verification and/or feedback, with an electronic copy also saved confidentially on the University of Otago file network.

Data emerged as written text in two subtly distinct forms, which I have categorised as either contextual field texts or lived experience field texts. Contextual field texts involved all information documented at the periphery of the student solo experience: my initial field observations, a content analysis of Tihoi official documents (especially those pertinent to solos), and conversations with Tihoi staff recorded as text. Lived experience texts were related specifically to the experiences of the nine student participants in the study. These involved textual representation of the 18 student interviews, my field observations (which incorporated insights from my own parallel solo experience), and content analysis of students’ written work (journal entries, letters to self and others’, solo booklets, timeline details).

With regard to data storage and retrieval processes all field texts became electronic word files that were printable, and so the contextual field texts were grouped together, printed and stored into a common box-file. Similarly, the lived experience field texts were collated into nine separate box-files representative of each of the student participants. Original material was able to be stored with the tapes and hard cover field note books, and ultimately stored separately to leave the ten box files of field texts to take over a significant portion of my desk.
Field Text (Data) Reduction & Representation

It is typical in most qualitative research to analyse data with the intent of uncovering key phenomenological themes, and this project was little different. However, it was the experiential richness and meaning of adolescent solitude I was most interested in, and so my intent was for the data reduction and representation process to be far more than a frequency count or coding of key statements or text. Field text representation was an attempt at seeking meaning from experience, for experiential themes are best understood as the structures of experience that might illuminate such meaning. van Manen (1997, p. 79) details the subjective accuracy inherent:

Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure – grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning. Ultimately the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing.

Textual Labour

For van Manen (1997) meaning making becomes a process of “textual labor” (p. 78), of working with themes to uncover something of meaning and significance. In my experience, textual labour was a wonderful descriptor for the analytical process in action; a fascinating insight to the emergent nature of qualitative work. Ely et al. (1997, p. 20) acknowledge the craft required with meaning making:

Revelations won’t burst forth automatically from the data... ...the rounds of writing, thinking, analyzing, and forming will aid the search toward understanding.

They further note that the process becomes not one of attempting to find or see meaning within the data but rather one of composing meaning that the data leads us to consider and understand: “In life we create our own reality out of persons or situations; it isn’t that the person or situation is the reality” (Ely et al. 1997, p. 20, italics in original).

Significant challenges arose with reducing the substantial boxes of information that came to represent the student solo experiences and my own interpretations of them, and certainly
the analysis process did not commence once all the screeds of field texts were neatly stashed into their own box files. Rather the process became an emergent one, an interwoven process of reading then writing, and then looking backwards, questioning how my writing might be capturing the essence of those solo experiences, and how my own experiences have assisted me better understand the lived experiences of others.

Data reduction and representation became a restless, uncomfortable process as I grappled for a guiding structure. While committed to the phenomenon in question, my belief in van Manen’s (1997) hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and writing process slowly dissolved for a period, after months and months of narrative building and self-doubt in terms of accurately representing the student experiences. Revelations were certainly not bursting forth from the data (Ely et al. 1997).

To complicate matters, some of my interview transcripts were monosyllabic and shallow. Most were without the eloquence that I had hoped for, and which the adult solitude literature was ripe with. There came the realisation that the boys somehow knew more than they could actually tell me (Polanyi, 1969), that their solo experiences were intuitively far more meaningful than I was representing. While I recognised the need for insightful invention and discovery to grasp some meaning (van Manen, 1997), I wanted to be true to a legitimate process. The invention needed to be rigorous, and the student transcripts filled with grunts and silences did not seem to be assisting. While ‘grunt and silent’ responses are not uncommon when communicating with adolescent New Zealand males (Lashlie, 2005), I remained convinced there must exist other strategies for examining transcripts for some deeper meaning without being excessively inventive. Through my quest to discover new methods I came to resonate with Nairn, Munroe, & Smith (2005) who acknowledged the potential complexity and messiness of the research process, and the reality of research interviews being perceived as a failure when on first glance there might appear a dearth of useful content. Historically, they acknowledged, such an interview transcript might have been ignored in its totality, or made smooth or glossy via narrative outside of the readers’ eye. Yet Nairn et al (2005) encouraged researchers to take a second look, and to become more up-front
about the emotional investment necessary with meaning making. Their acknowledgement of
the importance of silences in interview transcripts similarly resonated.

**Dealing with the silences**

Silence is far more than merely the absence of speech or language. Heidegger (1962) contends that silence is very appropriate, for it promotes thinking and ultimately leads to a
deeper understanding. O’Donohue (1997) similarly writes, “silence is the sister of the divine...
...a greater tolerance of silence is desirable, that fecund silence, which is the source of our
most resonant language” (p. 112). As a trial I revisited the tape for one interview that seemed
especially empty. I noted the moments of silence in the transcript, before returning a second
time to type first person comments for each silence. Fascinating insights emerged that
resolved some of the disparities between my contextual field texts and my experiential field
texts, and there came an acknowledgement that reading the silences was intimately linked to
understanding human experience.

van Manen (1997) speaks to the various categories of silence existing in human science
research generally and promotes three silences the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher
should specifically attend to. The first, *literal silence* relates to the absence of the spoken word,
to the gaps between sentences, and the things unspoken that might somehow connect with
what has just been said. In these literal moments may come unspoken reflective insights,
things not said but acknowledged cognitively and which might be expressed through further
conversation or writing.

Other silent moments provide periods of enlightenment, of (sometimes) profoundly
deep realisations or understandings. These are those ah-ha moments which might occur after
a speech, a reading or during a conversation, which van Manen (1997) terms the *ontological
silences*. Such silences humans typically dwell upon in their own time, and which reflect a

In his book *Knowing and Being* Polanyi (1969) describes many real-life situations where
an individual intuitively understands some experience or phenomena yet cannot easily express
that knowing via typical conversation or writing. Such moments van Manen (1997) deems the
epistemological silences. That is, silences related to an experience that cannot adequately be described in words and which reflect tacit, intuitive understandings just beyond one's linguistic competence. Polanyi (1969) highlights the opportunity for others with narrative skills, or with skills of expression in alternative discourses such as poetry, music, or art to access such knowledge and to represent it in a manner that brings to consciousness the intuitive meanings held.

My mission thus expanded to re-evaluating field texts and to access those moments of ontological knowing for the students, as well as the knowing that students held about solitude but were unable to adequately describe. An important question became, ‘what are the silences and the things unsaid telling me about solitude experiences?’

As Wolcott (1990, p. 18) acknowledges, “the major problem we face in qualitative inquiry is not to get data, but to get rid of it. …of winnowing material to a manageable length, communicating only the essence.” In reality the evaluation of the silences within the student interviews built upon rather than reduced the volume of field text, but the process was insightful. I then chose to reduce my data, without compromising meaning (Ely, et al., 1997), through isolating thematic statements and composing linguistic transformations as promoted by van Manen (1997) as the process of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection.

Field Text Reduction and Representation: The path chosen

The journey to determine incidental and essential themes involved recognizing the experiential structures that related to the solo experience in four distinct moments. The first related to interpreting wider conversations; that is, the observations made and discussions had with others at Tihoi, which I deemed the contextual field texts. The second moment was a detailed listening to the pauses and silences within interview transcripts and a first person write-up of those silences. The third was a lengthy process of isolating thematic statements from all field texts for each participant (including the pertinent silences), which involved developing holistic statements that captured each solo experience in its entirety, selectively highlighting insightful sections of field text, and a detailed line-by-line reading of all texts. The
forth moment involved developing lived experience descriptions reflective of each students experience.

**Lived Experience Descriptors**

van Manen (1997) describes the process of hermeneutic phenomenological writing as one of developing phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs as linguistic transformations (vignettes or narratives) that “capture the tacit silences or the ineffable” (p. 113). Writing becomes the mode of analysis. It is the method that promotes ongoing reflection, ongoing writing and rewriting to ultimately see, to illuminate, and to share. Each of the nine student experiences are reflectively thematised and represented in Chapter 6, Results A: Alone in the Bush. There the soloists are introduced in relation to their forthcoming solo (two to three pages), their solo experience summarised by way of a solo synopsis (two or three pages), and key thematic statements and linguistic transformations presented in table form.

**A Reflective Synthesis of Nine Solo Experiences**

Chapter 7, Results, Part B: Interpretive Synthesis is a reflective fusion of the nine solitude experiences, utilising lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection (van Manen, 1997, 2000); existentials that “pervade the lifeworld of all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural, or social situatedness” (1990, p. 101). These provide a framework for synthesising the key thematic statements and linguistic transformations for each solo participant into a series of coherent vignettes that are intended to assist the reader suddenly see something that enriches our combined understanding of the solo experience for adolescents. The reflective synthesis is intended to bring the essences of the solo experience into being.

**Issues of rigour and quality associated with method**

If rigour is indeed both methodological and methodical, a clear link between methodology and method is necessary to assist the reader accept any insights as plausible and for the process to be reflective of sound research The rigour of qualitative research is “less about adherence to the letter of the rules and procedures, than it is about fidelity to the spirit of qualitative work” (Sandelowski, 1993, p. 2). Fittingness or vividness of description (Burns &
Grove, 1997) is closely linked with fidelity and provides for a faithful description in enough detail so that the participants and readers have a sense of experiencing the phenomena themselves. This is known as the “phenomenological nod” (Munhall, 1994, p.202), as the readers find themselves agreeing with the text.

**Purposeful sampling**

I had been inundated with students willing to participate in the study, and to keep the project manageable I set a limit of ten participants, handing over the decision of who to choose to the Tihoi staff. They knew the students well, and when I shared my desired selection criteria they quickly set about selecting the students to partake in the project. My intent was not to get a sample representative of the wider Tihoi cohort but to access a cross section of potential solitude experiences. On my proposed list I had cultural ideals: at least two Pakeha (Euro-New Zealand) students, ideally two or more Māori students, and ideally two or more Asian students. I was also interested in covering and many of the following categories as possible: An international student recently arrived to St. Paul’s; a New Zealander recently arrived to St Paul’s; students who had lived much of their life in the city; students who had grown up on a farm and perhaps attended a small rural primary school; a sportsman or two; a musician or artist; a non-sportsman; someone very confident about solo, and; someone very apprehensive about solo. In the end the staff completed their mission successfully, with all of my participant criteria being met.
Chapter 6, Results Part A: ALONE IN THE BUSH

No man should go through life without once experiencing healthy, even bored solitude in the wilderness, finding himself depending solely on himself and thereby learning his true and hidden strength.

Jack Kerouac, Lonesome Traveller (1960, p. 128)

This chapter refocuses upon the question: What is the significance of the forty-four hour solo as experienced by students at Tihoi Venture School? It utilises participant voices to highlight aspects of nine unique solo experiences, and depth-full writing is provided to elucidate each solitude experience. As van Manen (2006) articulates, thickened and richly descriptive phenomenological writing invites the reader to encounter a phenomenon so that any deeper meaning structures are made visible. Phenomenological description thus becomes a poetising project (van Manen, 1997); not in the sense of the creation of verse or rhyme, but in terms of a depth-full writing that permits the reader to see a phenomenon more clearly.

Presented as nine separate cases, each student is introduced in third person narrative before a detailed (third person) synopsis of the solo experience is presented. Following these experientially derived accounts of each solo, a table of key thematic statements is presented for each participant in first person format. Further detail related to these three representations of the student experience follow in the next three paragraphs:

1. Student introductions incorporate the richness of preliminary interviews and background information gleaned from multiple sources including personal journals,

4 Ethical approval was granted by the University of Otago Research Ethics Committee in April 2002. According to the conditions of that ethical approval all references to students were to be treated so as to ensure anonymity. Thus the names of the students utilised in this chapter, and chapters subsequent are pseudonyms. Chapter two, Tihoi Solitudes, was crafted with the consent of management staff of St. Paul’s Collegiate School and the Tihoi co-Directors John and Christine Furminger to have their names explicit in any published findings.
Tihoi teacher and instructor insights, Tihoi management staff insights, and field observations. While initial interviews with each student were essentially about developing rapport and accessing preliminary personal background information, including the circumstances related to their arrival at Tihoi, they further served as reflections of the six hour solo that each student experienced earlier in their intake. Thus the nine introductions are important scene-setters for understanding each individual solo experience.

2. Each ‘solo synopsis’, also written in third person narrative, provides a detailed experiential account of each student experience. Thus each synopsis incorporates the threads of experience and many of the specific phrases utilised by each participant during interview or within their writing of journals, letters, and poetry.

3. A series of nine tables present key thematic statements for each soloist in first person narrative format. These are shared in the form of generalised ‘Theme Statements’ (as crafted by the researcher) and ‘Linguistic Transformations’ of experience (as crafted by the researcher utilising appropriate words and phrases derived from each soloist, and which reflect the general meaning and intent of their elucidations).

Alistair’s Lived Solo Experience

Introducing Alistair (3rd person)

Alistair’s six hour solo was a complete psych out. He was certain someone or something was watching him as he gathered materials for building his bivy. Trees in the distance were shape-shifting to represent human faces and bodies, and from every direction every sound and every little movement in the trees told him he was not alone. He found himself constantly turning around in apprehension of being surprised or slashed. The crazy thing for Alistair was that he knew well there was nothing to be worried about. He had grown up on the land and in a hunting family, and so the bush was not something Alistair should have been scared about.
But he was. On that six hour experience he found himself seriously contemplating returning to the centre. In the end he compromised by moving into a spot next to another soloist, apologised, then built his bivy and slept until it was solo-over. Even in sleep Alistair had been nervous, for when he was carefully woken by his Instructor when it was time to pack up and leave he lashed out to protect himself. The big-man hunter of the intake had lost some personal face by demonstrating a fear of the bush.

Alistair reminded himself via his journal after his six hour that while he had been hunting on his own before he had never spent time actually in the bush alone, and certainly not overnight. He knew he had been caught off guard by the story of the Tihoi Slasher and that it would be different next time. His mission would be to confront the fear, and a part of him was pleased that he would have opportunity to get over his overnight bush consciousness so that it wouldn’t manifest during a hunting trip with his Dad or with his mates. The real concern for Alistair though was the person or thing that was always there, day or night, whenever he was alone. It was not a guardian angel. Alistair had a person or being constantly watching over him and it was a creepy feeling.

Somehow Alistair appears more grown up than the rest of the guys at Tihoi: more independent, more supportive of others, typically more forthright in his views, and with a harsher tongue that suggests he has lived quite a tough life. There are few airs and graces about him and he seems to like being different. Even his plan of being a goat culler for the Department of Conservation is a world away from the lofty professional goals and dreams of the other Tihoi lads.

Unlike most of his intake, Alistair is willing to challenge the perspectives of his teachers. He is a deep thinker and loves to question and challenge. He has especially loved exploiting the void between the traditional science versus religious science ideologies of his two science teachers this year, evoking discussion around Darwinism and creation in class. He knows his personal stance on religion being a cop-out is counter to the Tihoi and St. Paul’s ethos. Yet Alistair can accept and value the perspectives of his teachers at Tihoi when they walk the talk.
and can clearly articulate their position; good teachers are genuine, have a clearly open mind, and are not full of bullshit (his term).

Alistair is also not into mainstream sports like rugby, cricket, or tennis as most of his peers are; though he talks up his prowess on a motorbike and some successes he once had on the motocross circuit. He keeps in physical shape with kickboxing and sparring (boxing), and entertains thoughts of being a cage fighter. Alistair is tall for his age, strong physically, and he exhibits a seriousness of purpose despite only giving a self-reported seventy percent to Tihoi thus far. One could easily overestimate Alistair’s fourteen years, especially when listening to some of the stories he espouses, and deciphering those stories has been fascinating. Regardless, it is obvious Alistair has had a hard life, growing upwards through periods of hardship and times of confusion, change, and loss.

The decision to send Alistair to St. Paul’s and Tihoi was fuelled with the desire to motivate a somewhat-lost young man towards academic and personal achievement. He had changed schools four times in the six years previous to his joining St. Paul’s, and there were phases during latter years when Alistair has been at risk of heading badly off track. St. Paul’s Collegiate was the school his dad had attended in the early 1980’s. Back then St. Paul’s ‘had worked’ for Alistair’s father, but only because of a new programme just commenced at a place called Tihoi. That Tihoi experience had really fuelled his father’s imagination and developed his passion for hunting and the bush. As far as Alistair’s dad was concerned, Tihoi was an opportunity to get Alistair excited about life again while St. Paul’s offered him the chance of a real education if Alistair could stick at it. His new school was a deviation away from the people and environment he had been mixing with.

Alistair’s early childhood was mostly settled, living with Mum after his Dad shot through, and he attended the same rural school from ages five through eleven. He was sent to Southwell, a private preparatory school in Hamilton, to be polished up a little during his standard four and form one years (school years six and seven). The following year Alistair moved north and west where he lived with his grandfather on his mum’s side and attended another small rural school for year eight, and a rural secondary school for half of year nine.
Issues evolved for Alistair at that secondary school and the decision was made to transplant him well away from negative influences. Moving back to Hamilton to attend St. Paul’s meant residing with his dad’s parents, who were really strict and organised and would come to evoke in Alistair some self discipline. In many respects that move had worked for Alistair was learning how to learn, and mostly from the other students at Tihoi for there was little else to do but study when others were studying. Alistair was also trying hard for his grandparents. They genuinely cared for him and Alistair wanted to repay them by doing well at school. He felt for them, knowing they had been devastated at how badly his dad had turned out. It didn’t seem fair to Alistair that his grandparents had seen his dad change into a whole different person, an arsehole basically for most of his life. The paradox was that Alistair hungered to know his dad better, and he foresaw hunting as a way to reconnect sometime soon.

Writing was what Alistair tried hardest with at Tihoi, despite really struggling in all of his subjects. He loved writing descriptively and got pleasure through his words being appreciated by others. Early on he wrote an eloquent piece about the bush and sent the prose to his dad, which brought shivers of pleasure up his dad’s spine. Alistair knew his mum and dad, and his grandparents on both sides of the family had all appreciated his letters, just as he had enjoyed getting mail from them. For the first time in years he felt valued, loved and somewhat connected despite the physical distance between his extended family.

Alistair looks forward to writing what will be his last letters to his family from Tihoi during solo. He knows he will have to face his internal fears first, and looks forward to getting over his issues with the bush at night. Alistair also recognises there will be other barriers to his writing, for he doesn’t need a formal solo to contemplate who he his or his role and purpose: he is forever getting lost deep within himself. Exams have been difficult in recent years when his mind has gone AWOL and he has been unable to focus upon the task, and so Alistair is conscious that even during the most demanding of activities he might drift into psycho-space. He is hoping his solo will be something that keeps his mind on track, and that the voice within himself remains calm.
Alistair’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)

A misdemeanour prior to solo meant Alistair was allocated a site close to the centre where he could be closely monitored. He had hoped to really tackle his fear of being alone in the forest by setting up a long way into the bush, to confront his demon head on, but Alistair had blown it. His pleading brought a late compromise: a site adjacent to a stand of bush but closer to the centre.

The psychological games commenced as soon as Alistair was led to his spot, and he sat exhausted despite the very short walk in. Mind-blank took over when he was left alone and he pseudo-slept for maybe an hour before some noise snapped him back to action. Then the bivy building was a struggle; Alistair couldn’t replicate the model Chris had shown everyone but come nightfall it would have to do. The drizzle had started so Alistair set himself up inside his shelter before drifting into a shallow sleep. At the first instructor check Alistair was snoring loudly and no flags flew at his mailbox to suggest any problems. But they soon came. The drips interrupted the peacefulness and Alistair got soaked that night. His sleeping bag became soggy and he sat cold and wet, huddling his knees for much of the night. With torch batteries flat Alistair used the darkness to plan a complete rebuild of his shelter, abandoning the Chris design, and opting for a plan he had used building a hut as a kid.

The dark did not scare him, he had his watch for time security, and the thing he knew was looking over him like it did on the six hour solo was somehow reassuring. Come morning his new bivy was the bomb: weather-proof and solid. The second instructor check mid morning found Alistair again snoring loudly, and snore Alistair did until mid afternoon. He woke to the sound of birds celebrating the end of the rain, and he was surprised his body heat had dried out his sleeping bag liner and the clothes he was wearing. Even the sleeping bag itself was partially dry. He stayed in bed but opened his shelter to the light and watched the birds flitting around in the trees for awhile. Contemplating the dark side of the bush he quickly got up, demolished half his food, wandered into the thick of it and sat down to confront the bush head on. But there was nothing frightening there, no shapes, no weird noises, nothing but peacefulness: fresh earthly smells, bird song and patterns of light. Alistair considered why at all
he might have been scared before. He knew someone or something was there, ever present. But that seemed OK now. The third instructor check found Alistair’s bivy empty, and it was Rob not Alistair who got the fright as Alistair re-emerged out of the bush. That evening and late into the night using a borrowed torch Alistair wrote letters: seven pages to his mum, a couple of pages to his grandparents in town and another short letter for his grandparents in the country. He wrote till he fell into a restful sleep.

Next morning Alistair caught up on his journal and completed his solo booklet. This was interspersed with contemplations of the human activity that had taken place there: the milling of the big native trees, and up at the pa site he envisaged people living and working. He thought about going hunting, and of being the hero returning with fresh meat to his girl back at the bivy. While he couldn’t say he was at home in the bush it felt pretty good. Alistair had more than survived solo. There were no panic attacks, no shapes to haunt him, no voices within; just the mind-blank and mind-slide which he was well used to. Even the constant company he shared in his solitude he had started to get accustomed to.
### Table 2: Alistair: Key Thematic Statements (1st person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’ve been stalked all my life; someone is always watching me. On solo it was strangely comforting.</td>
<td>When I am by myself I’m not actually that alone. I’ve had that feeling of someone always watching me, stalking me, all the time I can remember. I’m always looking around when I’m by myself, seeing if anyone is there, and I just can’t get it away from me. I knew being in the bush would make it worse and that I’d get scared by the thing. But this time it didn’t; I knew something was there and that was OK. It was strangely comforting somehow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are strange things in the bush. I wanted to challenge my fears, but when I got there they had mostly gone.</td>
<td>I picked to go solo way up in the bush ‘cause I just wanted to fight it; wanted to fight the feeling of being scared. Cause I know there is nothing there, it’s all in my mind, but I’m still getting scared. So I had to do it, just go solo, find my fears, and get over them. But once I was deep in the bush I became at peace with the place. There were no disturbing shapes, no scary noises, nothing. Just that vague feeling that something was always there, watching over me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am the hunter, I am the hero.</td>
<td>I kept mind-drifting to a time soon when I was the hunter hero. I’d set my bivy up in a beautiful spot by the river and that girl was there sharing it with me. I’d come back with some juicy back steaks and roast them over the fire in the evening sun, and then we would devour each other. I was the hunter, the hero, and I’d got the girl.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m aware I sometimes drift into never-never land. It’s just who I am: a dreamer, a thinker.</td>
<td>My mind does it without me wanting it to – just drifts into usually really deep places. Even when I’m in the middle of a job, like cleaning frantically so that we can go and do something, I’d pick something up and I’d be lost for maybe ten minutes then I’d come back again and I’d quickly look around to see if anyone noticed me. On solo it was no different. I’d just drift from thought to thought. Day dreaming, it’s just a thing that I do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The forest, it’s alive with history, human history.</td>
<td>I kept imagining the forest the way it once must have been: all the big Rimu, Totara, Miro and Matai trees and the birdsong. I’d focus my eyes up on the old pa site until I saw movement: the Mâori living up there, working the gardens, hunting the birds. Then I’d hear the shouts of warfare, the sound of muskets, the screams of death. And I’d hear the chainsaws and the unbelievable crashing and thudding of the giant</td>
</tr>
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</table>
trees being laid to rest.

Dave, you have lived life but just don’t die yet.  
He was a good mate, my best mate at my old school. We did heaps of bad shit together. Now he is dying, has a blood disorder that they say will kill him. It’s hard to imagine Dave laying still, sick on a bed, when we have done so much crazy stuff together. No one will say he didn’t live life. I’ve gotta get across and see him, soon.

Sorry about the writing, I’m on a bad angle and can’t write neatly.  
It’s something I started every letter with, an apology. I seem to apologise a lot for some reason. Better to do that than to be known as a big headed prick who doesn’t care. Still, one day it will be good to forget about how people think of me and for people to just accept me for who I am and what I do. Yeah, I’ve written heaps more letters than I have received at Tihoi. Maybe I shouldn’t apologise for not writing for ages!

I’m at Tihoi, miles away from anywhere, and I’m closer to my family than ever before.  
It’s been really important to write on solo, especially the letters to mum and the grandparents. I know they love getting my mail, hearing the stories of Tihoi, knowing I am doing OK. It’s weird that I feel closer to my family that ever before, except maybe with my dad. Getting letters has been special; I’ve saved all of them, just like mum has collected all of mine so far.

I’m hunting: hunting for some connection with my Dad.  
A big part of solo is the knowledge that once I’ve past this challenge I’ll be ready to go hunting with my old man. I wrote a letter to him about the bush and it sent shivers up his spine. One day soon we’ll go hunting together, maybe not talking much to start with but after a few days we’ll like get to know each other better. He’s still a stranger, my dad. It will be good when he is my mate.
Aaron’s Lived Solo Experience

Introducing Aaron (3rd person)

The wilds of Tihoi are half a planet from the urbanism that is South Korea, yet Aaron has made the transition reasonably smoothly. He has embraced the challenges of Tihoi with an openness that typifies his approach to living in Aotearoa New Zealand during the past two-and-a-bit years. St. Paul’s Collegiate was a serious decision for Aaron. He and his parents knew well, from the stories of past Asian friends and an unauthorised ‘Tihoi’ publication written in Chinese, that Tihoi presented many potential hardships and physical as well as psychological challenges. Aaron chose the harder and potentially more rewarding path to St. Paul’s, and ultimately Tihoi was significant in that decision.

A self-acknowledged city boy, Aaron had never observed stars prior to his move to Hamilton nor experienced the sights and smells of native bush prior to arriving at Tihoi. Not surprisingly, his time at Tihoi has been an endless myriad of new experiences, and solo would be just another challenging experience. The pace of Tihoi life left little time for Aaron to lament any loss of his left-behind city antics, including the significant time he spent gaming on the family computer or of his street break dancing exploits. Aaron had rapidly bought into the Tihoi lifestyle of living simply, eating well, and being physically active; his ‘junk-fuelled’ lifestyle back in the city and a semi-addiction to computers relegated to memory.

Aaron is proud of himself and his indoor and outdoor educational achievements at Tihoi thus far. His excellent grasp of written and spoken English has allowed him to cope well with all of his curriculum-based lessons, and he has discovered an appreciation for social studies through locally-specific teachings and assessments. The emphasis upon journaling, letters home, and other writing provided another new-found interest, and Aaron has become meticulous with his journal writing and with producing a chronological account of Tihoi via letters to his parents.

Aaron reflects upon his house-life as one of the toughest challenges Tihoi has provided thus far. Washing dishes, cooking, cleaning, chopping wood, lighting the fire, making a bed,
and taking out rubbish were all new experiences for him but were not difficult to grasp. Rather it was the mocking, the put-downs, and the laughter at Aaron’s expense that were delivered by his house-mates in the early weeks that were hardest to cope with. His response was typically aggressive as he stood up for himself, and this occasionally led to in-house violence. Not surprisingly house life and the physicality of those first few weeks at Tihoi took its toll and Aaron almost cracked. Yet it was not a military-style induction; Aaron appreciated the support provided by Tihoi staff and came to understand Tihoi as a caring place outside of his house. It was also a programme with a history, and he was not alone in the challenges he faced. Despite referencing himself as an International rather than an Asian, Aaron found strength in reading of the experiences of previous Chinese and Korean students at Tihoi. He came to recognise that there were personal gains to be made through adversity, including his initial house experiences which he has subsequently come to accept as ‘tough teachings’.

Aaron soon came to be recognised by staff and his peers as a young man fuelled with determination, as someone with a good sense of humour, and who willingly contributed to house life. He learned to laugh with his former in-house combatants, friendships evolved with guys from other houses, and his personal confidence and pride grew in tandem with his developing physical fitness and strength. As his intake progressed he became more Kiwi than Asian, assuming a focused yet laid-back attitude to life at Tihoi.

Aaron was also a deep thinker, and he looked forward to solo as an opportunity to slow down and be on his own. He would not have freely chosen to go solo for two days and nights, yet was excited at the prospect. Like all of the activities at Tihoi, solo was something everyone had to do; Aaron accepted he had little choice but to make the most of the experience. His six hour solo had remained deep in the subconsciousness throughout the second half of the programme. In that six hours Aaron had struggled to build a bivy and so lay upon the track, sleeping for most of the time. There he was visited by a spirit of some sort, a white-glowing hand separate from a body that highlighted how easily his mind could play tricks. As he woke came the realisation that it was dark. He was certain that he had been forgotten, left behind and now truly alone in the bush. Panic had set in for Aaron, complicated by the lack of a head torch or flashlight nor a watch, and he had stumbled about madly thrashing his way through
the bush and ultimately attracting the attention of staff nearby. It was yet another minor epic for Aaron that had arisen from which he was able to make some sense of. As his journal attests, he had become good at internalising his experiences and drawing meaning from them.

That ‘I’m lost and alone’ feeling had sunk Aaron’s heart at the end of his six hour experience; the dark and the perception of being left behind alone in the bush had really scared him. He was dreading the thought of being lost and truly alone during the coming forty-four-hour solo. The fact he was excited about solo and looking forward to spending time on his own was an interesting paradox. He acknowledged that his mind would play tricks, and that he needed to remain mentally strong and determined and to sleep through the nights. Aaron also knew he would have to build a good shelter to keep warm and dry in the heart of the Tihoi winter, but doubted his shelter construction practicalities.

**Aaron’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)**

“Nightmare over, still good” writes Aaron on his forty-four-hour solo timeline just prior to packing up all his sodden gear. He had survived the solo experience but had slept little. The shelter that he enjoyed designing and constructing predictably became a swimming pool on the first night, and then wind-wrecked into oblivion late on the second day. Tihoi staff knew the odds of Aaron making a storm-proof shelter were not high, just as Aaron doubted his own bivy-making skills. Staff visited every six or eight hours, providing advice on his shelter, delivering additional food, and drying his soaking sleeping bag back at the centre. Yet for a city kid Aaron remained in good shape, telling himself to be positive and resolving to complete his solo. He was mentally strong, though there were moments of doubt and especially during the nights. His mind kept playing tricks, and the fluorescent-white hand that visited him during his six-hour returned to freak him out of his bivy. In the sodden darkness of that first night Aaron walked all the way back to the centre with his soaked sleeping bag, then elected not to disturb Mr or Mrs F. He retreated to his bivy unseen, spending a long dark morning shivering inside that wet bag while his mind wandered. He prayed, despite not being a religious person, that the unrelenting drips would stop. They didn’t. Swearing a line of curses later helped the
situation psychologically, and a visit from his favourite teacher Mel early morning was uplifting and a motivator for refinements to his shelter.

Writing anything was difficult in the wet, though Aaron wanted to record some of his thoughts and get the written requirements completed. Between bivy repairs, his journal was a joy to read, and the catalyst for some inward smiles and pride of achievement. So too was the reality that Tihoi was all but over. It had been a memorable experience, he had learned a lot about himself and how others operate. He had coped under enormous pressure at times. Yet the fact remained he was a city boy, unlikely to spend much time outdoors beyond Tihoi. Solo was a frustrating survival exercise, a mind-game that he ultimately won. It was, as he reported, “nearly a waste of time, as in what you’re doing not what you’re gaining out of it”. Through the hardships that were solo Aaron spent most of his time inside of himself, drifting from thought to thought, though he forever remained aware of his situation. There were no deep revelations or spiritual moments, but rather affirmations about who he was, reflections of past events, connections with family, pride in his Tihoi exploits, and a renewed focus upon where he was heading.
### Table 3: Aaron: Key Thematic Statements (1st person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation (1st person)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solo is just part of it, part of the Tihoi experience. Like we have a choice, not.</td>
<td>I’m no bushcraft guru, but like every Tihoi activity I just go with the flow and do my best. One activity merges with another; it’s what we do here. So my bivy was a swimming pool in the rain and a kite in the wind. I didn’t sleep. I got soaked, I got cold, and I survived. So nightmare over but still good. Now I’ll write up my journal and get ready for expedition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feared being forgotten, being left truly alone in the bush and having to really survive.</td>
<td>Solo was contrived I know: there were others quite close to me, I knew where I was, and we had regular teacher checks. Yet my mind kept telling me I was lost and alone deep in the forest. It was a dreadful thought being truly alone, having to really survive. At least now I know I could do it if I had to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oh come on you’re – Aaron Ho you can’t give up now</td>
<td>“My bivy is wrecked into oblivion, what hope is left?” I wrote on the first night of my forty-four hour solo timeline. I had to keep telling myself ‘got to finish this forty-four hour solo, must not give up’. It became my mantra and I think I kept saying it in my half-sleep. It became a personal pride thing; it was important to finish solo, to meet the challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prayed that the weather would get better – not that I’m religious or anything</td>
<td>St Paul’s and Tihoi are religious places. I’ve never been religious but I guess I was desperate enough or influenced sufficiently to pray for the rain and wind to stop. It didn’t of course, which Dan or Rev. Peter will probably tell me was for the best. I must admit I did wonder who was up there torturing us a couple of times, but I’m no more a believer than I was before solo. It was worth a shot, the prayer that is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oh no, it’s just a figment of my imagination</td>
<td>The same white fluorescent detached hand I saw during my six-hour solo appeared inside my bivy at one point. It was definitely the same one. I didn’t find it quite so disturbing this time round, but it was certainly weird. My mind has the capacity to really invent things. I started to see things moving around in the bush and my heart rate jumped; I was definitely on edge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I was to be myself I would be in the city.</td>
<td>Probably the best bit of solo is slowing down and being with ourselves. But I wasn’t really myself, I couldn’t be. I am a foreigner in the bush. To be myself I need to be in the city and surrounded by human noises like music playing, people laughing, or traffic. It needs to be light and things need to be going on.</td>
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</table>
I need people around me a lot of the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Here at Tihoi you have to write a lot, it’s like what you have to do here.</th>
<th>Typically I wouldn’t be bothered with writing but at Tihoi I have come to appreciate my journal and letter writing. I find it a great way to reflect back on the experiences of Tihoi. There is always something to write about here. I just couldn’t get comfortable to write much on solo, and didn’t want to get my journal wet. My forty-four hour solo booklet I didn’t mind getting soaked, and the timeline was laminated card. They bore the brunt of my frustrations and even a day later were a good reminder of what I had been through.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Originally I’m like real unfit, and like now I’m much fitter</td>
<td>I’ve become a lot happier and a bit more confident at Tihoi. On solo I thought about that. It’s connected to my fitness and strength and to eating healthy. The Tihoi food has been great, but all the different fitness activities have been damn hard. I’ve always been a tall, skinny guy but am quite chunky with muscle at the moment. Part of me has come to like the hard stuff at Tihoi, the hard physical work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I guess we really are governed by the time at Tihoi</td>
<td>We pack so much into every day at Tihoi, so watches are pretty important for being in the right place at the right time. Now we are on solo we can’t have our watches. It’s totally unsettling. I’m lost except for day and night. I would cope better on solo if I had my watch and not get so stressed.</td>
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Brent’s Lived Solo Experience

*Introducing Brent (3rd person)*

Tihoi Venture School was always going to be a challenge for Brent. Indeed the reputation of Tihoi, in terms of the physical challenges the boys were confronted with, was seriously considered by Brent and his parents when selecting his secondary school. The Tihoi experience was intimidating well before Brent enrolled at St. Paul’s Collegiate School, and in the end it was the will of his intermediate school friends who were to attend there that convinced him he should too. For Brent having a ready-made network of friends at his school was very important, and he perceived it would be easier to get into a school routine despite some physical hardships down the line than to have to start again in developing new friendships.

School life has never been especially easy for Brent. Growing up with mild cerebral palsy meant he was a little different to the others in terms of being heavier in weight and not especially coordinated with physical activities. Despite his positive outlook, a friendly disposition and determined spirit Brent’s differences often manifested in getting a hard time or being bullied. Living in a house at Tihoi with nine other young males was no exception. Brent had taken the brunt of the ‘dissing’ in his house. While his classmates were unaware of his disability, they knew his physical weaknesses and that he did not respond positively to the ‘dissing’. They knew that Brent would occasionally ‘bend until he snapped’, something some of his house mates seemed to enjoy witnessing. Of the ‘six people I hate most’ that Brent identified in his solo journal, five came from his Tihoi house. Not surprisingly, Brent was looking forward to finishing his solo, to completing his expedition, and then returning to Hamilton.

Surprisingly home-sickness had not been a significant issue for Brent while at Tihoi; to start with Tihoi was all just a dream that he thought would go away and that normality would resume. But it hasn’t, yet. Brent was smart enough early on to recognise that through his journal he was able to discretely communicate with Mrs. F., and she had become an important confidant. The journal provided Brent an important outlet for sharing some of the hardship he
was enduring in his house while also alerting Tihoi management of some of the house issues. Over time Mrs. F. became Brent’s Tihoi mum (as she does for many of the guys each intake) and Brent came to regard Tihoi as home. He appreciated the laid-back classrooms and came to love the outdoor weekends despite their physicality and the opportunities they created for him to look uncoordinated and unconfident. Tihoi was a school where the teachers cared deeply and kept an eye on you, and Brent mostly liked it there. He knew the staff recognised his intelligence, his inner strength and resolve, and that most Tihoi students encouraged him rather than bagging him. Student ‘house life’ was the only aspect of Tihoi that Brent needed to endure.

Whilst living in a student house was not especially easy for any of the boys at Tihoi, for Brent having to share his life with others was something new. As an only child he had lived within arms-reach of his parents, and also enjoyed a strong bond with Grandparents on both sides of his family. He was also a city-boy, not at all used to rural living, and most of his recent ‘solo’ time had been in front of a computer or at home with his cats (while Mum worked in the office down the hall). At home Brent was a central focus to family life, and everyday living was very easy. Even the most mundane daily house tasks at Tihoi, such as making his bed, sweeping the floor, and doing the dishes, presented Brent new challenges. For recreation in Hamilton he occasionally played social cricket and basketball, but it was competitive chess that most excited him. He excelled at chess and was verging on national honours, after dismissing many of Waikato’s chess-devoted adults in the past year. Other pleasures included hours with the headphones on, for Brent loved music. It was only after a milk truck arrived at Tihoi with the radio blaring some four weeks into intake that he realised how much of a void Tihoi had created electronically. Much of Brent’s former life was oriented indoors and involving sedentary pursuits either in the company of adults or on his own, and so Tihoi with its shared living emphasis and testosterone fuelled, young-kiwi-male physicality presented a massive contrast of lifestyle.

The daily physical fitness sessions, especially the long runs, have been sheer hard work for Brent. He has not kept pace with most of the other boys in terms of gains in physical strength and endurance, but is proud of completing all of the fitness challenges set and to
assisting his house in the competitions. Whilst he harbours no real interest in becoming a fitness machine, Brent is happy with losing some seven kilo’s so far at Tihoi. Despite a setback in breaking his ankle in the first term, Brent is now much fitter and stronger than when he arrived. He also feels he has really grown in confidence through the outdoor weekends. The abseiling and rock climbing sessions are a classic case, where Brent has overcome a fear of heights and significant personal apprehension. Such fear had limited him participating in abseiling during school camps throughout his childhood, and so the support systems at Tihoi had provided Brent a safety net where he didn’t have to look like a chicken in front of his peers. Rock climbing remains one of the real high points of Tihoi for Brent thus far. Brent’s willingness to confront personal limits typifies a determined spirit; he knows that he can face his fears and achieve anything basically.

Solo presents different sorts of challenges for Brent, and there is some self-doubt in terms of how he will cope on his own without the usual Tihoi support network in place. The duration of solo especially concerns Brent; he is not sure if he will be able to stay focused that long without things creeping into his head. It is the psychology of solo that creates the most uncertainty, and he is apprehensive about how he will personally cope. He is also relieved to know Tihoi staff will be checking sites regularly, for he harbours real fear about being truly alone in the bush. The site he has been allocated is partially in the bush but with access to an open field (and reflects the level of understanding Tihoi staff have to Brent’s apprehensions). Apprehension pervades Brent’s vocabulary pre-solo. He is more apprehensive about his solo than with any of the other activities he has done at Tihoi so far. He doubts his bivy making capabilities, harbours concern for getting wet and cold, and is fearful of his mind wandering places he has no control of.

**Brent’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)**

Solo has proven to be a rollercoaster ride for Brent. From his initial apprehensions around coping mentally and remaining focused for the full forty-four hour period, Brent experienced brief moments of quiet pleasure before enduring extended periods of physical
discomfort and emotional distress. As he had feared prior to solo, Brent’s time alone allowed his mind to venture to places he was not especially ready for. Reflecting upon his pre-Tihoi life brought with it the realisation of immense loss and emotional pain associated with the death of his grandfather just over a year earlier. Solo proved to be an opportunity for grieving and Brent shed many tears and felt emotional pain. His shelter, initially a quiet haven from his house-mates, came to represent a site of misery. Drips through his plastic roof tormented him, soaking his sleeping bag and clothing and ultimately his spirit. Brent bottomed out emotionally about mid-way through his forty-four hour challenge, and he returned to the centre and the comfort of a long chat with Mrs. F. Much later that afternoon he made the decision to return to his shelter, and armed with a dry sleeping bag, warm clothes and a renewed positive-ness braved a second night alone in the bush. The emotional outpouring continued in the form of journaling, letter-writing and poetry, and eventually Brent cried himself to a deep sleep before awakening on day three with a sense of peacefulness and achievement. Solo was an emotionally tough time, a challenging personal hardship from which Brent feels he has gained new perspectives and a renewed appreciation of family and friends.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A watched pot on solo never boils</td>
<td>The lack of a watch percolated into my psych, and time became a curse that stressed me out and worried my mind. The world slowed right down on solo, particularly the first night which was interminably long and wet as was the excruciatingly emotional day that followed. Calculations scribbled in my forty-four hour solo booklet were attempts at measuring time, by the hour, minute and second. I effectively watched the pot boil, counting down the solo hours, without a stove to heat the pot. Solo in winter meant for me many minutes by day and many more by night.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m scared of being left truly alone</td>
<td>I really spent a lot of time thinking about my fears. Interestingly it wasn’t about the bush so much, or the strangers out there, or even the guys from my house beating up on me. It was way more scary. I spent a long time thinking about what I would do if my parents died, how I would cope, what I would do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The drips of rain inside my shelter tormented me</td>
<td>Drip, Drip, Drip... it was a relentless torture and I became wetter by the hour. My bivy was structurally fine, but the plastic full of holes and so I paid the price. Moisture seeped into my heart and slowly did my head in. My emotions were all over the place - I was laughing aloud at nothing and then my tears matched the endless drizzle. The rain drowned my spirit for quite some time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo encouraged me to reflect</td>
<td>Much of solo centred upon me reflecting on my life so far, and also thinking about my Tihoi life. I just sat there and thought a lot actually. Reading my journal helped, but it was all really quite fresh in my mind including my early school years. The trouble was my mind wouldn’t stop. I ended up reflecting too much, mostly random thoughts which inevitably kept returning to me thinking about my grandfather.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are six people in this world I HATE.</td>
<td>Solo meant enforced time out from others. It was good to be away from the six guys who have tried so hard to make my life a misery. It’s hard to know why they get pleasure out of seeing me break down. Still, that’s their problem. I’m too busy getting all I can out of Tihoi to change my goals. But that doesn’t stop me hating them with a passion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I returned from solo early because I was</td>
<td>I didn’t want to go back into my bivy. I’d been thinking about my Grandfather and next thing there was a presence in there, like his ghost. I jumped out and was totally freaked. When I calmed down again I decided</td>
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<tr>
<td>scared, but scared of what?</td>
<td>to go back into my bivy. So I stayed there for awhile but the spirit came back again. I just had to get out, and so I bailed and headed back to the centre. It was really scary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo is loneliness.</td>
<td>Isolation is a good word for solo. I felt isolated, separated, so totally on my own to the point of being lonely at times. I have a loving family and special friends, but knowing they were probably thinking of me was not enough. I know that part of me returning to the centre was about human contact. I had to have a time-out from my solitude, maybe which is connected to me being an only child and in need of regular attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo writing has been cathartic</td>
<td>Solo has been a massive challenge for me; yes a mental challenge mostly which my journal helped me make sense of. The last night of writing was liberating, both in terms of accepting granddad’s death a little more and making some sense of my solo experience. I surprised my self when I wrote that letter to myself to be posted in five years. It was so positive, and focused on my personal gifts from Tihoi. To be able to write that after being so totally emotionally wrecked half a day earlier was awesome. My journal is why I slept so well that last night.</td>
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<td>I’m reasonably healthy and fit, and my size isn’t an issue.</td>
<td>I’m actually OK about being a little bit bigger than a lot of the guys and not as fit as them – I’ve got used to it over the years and solo has helped reaffirm that. Sure it has been good to get a bit fitter at Tihoi and I’m definitely a bit slimmer, maybe six or seven kilos, and a lot stronger. I’m really proud of completing all of the fitness challenges and the outdoor weekends and part of me has enjoyed the hard physical work. But still, I’d rather be a little overweight than a fitness machine.</td>
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Bevan’s Lived Solo Experience

**Introducing Bevan (3rd person)**

The reputation of St. Paul’s Collegiate School for educational and sporting excellence featured prominently in the decision around Bevan’s secondary schooling. It meant he would have to live with his grandparents in Hamilton, and that was something else Bevan was looking forward to. Bevan knew well that St. Paul’s also meant going to Tihoi in year ten, and that place sounded amazing from all the stories he had heard. Guys he knew had really talked up their time there. From all accounts his parents and grandparents also recognised the opportunities for Bevan to grow in a positive, mostly-male environment and Tihoi featured as an important part of that.

His extended family was significant in Bevan’s life, and he had really missed them all this year while at Tihoi. Living with his grandparents had been special while at school last year and he had formed quite special connections with them. They were both prominent in the community as Māori educators and Bevan had really come to value his traditional Māori connections and values. His whanau (family) was significant in his life and his culture was central, and Bevan counted being a reasonably fluent speaker of Māori as a vital part of who he was.

Despite being a city boy, Bevan was no stranger to the bush. He was used to spending time outdoors and was a keen surf fisherman. He enjoyed riding horses and motor bikes when he could, and this typically took place on one of two family farm blocks, one on the west coast and the other on Matakana Island to the east. The west coast block had a lot of native bush which he had enjoyed exploring during the holidays. It was the holidays when Bevan connected with his wider whanau, and typically at one of the farms. There was always lots of outdoor stuff to be done in the holidays.

Back in the city Bevan fancied himself as a musician of the future, learning the bass guitar when he could. He was a good singer and was looking to become part of a band. Like many boys at St. Paul’s Bevan was also a dedicated rugby player and, despite some modesty, was
destined for representative honours. Many of his best mates were rugby guys, and because Bevan played a grade higher than his year nine peers last season he was exposed to the stories the guys brought back from Tihoi after the first intake. He knew Tihoi was going to be a physically challenging time and he was really looking forward to it.

After a self-reported slack last year Bevan is now really working hard at Tihoi, trying to get his grades up. Someone had got into Bevan’s ear about him maximising his opportunities and aspiring for vocational greatness, and he mentioned psychiatry as a possible career destination. The reality though is an almost fourteen year old without too much future focus. Brook is fired up to experience all he can at Tihoi and wherever, and for now the future isn’t so important. He is pleased to report being a hard worker academically at Tihoi, and like many of the boys there has discovered some pleasure in writing. His letters home were good to craft, and he knew they brought smiles to the faces of his parents and his grandparents. It was a weekly task he was diligent with, and when he misplaced his journal mid-intake he was sent back copies of all his letters and some of them were a real laugh to read again. He will take those letters and his new journal on solo to read and to reflect upon.

Solo will be time for Bevan ‘to be by myself and a chance to reflect’. Ever the competitor, he looked forward to building his bivy and to win the bivy design and build contest. He was returning to the same site as he had for his six-hour solo and so knew the exact spot he would build on and the likely materials around that he could use. His bivy would be different to how he was shown by Chris; in part due to the location and materials, but also to express himself as being a little creative and free thinking. So he was looking forward to solo but also somewhat nervous about the duration. Boredom was the primary issue, and some concern about being alone in the dark simmered away. Bevan liked to stay busy and he planned to spend time outside his shelter finding sticks and making spears to kill time. He planned writing all the letters he owed people, completing his journal for student-led tramp, and writing notes in his forty-four-hour solo booklet. He viewed solo as a mental game, and that fears are what you make up in your own mind. Bevan knew that there was nothing to be scared of in the New Zealand bush, but he remained somewhat apprehensive about getting bored and what all his free time and the nights might conjure up.
Bevan’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)

Beneath the quietly spoken, modest Bevan being led up the AB track to his solo site was a young man fuelled with excitement and apprehension. There was very little uncertainty initially regarding what he was going to do, for Bevan had been to the exact spot before and he was focused upon making a shelter unique to that place. After that would become less certain; Bevan would need to be creative in order to curb the boredom that he anticipated would arise to haunt him. He was also apprehensive about spending two nights in the bush alone. Being well organised and practically adept he took care with building his home, knowing that the weather forecast predicted drizzle and cold. Snow was a remote possibility.

The time Bevan spent building his shelter was a valuable investment that set a platform of relative comfort for the remainder of solo. His thoroughness typified his approach to all of the challenges at Tihoi and he remained reasonably dry and warm throughout his experience from that first evening, allowing two good nights of sleep and the completion on the first morning of all of the written tasks the Tihoi staff had ambitiously set.

His prediction of being bored senseless only partially eventuated. There were definitely periods of not being active with nothing to do, but for the most part Bevan kept busy. His letter writing was the catalyst for his mind getting in touch with and celebrating family, which led on to reflections around his life so far and some of the experiences and people he had encountered. It was a celebration of his life and he felt rich with experience and surrounded by love. He recognised his own strengths as a person, primarily through contemplating his efforts and achievements at Tihoi. The time there had been massive, and he was enormously proud of himself. That bubble burst somewhat when Bevan was told off for carving his initials into a tree later on the second day. That carving represented the deep connection and sense of ownership Bevan felt toward his solo spot, but he had broken solo rules and later came to regret his actions. It was an event that subtly soured Bevan’s solo, despite him overcoming his unease with the dark and which had him resolving to spend time in the bush in the future.
| Theme statement                                                                 | Linguistic Transformation                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Writing helped me to reflect and to connect with whanau.                         | Writing got my mind really in touch with family. I thought a lot about what is important for us as whanau and I thought about how important all of my family was to me. Writing helped with that, even though I didn’t write down all my thoughts. To start with I wrote just to counter boredom, to have something to do, but it was like once I started to write that the thoughts came to mind. Writing was my reflective structure. |
| Solo is about reflecting on life. My mind was amazing in terms of being able to recall all the good stuff that I’ve done. | Solo is more of a reflection thing whereas rock climbing is more of an adventurous person’s thing. It was a challenge but not a real big one. I got right into thinking about Tihoi, all we have done here, my mates here, my whanau at home and also what I have done in my whole life before Tihoi. I thought about fishing, and riding bikes, and my horses, and of course I thought about girls. But mostly I thought about my family. |
| I felt quite connected to my spot, and to the tree in the middle. I had to tag it. | Yeah I was bored, and the tree was there. It made up the centre part of my bivy and I had to tag it. It felt right to carve my initials into it, like it was my tree really. I felt quite connected to that place, and to the tree. I knew I was going to have lots of time to get bored, so I came prepared. I brought the knife to carve sticks and spears. That’s part of what I do in the bush. But then maybe carving the tree wasn’t such a good idea, with all the hassle it has caused and the obvious reaction by Chris, and then Mr. F. |
| Solo was easy, it gave me time to relax and to sleep. Solo was also hard; I needed things to do. | The pressure was right off, exams were over, it wasn’t physical and so I just cruised. I slept a fair bit compared to most of the other guys by the sounds. Then again, solo was definitely not free time. I struggled with not having much to do. It was boring sometimes; I had to find things to fill in time. That was the hardest part, just doing nothing. |
| Sure solo was a lonely time, but I know who I am, I appreciate me                  | I’m more comfortable with myself through doing solo. Yeah, pleased to have been on my own and also to have been alone for such a long time away from others. Sure I was lonely, but also pleased to have been on my own. I’m proud of my achievements on solo, and at Tihoi. I’m really fit and strong, I’m healthy, and I’ve coped OK with all of the challenges. I have a great family who I admire, I know where I am from, and |
**most of all I appreciate me, Bevan Kana.**

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<tr>
<th>I was confident in the bush, without much fear. I like the bush, I’ll go there again.</th>
<th>Solo has definitely got me used to being alone and probably taken away my fears of the outdoors and the dark. I feel comfortable with my bush skills now. At one time I heard a kiwi and that comforted me. It was a neat sound; I just wanted to cuddle it. So solo has given me confidence to get out there more, to explore without fear of the dark. I want to get the most out of life from here.</th>
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<tr>
<td>I prayed on solo, I gave thanks.</td>
<td>I thought a lot about Dan’s science classes on solo, how nature can be so well made and how science and religion are closely connected. I thought about how Jesus spent 40 days and nights alone and without eating anything like Reverend Peter told us, but I didn’t believe it. Still, I’m religious sort of, and part of being religious is giving thanks. I didn’t need to pray for my own safety, but I silently gave thanks to God for everyone on solo to be safe. I said thanks for keeping an eye on my family back home, before I ate anything, and on the last morning for making my solo work out fine.</td>
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<td>Tihoi has boosted my academic attitude. My writing has improved, especially my vocabulary.</td>
<td>Tihoi has been time intensive. We have packed in a lot more than we would have at St. Paul’s. I’ve really dug it in just to keep up. I’ve actually enjoyed the classes that somehow connect with Tihoi, especially social studies. My writing has really improved and vocabulary has grown a lot. Mrs. F made us write our journal and letters, often in the evenings; I think that journal, the outdoor books we read in English, and the letters home have helped my writing a lot.</td>
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Kerry’s Lived Solo Experience

*Introducing Kerry (3rd person)*

There is a hideaway on Kerry’s farm where he has escaped occasionally, to spend a little time on his own and away from his older brother. It is really the only time Kerry has been deliberately alone, though it seems like he was always pottering around at home doing things for himself. The duration of his forthcoming solo represented an interesting challenge for Kerry, as did the need to construct a top quality shelter that would withstand the rain that was forecast. He is nervous about solo, but not explicitly so, and his ‘no worries, she’ll be right’ exterior does well to shadow his unease.

Kerry has attended a number of schools, both in the country and more recently in the city. Initially he grew up in a small rural community near the family farm, and then for school years six through eight he lived at the Mount on the east coast where his mum worked. Holidays for all the family were back on the farm, and the summers especially meant hard work helping out his Dad and his Uncle. He had a close extended family and much of family life centred upon farm endeavours. For free time during those late childhood years Kerry identified mostly with the Mount, and that typically meant surfing and hanging out with the surf crowd. He had missed the surf since becoming a hostel-boy at St. Paul’s in land-locked Hamilton, and now that his mum had moved back home to the farm his visits to the beach and his old mates had become less frequent. Being a strong physical guy he had quickly adopted the sports of rugby, cricket and tennis at St. Paul’s, and he had his hopes on at least getting into the rugby second fifteen. For the future though he was looking towards some sort of career in the outdoors. His farming background, his surfing, and then the adventurous pursuits at Tihoi all suggested to Kerry that he was an outdoor guy. It was a theme that had been reinforced by some of the staff at Tihoi, for he had proven adept at most of the Tihoi pursuits. Kerry was already eyeing up a year as a house tutor back at Tihoi after completing year 13.

Kerry has been well prepped for his Tihoi experience. As a younger boy he got to read the letters his older brother wrote home from Tihoi, and was quite jealous at the time of all of
the challenging things that were reported. Kerry’s uncle had attended one of the first ever intakes at Tihoi and his two sons, Kerry’s cousins, had gone there too. Tihoi was a word commonly used during family conversations in recent years, and he had really been looking forward to Tihoi since enrolling at St. Paul’s. Kerry acknowledged that the experience of Tihoi somehow changes you and that Tihoi had almost become a family rite-of-passage, for the males at least. He was unsure how that change had occurred for his brother or how it might manifest within himself, but he did look forward to his own Tihoi initiation being over. He wondered if he would better connect with his brother, his cousins, and his Uncle because of Tihoi. For now he knew that he had gotten fitter, stronger, and faster in the time he had been immersed in everything that was Tihoi.

Tihoi had become a series of challenges for Kerry, rolling on and merging into one great experience. He had lapped it all up, though was definitely less motivated for the academic side of the programme. Part of him could not accept how hard the Tihoi teachers drove the students, nor why the curriculum should be the same as at St. Paul’s when there were so many special local activities that could be experienced. Kerry hadn’t worked especially hard with his studies all intake and so had struggled with his recent exams. The whole experience had become very tiring, and he felt sleep deprived. There was never enough time for sleep at Tihoi, and Kerry had started to think about getting back to St. Paul’s next term. Hostel life there meant a lot of free time which Kerry was looking forward to. In fact part of him wanted Tihoi to be all over. Then again, solo and kayak expedition were on the immediate horizon and he was quite looking forward to them; kayaking especially.

Solo fascinated Kerry and also made him a little nervous. It seemed to be the one BIG activity talked about early on and for which his intake seemed most apprehensive about. But now no one was really talking about it and most of the guys appeared less phased by thought of two days and nights on their own. Kerry was ready to just go with the flow on solo and cope with whatever cropped up. He had basically slept through the six-hour solo, and that was his strategy again: build a bomb-proof shelter, sleep lots, do some writing, sleep lots, go home. But Kerry knew he couldn’t sleep through the whole forty-four hours. He had decided early on to take in his watch, so that he wouldn’t spend time worried about how long there was to go.
It seemed that unless he knew exactly what the time was that his solo would drag on and on. Kerry harboured no real fear for being in the dark nor for being alone in the bush, yet the fable of the Mangakino Slasher permeated his psych. He backed himself with his shelter building skills after spending a lot of time practising and was comfortable that there were no predators that could harm him. Yet the slasher he knew would appear whenever there was a rustling outside his bivy, and his mind would tell him he was about to be attacked by a bush-living murderer. He needed a distraction. Kerry decided it would be in form of a four centimetre thick novel.

Kerry’s solo coping plan involved breaking two minor solo rules: no watches and no reading material other than journals and solo booklets. As an otherwise all round good guy who tries hard and a young man who liked to do a good job if he started something, Kerry’s planned misdemeanours mirrored a possible unease for his solo. He had also been involved in a minor physical skirmish with another student the morning prior to solo departure, which was totally out of character. That aggression occurred occasionally pre-solo, as reported by a Tihoi Director, reflecting some student anxiety. However, there was no doubting that the casual, laid-back, exterior that was typically Kerry showed a few cracks pre-solo. Two days would tell if those cracks represented anything more than just extreme tiredness.

**Kerry’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)**

Kerry’s solo was mostly a positive experience. He was not attacked by the Mangakino Slasher, and the wet then windy conditions meant there were rarely sounds outside his bivy that he should get anxious about. He was never afraid of the dark, didn’t get lonely, and the time didn’t drag on as he thought it might. Indeed Kerry’s mission to sleep his way through the forty-four-hours was reasonably successful, for he slept well on the first night and drifted his way through much of the entire next day. Kerry’s bivy was mostly bombproof, requiring only a few adjustments early on the first night when the mist turned into a constant drizzle and the drips started to absorb into the top of his sleeping bag. He remained dry and mostly warm throughout his solo, and that allowed him to sleep and then to read his novel. Kerry estimates
more than twenty hours of the forty-four was spent sleeping and he managed to consume 120 pages of his epic novel.

Despite wanting to catch up on writing his journal, to write letters to his family and to himself, and to complete the forty-four hour solo booklet, Kerry basically didn’t write anything until just prior to departure from his site on the last day. His novel was all consuming, his sleeping bag too comfortable, and his energy for doing much else was about zero.

Infrequent calls of nature, the occasional repair to his bivy, the consumption of his food stocks, and visits from Tihoi tutors were the only real interruptions to his sleeping and reading regime. His mind wandered occasionally to girls he knew, to St. Paul’s and the possibility of socials where girls would be invited, to surfing in the mid-winter break, and to the other guys in his intake and how they might be doing on solo. Part of him really wanted some of the guys to get wet and cold, and through the door of his shelter he had seen a few guys wandering along the AB track. He wondered if they were giving up and returning to the centre.

His own bivy was serving him well, and his random thoughts were few and far between chapters of his book. At one time he read, then re-read, his forty-four-hour solo booklet but no writing flowed from that reading. He was stumped by the ‘me-tree’ challenge in the booklet, where he was to articulate his personal strengths. Either modesty, insecurity, or a lack of interest had his head back into his novel. Kerry’s ‘me-tree’ on solo was escapism into his novel. It was an action an English teacher would have been proud of from a fourteen year old active male. For the purposes of the Tihoi solo, however, the novel represented a lack of engagement with the spirit or intent of the experience.

Kerry had not dug deeply into understanding himself, had not made any attempt to explore the meaning or significance of the Tihoi experience, nor chosen to complete the tasks as set. It was an opportunity missed, which Kerry freely acknowledged. He was OK with that, had survived comfortably the solo, had not disrupted the experiences of others, and had caught up on his sleep. He now looked forward to his kayak expedition.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like being on my own sometimes but I’ve never done an overnight solo before, what will it be like?</td>
<td>I’m a little nervous. I don’t really want to say it aloud but I’m a little apprehensive about solo, what will happen, what I’ll do for all that time. I used to hang out at a place at the back of the farm if I ever got upset with my brother, but only for a few hours, not overnight or anything. I was always too scared to actually run away there; I didn’t really want to be on my own for that long. I’m not sure why.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Mangakino slasher is a metaphor for the paranoia that sets in when you hear strange noises in the bush.</td>
<td>The story of the slasher, passed down from intake to intake, preys on my mind. Even though the story is a fake, it permeates my thinking. On solo when I hear strange noises my mind automatically thinks the worst, that I’m about to be attacked by some bush-living weirdo.</td>
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<td>Solo is mostly about sleeping. I’ll just set up my bivy then sleep I reckon.</td>
<td>It didn’t quite go to plan. I was going to write my journal and the letters on the first day then just sleep heaps. But I spent all day and night in my bivy, just reading or sleeping mostly. You’re always short of sleep at Tihoi. But come the last night I couldn’t sleep; I’d slept too much already. There was nothing else to do but read my book.</td>
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<td>I could have done a lot better on solo, taking the challenge they set to write and think. But I didn’t, so I guess I didn’t really do the solo properly.</td>
<td>Solo was set up for us to be on our own, so we can write and write, and also to think about our past life, our future, and what Tihoi has meant for us personally. I missed that opportunity. I hardly wrote anything and read about 120 pages of my novel. Sure I did think a little about going back to St. Paul’s next term, having a social with the girls’ school. I was thinking about going surfing in the break, whether it would be too cold. I also wondered how the other guys were doing in the rain, hoping some of them were soaked. But I was too busy reading to really think about me, or Tihoi, or the future, though I did think about my family a bit.</td>
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<td>That night I was thinking: oh please let it stop. Can you please get it to stop raining?</td>
<td>I’m not from a religious family, but at St. Paul’s they embed religion into everything. I guess I made a request to God to stop the rain during solo, and I’ve thought about becoming a bit of a Christian since being at St. Paul’s. I’m making my own mind up about religion.</td>
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Solo was a small confidence booster. I know I can look after myself well in the bush and cope fine on my own.

The solo challenge was to set up a good bivy and spent time safely alone in the bush. I did that, I know I have the skills to cope fine in a survival situation. I’m pleased I can trust myself; I have the confidence and skills to manage on my own. Maybe that will help me some other time, either in the bush or somewhere else.

Solo is just another of the seemingly endless Tihoi activities. Let’s get it over with and Tihoi for that matter.

Part of me wants the whole Tihoi thing over with. We have been so busy; it has been totally full on, packed with things that need to be done. It is way busier than at St. Paul’s. I’m looking forward to having some free time; getting back to the hostel next term will be great. Solo’s been a good rest from the programme, another positive experience, now I’m looking forward to kayak expedition. Then Tihoi will all but be over.
Martin’s Lived Solo Experience

Introducing Martin (3rd person)

Some serious family conflict pre-empted Martin’s enrolment at St. Paul’s Collegiate School. He and his mum were at loggerheads, for Martin had become particularly rebellious and anti-establishment during his intermediate school years. It was his aunt in Hamilton who had suggested Martin go to boarding school, sowing a seed that was to germinate in Martin’s mind. He was fascinated by the stories passed by his aunt about life at St. Paul’s, and especially about their satellite campus at Tihoi where the boys were forced to grow up rather quickly by facing a range of physical challenges. It sounded like an exciting school, and after a visit to Hamilton he was convinced it would be a good move. Sending their boy so far away from home was not the ideal solution for Martin’s parents, but St. Paul’s was founded on a Christian ethic which was important to them. The school also had a reputation for educational excellence, and they certainly knew that Martin needed a fresh start. So despite Martin being accepted into out-of-zone schools a lot closer to their acreage well north of Auckland, his parents made the financial commitment and enrolled Martin at St. Paul’s hoping with all their heart that the trial would work for their troubled son.

Martin freely acknowledges that he had been out of line for awhile, citing a soft approach to discipline at school and a respect issue at both home and school as contributors. He had already come to appreciate the clear boundaries at St. Paul’s in his first year there, how they come down hard on you. It was way-more strict and he felt the rigidness of the system had changed him for the better. Being acutely aware of the financial cost of schooling at St. Paul’s, Martin was working hard to secure his parents’ investment. He fitted into St. Paul’s easily, though found the classes pretty impersonal and not great for making friends. But hostel life was better for that, his sporting interests were highly valued and encouraged, and he felt he was getting a way better education. He also had the stories of adventure from his aunt affirmed by guys in the hostel who had been to Tihoi, and he was looking forward to his half-year there. While he missed his friends up north, and especially his girlfriends Holly and Kelly, there were opportunities to connect in the holidays. He felt mostly in control of his life again;
the hard work he had put into his new school and his studies seemed to have calmed him down. His mum also didn’t seem so agro towards him.

Martin was very nervous arriving to Tihoi, and from the stories he had heard he thought the whole Tihoi programme was based out in the bush. He was essentially a city kid, not at all used to an outdoor way of living and there was something weirdly terrifying in his mental images of impenetrable, sodden native bush. It was a surprise to arrive at Tihoi and find a village of mostly modern student and staff houses, classrooms, kitchen facilities, and various other buildings. He seemed to readily appreciate the challenges of communal house living and soon learned the art of washing, cooking, cleaning, wood chopping, and fire lighting. He was delighted to have earned the right to keep a stereo in his house and to find others in house with heavy metal interests. Tihoi was a mostly civilised place.

Martin had also come to value his life skills and ability to look after himself better. One of his real highlights at Tihoi had been catering week where he had been responsible for planning a week of meals for his house, being involved with sourcing food supplies in appropriate quantities, and supervising the food preparation. Through living in his house he had become conscious of those mundane tasks his parents had performed for him over the years: cooking, cleaning, washing, making beds and the like. Already he had surprised his mum during the first break of Tihoi by making his bed without prompt and contributing around the house. Martin was trying hard to be better at home. He felt his mum had already taken notice, but in the back of his mind was the comment from his dad that it will take one hundred good things to stamp out every one bad thing that he had done.

Martin is an articulate young man who has a physical presence about him. One can envisage him as a lawyer of the future; a career that the school counsellor has him believing in and committing to. That career counselling has been a further motivator for Martin to work hard at Tihoi this term, and especially with English. He is a good writer, and enjoys writing, though it does take him some time. So far Martin had given 85-90 percent effort at Tihoi. The education style has really suited him, particularly the programme variation and flexibility. The longer teaching sessions for each subject have given opportunity to delve deeply into topics in
an applied way, and he feels he has done as well if not better with his exams at Tihoi than if he was in the intake that was still at St. Paul’s.

Following his solo Martin is off on kayak expedition. He has come to love kayaking, though there are always scary times when he is upside down in the river waiting for a flip rescue. He has been very comfortable with sailing and rock climbing, has come to appreciate tramping despite his earlier doubts, and got through the various bush-craft, caving, and survival weekends unscathed. However, nothing had made him as apprehensive throughout the Tihoi outdoor weekends as his forthcoming forty-four hour solo, and that apprehension had commenced last year with the exaggerated stories from guys who had returned from their Tihoi terms determined to scare the new boys. This all meant for Martin that solo was it; his Tihoi nemesis.

From his six hour experience, Martin knew he would need to keep busy on solo. He knew he would be nervous alone, especially if he stopped and allowed himself time to listen and to imagine. For Martin solo was very much a personal survival exercise. Never mind the aspirations of Mrs. F. for it to be an opportunity to reflect on life, on Tihoi, and to have a profound or possibly spiritual time. Martin was solely focused on getting through it; surviving. He knew he would be scared of the noises at night, of random strangers, of the unknown. He knew his imagination would play tricks. So he would construct an amazing bivy, invest a lot of time to it. Then sleep would be a strategy for getting through the nights. He thought he might keep a torch on as a night light. The last thing he wanted was to bring out the dark side of the bush. Solo would be a very uncertain time; Martin didn’t know what might happen.

**Martin’s solo: a synopsis (3\textsuperscript{rd} person)**

The first day or so of solo was a cruise, though a minor mix-up between two Tihoi instructors meant a befuddled start. Martin had been pointed out a spot from the track and left on his own to negotiate the short push through the undergrowth to get there, but upon arriving at the spot found another boy building his shelter there. With no one to be seen back
at the track Martin dropped his pack and retraced his steps to the centre, located Mrs. F, and clarified where he would be best to live for the next two days. By the time he had returned to his new solo place the first hour of his forty-four had well passed. The upshot was a better site, one with a few tall pines closely grouped together with an adjacent clearing surrounded by bush. It was light and open and evoked no claustrophobic sensations. Martin liked it there.

The first spots of rain hit about three hours later as the finishing touches went onto his bivy, corresponding with the arrival of Martin’s instructor to check on progress. The bivy was a functional creation, not pretty, but definitely watertight. Martin set up quickly for the imminent darkness, and with the busy-ness of the afternoon and the gentle patter of raindrops upon his plastic roof soon fell asleep. He slept well through that first night and spent much of that next morning in his sleeping bag as the heavens soaked all else around his bivy. Martin easily drifted into thoughtfulness. He didn’t need to read his journal or write anything to assist with reflection; there was a relaxed outpouring of consciousness as his mind randomly traced a path across the experiential richness of his life. The memory work included acknowledging the long journey he had metaphorically travelled since starting at St. Paul’s. Martin found joy with climbing the pines once the rain subsided, taking pleasure from adventurous play after first seeking to spy on others. He relished new perspectives up high, and loved the feeling of swaying with the escalating wind. It was a wind that would later come to haunt him.

His second night brought Martin perceptual terror. The dark pervaded all, and his worst fears were realised as sounds outside became amplified and transformed by the wind into some gnawing physical threat. He was freaked and had to get out, to escape the bush, and so beat again the well worn path back to the centre. There was magic in the calming words from Mrs F. that saw Martin, when given the choice of his house bed or to go back into the bush, opting to return to his bivy. Further encouraging thoughts from Chris allowed Martin to recognise the benign quality of the bush as he was escorted back up the track. But alone at his bivy again the noises continued and the calming words faded into apprehension. Sleep was little more than thoughtful dreams awake that night; a semi-consciousness that was not peaceful but which did invoke a lot of navel-gazing, self-analysis. The dawn chorus was a welcome respite and motivated Martin to climb the biggest pine and observe the unfolding of
a new day. He was filled with awe as the vista unfolded with a special display of light and birdsong. High in the treetop Martin knew he had survived solo. He surprised himself by speaking to the Lord, giving thanks for solo being almost over, for the experiences that he had, and for keeping him safe.
Table 7: Martin: Key Thematic Statements (1st person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solo is it: the scariest, hardest challenge as far as Tihoi is concerned</td>
<td>Solo has been the hardest thing, my biggest challenge so far at Tihoi. It involved the greatest unknown for me, and at times it really scared me. I returned back to the centre at one point, just too freaked out to stay on my own. But I didn’t quit. I now know that fear is a mental or emotional thing. Something inside my head can be way scarier than risky things that actually exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure I’m alone on solo but I’m surrounded by people.</td>
<td>There are people in my life so far that have actually had a big influence on me, like my old Intermediate School Teacher, Mum and Dad, Dr. Smithells, all the Tutors at Tihoi. I really value my mates back home, especially my girlfriends who I seem to be able to really talk to, and I’m surrounded by some great guys here at Tihoi. I thought a lot about all of them on solo, and I’m lucky to be encircled by good people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo, it’s basically a survival exercise.</td>
<td>Never mind the solo being some spiritual experience, for me it was all about getting through it, actually surviving. I had to keep busy or my mind would blow me away. It’s like I’ve got this over-active imagination. The second night was the worst: every rustling noise transformed into a potential threat. Next time I’ll be way more confident now that I’ve done this. I can survive in the bush on my own; I’ll be sweet, I hope I’ll be sweet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s OK to reach out for help. Sometimes seeking help is for the best.</td>
<td>I like to sort things out for myself, my way. But on solo I had to go back and talk to someone. The talking was good. It helped me know that the fear was within me, it didn’t actually exist. I could go back and face the fear, and I did. It wasn’t easy but yeah, with that help I made it through to the end and even started to enjoy it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve actually appreciated thinking back on life a bit and realising how far I’ve come here.</td>
<td>My mind kept switching into reflective mode, to what I had achieved in the last year and a half. Like I’ve found out who I am deep inside, some of the skills that I have, what is important to me. I reckon I’ve got way better at my approach to School. I used to be a pretty smart-arsed guy in class, but now I’ve changed heaps. I’m actually in control, I’m fitter, and I’m back on the rails. The switch to St. Paul’s and Tihoi has been good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time alone outside can</td>
<td>There were times of calm and pure joy on solo: The sound of rain on my plastic roof put me into a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be truly cool: peaceful and serene.  

peaceful sleep, the warmth of the sun on my body was totally relaxing, and observing from high in a tree the unfolding of the landscape at sunrise and hearing the dawn chorus was truly memorable.

Tree climbing was a great adventure, liberating and joyful  
The pine trees became a playground. I revelled in climbing as high as I could before slipping down the needles, or bending the trunks over right at the top. Good fun, a little risky, but immensely enjoyable. Climbing the tallest pine at dawn allowed me to see how serene the forest was. The views, the birds, the colours, and the rising sun evoked peacefulness. It made me appreciate how lucky we are as New Zealanders.

I’ll be pleased to see them and they’ll be pleased to see me and it will be way better. Life at home can only improve from here.  

I’ve noticed how much better things are now. On solo I thought of the different things Mum was getting upset with, of the things I’ve done wrong. I’ve taken all that and I’ve just changed. It’s heaps better now and I’d like to keep it that way. I’m looking ahead to the holidays and being home again. I’ll be making a big effort to help out, and to just be me; the new me. Mum and also Dad will notice that I’ve grown up a lot.
Nigel’s Lived Solo Experience

*Introducing Nigel (3rd person)*

The transition into a new school is never easy, and arriving at an old forestry village in the middle of nowhere really was a massive cultural shock for Nigel. From the luxury of living at home he found himself sharing one of the oldest houses at Tihoi with a bunch of seven strangers. The smell of the house, a horrible porky butchery stench, infused his memory to be forever associated with Tihoi. His house-mates had been away for a few days on their house tramp and had returned tired and intolerant, and their wet dank gear invaded Nigel’s space. Nigel was a week late joining Tihoi and new to St. Paul’s school. He didn’t know anyone there, was in the whops who knows how far away from civilisation, and going to be spending the next four and a half months sharing a smelly house with other guys. It was no wonder on that first night that he thought to himself, “what the hell am I doing here?”

Nigel is a solid physical guy, very capable in a sporting sense, and an ‘A’ student academically. Yet the move to Tihoi had drained his confidence. He had to start again in terms of the recognition he used to get for sporting and academic prowess, and it was important for Nigel to demonstrate his capabilities rather than talk them up. But at Tihoi they did not really play the sports he was good at and he had been placed into the ‘B’ class. He struggled to find new friends at Tihoi early on, especially in the house where there always seemed to be minor tensions which he had been caught up in a couple of times. Nigel enjoyed the outdoor weekends immensely but in the first few months he most enjoyed writing home and reading books. The movies were also well appreciated and gave a sense of normality to an otherwise foreign world.

Nigel missed his mates, and especially his time surfing and hanging out with them. His first break home at Easter was a treat, and made Nigel realise how much he loved his large family and how badly he missed home life. Time at home meant freedom to roam on the land or along the beach adjacent to their east coast farmlet. It also meant being surrounded by the television, his stereo, computer, and X-box. He loved the bustle of town life, and it was in town
and the beach adjacent to it where Nigel was perhaps happiest. He had told his mum he hated Tihoi and that he didn’t want to go back. Nigel’s return to pork butchery smells came hard.

Another break mid-intake meant two weeks of craziness and fun with family and mates, and it also meant silent tears and solitude in the weeks that followed. Nigel had become depressed back at Tihoi, reclusive, and self-centred. Yet it was not a stance he was acutely aware of until a teacher subtly pointed it out to him during a ‘listening-counselling’ session. That chat was one of many subtle tuning points for Nigel. On a caving trip to Waitomo he had got to know a couple of students outside of his house, and he found himself sitting with new guys for group meals and laughing a lot more. People were warming to him. The Tihoi worm was slowly turning, and during the latter half of the programme Nigel moved out of cruise mode and out of his shell. Nigel’s letters home reflected a new-found appreciation for the people, programme, and place that are Tihoi. He had left his self-doubts behind and come to not bother about how he looked to others. People noticed.

Missing out on year nine at St. Paul’s also meant not hearing the stories of Tihoi from other students or during information evenings. He was unaware of the need to complete a solo until preparations commenced for the six hour experience mid-intake. The six hour solo was easy. Nigel slept through most of it, not bothering to make a bivy and laying upon his plastic sheeting. He thought little about the forty-four hour experience until preparations commenced again, though had come to regard it as the one outdoor thing at Tihoi he was looking forward to least. If anything, it was the time spent discussing solo during the first interview that got Nigel a little apprehensive. On his student-led tramp Nigel’s group had walked 27 kilometres. On solo he would go nowhere in the same timeframe, and so he envisaged solo as boredom. The dark Nigel contemplated as a minor issue that would be resolved with sleep, and he felt no unease with stranger danger or animals in the bush. There was a calmness pre-solo that flowed from his tramping and bush survival experiences, and Tihoi Chris had spent time detailing bivy-construction specifics. Nigel would build a bivy and sleep the nights, and undertake lots of writing during the daytime. It all seemed very easy and straight-forward.
Nigel’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)

Solo was a cruise for Nigel. All went according to his grand plan. He built a wicked bivy, slept the nights, and kept busy during the day with writing. The calmness he exhibited pre-solo had a flow on effect, so that nothing fazed him throughout except misplacing his torch for a few hours one evening. Nigel was relaxed all the way through and in apparent control of his situation. It was an experience he enjoyed; solo was a positive time and Nigel gave himself a nine out of a possible ten for his efforts (though was unable to identify any enhancement which would facilitate the perfect ten). He would have given himself a ten for his shelter though. It was a masterful creation that was functional in all respects, from the under floor padding through to the fern fronds soundproofing his roof. The structure shielded Nigel from the heavy rain on night one and the wild winds of night two, aiding two restful sleeps and rendering redundant any self-doubts he held regarding getting through the darkness.

Nigel was proud of the fact he had easily survived and that his shelter was key. That bivy further protected his pen and journal from the elements, and his days were intermittently filled with writing and reflection. Writing was a pleasure on solo, if a little uncomfortable. Nigel penned the ‘letter to self’ and took the opportunity to connect with his friends and his family at home. Those letters were obviously deeply personal and went into sealed, stamped envelopes as soon as he returned to the centre, forever outside the gaze of others. His journal, forty-four hour solo booklet, and a Tihoi reflective ‘recount’ were similarly crafted, but with the knowledge Mrs. F would likely come to read them in due course.

Nigel carefully summarised via his Tihoi Recount the personal challenges he faced arriving to a new school and to the trials of those first couple of enduring months at Tihoi. It was a succinct summary of his early journal entries and spoke of personal challenges that Nigel had worked through. The happy ending was that Nigel had progressively come to love Tihoi and the gamut of learning opportunities there. He acknowledged the reality of Tihoi ending soon, and was excited with the thought of a well-earned holiday before commencing a new schooling life at St. Paul’s. There were few deep revelations as Nigel’s mind traversed the various experiences his life had thrown up thus far. Reading his journal allowed Nigel to recall
negative feelings and experiences from early times at Tihoi; memories that had become faded in his own mind. He recognised the journey that has been Tihoi thus far and he relished his current position.

Thinking time on solo was mostly a celebration of those people he knew and was close to, and the experiences he had shared with many of them and Tihoi counted definitely in that. The future rarely entered his thoughts beyond what he might entertain himself with during the coming holiday. Invariably that involved his girlfriend, his mates, and his snowboard. Nigel finished solo with his body and soul refreshed, with a renewed confidence, and with the knowledge he had more than survived.
Table 8: Nigel: Key Thematic Statements (1st person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was a pretty good experience and it was pretty good just being by myself.</td>
<td>I spent the first month or so within my own shell and was used to going solo really. So after the last couple of months it was good to celebrate my time at Tihoi by being on my own. It felt pretty good hanging out with just me, having some space to do my own thing. Solo was a positive time; a nine out of ten I’d say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time allows for the memory to recall.</td>
<td>Tihoi has slowly allowed me to come out of my shell. I feel back to being myself now, I laugh and joke with the other guys, and am feeling like Tihoi is a great place. Time on solo has helped me a little to recognise how I might have changed. That meant thinking about the miserable place Tihoi and my house was to start with. I’d already forgotten those bad times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature is there; I observed things but so what?</td>
<td>Sure I recognised the different birds, chose the right ferns to pad out my bivy, and I even sketched the tree outside my bivy. There was a familiarity in the bush that I guess has come from time in it, but it wasn’t awe-inspiring or fascinating like the solo booklet suggested it might be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have come to really enjoy writing</td>
<td>Just being by myself and having no one to read my stuff was great, and I wrote whatever I wanted. I wrote that letter to myself and then quite a few letters to my mates. I wrote stupid things and personal stuff, and posted them before anyone else could read them. Like I planned, I wrote a lot during the day, finished my journal, the solo booklet and even wrote a Tihoi recount. I wrote because I wanted to, not ‘cause I had to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the time Mr. Wolf, what’s the time?</td>
<td>That song from ‘Once Were Warriors” got into my brain and I even sung it aloud a few times. I wasn’t worried about what the time was, but it was a little strange not knowing exactly. I kept writing and the time went fast. Once I thought it was maybe ten o’clock then Jean came round and she said ‘goodnight’ which told me it must have been closer to four or four thirty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud of my bivy, and proud of self.</td>
<td>Just to build a shelter and live in it for two days told me I can actually survive in the bush. My bivy withstood buckets of rain and then wild winds, and I was proud of it. I even put ferns on the roof so the rain wasn’t too loud. I didn’t get scared the entire time, or get wet or cold. Good on me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming awake</td>
<td>My plan was not to sleep in the daytime so that I’d sleep at night, and that plan worked. It didn’t stop my daydreaming though between bouts of writing, and the writing itself evoked lots of thought. I sat there wide awake processing so many memories. Most of them were about Tihoi, and also my mates and girls at home. Special times indelibly imaged upon my memory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paul’s Lived Solo Experience

Introducing Paul (3rd person)

Paul is a capable, confident and conscientious young man of fifteen and a half years who has cruised through all of the experiences Tihoi has presented thus far. His upbringing on a farm some forty minutes drive from St. Paul’s school has given him an advantage in terms of a maturity of outlook and the ability to cope with the physical side of the programme. Following his two older brothers into St. Paul’s and now to Tihoi has also provided a window of understanding to the demands of the programme. So Paul arrived to Tihoi psychologically ready to embrace any challenge, including solo, knowing well from the stories of his brothers and others before him what generally to expect.

The first few weeks away from home were tough for Paul, but now Tihoi features as the place of preference to school at St Paul’s and perhaps also to life at home. Paul has relished the Tihoi food, the opportunity to really develop his fitness, and opportunities to become competent with all of the outdoor challenges. There is obvious personal pride for Paul in being the dependable support-guy within his intake without himself standing out as a tall poppy. Indeed Paul has a very perceptive self awareness, knowing himself and his strengths without the ego-driven tendencies of many of his classmates.

Paul is himself supported by a close family. He feels valued as well as missed at home, especially by mum, and he has appreciated the ongoing connection to home via the weekly reciprocity of letters. Getting mail from home has been a motivator for his own letter writing, with the variety of experiences at Tihoi providing plenty to write about. Paul also recognises that his brothers as well as his parents will be able to relate to his letters by virtue of their past association with the school. Paul’s demeanour seems to reflect implicit family values related to working hard, being independent, assisting others, and taking personal responsibility. Indeed for Paul and his brothers to share the forty minute drive to school and back each day is testament to the trust his parents have provided in them all. One cannot discount the
influence of parents, older brothers, and a rural farming upbringing upon Paul’s ability to look after himself (and others) and to his obvious maturity of outlook.

Dealing with the curriculum side of Tihoi life has required from Paul plain hard work, and he is focused upon doing well with his studies despite being placed in the bottom academic stream of his intake. He is not fazed by his lowly academic status and acknowledges no desire to be in the top stream, for he knows that his passion for things mechanical and his broad practical competencies shall take him a long way in the world of mechanical things and possibly motor sport. In this regard Paul appears well aware of his strengths and has a focus upon mechanical opportunities beyond schooling, though he may well be limited in his thinking by such an emphasis from his career counsellor. Indeed Tihoi staff view Paul as a deep thinker and someone with the ability and dedication to really go places in his life if he so chooses.

Despite his general confidence and practical competencies Paul is a little apprehensive of solo, though perhaps no more so than during the lead up to other physically and emotionally challenging activities like kayaking and rock climbing. He has elected to go about as far as one can be from the centre for his solo, right up the Albert Burgess (AB) track and into the deer paddock. He knows himself well and he values his practical skills, hence he knows he can complete the solo. Yet there is something a little unnerving for Paul about being way up the AB track, and while he is keen to challenge himself by really going bush this may also be a strategy to prevent him returning early. The psychology of the solo is something Paul will have to deal with, for he knows he might succumb to the temptation of returning early if too many variables pop up. He is a little scared of being alone, especially if required to get out of his sleeping bag and fix his shelter deep in the night.

**Paul’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)**

Prior to solo Paul had devised the emergency plan of telling himself *just ten more minutes, ten more minutes* so that any nagging desire he had to retreat to the centre would
dissipate. His strategy was to get as far away from the Centre as possible to avoid any temptation to head back, then set up a bomb-proof shelter and sleep in it heaps. On the walk up to the bivy sites there was a solemn silence, and Paul knew that others too were apprehensive of what was to come. But in the end Paul more than coped OK with solo; indeed he thrived on his own and appreciated the company of himself. Sure there were moments of apprehension, especially at night when mysterious noises really got his heart racing, and sure there were quiet times when his mind drifted places. But in the end solo was far easier than Paul had envisaged it would be. Like all of the other challenges Tihoi had thrown at Paul, solo was a cruise really.

Paul’s solo space was in his own words a five star spot way up by the deer paddock. Yet he was not completely alone there. On the first night he could hear the yelling and frustrations of other soloists nearby, and he knew others were struggling with their shelters as the drizzle became more constant. Then there were the weird scratching noises outside his shelter from time to time, suggesting he had vermin neighbours, and the footsteps crunching the undergrowth late on the first night made him sit bolt upright. Eventually Paul’s heart slowed again as he rationalised the likelihood of a Tihoi staff member doing a solo check, though his senses still strained to decipher the sounds outside. Those sounds prohibited Paul from completely relaxing. There was a sinister quality to that first night, and Paul was uncertain about something connected with the dark. He wasn’t exactly scared but he wasn’t at ease either. Perhaps it was the stories of the Tihoi slasher and the marauding wild pigs that so affected Paul’s psyche at times.

The light rain on his shelter was also calming and his mind drifted in and out of a dream state: from Tihoi to his home, the farm, his family, his dog and cat, his friend Tony, the girls he knew back home, and back to adventures at Tihoi. His basic need for warmth and shelter were met and he was essentially comfortable; a state emerging from his foundation of inner confidence and practical skills in building a solid bivy shelter. His site was special in terms of providing four well placed trees, enabling a creative shelter that only required modest repair despite the wetness of night one, the wild winds of afternoon two, and the frosty chill of the
last night and morning. It was a shelter he was very proud of, though it took three or so hours to construct to the specifications of his simplistic design plan.

Whilst he backed his own capabilities with bivy making, Paul knew other soloists would be wet, struggling, and likely miserable on night one, and he had to resist his urge to get out and help them. A visit from a neighbour, who was covertly scoping out his shelter for construction tips, was nearly enough to tempt Paul to assist with the other student’s shelter rebuild; the sort of support Paul had proven himself able to provide repeatedly during the other Tihoi outdoor weekends. These were qualities Paul was both proud of and humble about, and he knew he was respected by his peers as the helpful and supportive guy of the intake.

Paul caught himself singing and whistling a few times when he was outside in the sunshine around midday on day two. He recognised how comfortable he was on his own. While he planned to do all of the writing tasks first up on solo, he ended up only doing a little writing; not out of compulsion but because he wanted to. Tihoi had helped Paul understand the importance of writing letters and he enjoyed crafting stories of his Tihoi exploits. He knew he was a good writer but only when it suited him, and on solo this meant Paul catching up on his journal from the student led tramp but not crafting anything much about solo proper. There was no letter to self and no writing about the solo experience, though he did make notes in his solo booklet about some plans he had for the future. Solo allowed Paul to consider the crossroads he was about to arrive at: should I leave school now or hang in there? He found himself spending time thinking about the box that the career counsellor had put him in, thinking about sticking at school for another year or so, and wondering what it would be like out working. He had come to tolerate school work at Tihoi; it was way more relaxed and he knew he could do OK if he worked hard. Solo allowed Paul to contemplate his next steps in life.

Later on Paul digested his journal, reading it from start to finish, and thinking about all that he had achieved at Tihoi. It had meant a lot to him, Tihoi. There was much that he identified with... the adventures, the fitness, the good food, the Teachers, even the classes sometimes. Paul felt at home at Tihoi, and he wondered what it would be like going back home
again. He also appreciated the opportunities that his family and farm life had provided; that he had enjoyed a good life so far.

Paul relished the chance to hang out on his own during the second afternoon, and he took the time to really look around. He liked the fact that Tihoi had made him physically strong, and he felt in great shape. He did a few press-ups, and then used his muscles to pull himself up into a large tree. Paul climbed with ease and confidence, ultimately spending ages high above the ground and gaining perspective. He held on to the upper-most branches and let his mind drift again as he swayed in the wind. Paul liked the fact that he was in charge of himself; that he was free to climb or sing or do whatever he felt like on solo. He felt safe, felt confident in his own abilities, and felt comfortable being on his own.
Table 9: Paul: Key Thematic Statements (1st person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know who I am, and I knew me before solo</td>
<td>Paul is sure of himself, comfortable with who he is and what he is capable of. Solo has not assisted him finding out or discovering who he is. Rather it has reaffirmed that he is capable, independent, confident with his practical skills, and considerate of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction is my thing, a modest shelter is the go</td>
<td>Solo has provided Paul great opportunities to keep busy and to express himself constructing his solo shelter. The shelter is nothing too flashy, but typifies Paul’s down-to-earth practical capabilities. There is pride in his craftsmanship and attention to the details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m thinking back to the past now, and my family are with me all the way</td>
<td>Spending time on his own provided time to think, and Paul was able to reflect upon his life to date. He has a close supportive family and a richness of experiences from childhood to his adolescence. Solo has been great for thinking about family and familial experiences. Paul’s mind has drifted to the past often during solo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m thinking forward to the crossroads, what now?</td>
<td>Solo meant time deliberating around whether to stay at school for another few years or to leave after next year. Paul is both excited and confused by his career counsellor who has put him clearly into a career box. Paul intuitively knows he is capable of achieving at school, but would working be more exciting? “What shall I do from here” Paul asks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is great to spend time in my own company, I wasn’t really bored</td>
<td>Paul knew solo would mean lots of thinking time; something he was looking forward to. He actually appreciated time out from others, and relished the independence solo brought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo is a little uncertain. I think I was scared of something</td>
<td>There was a dark side of solo deep in Paul’s consciousness. He was uncertain about something, which seemed to be connected to the dark. He wasn’t actually scared of the dark, but it was the (potentially) sinister undertones of being awake and alone that stirred something primal within.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree climbing is important, no matter</td>
<td>Paul is conscientious and hard working, and an adventurer at heart. Climbing a tree near his solo site meant far more than breaking a solo rule – it was an opportunity to utilise his practical independence and to gain a different perspective on life. It wasn’t so much breaking the rules but</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
what the rules say      expanding horizons.

I love Tihoi for the physical challenges, and I am proud of my body and fitness

One of the appreciated by-products of the Tihoi experience has been gains in physical fitness and strength. Paul is quietly proud of his body - his developing musculature especially. Solo has provided Paul time to acknowledge he is fitter and healthier than he has ever been, and to recognise himself as one of the fitter guys at Tihoi.

I wonder how the other guys are doing?

There is a gentle and considered side to Paul. The challenges of the weather on solo were very real, and while Paul coped well his mind regularly shifted to consider how his class mates might be coping.

OK, so I can write. Just don’t tell the Teachers

A practical intelligence surrounds Paul. He is not one to stand out in the crowd, and this includes his academics. Writing is something Paul has come to enjoy while at Tihoi, though solo did not enthuse any significant writing endeavour. That said, he is in no hurry to exhibit his developing writing expertise via his journal or letter writing.

I like this place, Tihoi

There is a familial comfort at Tihoi that Paul recognises. He has loved the challenges and experiences, and schoolwork has been more than tolerable when situated in the bush environment. Paul is deeply connected to Tihoi the place, and his solo reflections have been a celebration of his time there. Re-reading his journal has been a wonderful catalyst for Paul to reflect upon life at Tihoi, and to smile at his achievements.
Zach’s Lived Solo Experience

**Introducing Zach (3rd person)**

His six hour solo was a sleepy encounter for Zach; an opportunity to relax in the presence of his own company and to partially recover from what was a busy first term at Tihoi. Ever the conscientious student, Zach dedicated himself to crafting a quality shelter and to working on some of the written tasks set for the solo. But it was catching up on sleep that made the six hour solo memorable. Zach was by his own admission pretty exhausted really and despite not thinking he would need any sleep between 3pm and 9pm he did drop off unexpectedly and didn’t even eat anything for dinner. Despite the tiredness, the six hour solo did not prevent Zach thinking deeply about many and various things related to his Tihoi experience.

As somewhat of a mature thinker, the time spent furnishing his shelter and writing a letter to self provided Zach moments of introspection. *Yeah, I did a lot of thinking, especially when writing* was a response to my challenge that the six hour probably didn’t evoke much in the way of stimulating thought. It was a typical Zach response, reflecting his maturity, his energy and passion for life, his dedication to any task set at Tihoi, his competitive sporting background, and to his status as a high academically achieving student.

For Zach the six hour solo provided the first opportunity to be alone since first arriving at Tihoi almost two and a half months earlier. So while being quite apprehensive about solo, Zach was also looking forward to it in a weird sort of way. No stranger to enjoying his own company, Zach is the only child of two practicing doctors. Growing up meant lots of time in his bedroom; reading, studying, and mucking about on his own. Zach’s childhood was undoubtedly influenced by his ethnic background, thus minority status in New Zealand, and dealing with English as a second language. But his circumstances were no barrier to success, and Zach arrived to St. Paul’s as a high achiever on the sports field and in the classroom. It was his sporting and academic achievements during his eighteen months at St. Paul’s Collegiate School that provided Zach with the personal strength and confidence to manage the experiences that Tihoi presented. That competitiveness and focus has spilled over to all he puts his mind to,
and Zach has given 100 percent to everything at Tihoi. While Tihoi had not been a cruise at all, Zach had more than survived and had come to appreciate his opportunities. Zach is a deep thinker and an eloquent speaker and writer of English, despite it being his second language. In the classroom Zach is streamed in the top class for his year group and he humbly reports he is top or close to top of that class. His Tihoi journal is full of in-depth insights to his experiences, and there is a maturity of outlook in his words.

Zach is essentially a townie, having lived in a big city for much of his life. While he and his parents recently moved onto a lifestyle block close to the city of Hamilton, Zach remains a city boy. His immersion to the remoteness of Tihoi required for Zach a period of adjustment. But adjust he did and, while the demands and variety of Tihoi life have been both motivating and challenging, he has come to appreciate Tihoi the place and Tihoi the people. Some of his biggest challenges centred upon the sharing of his house with other students, whom Zach reflects have matured significantly through their communal experiences. His own maturation must surely have been in contrast to his real life away from Tihoi as an only child, yet he has been able to see beyond himself and to the growth of his peers.

Solo presents Zach with one of the more seriously challenging components of Tihoi, but like everything he has experienced thus far he holds openness to learning something. That said, his six-hour solo has given him insight to the mental challenges he shall face and he acknowledges the potential for scaring himself rather than something external scaring him. He reports that most students have specific strategies for coping with the mental aspects of solo, and his own involve spending time building a quality bivy, completing the required academic tasks, sleep, and maintaining inner control. The inner work Zach shares relate to his religion and spiritual practice. He is looking forward to time alone to meditate and to commune with his God. The social structure of everyday life at Tihoi, and particularly the collective nature of living in his house, had diminished Zach’s opportunities to practice and celebrate his religion. So Zach looks forward to time alone as a way of acknowledging his God while away from the gaze of his peers.
Zach’s solo: a synopsis (3rd person)

The greeting Tihoi Instructor Dan received from Zach immediately post-solo said it all: *Solo was fun, I really enjoyed it.* Zach’s time alone was profound and renewed his spirit in many ways. Mostly it was a time to relax and reflect; to celebrate all that Zach has achieved at Tihoi and in life thus far. It was also a chance to slow down in a special place after the routines and the go-go-go of Tihoi life. Zach did the things that he had planned on solo, such as building a good shelter, writing, sleeping, prayer and regular meditation. He also spent time singing and dancing with himself in the bush, and his sensing of joy and freedom with solitude came as a surprise. Indeed the whole experience of solo was a surprise, and that contrasted with the assumptions and apprehensions he had of solo before arriving to Tihoi some five months earlier.

It was the concept of just being in isolation and in nature that Zach so enjoyed, and he relished that nothing seemed to interfere with his time. Even the written tasks Tihoi had set were not a distraction. Rather they were embraced with Zach’s typical enthusiasm, and the result was a depth of insight that emerged from his reflective capabilities. Zach enjoyed time writing letters to his parents and also to himself. The letter to self he would read around his 21st birthday was not especially profound through his own eyes, in reference to the fact that he had not written anything about his future in it. Yet his letter spoke volumes to the sense and meaning Zach had made while on solo to the many and varied experiences Tihoi had provided him. Indeed all of his writing oozed of maturity and reflected a quality depth of thought. Zach is without doubt a deep thinker and capable of quality reflection upon experience. In that regard, his poem as crafted on solo speaks volumes...

*Going Solo / Alone with nature / Thinking by myself / Memories of the past / And aspirations for the future.*

*Alone with nature / In the beautiful bush / The green plants and shrubs / And the chirping birds.*

*Alone with nature / With a dodgy shelter / Saturated clothes / And barely any food.*

*Alone with nature / A time by myself / To learn and discover / Who I am.*
Thus solo was a period of reflective insight for Zach as he made the most of his time in isolation from other humans and where his inner reflective processes became prominent. As Reverend Peter had mentioned immediately prior to solo, Zach could not help but be influenced by his solo experience by virtue of his capacity to process that experience and others before in his life. It may well have been Zach’s religious affinity that had him listening closely and responding to Reverend Peter’s challenges, or his commitment to completing all of the tasks set, or his confidence in looking after himself that provided his reflective platform, or perhaps his need to say what he thought he should say about solo. Whatever combination of factors contributed, Zach demonstrated clarity and wisdom with respect to making sense and meaning from his solo and his other life experiences.

His religious upbringing provided Zach important tools for survival and happiness. Zach’s strategy for eliminating negativity was centred upon prayer, which he admits allowed negative thoughts to dissipate and assisted him remain positive and relaxed. He would regularly give thanks to his God and also pray before sleep so that he would not have a restless night or one full of fear. Zach did not anticipate encounters with pigs or other humans, but there were undertones to the nights in his mind that had the capacity to make solo a scarier experience than it actually was. Thus religion allowed those fears to dissipate, and Zach knew that God was there with him. His solo had a strong ritual presence, centred upon prayer and periods of meditation, so that Zach’s culture and religion gave his solo definite structure.

The naturalness and isolation of the solo space was important in terms of Zach’s religious ritual, providing important space away from others to focus on what was important. Birds, trees, and shrubs provided a non-judgemental backdrop, so that Zach was happy to truly be himself. The solo space was conducive to Zach dancing around his shelter and singing aloud old songs that would enter his consciousness. The trees and things around him became Zach’s friends. He took note of the little things that surrounded him, and was adamant that he would remember those things for twenty years or more. His solo space was indeed a special place.
### Table 10: Zach: Key Thematic Statements (1st person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme statement</th>
<th>Linguistic Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not my New Zealand family, but my family in India</td>
<td>Straight after Tihoi I’m visiting family in India. I guess that’s why my mind kept drifting ahead to the summer there and to seeing familiar faces and places. I can't wait to go back to India; solo gave me space to get excited about that next adventure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation on solo caused my mind to drift</td>
<td>I was thinking really random things that I have never thought of before. Like the names of my kids in the future, like what they will be like when they are old. Solo allows you to think about the past and to think about the future. Sometimes my thoughts were totally random.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was great just being in nature; just feeling so relaxed on my own</td>
<td>Some old songs just kept popping up in my head. I would sing out loud and I did some dancing in the bush. I can’t remember feeling so happy, so free, so relaxed at Tihoi as I did when the sun emerged and I was surrounded by bird song. Solo would be different in a stark room with no windows. I felt free surrounded by nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo made me more religious. I appreciated the time alone to be with God</td>
<td>I have missed opportunities for prayer and meditation at Tihoi, so being alone gave freedom to practice what was important. My solo was rich with meditation, and I prayed and gave thanks often. The prayers helped keep me happy and I was grateful for everything; even the rain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll bet in 20 years I’ll remember these things</td>
<td>The trees, birds, and glow worms became my friends. I really appreciated the nature at my spot, and I feel like I know the place deeply. I’ll remember my solo place, including all of the little things there, for a long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo allowed the space to focus on my challenges beyond Tihoi and the summer</td>
<td>Solo transplanted me into the future, and I dreamed of being a winner with my cricket and with my academic goals. I liked the fact that solo gave me the time to think ahead; to dream of doing well with everything in my life. I like setting goals for myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo rules were for obeying; there was no need to do anything</td>
<td>I was proud that I didn’t do anything I wasn’t meant to do on Solo. I didn’t need to break any rules, and that made solo more special. No, I took all of the challenges they gave me and I am happy with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
different. that. I can’t think how breaking any of the rules would have enhanced the solo actually

| I’ve been reflecting on life more than ever. It’s an isolation thing | I’m pleased I took my journal on solo because I read it over and over, as well as writing more stuff. Yeah I’m just so proud of all the things I’ve done at Tihoi and proud of my journal; reading it on solo has been great for remembering everything. |
Chapter 7, Results Part B: INTERPRETIVE SYNTHESIS

_There at the camp we had around us the elemental world of water and light, and earth and air. We felt the presences of the wild creatures, the river, the trees, the stars. Though we had our troubles we had them in perspective. The universe, as we could see any night, is unimaginably large and mostly dark. We knew we needed to be together more than we needed to be apart._

Wendell Berry, _Watchfulness_ (1998, p. 132)

I have described in chapter four the philosophical and methodological contributions the likes of Husserl and Heidegger have provided to phenomenological inquiry, and in chapter five I have laid out the inquiry framework. The previous chapter utilised that framework to capture the lived experiences of nine Tihoi soloists utilising van Manen’s (1997) lifeworld existentials as guides to phenomenological reflection. This chapter now provides a further interpretive description of those individual experiences, and synthesises the collective solo experience at Tihoi into a series of plausible insights worthy of deeper discussion.

Following van Manen (1997, 2002), the plausible insights presented in this chapter are designed to elucidate deeper aspects of the solo experience worthy of further analysis and critique. Plausible insights are represented as statements with a distinct border and are placed within the chapter in locations that best fit phenomenologically, though in reality each insight statement might well fit within multiple existential categories.

**Lived Other: Relationality**

As described earlier, _Lived Other (relationality)_ refers to the lived relationships we maintain with others within the spaces that we share (van Manen, 1997). At the heart of relationality lie the existential questions ‘What is important to me?’ and ‘Who / what do I want to be with?’ Both questions query and acknowledge the quality of connectedness we share with others in our interpersonal lives. Certainly for a solo participant being separated from other humans allows for the opportunity to examine the lived relationships that may exist or
have potential to exist with fellow humans. There is also the very real possibility of embracing body-world or body-place connections; recognising lived relations with other beings (whether living, inert, or secular) and thus potential for awe, wonder, connection, separation, mystery, and possibly spirituality.

One of the great paradoxes of the solo experiences for most adults is that time alone becomes an opportunity to connect more deeply with others (J. Barbour, 2004; Buchholz, 1999; Dowrick, 1997). Post solo interviews focussed initially upon what students did, felt, and thought about on solo and without doubt the Tihoi solo has provided students with the time and space to reflect upon their relationships and everyday appreciations of family, friends, and significant others. Most of the written tasks the students are encouraged by Tihoi staff to complete while on solo are around reflecting upon the Tihoi experience and the relevance of that wider experience to their everyday lives, yet reflecting upon others in their wider lives has been a significant component of the mental work that has occurred.

**Relationality: Family and Friends**

All nine participants spoke avidly of their family during post-solo interviews. This ranged from a nonchalant comment from Kerry that he thought about family *mostly when I write the letter yeah; the letter home* (written while on solo) (interview 2) to far more all-consuming thoughts and actions. For Bevan, solo meant serious homesickness and this was a surprise as it came almost at the end of the Tihoi experience: *I really thought of my family, I got more homesick than usual, because I wasn’t really homesick until then. Yeah* (interview 2). Prior to solo there had been little sadness at being away from home for Bevan, but solo brought lengthy times when he focussed upon his little brother and sister, his grandparents, and his dad. Bevan acknowledged being far more emotional on solo, and much of this related to being away from those to whom he felt closest. When prompted to discuss how the emotions arose, the writing of letters home was the biggest catalyst: *Oh just yeah, writing, because my little brother and my little sister had sent me a letter* (interview 2) and *it was solo that helped me understand how important family is to me* (interview 1).
For Aaron it was the hardship that brought reflections on what sort of things his family would be doing in the city: *Uhm, when times got hard uhm, I did think about it – friends and family... Yeah. I had thought about how they were doing compared to what I am doing right now* (interview 2). Brent similarly engaged in family thoughts during those periods when he was struggling most. On the negative stuff side of his forty-four hour timeline were the words *family tree* and this represented some journal writing around those people he felt closest to (family and friends at home). Those people he encapsulated in a heart shaped diagram within his journal. Of interest was that those reflections were a precursor to some terrifying thoughts around the potential impacts of death in the family: *I thought of about the fear of like losing family* (interview 2). Later those thoughts transpired into Brent ultimately returning to the centre (night two) to talk to someone about the death of his grandfather.

Zach, an only child, extended his thoughts to extended family overseas: *Um thinking about yeah a lot about family, not at home but in India, my family in India, like overseas, like most of my family is in India* (interview 2). Paul similarly extended his family thoughts to include his animal friends: *Yeah thought about brothers and my sister and all the animals at home too hey. Wondering what they [silence] my cat and my dog (were up to)* (interview 2).

As a boy who had been sent to St. Paul’s because things were not working out especially well at home, Martin spent a lot of time contemplating his Tihoi experience on solo. At interview he spoke of moving beyond the issues at home with his parents and the effect Tihoi has had: *I dunno, maybe I’ve got some more self control ... I’ve thought a lot about home and Mum and why things were getting to be a hassle and now I wanna do things better. Yeah I want to keep the changes* (interview 2).

Solo meant Alistair could not help but reflect upon an estranged relationship with his dad. Brought up by his mum and extended family, Alistair did not know his dad well and he so desired to connect with him. Complicating matters was that Alistair’s dad had been through Tihoi during the formative years as a St. Paul’s student, which was the first father-son Tihoi experience on record. Thus Alistair was perhaps the first boy at Tihoi to have had his dad really understand some of his experiences there and the connections that Alistair felt for the bush:
my grandad told me my dad came back to that bush after Tihoi and he loved it and I wrote a letter to my dad about the bush and my dad said he got shivers up his spine cause it reminded him (interview 1). Alistair knew that his letters were an opportunity to make his dad proud, and he wished to connect with his dad better. Tihoi was his great opportunity, and so on solo Alistair couldn’t help but reflect on his desire to build on his relationship with his dad: um I’ve had a few nights at my dad’s house just staying up talking cause we don’t um (silence)... I love my dad um I used to say when I was little I used to love my dad more than my mum but now I just know I need to know my dad a little better (interview 1).

There were also many appreciative comments around the efforts of parents at home in maintaining family life. The intensity of house life at Tihoi included making beds, cooking meals, tidying and cleaning, and minor maintenance tasks. Thus reflections on the Tihoi experience, as detailed in personal journal entries, included plans and motivations to do more when next home:

My ideas of life have changed, before I was so lazy, took everything for advantage, took my parents for advantage by doing no work, always wanting stuff, always complaining. At home I have three older brothers two loving parents all of it I take advantage of never do my fair share, receive but never give, I have to try harder even if it means compromising a few things, total happiness cannot be achieved without compromising (Kerry, journal entry, original spelling).

Martin took time to reflect upon his relationship with his parents and how he might operate in the future: I think about home heeps and think of ways to get along with my parents more and things I could do in my spear time (Journal entry, original spelling). Like Martin, Nigel reflects upon being a better person when next home: When I get home I am going to be a different person who is more mature and confident than before I left. I will make a difference at home which will be noticed by all of my family members (Nigel, Journal entry). Zach similarly reflects upon his journey towards self identity and the influence of the Tihoi experience: I have also learnt to look after myself and not let Mum and Dad do everything for me (Zach, journal entry).
**Relationality: Lost Ones and Dying Ones**

Three students, Brent, Zach, and Alistair, spent time reflecting upon close friends and family dealing with death and dying. Brent wrote extensively in his journal about death, and this was linked mostly to unresolved feelings of loss associated with his grandfather’s passing:

*Dear Grandad... well I am at Tihoi. It’s been over a year since you died. Your death was swift and painless. Only painful for those you loved. Why did you have to leave us? Even the soaking wetness that is my bivy is better than knowing you are gone... This is pain. Not the physical sort. Be with me tonight as I will probably cry myself to sleep (Journal entry, original spelling).*

Zach was more circumspect about his own grandfather’s death: *I was pretty sad when I was thinking about my grandfather but it wasn’t a low low sad, I spose it wasn’t that bad, I sort of tried to get over the fact that he died and that wasn’t too bad (interview 2).* Zach had known his grandfather well and he had also spent time grieving. His strong faith also meant Zach knew his grandfather had gone to a special place.

Reflection time saw Alistair contemplating the coming death of a good friend:

*Yeah well my best mate from Kaipara he is gonna die cause of clogged blood cells or something, even though he is this young he is getting um he is dying, and I feel like I should go out there and stay with him and ah ride or hunt with him do whatever he wants you know, I don’t wanna be down here when he dies (interview 1).*

Alistair was already plotting how he would spend his time post-Tihoi during the holidays, and his two most common thoughts on solo as disclosed at interview were: *my mate David and if he will live, and uhm hunting with my dad sometimes, that sort of stuff (interview 2).*

**Relationality: Nature is around me**

The notion of death was not confined to students’ thinking about humans. Kerry was surprised by the amount of dead matter surrounding him in the forest: *Once I noticed lots of dead stuff in the forest... It’s not all living... like dead fern, rotten wood on the ground.* (interview 2).
It was boredom that got Kerry thinking about his immediate natural surroundings, after he had set himself up and slept reasonably well the first night. Similarly Brent noted that: when I was bored I was looking around at the trees and stuff and I was just thinking, WOW, how small I am. Like just seeing the birds going around doing all their normal stuff (interview 2). Those insights into the lives of other biotic organisms such as birds were common once there was nothing much else to do, and perhaps best encapsulated by Alistair:

I put on my gumboots and went for a leak and then I started feeling um, like dizzy, like real weak, I didn’t wanna do anything so I just ah laid down outside and listened to everything and heard like a um Tui above me like I musta blocked out everything else and listened to it and that had its call and another one over in the distance had its call and um I realised there is a massive thing going on that I didn’t even realise (interview 2).

That massive thing Alistair referred to was nature and natural processes, coupled with the understanding that there were larger forces at work that rendered humans as less significant. His classes in science while at Tihoi: made me think a lot (on solo) about like how we are just nothing but a small creature on the planet (interview 1)... Like how humans think of themselves most of the time and if you think about the birds you got a big thing, like they are talking to themselves that sort of things (interview 2).

Alistair was quite taken by the large tree close to his solo site that helped him understand human impacts upon the immediate forest: Tuis were calling to each other. And quite a large Rimu sort of tree next to me, and I reckon the whole bush would have been filled with them and there would have been lots of bird life before it all got milled (interview 2).

Solo generally brought a heightened interest and awareness of nature; the seeds of which had been sown during the Tihoi experience. For Kerry that meant pride with differentiating bird calls: I can pick out the bird calls now... I used to think what was that? Is it a Tomtit? A Fantail? I can split them apart now (interview 2). For Nigel that meant being able to report on the variety of native birds with familiarity and pride: There were Wood Pigeons, Morepork... some Tuis, yeah some Tuis and Fantails and Tomtits (interview 2). Bevan was certain he heard a Kiwi calling at some point: once I heard a Kiwi; I think I heard a Kiwi (interview 2).
Aaron was the one student who really struggled with creating a decent shelter, and his time was full of either bivy repair work or attempting to catch up on serious sleep deprivation. Thus the birds and trees were just there; part of the solo backdrop: *Uhm, native birds and plants? Well while I was working I could see Fantail, I could see Totara trees, this tree that tree. And uhm [silence] (interview 2).* However, those were not learning moments for Aaron but were incidental to the exercise of solo, and he came to suggest that: *nature isn’t an encyclopaedia* (interview 2). The real work for Aaron was about survival.

For others the solo was a cathartic exercise that had them interacting and appreciating nature when typically they would not. Martin (interview 2) perhaps best articulates this when reflecting upon his tree climbing exploits:

> *On the last day when I climbed up (the tree) to watch the sunrise, like I could see all around all the trees and that, and how peaceful it was, I could just hear the birds and see the sun like just coming up over the clouds, yeah like it was real peaceful. I’d never seen that before, like thought about that. Yeah. Oh it’s a tree, who cares like something like that. But now, since I went up there and looked at everything I was like: whoa.*

Paul spend considerable time sitting and watching birds: *There was a big tree right across the road that the Kereru (wood pigeons) came and sat in and they just sat there in the sun yesterday; soaking up the sun and looking at me... when the sun died off they flew away* (interview 2)... *Maybe they were bored but they were just looking at me... anyway they were fat and probably good to eat* (interview 2). The presence of the Kereru led to thoughts of hunting and food, and Paul described at interview some of the thoughts he had considered on solo to creep up on the birds and kill them. In the end he didn’t wish to scare them away. They were a distraction from his second long day and provided something to focus on.

In his lengthy letter to his mum and dad Brent wrote: *I just saw some really cool looking parrot thing* (page 7) and during interview emerged the shared desire to communicate: 

> **JOHN:** You had a conversation with any of them (birds)? Or just heard them? **BRENT:** Yeah whistled to them. *Saw a couple of those parrot things* (interview 2). For Bevan the communication would ideally have been tactile: *I was just wishing I had one (a Kiwi) to look at or pat, like a little pet* (interview 2).
**Table 11, PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 1: Solo, Adolescents and Nature**

**PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: Solo, adolescents, and Nature:** The bush provides the backdrop for the Tihoi solo yet Kaplan & Kaplan (2002), amongst others, stress that adolescents are much less likely to engage with nature and natural processes than children or adults; that there is some disinterest with nature during adolescence that prohibits some authentic and deep connection of the soloist to their surroundings. Yet solo has potential to provide a slow ecological pedagogy for adolescent males, through the removal of technology and a de-emphasis of the performance aspects common to many outdoor education activities (Payne & Wattchow, 2008). The meeting of fundamental survival needs without additional challenges creates opportunity for boredom on solo through which breeds ecological interest and possibly insight (Walle, 1997). A counter thread is that solo may encourage a pathway for adventurous insight through non-conformity to solo rules, similarly facilitating adventurous insight and ecological connection. Thus the experiences of both boredom (constraint) and challenge (freedom) potentially contribute to adolescent male interest in nature on solo.

Brent, Bevan, Alistair and Kerry were not alone with their interest in the birds hanging out in or near their spot; indeed this was a common response to questions around what soloists did, saw, and thought about on solo. Birds provided a familiarity and a connectedness to the solo space that cannot be discounted. The movement of birds brought contrast to the relative stillness of solo, capturing attention and attuning thoughts to nature and natural processes. Birdsong also brought attractive sounds to disturb the silence of solo. Eight of the nine soloists acknowledged whistling in attempts to mimic the birds, thus communicate with those whom they shared their solo site.

**Relationality: Trees made the experience**

Interestingly the only student who did not attempt to communicate with birds (Aaron) wrote on his solo timeline: *crappy spot, no good trees.* While the absence of trees diminished the initial value Aaron placed upon his solo site, trees definitely made the solo experience for most others. For Paul there was exhilaration from holding onto the thin branches at the very
top of one tree and being swayed by the sometimes gusting wind. Trees provided Martin with some similar adventurous moments as he climbed as high as he could in as little time as possible before then sliding down again holding branches. As he described at interview: *I got to the very top of one fast as and I like slipped down, because the branches get thinner as they get up and I got to the very top and then I slipped down then I grabbed onto another branch and went down a bit. I did that over and over again and it was pretty cool* (interview 2).

Climbing trees was a counter to boredom for Martin and provided feelings of freedom for Paul. Martin later reflects on his state of non-solo-boredom during interview: *Oh I wasn’t really (bored), I was like just climbing trees the whole time, like yesterday morning really early like 5.30 and I like climbed right to the very top of a pine tree and watched the sunrise and looked all round and I could see (Mount) Ruapehu and everything* (interview 2).

According to Martin much of his daylight time on solo was spent climbing trees, but in the back of his mind solo was not something he freely chose: *No. It didn’t really (feel free). Because we had to do it, we had no choice...* (interview 2). When asked during interview “But what about when you were up there, climbing trees? Did you feel free, you could do anything you wanted?” Martin’s response was: *Yeah. Pretty much. But there’s still rules so you can’t really say that you’re real free* (interview 2).

For Paul, climbing trees was mostly: *piss around time... yeah do whatever you want time* (interview 2) and contributed to solo feeling free. After all of the activities at Tihoi, the routine, and the strict timetable, Paul felt great just doing nothing, being in charge of himself. He liked deciding what he was going to do and when. The tree climbing was a chance for Paul to be physically active rather than hanging out doing nothing.

Climbing trees was also a deliberate breaking of solo rules by both Martin and Paul, but it seemed clearly worth the risk, as Martin’s second interview attests (interview 2):

*INTERVIEWER: Were you safe? I mean a fall from a height like that would probably push your head through your butt.*
MARTIN: Yeah, well I thought about that. Yeah that Pine tree had heaps of branches, it hadn’t been like pruned or anything so there was heaps to stand on. I chose the one with the most branches, and it was also the tallest.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds great, good for you.

MARTIN: Yeah it was worth it. I didn’t really take any risks . . . except maybe right at the top it swayed a lot which was also cool.

INTERVIEWER: Well done, I’m pleased you got down OK.

Paul was similarly in control while climbing trees and he was conscious of the ‘no tree climb’ rule (interview 2): Yeah, but I was careful. The rules are only there for common sense... to make sure no one gets injured or killed. I didn’t... [pause] actually I was really safe, no one was there and so I had to climb it properly... [silence]. Then a little later came a further justification (interview 2): I just wanted to have a look around, not really breaking a rule, except the tree one maybe. I’ve been climbing trees all my life... [pause]... it’s good fun I’m good at it and don’t fall... it was fun to check the place out... [silence].

There were moments of epiphany for Martin high in the treetops:

on the last day when I climbed up to watch the sunrise, um like I could see all around, all the trees and that, and how peaceful it was. I could just hear the birds and see the sun like just coming up over the clouds and heaps of things and like it was real peaceful. I’d never seen that before like thought about that. Yeah. Oh it’s a tree, who cares, like, something like that. But now, since I went up there and looked at everything I was like: woa. Changed heaps hey, just the way I thought about it (interview 2).

_Relationality: Visits to other soloists_

Other rule breaking occurred. As Brent reported everyone broke that rule, inferring all soloists will have ventured further than their allotted five metre radius. Indeed all of the nine soloists in the study moved far further than Tihoi rules demanded. The attraction of pockets of sunshine when available was common, and students spent time photosynthesising: Um on the second day I did ‘cause on the day we were going to be picked up, like my site had very little sun and so I went and slept in the sun on the track (Zach, interview 1).
Hunger drove Aaron to visit a neighbour for food, though he had been having ongoing shelter problems throughout the first night and likely needed to view other shelters for ideas: *I had to go and visit my next person to ask him for some scroggin, I was so hungry then, especially because I lost all my sleeping stuff, couldn’t keep up so [silence]* (interview 2). Alistair also visited his neighbour to get additional food, Brent had gone to look at other shelters, and Martin needed more string for his shelter. So despite Tihoi staff circulating around solo sites and checking on students regularly, students preferred not to ask their leaders for assistance and instead had motives for connecting briefly with other soloists.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Brent, Martin, and Aaron all returned to the centre at some point during their experience, as they were the three students who shared that they had visited others during their solo. They sought human company. Alistair had also visited his neighbour and admitted that it was only his geographical distance from the centre that dulled his internal psychological struggle to return back.

For Nigel one of his goals pre-solo was not to disturb the experiences of other soloists by visiting them. On his six hour solo experience he had been visited twice by boys needing some company or contact, and during Nigel’s forty-four hour experience he had another brief visitor. Paul reported a visit from his neighbour who had a watch, thus was able to get an accurate gauge on the time. Both Paul and Nigel regarded boredom as the most likely reason why students would be wandering around visiting others. Others (Aaron, Kerry, Alistair and Bevan) reported boys yelling out to either voice extreme frustration or to make contact with their neighbours. At one point Aaron appreciated a burst of stag roaring around his solo neighbourhood. This roaring he regarded as more human than deer-oriented, and it made him laugh. He could not resist returning the calls and so engaged in the conversation, but acknowledged that the guys were likely just bored: *Yeah. I think too, people making deer calling noises I can tell that they’re bored* (interview 2).

**Relationality: Scary noises in the night**

The forty-four-hour timeline exercise allowed for students to record those moments that were somewhat emotionally laden and to place them onto a continuum of time that
represented their hours of solitude. Designed to facilitate later discussion, the timelines effectively captured emotional highs and lows, as well as those surprise moments when things occurred that were totally unexpected. Many of those surprises related to sounds and movement outside the bivy shelter and these occurred predominantly at night. The dark brought with it a silencing of the birdsong and a corresponding heightened awareness to other sounds. Lying in sleeping bags in states of half sleep the night sounds typically startled students, and allowed for minds to conjure images of scary things and of impending danger. Heart rates were easily elevated in the heart of darkness.

The solo bivy was something of a cocoon to the outside world at night, and the sleeping bag was a warm safe place. Collectively the bivy and bag provided a partially-permeable barrier to the outside world and so each soloist was more alone in the night that at other periods during their solo. The blanket of darkness forced the students to focus their auditory acuity more so than when there was a visual perspective with things to observe and reflect upon. Thus for all soloists the night represented some of the hardest moments of their experience, and the nights tended to drag on in terms of time.

Sleep was a premeditated strategy for dealing with the potential anxiety associated with the nights, as Aaron describes: *Because you’ll only get scared if you go out and look around and see stuff, that way you’ll get worried. Day time is what really matters I reckon. Night time is resting* (interview 1). Paul shares a similar strategy for dealing with his apprehensions:

*What am I scared of ah... [silence] oh nothing really, maybe just the pigs and that... [silence] maybe the sounds at night might be weird and that... [silence]... na I won’t get freaked, maybe a little bit... [silence]... if I make a good bivy I’ll just sleep through the night (interview 1).*

For Alistair he knew that the hardest aspect of solo would be dealing with his own mind, and so he made a deliberate decision to be placed a long way from the Centre where there would be less temptation to return early:

*The little story about the Tihoi slasher got me freaked out and so I picked to go in the deer paddocks cause I just wanna fight it. Cause I know there is nothing there but I’m still getting scared so I just wanted to fight it (Alistair, interview 1).*
Interpretation of timelines via interview highlighted that night one on solo was far less stressful than night two. While this seems counter-intuitive, night one was very wet and so the sounds of drips from the surrounding trees onto the ground and onto plastic bivy sheets likely hid other sounds. As Martin describes (interview 2): *(T)he rain on my bivy dulled out all the other sounds on the first night... meant I didn’t hear any sounds that I thought might scare me.*

The boys were also tired and most slept reasonably well that first night. Indeed for those soloists who managed to create a decent shelter, night one allowed for some long periods of sleep with timelines estimating around five hours on average. Aaron was the key exception and his estimate of sleep time for night one was: *probably less than two hours and even then I was just so totally soaking wet that my bivy was like wrecked to oblivion and my sleeping bag totally sopping* (interview 2). Other students, especially Brent, Martin, and Kerry, struggled with both of the nights and tended to sleep more in the daytime.

Night two was brutally cold, with clear skies and a hard frost that saw bivys that were on the edge of the bush coated with white rime. Yet not one of the students reported issues with the cold; it was like they had been well acclimatised to it at Tihoi and had good sleeping bags with them. However, in the middle of the darkness that second night the wind blew into a rage, creating new sounds outside the bivy. For Martin the wind sounds conjured images in his mind, to the point where he couldn’t stand it anymore:

*No it was pretty windy out there and the wind kept me up [silence] my bivy was going like kkkkkkkkkk in the wind [silence]. Yeah, it was like rustling, what the hell is that, then it was getting louder and yeah, I thought buggar this and yeah I got outa there (Martin, interview 2).*

**Relationality: The bush, it’s scary**

The apprehension and uncertainty of night noises conjured imaginations of unknown creatures (both human and non-human) outside the bivy. Despite the New Zealand bush being benign with respect to natural predators for humans, the sounds of the night created fleeting moments of fear and conjured images that just plain freaked students out. As Martin described (interview 2): *the second night I like was scared shitless. There was a pig outside my bivy at one time and I’m like outa there.* Interestingly one Tihoi staff member identified pig hoof-
marks reasonably close to Martin’s shelter when he was collected on the last morning, and so Martin’s apprehension or fear of being attacked by a wild pig was based on an accurate interpretation of noises close by.

Despite a recent poisoning programme for creatures regarded as a serious threat to local fauna and birdlife, there existed other living biota in the solo area and thus more nocturnal sounds than some of the soloists had predicted. For some students there was an acceptance of those night sounds, while for others it became an issue. With the cold, wet conditions and the presence of food, it is likely that Rats and Opossums were attracted to the bivy sites. However, it was only Alistair who was aware of rats through firsthand experience: and um it was just about dark so I went um back into my bivy and left my food next to my face and when I woke up there was a rat eating my food right in front of me (interview 1).

Despite these scary experiences, there were many other perceptual moments that were unable to be validated visually but which created auditory anxiety. For Alistair the aliveness of the bush was disturbing (interview 1):

*yeep every direction around me in the trees, um every sound, every little movement and stuff triggers me... ...you start getting used to it but then something louder might happen and so you listen and then it’s nothing.*

For Brent solo forced him to just lie there and think, rather than being able to be distracted (interview 2) and that resulted in him becoming more emotional than usual (interview 2). It was the noises just outside his bivy that were the most freaky: *like crunching of twigs and leaves making me think I was about to be attacked* (interview 2). Later at interview Brent was unable to determine if the night noises he had heard were real or imagined; whether there might actually have been someone or something outside his bivy or if the noises had been about his mind playing tricks.

Nigel later shared his thoughts on the mind games that the other soloists had to endure (interview 2): *Oh they say that they’re scared, but there’s actually nothing to be scared of in the bush, but they’re scared anyway. They just freak themselves out.* For Martin it was his imagination that he was most concerned with: *Yeah. Like my imagination plays tricks. Like if I*
was outside in the dark by myself things would change. Like trees would turn into something else and . . . so I’d just try and close my eyes [Martin interview 1]. In the immediate post-solo interview with Paul he shared of his experiences with fear, and how he rationalised it:

*On the first night I was pretty scared for a little while, but then I was fine after that. There was nothing.... [silence]*

INTERVIEWER: Nothing? And what were you scared of on the first night?

PAUL: I don’t know, to be honest, hey. Just noises in the bush. That was all. But they didn’t harm me after that . . . it doesn’t matter what it is. It’s not going to eat me (Paul: interview 2).

On reflection Brent shared some of the deeper life-related fears that emerged for him during solo:

I really spent a lot of time thinking about my fears. It wasn’t about the bush so much, or the strangers out there, or even the guys beating me up on solo. It was more scary. I spent a long time thinking about what I would do if my parents died; how I would cope, what I would do (Brent, interview 2).

**Relationality: God and Religion**

One of the preambles to the solo experience was a message from the St. Paul’s School Chaplain. He had made a special trip to Tihoi that morning and, in his inspirational manner, placed the solo clearly within a religious framework. There were stories of Jesus surviving alone for forty days and nights, a woman dedicating her time to God by meditating in a cave for twelve years, and of North American Indian youth embracing solo-fasts as part of a vision quest and rite-of-passage. The boys were encouraged to *use your time wisely* on a number of occasions, and there was explicit reference to the potential for gleaning *spiritual voices and insights* from solo. Prayer was a solo activity that some students’ acknowledged, though the prayer was not necessarily from a deep religious conviction.

When I first spoke with Zach immediately post-solo he shared that a lot of his time was spent with singing, prayer, and meditation. For Zach his eastern religion was a positive force in his life prior to the Tihoi experience, providing him a platform for connecting with his God during solo. When asked if he prayed more during solo than normally, Zach’s response was Oh
definitely, definitely and he went on to state that *isolation in nature has accentuated my religion* (interview 2).

Religious practice provided Zach a structure to his solo, and he was able to catch up on prayer and meditation:

*um just keep my mind off other things and cause it was a good time to do that, cause like most of Tihoi being a religious person it was kind of hard to pray in the house and stuff (silence) it was a really good time just to catch up and to like set a pattern that I would do like 3 times a day or so (interview 2).*

For Zach it was solo more than any other Tihoi experience that presented the freedom and opportunity to practice things most important to him without distraction, as he reports:

*it sort of relaxed me down a lot, it was quite nice being alone and not being disturbed and I could um I could talk I could do that without hearing anything any voices or people talking and stuff, just the birds and stuff which was very special (interview 2).*

For Zach his insignificance while surrounded by nature was further validation of the power of his God. Bevan had also been brought up with religion, though following more western approaches as promoted by his grandparents. He prayed regularly on solo and this prefaced eating his snacks as a way of giving thanks: *Yeah. Just to say thanks for the food, not for asking for help or anything* (interview 2). Bevan also thought about the words of the Chaplain but struggled to make a connection between the solo stories of others and his own solo: *I thought about it, but I didn’t really relate to it* (interview 2).

Whilst Zach accentuated his religion on solo and Bevan gave thanks, four soloists neither thought about God or things religious nor did they engage in prayer. For Alistair solo assisted reinforce his non-belief and he saw little value in placing faith in God:

*Bollocks, that’s what I think about God or Jesus or Muslim or whatever all those religions are is cause ah if you did get lost in the bush or whatever and you did get lost and had no shelter and you start praying and I think it was made up so that we had something to rely on or think that we had someone who watching over us... Um, I just don’t even believe that even one little bit (interview 1).*
The remaining three soloists (Kerry, Aaron, and Martin) did some praying despite not being religiously inclined. For Kerry that meant a desperate request for a change in the weather:

*That day and night it was raining I was thinking “oh please let it stop. Can you please get it to stop raining?” I’m not really religious, but it was a request... the influence of St. Paul’s I guess (interview 2).*

Aaron had a similar request via prayer: *I just prayed to God, not that I’m religious or anything but... I only prayed that the weather would get better, but that didn’t help* (interview 2). Then a few moments later, in humour, came the inference of his Tihoi Co-Director as a representative of God: *After praying and it didn’t get better I knew that Mr. F was behind our shitty weather* (interview 2).

As Brent retreated back to the centre mid-solo his mind flashed briefly to what a religious person might do in similar circumstances: *I sort of thought would they pray to God or something like that?* (interview 2). Martin left his religious thoughts to the very end of solo, when he gave thanks via a quick prayer for his safety: *Just thanking (God) for the time that I was at the end, the time that I had, and like keeping me safe and that* (interview 2).

**Relationality: Other students**

Earlier Martin had also expressed his thanks to God for keeping the other soloists safe, for he felt solo was by far the scariest of the outdoor experiences at Tihoi: *Yup (I prayed for) keeping me safe and everyone else safe. Because when they came to pick me up they said that everyone was sweet* (interview 2). There was a genuine interest in the experiences of others on solo, and a fascination with any boys who had decided to return to the centre. Kerry perhaps best described this at interview:

*I saw some of the guys walking back down the track, every now and then, and I wonder if they are pulling out... ... yeah I hoped that he got a beating from the weather that he can’t succeed* (interview 2).
Martin similarly wondered how others were doing. At one point he wondered if any boys would break rules, and a short time later he had his answer: *one of them did, I knew he would. I knew he would be really bored and like he’s a chatty guy* (interview 2).

Two students also pondered future Tihoi students visiting their solo site. For Zach he was concerned that there would be little evidence of him being there, for he wished any future student to have a similar nature-experience to his own. Bevan had a different take on others visiting ‘his place’, and carving his initials in a tree meant that others after him would be aware of his presence:

> Oh it stopped the boredom for awhile, sort of like tagging my patch [silence]. Yeah, it was a cool spot, I uhm liked it there, thought I’d let Tihoi guys on forty-four hour know someone had been there before [silence] (interview 2).

Deeper reflections on others at Tihoi surfaced during solo, and journal reading and writing was the catalyst. Alistair wrote with eloquence and honesty in his solo journal (albeit a day after his solo had finished) about something he had thought a lot about during his time alone:

> At Tihoi I’ve had a few friends I’ve been a total arsehole to, they help me but I don’t help them in return. The person I admire the most I hassled and hassled him so much that if it was me being hassled I would probably have committed suicide but he helped me sometimes, even after I’d been hassling him. Up until the first day of solo I would have hassled him but now I have realised that he is the best person I’ve ever met (Alistair, Journal entry).

### Lived Space - Lived Place: Spatiality

Notions of place and space infer a geographical orientation, yet those concepts can be interpreted much more broadly on deeper analysis. The key epistemological question related to space or place is ‘where do I belong... is it here?’ Such a question infers reflections beyond the solo geographical space. They include feelings, conjured emotions, and the atmosphere of the built space that is the solo shelter as well as the natural dimensions of the immediate environs. Van Manen (1997) encourages reflections of other places and spaces that might exist
in lived consciousness, and for the Tihoi solo this may include reflections on places and spaces related to home with family, reflections specifically related to Tihoi memories and experiences, and projections of future places and activities in those places. Thus space in relation to the solo experience has potential to discuss issues and ideas well beyond that of the geographical space that is the solo site.

**Spatiality: Choice and Freedom**

For most soloists the choice to select a solo location was an opportunity to return to the site of their six hour solo, though there were exceptions. There was a familiarity to those places, born not only from brief residence during the six-hour solo experience but also an emerging feeling of knowing the Tihoi bush. Some of the experiential insights emerging from the return-to-site involved a known inventory of their space. That is, students had insights to the physical characteristics of their solo spot, including material assets in relation to shelter building as well as the less-material elements associated with the atmosphere of the place. There was a familiarity to those spaces. The space that was solo further allowed for reflections and considerations of others in a diversity of other places. For some that meant contemplating activities in other places and particularly endeavours that to them represented freedom from the constraints of Tihoi. Solo presented glimpses of freedom.

Paul was pleased for the opportunity to be alone from the other guys and the routines of Tihoi. He liked the freedom from the annoyance that came with constantly being surrounded by his house mates and class mates. *(I)* it was a great time, I enjoyed it…. silence was how Paul referred to his experience when interviewed immediately afterward (interview 2) and then further thoughts: *um… I was doing OK, on my own…[pause]… pretty cruisy time really… just hanging out nothing to do except have…[pause]… just a good time…* silence (interview 2).

Aaron struggled with meeting his basic needs of warmth and shelter, and solo was definitely not free time. It felt like ah… probably nearly torture clinic I reckon (interview 2). In contrast, for Paul (interview 2) solo felt like free time: *Uhm do whatever you want time.* Solo presented Paul a welcome respite from both the routines of Tihoi and other students. He was
especially pleased to be away from the other guys and (the routines of) Tihoi, getting away from the annoyance of... (silence) (interview 2).

There was solace in returning to the site of the six hour solo for most soloists. Zach observed the moon on the second night, had glow-worms in the bank next to his bivy, and he followed the sun during the day; activities he had anticipated from his six hour solo which he looked forward to and also which connected him to that place in a meaningful way: *Well it was a pretty special sort of place, yeah, it was quite sad really to leave it cause it was quite a nice place* (interview 2).

Zach and Paul were perhaps the most deeply connected soloists to Tihoi-the-place, and solo reflections were for the most part a celebration of time spent on location. Re-reading his journal was a special catalyst for Paul to reflect upon life at Tihoi, and to smile at his achievements. Zach had similar positive feelings

*Spatiality: Someone’s out there; someone’s watching me*

To the north of the Tihoi complex is the Pa site; once a stronghold and a former dwelling place for local Māori. For Alistair the Pa on the hill remained alive with human history. It was not just on solo that he had glanced to the hill and seen human form and movement. He knew he was being watched from afar (interview 1) while at Tihoi, and that he was invading someone’s space (interview 1) on solo. Scarier still was the form of the trees adjacent to his solo spot, which personified into human form out of the corner of his eye. Like *them trees in Lord of the Rings* (interview 1) the forest was a living and breathing organism for Alistair and that scared him to the point where he just wanted to fight the stupid thing (interview 1). The first half an hour or so for Alistair was especially unsettling, and he knew he was being watched. He didn’t like it much; indeed he had to keep telling himself to focus and to commence building his bivy shelter. Alistair struggled to focus as the bush was so alive and all consuming. Unfortunately Alistair’s first hour or so on solo was quite debilitating and he struggled to construct a decent shelter despite demonstrating good common sense and practical capabilities earlier in the programme.
It was not only Alistair that struggled early on psychologically with the aliveness of the bush. Both Brent and Aaron saw things that they just couldn’t explain, and they were not easy matters to deal with. For Aaron it was the appearance of a glowing light resembling a human hand inside his shelter that was deeply troubling: *once you start seeing things moving around – like looks like a hand or something then you start getting an ill feeling* (interview 1). Brent became aware of his newly constructed bivy being visited by the spirit of his recently deceased Grandfather, and so his solo place was haunted. Nightfall should have brought on sleep, but what emerged was a deep seated fear of the dark and of his Grandfathers’ spirit watching over him. Brent knew he was being watched; that the Tihoi staff had a close eye on all of the soloists. Yet it was only a matter of hours before the fear and the tears led to Brent retreating back to the Centre. A letter written later to Mum and Dad reported: *That bivy became like a coffin with his spirit inside. I couldn’t go back.*

For Martin it was the uncertainty of what would transpire that meant (interview 1): *there was nothing as scary as solo... scarier than rock climbing, kayaking and caving.* The scare appeared mostly apprehension, and on solo was endured psychologically more-so than physically. As Martin details, the lived fable of the Tihoi Slasher was at least partly responsible: *I still think of the slasher, the Tihoi slasher, and all the scary stories I’ve heard hey* (interview 2). Passed down from intake to intake, the slasher story intimates a crazy deranged killer living in the Tihoi bush armed with a large machete. For Kerry the slasher was *the big thing that’s got people worried about Tihoi solo* (interview 2), and that *it’s only when I am by myself that I think about it (the slasher)* (interview 2). The slasher is a thread that is repeated by all nine of the participants of the study. Utilised perhaps as an attempt to accentuate the pre-solo perceptions of risk or fear, the Tihoi staff appear responsible for passing on the slasher story from intake to intake. For Alistair, the sharing of the slasher story by Mr. Furminger was: *to see how strong minded you are probably* (interview 1).

The slasher creates a lived stranger danger reality. Alistair, Brent, Martin, Zach, and Kerry all explicitly report pre-solo on their concerns of random people visiting them. For Brent the fear was of *some random hunter coming up and shooting me* (interview 1), and for Martin it was *just people; just random people walking around the bush* (interview 1). For Alistair was the
ongoing reality in his mind that there were people in the bush watching him. The bush remained alive for Alistair on solo and he was sure he was in someone else’s patch; like the bush had a spirit of its own (interview 1) and the slasher, he’s still living off the bush here (interview 1). On solo the stranger-danger reality came true for Kerry: I woke up and there was this random guy he just sorta walks down in his gumboots, just some random hunter, trying to find his way back to some track at the lagoon (interview 1).

For Brent, who had endured extensive bullying earlier in the intake, solo meant an opportunity for his perpetrators to potentially have one more shot at him. He remained conscious of the possibility of a visit from one or more Tihoi students throughout his time alone; indeed he expected it. His solo journal listed the six (boys) I hate most at Tihoi (p. 4). One of those peers would be out to get Brent on solo; he knew it, and he feared it. Apprehension for Brent included the potential of danger from within, and he felt he was being watched by others. The biggest risk was failing in front of his peers; of not completing the solo, which would be grounds for getting a hard time again. When Brent felt he could take no more, and he returned to the Centre to talk to someone, it was under the cover of darkness in the hope that he would not been seen. Then that fear of being seen, and thus later chastised by others, emerged again as he returned to his solo site at dawn on day two: yeah that was the thing I thought about; that was just being labelled a ‘woos’. That was the thing I was worried about (interview 2). For Brent his bullying experiences created an invisible layer of apprehension on solo that existed whether the threat was perceived or real. He lived under the panoptic gaze of his peers, even though in reality they were not there or seriously watching him.

Others quietly hoped that there would be guys who would not cope well on solo and would give in. Kerry mentioned seeing: some of the guys walking back down the track every now and then, and I wondered if they were pulling out (of solo) (interview 2). He followed that comment... yeah I hoped that he got a beating from the weather; that he can’t succeed (interview 2). Paul was a little more sensitive of the experiences of others, yet the sentiment was clearly if others did not cope so well on solo that it would be a better look for those that
did... I was thinking what the other guys might be going through... ...if they had to return to Tihoi or not. I was pretty sure some would, hey (interview 2).

**Table 12, PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 2: Solo as fear, apprehension and uncertainty**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: Whilst the academic literature is consistently upbeat about the values, qualities and outcomes of nature-based solitude experiences, the adolescent solo seems a far more challenging and scary proposition than is widely reported. Solo for adolescent males can be an experience laced with ongoing apprehension and fear. Kohak (1984) speaks of fearing solitude no less than fearing the darkness of night, and the Tihoi solo is a fearful endeavour accentuated by the onset of the night. The darkness of night penetrates the soul and adolescent male soloists attempt to banish the night with sleep. Nights heighten apprehension and uncertainty when one is alone, and the mind remains active which may not always be in the best interests of the soloist.</th>
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**Spatiality: My place**

One of the etymological roots of the word *ecology* is (Greek) *oikos*, translated to house, dwelling place, or location. Tihoi soloists referred to their bivy site regularly, being able to describe in detail the features of their place in natural terms as well as the specific design and features of their bivy. Pride emerged from most soloists when sharing of their bivy construction efforts, and that overall their shelter had been effective in some challenging weather. These ‘pride’ reflections acknowledged a deep connection to place in terms of an ownership, with ‘my’ as a standard descriptor. This ownership was despite the knowledge that Tihoi students had likely been to their solo spot before. Indeed, most of the soloists felt like their solo spot was theirs. As Alistair states (interview 2): *I couldn’t say ‘at home’ but uhm, pretty close to it*. Bevan similarly comments: *Yeah, it was a cool spot, I uhm liked it there* (interview 2).

Such was the feeling of ownership for Bevan that he carved deeply into a tree, using a knife he brought along for the purposes of making spears and whittling wood to pass the time
away. As Bevan shares, *Oh it stopped the boredom for awhile, sort of like tagging my patch. I thought I’d let Tihoi guys on 44 hour know someone had been there before* (interview 2). There were mixed feelings of pride and sorrow for Bevan associated with the tree tagging; he was really pleased he had done it in terms of making his mark but somewhat sad in terms of the consequences that evolved for him.

For Zach, feeling at home meant making the most of every part of the day, and maximising the full use of his site:

*I had some nice places where I could sit in the morning I would sit in a place by the track where the sun comes in the morning sort of and I’d put my towel down and my raincoat down and do stuff and I dunno why I did that, maybe to get maximum sunlight and in the evening I’d sit on the other side of my bivy and get the evening sun* (interview 2).

In contrast, Brent did not feel a connection to his place. In post-interview his negative memories of his solo place were obvious. As discussed previously, the spirit of his grandfather had inhabited his bivy. He could not feel at home there. Similar sentiments existed for Aaron, who also had a supernatural experience with the glowing forearm entering his shelter. That definitely spooked him and, combined with the reality his shelter was essentially dysfunctional, destroyed most of the tangible connections Aaron felt with his solo place.

Paul was comfortable in his solo place and this facilitated time thinking about his home back on the farm and all of the associated animals, other family members and his motorbike. Zach was similarly able to project forward to the coming summer in India, to his family places there and to long distant close relatives.

**Spatiality: Trees made the experience**

As described in terms of relationality, trees associated with solo were important to all bar one soloist. For Aaron the comment, *crappy spot, no good trees*, on his timeline was psychologically more than just an acknowledgement of the lack of quality materials for shelter construction. Rather he knew that trees would have somehow enhanced his experience.
For both Martin and Paul, the opportunity to self-challenge with climbing trees was significant. Both had fun climbing, both felt in control, and to a certain degree both felt free. For Martin especially there was merit and awe in extending his solo space visually by climbing high and obtaining a new perspective. The challenge of climbing up as fast as possible before slipping down, while retaining control, was cathartic. As Martin describes, *Yeah it was pretty scary when I was doing that because it was windy and the whole trunk was shaking; it was pretty cool I was holding on. I was just hanging on* (interview 2). So too was the opportunity to embrace nature on nature’s terms while high in the tree. Martin identified with his surroundings through challenging himself; the breaking of the tree climbing rule was a significant opportunity for self-growth.

Alistair, the guy so totally scared by the human shapes of the trees in the bush during his six hour solo, was pleased to just hang out in the forest a second time alone. While the trees remained personified, they no longer were so scary on solo. Alistair was a lot more comfortable in his place now surrounded by the trees.

**Lived time: Temporality**

*Lived time* (*temporality*) infers a temporal quality of being in the world that is perceived in a subjective sense and not necessarily ‘clock’ time (van Manen, 1997). The central existential question “who am I in relation to time?” might mean for the solo participant the feelings associated with a long dark night, or the processes involved with tuning into the daily cycles of nature, or recollections about people and places in other ‘times’, or the potential of time dragging with boredom. Brent’s ‘time’ poem crafted on solo (Journal, spelling as original) perhaps best describes how time percolates into the consciousness:

**Time**

*Time is the chains which enslave us all*  
*It is a drug once you take it your colored*  
*Time stresses you out, and worries the mind*  
*We live and die by time*  
*Without it we seem lost*
Time, time, what’s the time?

Temporality: Is a watch important?

Solo presents a significant chunk of time when students are expected to make decisions about their own timetable, which starkly contrasts with the balance of the programme. As Martin describes Tihoi life as: *It’s real busy, no down time... it’s too formal sort of. Yeah ...* (interview 1) and then just forty-four hours on your own, no stuff you have to do (interview 1). Brent describes the Tihoi programme, including the lead up to solo, has having a clock-oriented quality: *If something is 15 minutes late it just destroys the whole timetable* (interview 1). Similar sentiments are shared by Kerry: *Cause here at Tihoi like everything is like clockwork, you gotta be at some place at 7, then somewhere else at 7.30. You get told once at the start of the day and gotta be there and sorted* (interview 1). Without other technology to indicate time, a watch is essential day-to-day Tihoi equipment. Yet for solo the expectation, via Tihoi rules, is that watches are left at home. The rationale, according to Co-Director Christine Furminger (interview 1), is that the opportunity allows for students to tune into nature better through aligning themselves with day and night, sunrises and sunsets.

Prior to his solo, Paul thought the scariest aspect of his time alone would be: *waking up in the middle of the night and we won’t have our watches so we don’t know what time it is* (interview 1). When another student who had a watch (Joel) visited Paul on day two he was able to tell Paul the exact time, and that was comforting. It also meant that when asked to guess the time by a Tihoi staff member a few hours later Paul was able to give an informed response: *Chris [Tihoi] asked me [what the time was] when he came up and checked and I guessed it right and it was 4.30. And it was one minute off. I guessed pretty spot on... ...the sun seemed to be dropping over the hills so I thought*... (Paul, interview 2). It seemed that a watch had assisted Paul attune to some natural rhythm, and allay some of his earlier fears, while also portraying the impression to Tihoi staff that he was far more attuned to the cycles of nature than he really was.
A different reality emerged for Nigel. He found himself singing the song *what’s the time Mr Wolf, what’s the time* (interview 2), which he thought came from the film *Once Were Warriors*. As Nigel reported at interview, while he wasn’t really worried about what the time was he just didn’t know: *I thought it was about ten o’clock in the morning and Jean* (Tihoi staff) *came round and she said ‘goodnight’ so it was about five or six* (Nigel, interview 2). In his letter to his parents, Brent wrote: *I have absolutely no grasp of time*. Indeed Brent was impacted far more deeply than all of his fellow soloists by issues associated with time. As his solo poem articulated, Brent viewed time as a chain that constrains us, as a drug that colours us, something that stresses us out, something that worries the mind, and that we are essentially lost when we are unsure of the time.

As far as Kerry was concerned, not knowing the chronological time on solo was always going to be an issue for him. He had planned to sneak a watch onto solo as: *when you don’t have a watch you sorta lost really* (interview 1). So take a watch he did. Kerry was not alone, as Alistair also had a watch in his pack and regularly consulted it. When asked if he was pleased he took a watch, Alistair’s response was: *Yeah definitely, I can’t know exactly when the sun goes down and comes up but then I can’t go like 1, 2, 3 like that* (interview 2). Knowing the time was important, and the dissonance created by not having a watch did impact most student experiences.

Creative strategies were employed to counter both boredom and the absence of a watch. Martin (interview 2): *I built a sun dial because we weren’t allowed watches. I also made a rake out of little sticks and with baling twine… … just to waste time*. Bevan left his watch behind and: *I tried to guess by the sun, but I couldn’t really* (Bevan interview 2). Brent similarly struggled without a watch: *whenever I’m not wearing a watch I just keep glancing there [points to wrist], and so it’s actually quite hard because you lose your sense of time. And it’s just – I sort of had to tell a wee bit by the sun* (Brent interview 2). When Brent was asked why he thought Tihoi ensured students did not have watches on solo his response was technologically centred rather than the ecological intent of the initiative: *Uhm, so you’re not thinking about time and I think it has something to do with – because like some watches have got stop watches and stuff and you play around with them* (Brent, interview 2).
Temporality: The curse of time

For Brent the lack of a watch: \textit{percolated into my psych, and time became a curse that stressed me out and worried my mind} (Brent, Tihoi Journal). As he reported later in his journal: \textit{the world slowed right down on solo}. Calculations scribbled in Brent’s solo journal were attempts at measuring time, by the hour, minute and second. On his solo timeline Brent wrote: \textit{Time is merely a curse which keeps us alive}. His poem, other details in his journal, and a sixteen page letter home were attempts by Brent to create something of a writing record on solo, and underneath that was Brent’s strategy and hope that he would be engaged enough to allow for time to pass quickly. He was deeply scared that his mind would take him places he didn’t wish to go, and as he journeyed there his letter writing especially became an expression of his mind as it engaged with many of the issues he had been internally grappling with.

Brent’s issue coping with time were connected to fears of abandonment. During his six-hour solo experience he thought he had been truly left behind on his own: \textit{I think for the last hour I stood by this mailbox getting a bit worried because we didn’t have watches – so I was thinking – because it was getting quite dark and I was thinking: maybe they should have come} (interview 1). Aaron suffered similarly on his six hour experience: \textit{You have no idea how long you’ve been there. You’re not aware of the time} (interview 1) \textit{but you don’t have a watch to know about it. You just stay there and try and wait for them to come and get you} (interview 1).

Aaron also suffered through his longer solo with feelings of abandonment. His second interview highlighted how his six hour solo played on his mind: \textit{Of course I was scared of being on my own and being lost or left behind like last time [silence] um I didn’t like being awake all night that made me mad like hell [silence]} (interview 2). Despite regular checks and re-supply of food and equipment, Aaron’s mind kept telling him he was lost and alone. They were dreadful thoughts, especially for an International student who had spent most of his life in the city.

Temporality: Loneliness or boredom?

The words that Bevan used to describe his solo when we met immediately afterwards were: \textit{probably a lonely time, kinda} (interview 2). Yet the lack of action of solo meant he was
more bored than lonely and he struggled entertaining himself at times. Writing was a strategy for avoiding boredom: *Yeah. I wrote my letter to myself and also written it to the family… I got quite bored hey* (interview 2). It was the state of boredom that Bevan was so keen to avoid pre-solo. The premeditated decision to bring in his knife was an attempt to rid his solo of possible boredom, but the boredom got to him and he carved his initials into the tree near his bivy.

Brent’s first attempt to define boredom at interview was the word *loneliness*, and then *isolation*, then *you think about time*. Yeah *loneliness for me came out of boredom* (interview 2). The connector for Brent was that the concept of time was prevalent when you were bored. Time was certainly consciously lived for Brent; his solo booklet had a crude set of hours, minutes, and seconds recorded as he chose to replace his watch with a best-estimate. The time was recorded as accurately as possible in his booklet, and Brent’s timeline was filled with comments and more X spots than any other soloist. He shifted from the feeling of boredom, to feelings of loneliness, before then keeping busy with completing writing tasks. Boredom was not a state he wished to remain in; nor was loneliness either. Ultimately Brent succumbed to issues related to the dark. As described earlier, he became more emotional than he wished and grieved for the loss of his grandfather. His strategy for dealing with his emotional state at night was to write, but in the end the emotions of the night got to Brent.

Martin spoke of his own emotions arising from boredom: *I was depressed when I was bored… more emotional than usual* (interview 2). Earlier Martin had shared his strategy of writing to relieve the terror of the night, which he had couched as boredom: *Well it was night and I was in my bivy and pretty bored and so turned on my light and started writing about solo, yeah* (interview 2). However, he too returned to the centre to speak with Mrs. F in the early hours of the last morning. Like Brent, the strategy of writing to rid the fear and the associated emotions of the night did not work. Martin was definitely more emotional than he would have liked. Earlier in the day Martin had chosen to climb trees to alleviate his feelings of boredom. He recognised his emotional state tended to become more negative when he had nothing to do, and so tree climbing became a strategy for avoiding the negativity:

*Oh I wasn’t really (bored), I was like just climbing trees the whole time, like yesterday morning really early like 5.30 and I like climbed right to the very top of*
a pine tree and watched the sunrise and looked all round and I could see (Mount) Ruapehu and everything (Martin, interview 2).

Table 13, PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 3: Solo as boredom, complexity and insight

PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: Solo rules present students with clear institutional boundaries that contribute to the Tihoi panoptic gaze (Wood, 2007) of managing student experiences via surveillance from afar. Yet most students freely chose to break rules at times as voluntary risk takers. Such glimpses of edgework behaviour (Lyng, 2005) acknowledge solo as a site for the fostering of conformity and resistance behaviours. Edgework assists understandings of the lived solo as dynamic and complex, and certainly not as a homogeneous student experience.

Solo contrasts in a temporal sense with the balance of the Tihoi programme, and the meeting of fundamental survival needs without additional challenges creates opportunity for boredom. Escaping the experience state of boredom is integrally linked with matters of complexity. Understanding boredom as but one experience state possible on solo assists understandings of the complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional qualities of the solo experience. Disequilibrium states such as boredom can manifest into positive opportunities for insight (Dewey, 1934) that embrace moments of pleasure, purpose and meaning.

Writing to relieve the feeling of boredom was actually a common strategy. Paul describes his efforts writing: *No it (solo) didn’t force me to write. I didn’t need to write that... ... just had to. Didn’t want to sit there and do nothing* (interview 2). Paul commented on his solo timeline after approximately 18 hours: *Can’t sleep. Bored. Tired. Raining. Hard to get up.*

Other emotions were to the fore in relation to time and boredom, as Aaron describes (interview 2) *No time for writing really. Too busy fixing bivy, yelling obscenities, trying to sleep. Too uncomfortable to write. Not bored, just frustrated and angry.* Aaron spent most of his solo time trying to get organised during the day, and huddling under a swamped then windswept shelter by night. His inability to manage his own basic survival needs precluded feelings of
loneliness or boredom, or indeed precluded him from focussing on much other than merely existing.

**Temporality: Random thoughts on life (and death) thus far**

Solo took participants metaphorically to other places and times in their minds. For Paul his mind kept drifting back to the farm, his animals and his Mum and Dad, and he thought a lot about the crazy times he had spent with his brothers and the freedom the farm gave him. Solo was a little reminder of that. Martin recollected times when he was not well appreciated by his mum and the conflict that had gone down between them. He was pleased those times were behind him. He cast his mind ahead to the holidays and visualising being home in the new era of being accepted as the new Martin: *I've thought a lot about home and Mum and why things were getting to be a hassle and now I wanna do things better. Yeah I want to keep the changes* (interview 2).

Brent started a Tihoi recollection, where his mind took him through the times at Tihoi and some of the challenges he had faced. He recalled the hard times of being hassled in his house by the others, and his struggles with always lagging behind in the fitness challenges. Other random thoughts emerged. He retreated further to his early school years and it was all really clear he shared. Then he kept returning to the special times and the memories of being with his grandfather. His process of grief unfolded, as another solo poem details (44 hour solo booklet, spelling as original):

*Sad your gone, only 1 year since your gone / Lonely on solo, other people not sad / Only solo brought this on, things left unsolved / I want to talk to you / Solo opened my eyes, no warning / Stuffs going wrong.*

It had taken solo and the passing of a year for Brent to grieve the death of his grandfather, and his poem signals how solo became a state of emotional overload. Central were feelings of loss and these spiralled into other fears of the dark. His bivy became haunted by the spirit of his grandfather and he had to retreat to the centre.

Alistair also contemplated the coming death of his friend, and his mind dreamed backwards to special times he had shared with him, and the need to see him again as soon as
Tihoi was over. His mind traversed forward to other imagined times, and going hunting and exploring with his dad: *uhm yeah looking forward to hunting with my dad sometime* (interview 2). I was thinking *yeah I’ll get some sort of break soon to go hunting, I look forward to – look forward to hunting with you again, even if it’s not this holidays* (interview 2). Alistair craved for a connection with his estranged dad, and the solo was important for getting comfortable in the bush so that he could be a respected bush guy in his dad’s eyes. Later Alistair changed into fantasy mode:

_**Oh uhm, his sister that girl, that I’m going to go on a three or four day trip from my dad’s house uhm, to this place we call the gorge and camp there the first night and uhm, shoot a goat, nice young nanny and cut the back steaks out for dinner and then carry on over – we call it like an Indian hideaway, it looks like a place where the Sioux Tribe would camp for one person there. So it’d be a solo but I’d have the girl there for the nights** (Alistair, interview 2)._  

There were many other random thoughts that took soloists forwards and backwards in time. Zach was amazed that his mind came up with the future names of his kids (plural); a fascinating revelation from an only child who was yet to turn sixteen. He shares other random thoughts reflecting upon time:

_**I spose I liked being able to just slow down most of Tihoi has been on the go all the time and it was nice just to reflect be able to reflect on everything we have done and that and I thought back before and that I have never really done solo before and like it was good to have memories of the past like every time I would think about something um like that I hadn’t thought about in ages, like the things like I dunno like an old song that would come to mind and I’d think of that for awhile and that and yeah it was good to just bring back the memories of my life sort of and that and just also think about the future and just what I could do and stuff, like career options and stuff** (Zach, interview 2)._  

For Martin the random stuff emerged high in the tree top when a penny dropped. He was thinking about the fights he had had with his mother when he remembered how his primary school teacher had told him how lucky he was to have a caring mother when so many kids in the world didn’t. *Up in the tree. Yeah. I was like – I didn’t really take any notice of that at the time she said it, but yeah. Something like changed hey* (interview 2). It was a revelation
that required space and time to emerge, and he looked forward to a new life with a little more respect for his mum.

**Temporality: Passing the time**

While some cruised through the experience that was solo, others struggled with the dimension of time. As mentioned sleep was the default activity on solo. For Paul, solo was just a regular two-days and two nights: *Well it was a kind of fun time, mostly enjoyable, nothing too happy or sad just the usual time for me* (interview 2). Zach was also upbeat about his time in the forest and appreciated the opportunity for prayer, meditation, singing, and dance away from the others. Paul and Zach really were the exceptions and the remaining soloists were a lot more conscious of timing passing slower than normal.

For Kerry who took his book on solo to read, solo time was something to be killed: *Yeah took my book and took my mind off the solo a little, read about 120 pages* (Kerry, interview 2). Brent observed nature as a strategy not to be bored, and what arose was some deep insight: *when I was bored I was looking around at the trees and stuff and I was just thinking, WOW, how small I am. Like just seeing the birds going around doing all their normal stuff* (interview 2). Paul, when observing birdlife, placed a temporal ‘bored’ quality to the birds themselves:

*There was a big tree right across the road that the Kereru (wood pigeons) came and sat in and they just sat there in the sun yesterday; soaking up the sun and looking at me... ...Maybe they were bored but they were just looking at me* (interview 2).

Aaron had no choice but to fill his time with attempts at repairs to his bivy, drying his sleeping bag, and trying to survive. There was not a positive temporal quality to his experience: *solo was definitely not free time. It felt like ah... probably nearly torture clinic I reckon* (Aaron interview 2).

Martin (interview 2) had a pre-solo strategy of singing through solo to take his mind away from matters: *um no I’ll just sing... to take the mind off* (fears of others and the dark). Zach also looked forward to time alone to sing, and on solo he stuck to his plan: *yeah I had a kind of a pattern that I tried to follow, like before meals I would do certain things and stuff,* and
sort of like the singing and stuff kept me happy, it sort of upped my spirit’s (Zach, interview 2).

Paul also sung; not in response to fear or as a part of routine but as a reflection of contentedness: No, just singing. Just quietly. Not like loud, but just singing (interview 2).

The experience state most soloists strove to avoid was boredom. As described earlier all manner of strategies were employed to avoid boredom. Whilst sleep was a defining quality of solo and writing in journals another strategy to pass the time, the reading of personal journals was another default to opposing boredom. Soloists read and re-read journals during the day and during the night, and this became the catalyst for some insightful reflections upon the Tihoi experience.

Lived Body: Corporeality

Embodied experience is central to van Manen’s (1997) lifeworld existential of ‘lived body’ or corporeality, and is intimately connected also to the existential of ‘lived other’. Indeed Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests that we perceive and conceptualise everything bodily, thus abolishing the imaginary separation of mind and body. Heidegger (1962) reminds us that as humans we are always bodily in the world, by virtue of existing in a physical material body that is connected with the world. Thus Lived body (corporeality) is the phenomenological reality of being bodily in the world. Existentially corporeality asks, in terms of a body-other relationship, “What am I?”, “Who am I?”, and “Where do I belong?” Corporeality is therefore about understanding ones place in the world via subjective bodily experience, and so the solo potentially allows for feeling, seeing, knowing, and understanding ones’ self in relation to other through the body.

In the case of a nature-based solo experience, ‘other’ may refer to other people, to birds, trees, plants, other places, or perhaps other life events that have been experienced in a bodily sense. Many of these themes have been encapsulated in sections of this interpretive synthesis already, and any repetition of key soloist phrases or written thoughts are included to
acknowledge the interrelationship and overlap between the four lifeworld existentials van Manen (1997) promotes.

**Corporeality: Engaged mind – reflecting body**

In contrast to much of the Tihoi experience, solo meant staying reasonably still and inactive. For most this was a massive challenge. Brent struggled with just sitting and thinking: *Solo meant I had to sit there and think, rather than being able to be distracted... made me more emotional than usual* (interview 2). A common theme during the daytime was lying down and staring at the bush, the birds and the sky:

*I just lied on my back outside looking at the birds and that* (Martin, interview 2)

*Uhm... just looking... [pause]... at the bush and that... nothing really to look at... just those birds... and the clouds... [silence]... wondering about rain again* (Paul, interview 2);

*I was bored I was looking around at the trees and stuff and I was just thinking, WOW, how small I am* (Brent, interview 2)

*I just sat and watched the birds. There was a big tree right across the road that the Kereru (wood pigeons) came and sat in* (Paul, interview 2).

The nights were different, and the lack of things to focus upon visually promoted the sense of hearing as soloists lay in their bivy’s awake. As intimated earlier, the nights became a mental game for most soloists for they were long winter nights and full of night sounds. Martin described how during: *the second night I like was scared shitless* (interview 2). The bush was alive for Alistair, bringing an elevated heart rate often: (interview 1)

*Yep every direction around me in the trees, um every sound, every little movement and stuff triggers me... ...you start getting used to it but then something louder might happen and so you listen and then it’s nothing. Similarly for Brent were feelings of likely attack: like crunching of twigs and leaves making me think I was about to be attacked* (interview 2).

Only Zach ventured outside for any lengthy period during either of the nights and he observed glow worms and the moon. His was a positive outdoor night experience as opposed to Martin, Brent, and Aaron who walked back to the centre under the cover of darkness but
living the fear. As Martin explains: Like when I was (walking) outside in the dark by myself things would change. Like trees would turn into something else and . . . so I’d just try and close my eyes (interview 1).

Table 14, PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 4: Solo as insightful reflective space

PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: The process of journaling the personal meanings arising from a five month outdoor adventure education programme, coupled with the deliberate placement of an extended solo towards the end of that experience, creates an insightful opportunity for students at Tihoi Venture School. The set tasks, the alone-time, the stillness, and the fresh air present a significant reflective space that is solo. Solo is a key pedagogical strategy that presents Tihoi students with considerable opportunity for personal insight. Yet, as former Director John Furminger has described at interview, Tihoi students typically “…need to be shown the mountain” in terms of securing lessons from their experiences. However, a deeper journey of self-examination, self-discovery, and self-reconstruction via introspective reflection is unlikely for adolescent males without the skills or life experience to adequately process their own self discovery (Larson, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003).

Kerry engaged his mind with a good novel, sometimes at night and sometimes during the day. The novel would likely please his English teacher but for Kerry the book ended up compromising his solo time through his own eyes. On reflection this was problematic for him and he felt he had cheated somewhat: next time I wouldn’t take a book in… I didn’t give it all… I’ve done solo sort of, but I haven’t done it (did not complete the reflective or written tasks as set) (interview 2).

Reading was the mechanism for quality reflections about Tihoi, with soloists acknowledging personal achievements, relationships, shared experiences and hardships. Brent was a prolific writer on solo but also took the time to read his journal regularly. He speaks of how his reading got him thinking:

Uhm, I thought about arriving at Tihoi first and how my view of Tihoi has changed I just thought about how – I remember in the first five weeks of Tihoi, the things that you just – like you just take things for granted, but you actually
really miss them when you don’t have them, like the shower, and like having an actual good shower that works, our house has got a stuffed shower. And a flush toilet rather than a bio-loo. Uhm having someone cooking your meals.

Things that you don’t really think about when you’re at home. I don’t know – how short life is and you’ve just got to do what you like doing and don’t worry about what other people say (Brent, interview 2)

Zach acknowledges the journal as the catalyst for reflection: Yeah lots, yeah I’d read my journal over and over and remember all the things I’d done (interview 2). As he wrote in his journal:

I’m pleased I took my journal on solo because I read it over and over, as well as writing more stuff. Yeah I’m just so proud of all the things I’ve done at Tihoi and proud of my journal; reading it on solo has been great for remembering everything (Zach, Tihoi Journal).

The story was similar for Paul:

The journal was great to look at again. I read my journal two or three times and remembered a lot of the things we did earlier at Tihoi. Some of the things I had forgotten about and it was cool to think about them again. I found myself laughing a lot when reading it. Like when people slipped over when coming down on the side of Mount xxx, it was like a mud slide. Three of us had real great fun, we just got covered in mud (Paul, interview 2).

In contrast Bevan had lost his journal prior to solo and he had to rely upon his own thoughts as part of his ‘Tihoi recount’ and also letters from home that he had taken in to read.

**Corporeality: Solo, play, and fun**

The stags were roaring out of rutting season as soloists communicated via imitating deer calls, and the ‘roaring’ made Aaron laugh. He engaged in the banter with his own roaring style. For a guy who had been soaked on night one and forced to lie awake in a soggy sleeping bag before having his bivy wrecked in the following nights’ wind, Aaron remained remarkably upbeat about his experience. His first interview spoke of his positive outlook towards solo:

No I’m like alright, cause it might be fun. You get to do stuff. You’re by yourself so you can do anything you want. So I’m really keen, not that I can really do anything about the weather or the rain (interview 1)... Well that’s probably the best bit, we get to just slow down and be with ourselves and do things yeah I like
doing nothing [silence]. If I was back in Hamilton that’s what I’d probably do, just nothing. I think it will be fun just hanging around on solo [silence] (interview 2).

Post solo Aaron remained upbeat and wanted to share that solo was a fun experience, but he struggled to celebrate much beyond a positive attitude:

Yeah. There are fun bits, like actually making the bivy and designing it and took effort into making the bivy, that was the fun bits. What other fun bits? Yeah. The eating was alright. Had toothache, and I still have it now, right there. And what else? Uhm... (interview 2).

It was an attitude of positive fun that had served Aaron well throughout solo and all of Tihoi, even through times when it definitely wasn’t. Aaron had come to appreciate the opportunities that Tihoi had given him as a city guy and as an International student; it had been physically and emotionally hard but mostly fun.

Other soloists drew the positive from seemingly negative situations. Brent, for example, wrote eating chocolate was a winner amidst his letter home that was documenting his struggles with the death of his grandfather. Later in the same letter was the by-line: reflection is fun I’m enjoying writing this.

There were moments during solo, particularly on day two after the rain had stopped and the sun had emerged, when soloists acknowledged singing to themselves. As Zach mentioned he found himself dancing to the music in my head (interview 2) and singing out loud sometimes sort of like the singing and stuff kept me happy, it sort of upped my spirits (interview 2). As he stated there was no one there except nature and me (Zach, interview 2). Paul acknowledged singing behaviour but denied any dancing: No, just singing. Just quietly. Not like loud, but just singing (interview 2). Others sang, sometimes aloud and sometimes in their head, as Nick states: Sang a few songs, yeah. Oh a few of them I sang out loud (interview 2).

Martin spoke of singing being his strategy for coping with the fear of the nights prior to solo but that failed him somewhat on night two. The fear became too much, yet after a motivational chat from Chris he returned to his bivy. He didn’t sleep yet he wasn’t scared. There were songs in his head but he was bored and in the early hours the tree climbing began.
The pine trees became a playground and, as described earlier, Martin spent ages playfully climbing the tree and sliding down the needled branches.

**Corporeality: Freedom and aesthetics**

The lifeworld existential of spatiality has allowed for dimensions of freedom to be acknowledged as related to the solo place or space and, in terms of corporeality, freedom relates to those lived experiences that have been felt in a bodily sense. Martins playfulness tree climbing was a significant physical and emotional experience that represented freedom. It was also *a bit challenging and maybe a bit risky but I was safe* (journal entry). There were pleasures in swaying in the wind high in the pine trees, and the experience evoked aesthetic qualities and stillness as he spent time watching the sun rise and the landscape and the birdsong unfolding before him. As Martin wrote in his letter to his mum, while waiting to be collected at the end of solo: *the views, the colours and the sun was really peacefulness. It made me appreciate how it’s good we are New Zealanders.*

On his 44 hour solo timeline Martin had positive notes that spoke of the aesthetic qualities of some of his experiences: *sounds of rain on my plastic roof is peaceful... sunrise and the dawn birdsong... sun on my body really relaxing.*

As discussed, Zach was afforded freedoms on solo he had not had at Tihoi for practising his faith. The solo provided space away from others to focus on what he had not been able to in his Tihoi house. The birds and the forest provided a non-judgemental backdrop, so that Zach was happy to truly be himself. His journal reflected upon such freedom:

*I have missed opportunities for prayer at Tihoi, so being alone gave freedom to practice what was important and I prayed and gave thanks often. The prayers helped keep me happy and I was grateful for everything; even the rain (Tihoi Journal, spelling as original).*

There were aesthetic qualities to the solo bivys and significant pride in their construction. The soloists invested energy to constructing and refining them, as Nick describes in detail:

*I got there, and went looking round for a site for about an hour and found one, it was right there. And then I just went looking for ferns and put them on the ground and dragged this – oh I was looking for sticks for ages and I couldn’t
really find any sticks and then I found one massive one and broke it into three so that was pretty good. And then probably I was working at it for about an hour and a half into the night, so it took me ages. And then the next morning I just – I just did a few repairs, because it rained that first night (interview 2)

Table 15, PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 5: The Tihoi solo is an adventure

| PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: The solo at Tihoi has the ingredients of the classic ‘adventure’ experience, including risk, uncertainty, challenge, anxiety, and fear (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Wurdinger, 1997). While solo lived-experiences reinforce the prominent place solo holds in the Tihoi curriculum and the many qualities and educational opportunities that are presented for students, they also highlight the potential of solo to be a risky and occasionally fearful experience. This may not necessarily be in terms of participants being exposed to objective dangers or hazards, though they do exist. Rather the risks can be more of a psychological-emotional kind; risks that may be perceptions of reality that for the soloist feels very real and which require careful support (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002). With that support, the solo experience becomes a site rich with educational opportunity (Brown & Fraser, 2009) and adventurous insight (Walle, 1997). Solo allows for a reconceptualisation of adventure that is more inclusive of ecology and place and less focussed upon uncertainty of experience. |

From Interpretive Synthesis to Plausible Insights

Following van Manen (1997), the existential ground upon which all human experiences are ‘lived’ (spatially, temporally, corporeally and relationally) has provided an integrated filter through which to distil the experiences of nine soloists. Those experiences have been reframed into an ‘interpretive synthesis’ and through the process a series of five plausible insights have arisen that are worthy of deeper discussion. The following chapter interrogates those five insights in relation to the contemporary literature surrounding solitude within outdoor adventure education.
Chapter 8, Discussion: SOLITUDE SPEAKS

To the native peoples, the land was not wild. It was home, it provided shelter, clothed them, fed their bodies. And echoing through their souls there was the song of the land. The singing isn’t as hard as it used to be but you can still hear it in the wind; in the silence of a misty morning; in the drip of water from the tip of water from the tip of a paddle. The song is still here, if you know how to listen.

Bill Mason, Song of the Paddle (1988)

To come to understand the deeper meaning and significance of the Tihoi solo, within the context of solitude as humanly experienced, has required a deep listening and a reflective attention to the lived-student experience. Those solo experiences now have potential to speak to the teachers, instructors, and educational guides who might utilise solo within their own practice and perhaps to others with whom solitude holds an interest.

Four lifeworld existentials, as detailed by van Manen (1997), have provided a methodologically useful theoretical framework for accessing the solo as lived. Attached as Appendix 1, the Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix was utilised as a methodological and practical guide for gathering and reflecting upon the experiences of Tihoi students while on solo. Beyond the interview process, the matrix further contributed to the interpretation and analysis process as a ‘reflection framework’. This facilitated the development of the solo interpretive synthesis, as detailed in the last chapter. Emerging from the four sections oriented around the dimensions of lived space, lived time, lived relation, and lived body are a series of plausible insights worthy of further pedagogical elucidation. As van Manen (1997) describes, such insights tend to emerge from the fusion of horizons between the field data, the academic literature and the researcher pre-conceptions. What follows is a discussion of the personal and pedagogical significance of those five plausible dimensions of the solo experience in relation to relevant academic literature. There are many further dimensions of the Tihoi solo that have been brought to consciousness through the research process, and editorial space has limited further representation of those insights. It is hoped that other dimensions of solo might already have spoken to the reader in some form via the interpretive synthesis as presented.
Five plausible insights frame the discussion, and there is a subtle and sometimes explicit overlap between each of them. The lifeworld of solo certainly has aspects that are both chaotic and orderly, rendering the dimensions of solo as sometimes contradictory and ambiguous yet remaining of pedagogical usefulness. So, while each plausible insight (PI) has been separated for the purposes of discussion, there is some common ground of potential pedagogical interest as well as some inherent contradiction. As I have signposted earlier, the solo has allowed for an immersion experience in and with surrounding nature. PI 1 represents the interconnection of time and space, and points to the possibilities of a slower pedagogy (Wattchow, 2006a) for fostering ecological insight (Walle, 1997). PI 2 acknowledges that solo has been an experience laced with uncertainty and fear, and this appears to contrast with the published philosophical and research derived understandings of the solo experience. Similarly there are complex and dynamic qualities to the variety of solo experience states that traverse a continuum between boredom and peak experience (PI 3). Other approaches to learning from the experience of solo have emerged and PI 4 both confirms and resists classical experiential education ideas. Finally PI 5 promotes the Tihoi solo as a dynamic, multiphasic adventure; one that broadens traditional definitions of the adventure education experience.

**PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 1: Solo, Adolescents, and Nature**

PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: The bush provides the backdrop for the Tihoi solo yet Kaplan & Kaplan (2002) stress that adolescents are much less likely to engage with nature and natural processes than children or adults; that there is some reduced interest with nature during adolescence that prohibits some authentic and deep connection of the soloist to their surroundings. Yet solo has the potential to provide a slow ecological pedagogy for adolescent males through the removal of technology and a de-emphasis of the performance aspects common to many outdoor education activities (Payne & Wattchow, 2008). The meeting of fundamental survival needs without additional challenges creates opportunity for boredom on solo. The modification of emotional states when encountering boredom enhances ecological interest and possibly insight (Walle, 1997). A counter thread is that solo may encourage a pathway for adventurous insight through non-conformity to solo rules, similarly facilitating adventurous insight and ecological connection. Thus the experiences of both boredom (constraint) and challenge (freedom) potentially contribute to adolescent male interest in nature on solo.
A body of evidence points to children valuing nature in different ways and at different stages of their physical and mental development (see Mergen, 2003, for an exhaustive review of children and nature through history). The direct and ongoing experience of nature (such as interactions with plants, objects such as trees and rocks, events such as storms, and other creatures including animals) is far more profound upon children than indirect or vicarious nature experiences (Kellert, 2002; Louv, 2006, 2008), with childhood ways of knowing nature being particularly complex (Chawla, 2002). Mergen (2003, p. 651) details that adolescents have the capacity to “manifest an ethical and spiritual relation to nature and begin to explore and develop a scientific understanding of nature.” Yet, as I have highlighted earlier, Kaplan & Kaplan (2002) report a significant cross-cultural “time out” (p.252) in the adolescent preferences for natural environments. That time-out has cultural and evolutionary foundations driven in part by adolescents craving places that convey action and excitement, that involve interaction with peers, and which promote self autonomy. Of interest is that the Tihoi solo has conversely provided an extended ‘nature’ immersion experience for adolescents away from the action and activity of the balance of the Tihoi programme, coupled with a distancing from peers and authority. Thus the pedagogical question how might solo enable adolescent males at Tihoi to interface and engage with nature (if at all), paraphrasing Chawla (2002), is a complex one.

There has emerged from solo a captured interest in nature, particularly in relation to birdlife as well as trees and shrubs. The movement of birds brought contrast to the relative stillness of solo, maintaining soloist attention and providing some focus while providing an auditory backdrop to the silence of solo. There has also been tacit acknowledgement of the challenges that can be provided by nature, such as weather and the sounds of the night, which bring forth notions of both fear and also respect. At one extreme of experience sits Zach who worshipped the bush surrounding his bivy as sublime, and he took many opportunities to observe and to appreciate. Rituals permeated his solo experience and he regularly gave thanks, and his deep seated faith brought with it an acknowledgement of the creations of a natural kind. His religious and meditative practice enabled a spiritual connection with his solo spot,
reaffirming Mergen’s (2003) belief in the capacity for an adolescent spiritual association with nature. At the other end of the spectrum was Kerry who engaged deeply with the fantasy world of his novel. Yet when Kerry emerged from his personal cocoon he also noticed the small things around him like the dead leaf matter and the birds. Even while lying in his shelter reading during the day Kerry was conscious of the background chatter of birds and he was able to pick out some of the different bird calls.

The adolescents were clearly varied in their capacity to engage with nature (Mergen, 2003). As Buber (1971) promotes in *I and Thou*, a person is at all times engaged with the world in either a mode of ‘interaction’ or of ‘being’. Zach held a conscious awareness of nature on solo in relationship to himself, accentuated by a predisposition to awareness of matters greater than self. Thus his experience of place was closer to the ‘I-Thou’ end of the relationship continuum compared to *Aaron*, *Brent*, and *Kerry* who noticed natural things but did not essentially engage at any intimate level. For the other five soloists the backdrop of the solo provided a natural context, facilitating a variety of levels of connection and disconnection. Thus we can state with some surety that the solo experience represents a complexity of nature relationship (Chawla, 2002), despite the lack of explicit ecologically-oriented pedagogy employed.

There were important glimpses of nature-insight to the Tihoi solo experience that, while not necessarily representative of nature-based spirituality (R. Fox, 1999; Heintzman, 2003) or an I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1971), should not be discounted: For *Nigel* there was a familiarity with the bush; not a keen or deep interest, but like *Kerry* he was able to differentiate bird calls with pride. While *Brent* was essentially deep in his own emotional world, the raindrops contributed to his negative state. He was bored often and, despite seeking to write to relieve the boredom and his fear, he noticed the birds doing their thing in the forest and he contemplated how small he was in the grand scheme of nature. For *Alistair* the lack of things to do led to him laying out and observing the birds. Nature became the “massive thing” and he recognised humans as insignificant compared to the processes around
him. Bevan sought to connect to his place through carving his initials in a tree. For Martin solo brought moments of calmness and joy. Rain lightly falling was soothing on night one, and the warmth of the afternoon sun on day two encouraged him to engage actively climbing trees. He countered the potential for boredom with excitement, and he relished tree climbing for the adventure and the awe of his surroundings that emerged. Paul seemed like he knew the bush; he was comfortable there yet while he knew a few of the surrounding trees by name he was not that interested. Climbing trees avoided Paul’s boredom, but unlike Martin the tree climbing was more about freedom than nature. Zach had some deep spiritual moments in the bush, as discussed, unlike Aaron who regarded solo as a survival test and for whom the weather caused enormous grief. In summary all soloists, including Aaron, were provided some level of ecological insight.

Those insights were for the most part unconscious connections that emerged only via post solo interview. Only very occasionally were notes on solo timelines acknowledging of nature and natural processes. Journal entries, solo booklets, and letters to self and others were essentially devoid of ecological insight or observation. It was like the environment of solo was for the most part invisible. Yet Biophilia reminds us our relationship with nature is primal (Wilson, 1986), and solo interviews were cathartic for students understanding they held a nature relationship. Solo provides opportunity to engage with the wilderness within (T. Smith, 2005a); acknowledging and reminding participants that humans are in fact nature and belong as a part of natural processes. Indeed ecological insight has slowly oozed from the Tihoi solo experience, and insights that have arisen during interview represent potential formative understandings of an ecological self (Naess, 2008). Without the interviews, I suspect that the ecological self would unlikely have been brought into consciousness by many soloists if any at all.

Tihoi has not conceptualised solo as any form of ecologically insightful opportunity, and little emphasis has been placed in the solo briefing to excite soloists to their solo place. All of the emphasis has been upon students making sense and meaning from the broader Tihoi experience. As Henderson (1999) has suggested, an extension to the intra-personal dimension of adventure could easily realise soloists considering the self in relation to all that is alive and
vital around them during solo. That is, if the solo is framed with an appropriate ecological self emphasis, the intrapersonal relationship becomes one of self to place to universe. This orientation places the ecological self (Naess, 2008) central to the adventure education understandings of the intra-personal (Haluza-DeLay, 1999; R. Henderson, 1999); an orientation that would not require a pedagogical quantum leap for Tihoi, with respect to solo at least.

Payne & Wattchow (2008) introduce their ‘post-traditional slow pedagogy’ as an alternative to the universal adventure education experience centred upon romantic notions of the wilderness and which sees the experiences of the learner invariably “objectified by teachers or facilitators and rapidly converted to the debriefed learning product or outcome” (p. 28). The Tihoi solo is clearly not a traditional ‘fast’ outdoor education experience, and displays elements of a slower-paced more grounded and experientially rich experience. At the core are the central features of the solo experience: time and space. There is an inevitable slowing down that is so often missing from the classic adventure experience (Burridge, 2004), coupled with opportunities to understand the solo place in a different way to other adventure places. These are also solo experiences mediated and embodied to a large degree by the learner himself, with only moderate pressure from others to draw learning from experience. It could be said that the Tihoi solo is a ‘slower’ pedagogy contrasting in significant ways from other programme elements. Certainly the minimalist technology of solo, the self-reliance dimension to living simply without locomotion, and the absence of competition or performance elements have all contributed to a slowing down of the experience.

The snippets of ecological insight that soloists collated undoubtedly emerged from the complexities of a slow experience in one place. Yet student insights to engagement with nature emerged via interview, and not via reflective journals, letters home or to self, or the 44-hour solo timeline. Indeed, the snippets of ecological insight arising from solo might well remain invisible to Tihoi staff and retain an ineffable quality for the students themselves. Pedagogical opportunity exists to better understand and to capture the solo-nature experience nexus in creative ways.
One of the pedagogical strategies Tihoi does employ is not allowing watches on solo. This is an attempt at reorienting students from a linear, chronological timeframe to becoming more in tune to nature via the rhythms of natural time. Yet there is some confusion within the Tihoi staff collective as to the function of the ‘no watch’ rule and the lived experiences of students without a watch have been more confusing than insightful. In actuality, the lack of a watch has fostered dissonance and uncertainty more so than connection to natural rhythms, though some students took watches to maintain a more recognisable temporal quality to their experience. Framed as the ‘forty-four hour’ solo throughout the programme, the time dimension was important in the lead up to the experience requiring some psychological readiness, and then on-solo ‘time’ permeated the consciousness: For Nigel the song “What’s the time Mr. Wolf? What’s the time?” got into his brain and for Brent there were attempts to measure the hours, minutes, and seconds in his solo booklet. Others took watches and for most there were large tracts of time that needed to be negotiated and filled; a significant contrast to the balance of the Tihoi programme where chronological time dominated and students responded to being advised as to how they would fill their day.

Coping with the time was an underlying apprehension of students pre-solo, and there were strategies to counter the onset of boredom (in terms of plans for breaking letter writing records, sleeping through it, carving sticks and spears with a knife brought in expressly, reading a book brought in deliberately). Yet the time dissonance was ever-present on solo and this was a defining feature of the experience. The recording of timelines effectively tracked the perceived positive and negative dimensions of time, merging place-specific experience with temporal qualities. Yet the timelines did not speak to interactions with nature, with the exception of noises in the night and other such fearful moments. Most insights to engagement with nature emerged via interview.

Boredom has brought a significant quality to the solo, and so warrants discussion in relation to matters of time, space and nature. In the traditional adventure education discourse is a generally held notion that the intent of experience is accessing a peak moment for the individual (Ewert, 1989; Ewert & Garvey, 2007; P. Martin & Priest, 1986; Priest & Gass, 2005). Various antecedents of adventure have been proposed that promote the embracing of optimal
arousal states. In his classic work, *Flow: The psychology of optimal arousal*, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) points to humans being most happy when they are in states of *flow*. Such a flow state is an optimal state of intrinsic motivation, where the person is fully immersed in what he or she is engaged with, and where time becomes essentially irrelevant. Flow is a commonly referenced dimension of the adventure experience (see, for example, Creyer, Ross, & Evers, 2001; Jones, Hollenhurst, & Perna, 2003).

It is said that states of flow exist between boredom and anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), where the opportunity and the capacity for experience merge. As I shall discuss more broadly in the following section, the solo has provided many moments of anxiety, fear, and boredom, with these tending to be regarded as negative feeling states. Yet in the context of discussing solo and the non-human other, boredom paradoxically has led towards insight. That is, boredom triggered a reversal from a potentially negative state into an experience more positive and insightful. This reversal shift encouraged both an outward perspective on solo in addition to the inward journey of reflection. However, these shifts did not lead to transcendental states of flow based on the student descriptions, but rather became quests to pass time via taking stock of what ‘other’ things were occurring at their solo site. The interest in birds was a particularly common thread, and the soloists generally became actively engrossed in their surroundings. As Naess (2008) accurately suggested, soloists could not help but identify with their surroundings at some level. The threat of boredom facilitated a drive to fill in time, as so boredom became the catalyst for soloists to look beyond themselves towards nature and natural processes.

The quest to eradicate boredom as a negative state also led to the contrasting self-challenging activity of tree climbing and tree carving. For Paul and Martin these were moments of escape and transformed the solo into more of an action-oriented event (R. Kaplan & Kaplan, 2002). As Kahn & Kellert (2002) have reflected, there are challenges for educators to involve adolescents with nature in ways that account for their needs for action and excitement as well as social relationship. Beyond the social dimension, the exploits of Paul and Martin with their individual tree climbing efforts during solo represented opportunity for authentic nature engagement. There were personal choices made to climb the trees, and both of the tree
climbers felt safe with their own capabilities. The upshot was both students partaking in embodied moments of interaction with their surroundings, with the tree providing a different perspective and a big picture to the solo. Sure, students broke the Tihoi solo rule of no tree climbing but the experiences had the potential to be ecologically cathartic in addition to the opportunities for self reliance so typically reported in adventure education.

In terms of Bevan’s work carving his initials into a tree, this too broke a solo rule. Like tree climbing, the act further represented resistance against regulation. Yet it also connected Bevan to his solo place in ways that are difficult to describe in words. The embodied act of tree carving represented a deep connection to place; a desire to represent belonging and identity between himself and his solo spot that was consciously undertaken and which Bevan later reflected upon with pride. It was like he and the tree had merged somehow; a sign of an emerging ecological identity more-so than the act of vandalism as was interpreted by the Tihoi staff.

Smith (2005a) cautions educators to be true to philosophy; to structure solo frameworks that are aligned with programme intent and to orient preparations, activities, and reflective strategies accordingly. In that regard Tihoi has been true to philosophy: The forty four hour solo is an opportunity for personal reflection on the entire Tihoi experience. It is of interest that for individuals like Aaron and Brent their outdoor solo was essentially a survival game laced with apprehension, fear and states of misery at times. Being indoors may well have reduced the depth of anxiety both students endured, and allowed them to focus upon the reflective dimensions of the solo more effectively (Bevington, 2005). Indeed, if reflections upon Tihoi are the raison -de-entre of solo, then perhaps the bush context is irrelevant. However, Tihoi staff would disagree, and this points to the un-acknowledged motives for programming the solo experience in the bush. Solo is far more than an opportunity for reflection; opportunities for connection also abound.

Journals and other writings are rich with insights to the broader Tihoi experience yet, while solo has contributed to those social and personal insights via reflective work, intimate
connections to the various adventure places utilised by Tihoi do not explicitly feature. There is little that can be specifically distilled from on-solo reflections on the wider Tihoi experience that promote deep connections with Tihoi-as-place on any ecological level. Throughout the Tihoi programme students have been sailing, kayaking, caving, rock climbing, mountaineering and the like, and in a variety of environment types. The solo was essentially another outdoor challenge to be endured, appreciated, conquered, and reflected upon.

The absence of authentic place relation in adventure education, and the pedagogies employed that deny localised, embodied experiences of place, have engendered recent critique (Brookes, 2004; M. Brown, 2008b; Loynes, 2002; Wattchow, 2006a). It is, as Leopold (1966, p. 260) foretold decades ago, “that our educational and economic system is heading away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land.” Yet there appear connections that could be accentuated via the solo and other programme components that engender students to place. As Orr (2004, p. 147) states, “rootedness in a place is the most important and least recognized need of the human soul”. Certainly the five month programme duration permits Tihoi opportunity in terms of a deeper multi-faceted and compassionate relationship with Tihoi-as-place.
PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 2: Solo as fear, apprehension and uncertainty

PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: Whilst the academic literature is consistently upbeat about the values, qualities and outcomes of nature-based solitude experiences, the adolescent solo seems a far more challenging and scary proposition than is widely reported. Solo for adolescent males can be an experience laced with ongoing apprehension and fear. Kohak (1984) speaks of fearing solitude no less than fearing the darkness of night, and the Tihoi solo is a fearful endeavour accentuated by the onset of the night. The darkness of night penetrates the soul and adolescent male soloists attempt to banish the night with sleep. Nights heighten apprehension and uncertainty when one is alone, and the mind remains active which may not always be in the best interests of the soloist.

In All the Places You Will Go, Dr. Suess’s classic treatise on the journey of life from adolescence to adulthood, Suess poetically stated (1990, p. 39) that “when you’re alone, there’s a very good chance, you’ll meet things that scare you right out of your pants.” In short there have been many moments of apprehension, anxiety and uncertainty for Tihoi soloists, as well as feelings of potential danger and fear. Tihoi soloists have indeed been scared. For five of the nine students in this study their solitude was experienced negatively, involving times of sadness, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and confusion that have led to feelings of stress, tension, and fear. These feelings, acknowledge, represent ‘negative solitude’ (Long, et al., 2006) as opposed to the deeply insightful, spiritually rewarding, cathartic, rejuvenating adult solo experiences that academics and practitioners have written about. Indeed the solo was just another outdoor challenge at Tihoi to deal with for some students, perhaps best exemplified by Aaron’s “nightmare over, all good” comment towards the end of his solo timeline.

Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) noted more than two decades ago that many participants of wilderness programmes had reported that being alone in the wilderness can invoke overwhelming feelings of terror and anxiety. Yet the solitude literature has subsequently remained upbeat about the virtues and positive qualities of the outdoor solo experience, with only exceptional references from practitioners to matters that could go wrong on solo (for example, Kelk, 1994; Mortlock, 1998).
Daniel, Bobilya, and Kalish (2006), presenting insights from their respective extended research programmes, stated that one of five key elements to the significance of solo is that “solitude provided participants a chance to face their fears” (p. 21). Yet they made no mention of what those fears were or how they may have been faced was presented. Reporting on the same research programmes, Bobilya, McAvoy, and Kalish (2005) state “many students mentioned that they would probably have continued to be frustrated, anxious, and bored during solo if there had been no visit from an instructor” (p.111) and “only 13% indicated that they were primarily anxious or bored” (p.112); again there was no discussion of those felt participant experiences. Certainly fear was not an emotion made explicit. Campbell (2010) documented a five-day unstructured solo experience for University students and reported that “two out of the 28 students really struggled and described a negative response to the solo” (p. 46), which Campbell reported was primarily based upon a pre-solo mindset involving a combination of fears around not being able to stay warm and dry, fear of wild animals, unresolved personal issues, and the inability to seek support arising from low self esteem. No further insights were provided to the negative dimensions of the solo experience and the balance of her article was oriented to the positive responses arising from the extended nature-solo.

Interestingly, Long and Averill’s (2003), comprehensive review of research about solitude across a variety of disciplines, does provide a small section on the ‘dangers of solitude’ in terms of the social risks associated with spending extensive periods of time alone (such as becoming socially reclusive). Yet they do not specifically mention environmental dangers or the psychological responses to perceptions of environmental or social danger; aspects of the Tihoi solo experience that warrant further discussion.

Ward (2004) details that outdoor adventure participants have propensity to experience fears of a physical, social, emotional, and mythical/unfounded nature. Tihoi soloists experienced fear representative of all of these categories. Physical fear can be categorised as a threat to physical comfort and safety, such as the lived-perceptions of violence from an insider member of the solo group (as experienced by Brent), concerns regarding visits from a wild pig (Martin), or the concerns held with trees falling on a shelter in high winds (Zach). Social fears
are more concerned with letting others down through interrupting their solo (as experienced by Aaron), concerns for the welfare of other soloists (Paul) or feelings associated with getting a hard time from others when returning from solo early (Brent). Emotional fears were more associated with feelings of inadequacy (as experienced by Aaron), concerns around becoming bored (Bevan), or concerns associated with emotional responses (Brent, Kerry). Finally, mythical or unfounded fears related to engagement with mythical forest dwellers such as the punga people (as experienced by Nigel), visiting spirits (Brent, Aaron), or the Tihoi Slasher (all bar one of the soloists).

The more disturbing lived fears of Tihoi soloists I have categorised into two distinct groups: fear of the bush / nature, and fear of other humans. Both of these are essentially psychological-emotional fear-groupings as related to the unknown, thus creating uncertainty. The former ‘fear of the bush / nature’ is fascinating in that the Tihoi solo follows an extensive programme of bush-lore and bush-craft experience, basic outdoor survival training, and bush awareness activities, as well as some five months of living adjacent to the bush. Thus the students have been well prepared and, in relation to the self-perceived capabilities of each soloist, their degree of control (thus their propensity for positive solitude) should remain high (Long & Averill, 2003). Yet there were fears associated with the inadequacy of shelters in relation to the challenging weather conditions. Other concerns related to noises in the night; of creatures real or imagined outside the shelter. These emotional experiences of fear are consistent with early research into fear-evoking aspects of the (North American) wilderness experience (Bixler, Carlisle, Hammitt, & Floyd, 1994; Bixler & Floyd, 1997; S. Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). Solo may well have brought to consciousness ancient fears of nature and natural environmental dangers for students that have been inhibiting more-so than pedagogically useful.

As Louv (2008) states, “Fear is the emotion that separates a developing child from the full, essential benefits of nature” (p. 123, italics in original). The inference from Louv is that adventure educators would do well to minimise or eliminate fear when working with children (or adolescents) to facilitate accessing the benefits of nature. When natural affiliations to nature are not allowed to fully develop during childhood or adolescence, an aversion to
aspects of nature may evolve. ‘Biophobia’ is the term that describes an aversion to nature, and may take the form of fear and discomfort in natural places through to an outright discomfort or rejection of matters that are not human-made (Orr, 2004).

Research into biophobia suggests the felt uncertainty of solo for some students might hold evolutionary facets related to surviving natural phenomena (Mineka & Ohman, 2002; Ulrich, 1993); responses that are ineffably connected to some kind of ‘historical-biological preparedness’ for environmental dangers (van den Berg & Ter Heijne, 2005). More than likely, however, the fears of the soloists have been greatly exaggerated by social media (including news clips, horror movies, bedtime ‘wild things in the forest’ stories, and the like) or stories told of wandering strangers in the bush by Tihoi staff.

Fears or apprehensions related to other humans were lived by Tihoi soloists, highlighting that solitude is by nature influenced by social forces that needs to be understood within the broader context of society (Bialeschki, 2002; Long, et al., 2006). While there is an absence of ‘stranger danger’ or ‘insider danger’ discourse within the academic solo literature, adventure practitioners are seemingly well aware of these threats to soloist safety (see Boyes & Maxted, 2000, for example, or any number of safety manuals for adventure programmes incorporating solo). Despite the potential remoteness of the Tihoi solo site in areas adjoining the Pureora State Forest Park, the potential for danger from strangers was a reality for participants. The adolescent soloist is largely unable to control or influence the actions of outsider others (or indeed the actions of those from within the insider group), thus their fears become socially based. As Davis-Berman and Berman (2002) acknowledge, when adolescents feel out of control they feel most at-risk, and the Tihoi soloists were never psychologically free from the threat of aggression or violence despite being on their own in a remote setting.

While strategic management processes at Tihoi saw staff regularly checking on students, the psychological-emotional dimension of stranger danger was promulgated via pre-solo ‘slasher’ stories. All bar one soloist referred to the ‘Tihoi Slasher’ during interview, creating perceptions that random people would be in the bush. It is difficult to understand the motivations of Tihoi staff for such story-telling; however, the result was an increased felt
anxiety for most soloists. The ‘slasher’ stories further built on pre-solo apprehensions brought about from previous students (and their own exaggerated stories) as well as the reputation of solo for being a challenging and potentially scary experience.

For many, the solo was the one activity they were most aware of before arriving to Tihoi. I do not believe the ‘slasher’ stories have been pedagogically useful, unless they have been employed by Tihoi as a deliberate strategy for providing a readiness for students to the potential of a visit from a stranger. The perpetuation of the slasher stories from intake to intake may well be student-led, yet my gut feeling is that they are told by staff as a strategy for accentuating perceptions of fear for an activity that is perceived as not especially scary. This practice is perhaps not dissimilar to the ‘round-the-campfire’ stories told at outdoor education camps, where morbid, graphic stories of the scary and unnatural build a subconscious and irrational fear for mythical monsters and the like.

There exists a widely held belief in the value of heightening risk perceptions in adventure education settings to enhance learning (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Gass, 1993; Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Priest & Gass, 2005). With respect to held fears of the unknown, Davis-Berman and Berman (2002) acknowledge the assessment of perceptions of risk are as important as the actual risks that exist. They regard anxiety as a powerful variable that needs to be well understood by adventure leaders seeking to understand risk for participants in outdoor settings. The perception of risk by adventure participants involves a subjective discernment on the potential for injury or perhaps death (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; Haddock, 1993), thus stories of the Tihoi slasher may well account for one piece of the jigsaw related to the personalised danger evaluations made. Other factors may well be important, including the past experiences of participants, media representations of the dangers of being outdoors, the vicarious experiences of others (including prior Tihoi students) and personal predispositions to anxiety that have manifested well prior to the experience (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002). These dimensions clearly place the Tihoi solo under a social influence, and have implications in terms of theorising about risk as a social process (M. Brown, 2008a; M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; R. Zink & Leberman, 2001).
The Tihoi solo, like any outdoor adventure experience, I presuppose is not immune to anxiety for participants; the adolescents were challenged to draw upon personal resources, but with far more loneliness, fear, anxiety, and boredom than the academic literature on solo represents. That three of the nine students on which this study is based left their solo site to return to the safety and comforting words of staff back at the centre is testimony to the inner struggles they were enduring. That they then returned to their solo experience speaks to their resolve to face up to their challenges and fears and to embrace the experience again, as well as to the ethic of care and understanding provided by Tihoi staff throughout the solo experience. Aaron, for example, was determined not to disturb the Tihoi staff deep in the night and to get back on solo himself, even though he had made the long walk back to the Centre. While he was not coping well with a dysfunctional shelter, he was mostly freaked by the white hand that appeared in his bivy like a ghost and the uncertainty surrounding that phenomenon scared him. For Brent it was the spirit of his grandfather in his shelter that so affected him psychologically and emotionally; for Nigel the unknown noises in the night caused him grief; for Kerry it was the psychological dimensions associated with the myth of the Tihoi slasher. Facilitators of the solo experience need to be cognisant of the potential stimuli that might create or enhance perceptions of fear (Ward, 2004).

In her investigations of spirituality in adventure programmes, Fox (1996) suggests participants will likely experience stages of discomfort and anxiety before progressing towards deeper relaxation and possibly spiritual experience. She reports that all participants interviewed during her study acknowledged experiencing fear during the solo component of their programme, with Fox concluding that fears “...needed to be controlled to provide the relaxation necessary for spiritual experience to occur” (Fox, 1996, p. 93). In a later book chapter arising from the same study, Fox (1999) promotes a ‘spiritual experience process funnel’ model and a component of that model is an “overcome or rationalise fear” stage (p. 460). She states:

_Fears and anxiety had to be overcome, and an environment in which the participants felt safe and protected had to be found. Hence, fear, anxiety, and establishing a sense of place were barriers toward spiritual experience (Fox, 1999, p. 459)._
Most of the Tihoi solo apprehension and fear emerged during the night, concurring with Long, et al. (2006, p. 74): “...our data suggest these negative (non-nature-based solitude) episodes occur most frequently at night.” Nights heighten apprehension and uncertainty for soloists; they contribute to solo involving periods of negative solitude. Those soloists who returned to the centre all did so at night. They also all returned to their solo locations under the cover of darkness, primarily with the hope they would not be seen by their peers. Issues related to the dark seemed prevalent when discussing the perceived threats to safety on solo, and the onset of darkness brought with it uncertainty. Kohak (1984) highlights modern day humans are as scared of the dark as we are of solitude, and this was certainly true for some of the Tihoi soloists.

Sleep was the strategy used to deal with the uncertainty of the darkness; a retreat into complete solitude. However, this became problematic with the time spent inside the bivy and in sleeping bags during the day. Most soloists therefore slept for periods during the days, and it is not surprising that an interrupted night of sleep contributed to higher levels of anxiety during the day, depressive feelings, and fatigue (Fuligni, 2005). So day merged with night, and in the gloom of the forest mid-winter the students typically struggled to connect with natural time. Those students without a watch were never really sure of the day or night, and so time became another source of uncertainty.

Awake lying in shelters was furtive opportunity for the mind to traverse the mountains, rivers, lakes, streams, tracks, and the dense bush of their adolescent lives. This is exactly the intent Tihoi management had for the solo, and much thought took place. However, such mental work was not always appreciated by the boys: Alistair could not slow his mind down at times on solo unless he was asleep, and Brent ended up thinking about his grandfather’s death in a way that became emotionally painful. Despite the efforts of most soloists to keep busy (with reading books, reading and writing their journal, writing letters, completing other written challenges, and sleeping) the nights were long and the darkness all pervading.

The Tihoi solo occurred during a period of particularly challenging weather. It was mid-winter and close to the shortest day, yet hibernation was not totally possible. The first night
was particularly wet, and the second very windy, with the last day dawning to a harsh ground frost. Perhaps it was the weather that contributed to moments of negative solitude? Certainly for Aaron, unable to construct a decent shelter and with a wet sleeping bag, his experience was at times negative. Yet he managed to get himself organised with support of Tihoi staff. Alistair similarly struggled as his bivy was not up to the standard he wished for as it started to drizzle on night one, but he was soon well organised to cope with the weather.

It is my belief that the training and bush experience Tihoi affords students serves them reasonably well in terms of basic survival needs, but not to fully reassure participants of their ability to cope well on solo. As Bevington (2005) notes, the emphasis on many Outward Bound solo programmes has shifted from survival towards reflection, and this correlates to ensuring the soloists are comfortable enough to enable reflection (McIntosh, 1989). One potential strategy for acclimatising to solo and potentially alleviating stress might be to integrate regular, short-duration solitude moments throughout the programme. Potter and O’Connell (2005) describe the ‘teachable moment’ solo as a 30 minute solo experience attached to various programme components within Canadian College and University settings. Citing Potter’s earlier work into solitude moments for assisting participants of large groups to make meaning from their experiences, they state:

*Solo, quiet time apart from others, can offer the most powerful form of private reflection... For many the mini-solo experience is an opportunity to slow down and simply notice, perhaps for the first time, the wonders of nature. For others, this time allows one to reflect upon their trip, the environment, oneself and others (Potter, 1992, in Potter & O’Connell, 2005, p. 141).*

Nicholls (2008; 2009) has documented the use of regular moments of *Quiet Time* within adventure therapy practice as a sense of solitude independent of personal isolation or communicative separation. They are brief participant-initiated moments of either reflection or reflective conversation which have the potential to evoke positive experiences of being alone with others in special places and without the need to be truly alone. Perhaps the incorporation of a series of quiet times into all of the outdoor training and leadership weekends might well allay some of the fears and apprehensions of the Tihoi students in the lead up to their big solo.
Hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1997) has provided a window through which to capture honest accounts of feelings and emotions as lived while on solo. This study deepens understandings of fear and uncertainty during multi-night solitude experiences within outdoor programmes for adolescents, as well as acknowledging other opportunities emerging for adolescents from solitude in a natural setting. Negative lived-aspects of the solo have been exposed with this research that have not been previously captured nor adequately discussed within contemporary adventure education discourse.

A number of other studies have utilised a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of adults with wilderness solitude, and have highlighted some profound dimensions to the solo (Atchison, 1998; Dingman, 1992; J. Morrison, 1986; Richley, 1992). Yet none of these studies has analysed fears, phobias, uncertainties, or ongoing apprehensions or indeed any threads that might have contributed to moments or periods of negative solitude. In another phenomenological investigation that examined the experiences of rural children with solitude in a non-outdoor setting (Hoffart, 1995), the eleven meta-themes that emerged all spoke of solitude as a positive experience as equivalent to the adult solitude experience.

According to Maslow (1954) physiological and safety needs must be met before advances can be made in terms of esteem and self actualisation. This has implications in terms of the personal growth possible from adventure experiences, where there are risks, dangers, hazards, perils and adaptive dissonance challenges to encounter and manage. Indeed the very premise of traditional adventure education infers that through exposure to risk and danger participants will satisfy their personal growth needs. Ewert (1989, p. 3) contends that “risk taking is the sine qua non of the adventure experience”. Yet, as Walle (1997) notes, this appears counter-intuitive to the hierarchy of needs espoused by Maslow; another matter to which I shall return.

From the educational-psychology field comes the understanding that fear is a natural part of the human experience; a natural response to risk and an important emotion that speaks to survival. While learning is essentially adaptive to stimuli such as fear, the fear can
grow out of proportion to the danger producing a phobic response that inhibits the individual’s ability to function (Domjan & Grau, 2010). Thus the premise within traditional adventure education to work in the growth zone or, said differently, outside the comfort zone appears flawed. The pedagogical link between fear-induced uncertainty and learning is certainly contested ground (M. Brown, 2008a; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002) and ripe for future research.

This section has examined aspects of fear, apprehension, and uncertainty as experienced by Tihoi soloists’. These are emotional responses to the solo that have not been adequately discussed within the outdoor adventure education literature. There remains a need to better understand the experiences of soloists and fear, particularly with respect to how negative emotional responses might enhance or diminish learning. Certainly the traditional adventure education discourse being founded upon learning that emerges from uncertainty appears problematic.
PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 3: Solo as boredom, complexity and insight

PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: Solo rules present students with clear institutional boundaries that contribute to the Tihoi panoptic gaze (Wood, 2007) of managing student experiences via surveillance from afar. Yet most students freely chose to break rules at times as voluntary risk takers. Such glimpses of edgework behaviour (Lyng, 2005) acknowledge solo as a site for the fostering of conformity and resistance behaviours. Edgework assists understandings of the lived solo as dynamic and complex, and certainly not as a homogeneous student experience.

Solo contrasts in a temporal sense with the balance of the Tihoi programme, and the meeting of fundamental survival needs without additional challenges creates opportunity for boredom. Escaping the experience state of boredom is integrally linked with matters of complexity. Understanding boredom as but one experience state possible on solo assists understandings of the complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional qualities of the solo experience. Disequilibrium states such as boredom can manifest into positive opportunities for insight (Dewey, 1934) that embrace moments of pleasure, purpose and meaning.

Priest and Gass (2005), building upon the work of Mortlock (1984), state:

Adventure is characterized by the presence of some fear. Participants are in total control of the situation... ...Play is characterized by the absence of fear. We can describe play as pleasant or fun and as boring or a waste of time (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 49).

Thus adventure and play are presented as separate constructs in traditional adventure education, with the presence of fear being the point of difference. Yet to theorise that an experience is either play or adventure is overly simplistic and denies the potential for an important melding of psycho-emotional states within an outdoor adventure experience. Fear and boredom, and play and adventure, have co-existed within the Tihoi solo alongside an array of other experience states.

An evolving understanding of lived outdoor experience via qualitative investigations highlight outdoor recreation and adventure experiences as complex, dynamic, and multidimensional, and not always pleasant or desirable (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; B. Lee &
Schafer, 2002; Y. Lee, 1999; McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998). Complex experience suggests that humans are capable of experiencing more than one feeling or mood during a lived moment of time (Y. Lee, 1999), such as apprehension and excitement in building a bivy shelter with the onset of rain. A dynamic experience denotes the constant changing nature of the dimensions of experience (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001), such as the changes in mood states associated with changes in weather. Multidimensional experience describes how a lived experience evolves through various phases and the mixture of thoughts, feelings, and ideas (B. Lee & Schafer, 2002), such as feelings of freedom, frustration, anger, enjoyment being experienced during the solo. As Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) acknowledge, these (solo) experiences are not one time transactions between the participant and their surroundings but rather represent dynamic and fluctuating dimensions of the experience that accumulate to provide the experience in totality.

In the previous section I discussed the solo as an experience laced with fear, apprehension, and anxiety; moments within the solo experience that have not been adequately addressed in the literature. Yet these experiences did not occur in isolation and there have been many examples of more positive solo moments, which I have also sought to acknowledge in the previous two chapters. My intent in examining the less-positive dimensions of experience is not to diminish the positive qualities of the Tihoi solo but rather to explore how such experience states might appear in relation. As I have mentioned previously, the Tihoi solo was a far more negative lived experience overall than the solo literature promotes, yet these negative dimensions have paradoxically also led to more positive endeavour.

The positive moments of an adventure are often reported in outdoor research studies, while stressful and unpleasant experiences are only coming to researcher consciousness through studies that have specifically examined the lived experiences of adventure participants (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Y. Lee, Datillo, & Howard, 1994). This section acknowledges the multifarious experiential dimensions of the solo. It provides insight to how the solo experience is received and mediated by soloists. Part of that picture means understanding how the structures for solo at Tihoi are in place to mediate something of a universal solo experience, and how the soloist might choose to conform or resist that mediation.
The solo philosophically exists, as the Tihoi instructor handbook describes, to challenge students and to provide individual reflection time so that they may examine their experiences and set goals for the future. The specific aims include (J Furminger & Furminger, 1998): opportunity to be alone (which is a contrast from everyday life at Tihoi); opportunity to reflect on their Tihoi experience; opportunity to self-examine in terms of the changes that they have been through during Tihoi.

Solo rules present each student with clear institutional boundaries that limit the potential for physical injuries and ecological harm while emphasising the pedagogical intent of the experience. As detailed in Chapter Two, Tihoi Solitudes, the solo brief provides very clear understandings for students regarding what they should and should not do whilst on solo. This includes a long list of DO NOT’s and these are made explicit to students in their 44-hour solo booklets and thus reaffirmed by students on location.

The internalising of rules and regulations, such as those provided for the Tihoi solo, are an important dimension to social order and control (Wood, 2007). Sociologist Michael Foucault (1926 – 1984) examined relationships between systems of social control and power. Using Bentham’s ‘Panopticon’ design for prisons as a metaphor, Foucault (1995) described how strategies for surveillance present panoptic discipline for the masses. In the prison model, the structure of the panoptic tower (pan = all; optic = seeing) is designed to allow the prison guards to observe all prisoners at will. Prisoners, however, cannot discern if there is a guard in the tower or not and so they effectively assume a state of constant surveillance. The result in the prison model is an acceptance of the regulations and a normalisation of behaviours that fit within institutional expectations (Wood, 2007). The Tihoi solo rules and the potential for staff to randomly check on students, coupled with the backdrop of Tihoi systems and practices, present students with a similar mode of panoptic surveillance. So whether a staff member is observing or visiting a student or not on solo, the set structures combine to render a panoptic social order and to regulate behaviours. The Tihoi panoptic gaze is therefore ever-present in the mind of soloists, and that gaze promotes the solo experience in terms of the institutional design principles around reflection on experience.
Of related interest was that for Brent his experiences being bullied during the first term at Tihoi meant he was hyper-conscious of not engaging in behaviour during solo that might be opportunity for getting further grief from others. He was explicit with his concerns around being given a hard time post-solo if any of the student bullies had seen him return to the centre. This meant for Brent his actions on solo, whether seen or not by his peers, also fell under something of a panoptic spell. There existed surveillance within the surveillance, and of course Brent’s fear of being further bullied post-solo may have been real. However, his fears of being physically attacked by peer-bullies during solo were unfounded; The Tihoi panopticon regulated behaviour and the potential bullies knew they were under surveillance.

Despite the invisible social control of the panopticon, all Tihoi soloists in this study chose to break at least one of the rules. Most of the rule breaking was harmless, such as moving beyond the five metre radius of their solo site, visiting neighbours for supplies, and taking in a watch or a book to read. Other rule breaking, such as tree climbing or taking a knife and carving initials into a tree, would have been regarded by Tihoi as more serious. This later activity incorporated some degree of action and potential harm, with decisions voluntarily made by individuals who knew well the potential consequences of their actions. Against the panoptic backdrop, these activities presented glimpses of ‘edgework’ behaviour (Lyng, 2009, 2005).

As Lyng (2008) notes, edgework involves the negotiation of the line between life and death, or at the very least between safety and security. So to suggest that activities on solo were indeed examples of edgework behaviour would be a significant overstatement. Yet on solo emerged glimpses of experience that might indicate formative edgework behaviours. Lyng (2005), promoted edgework as both ‘escape and resistance’ from the constraints of an overregulated society and ‘valorised risk taking’ within a risk society where responsibilities for risk have shifted from the political and corporate towards the individual. In terms of escape and resistance, Lyng argued that edge workers seek to transcend institutional and social constraints through the pursuit of high-risk leisure activities... “edgework is seen as a means of freeing oneself from social conditions that deaden or deform the human spirit through overwhelming social regulation and control” (Lyng, 2005, p. 9).
The exploits of Paul and Martin with tree climbing on solo represent formative edgework experiences: One could argue that Tihoi has created an adventurous, risk-informed, societal microcosm where coping with challenge and hardship was indeed valorised. Decisions around tree climbing were voluntarily made against the backdrop of the panoptic framework employed by Tihoi. There were dimensions of freedom, escape, and resistance within the tree climbing experiences of both Paul and Martin and within the tree carving experience of Brent. These, I believe, have been formative edgework moments that contrast with the decisions of conformity to the rules and structures as made by the other soloists. That Paul, Martin, and Brent chose to break rules at key moments of their solo also contrasted with their own conformity to rule structures during other moments of the solo. This again highlights the complexity of voluntary risk taking (Lyng, 2005; 2008) and to the multifaceted dimensions of the solo.

There are inherent tensions associated with the exaggeration of risk within adventure education (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; Nicols, 2001). A body of literature has emerged that discusses the complexities of risk taking within modern society (see, for example, Beck, 1992) and Lyng’s (2005) conception of ‘Edgework’ builds upon this social research to offer perspectives on voluntary risk taking. Of significance is that edgework avoids the reductionist modes inherent in the psychological and economic discourse on risk. Edgework provides opportunity for a richer understanding of risk within the outdoor education context. A socialisation of the risk discourse moves beyond the traditional adventure education notions of risk being the potential to lose something of value (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Priest, 1999; Priest & Gass, 2005).

Examining outdoor adventure experiences utilising a sociological lens acknowledges the complex interplay of socio-historical, economic, political, and cultural forces inherent (Lyng, 2008), yet social researchers are only beginning to unravel this complexity. Lyng does suggest that there are common experiential patterns across an array of edgework situations and that “the most significant empirical patterns are those relating to the sensual pleasures and aesthetic arousal experienced by participants” (Lyng, 2008, p. 86). Regarding the solo
experience, the reflective experiences of Martin arising from his tree climbing adventures spoke to the aesthetic dimensions of voluntary risk taking.

With regards to outdoor, adventure education, considering sensual embodied pleasures and aesthetics as a component of experience aligns edgework with recent insights into the ecological and spiritual dimensions of adventure experience (R. Fox, 1999; Frederickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2003). As Varley (2006) notes, the outdoor context of adventure education provides “a multi-sensual engagement with nature” (p. 187) and “a romantic connection with the natural environment, offering the potential for spiritual renewal” (p. 188, italics in original). These are important dimensions to the notion of adventure within adventure education.

Whilst activities like carving initials into a tree or climbing to the top of a tall tree and swaying in the wind might only partially represent formative edgework behaviours, they speak resoundingly to decisions being made regarding personal capabilities, personal limits, and the rules of engagement. Internal decisions have been made that reflect aspects of conformity, resistance, and freedom (Lyng, 2005). Through a traditional adventure education lens, these matters might represent the socio-psychological growth of ‘self’. Through a sociological lens understanding ‘self’ dimensions, such as reliance, confidence, and efficacy, as socially mediated adds additional layers of complexity and richness.

Boredom was an experience state that students were particularly apprehensive of pre-solo. Yet the experiences of boredom were only fleeting when they did emerge and soloists quickly transformed the potential negativity of boredom into more positive experience states. From boredom arose opportunities for more positive experience and personal insight.

Solo is typically a massive contrast to other structured programme elements within outdoor adventure education, as typified by the solo within Outward Bound-style programmes (Bevington, 2005; Bobilya, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2005). The lack of physical activity, the stillness, and the lack of defined structure present an interesting challenge for adolescents. The solo is a significant time apart from peers and the comforts of the centre, and also a welcome break for
some from the busy Tihoi hour by hour, seven day weekly schedule. The time allocated for solo creates challenge for some, and soloists have at times struggled with managing their time productively.

Adolescents appear prone to boredom (Cadwell, Baldwin, Walls, & Smith, 2004; Fawcett, 2007) and on solo this appears to have been accentuated. Boredom for adolescents, like experience itself, is a multifaceted complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of different factors, not least of which is the environment or context within which adolescents are situated (Wegner & Flisher, 2009). In a recreational or sporting sense, boredom represents an imbalance between high participant skill level related to low levels of challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1992), and on solo this was accentuated once basic needs of shelter and warmth were provided for. Within the Tihoi cohort were varieties of skill level in terms of shelter-craft, suggesting a multitude of levels of challenge may have existed in the initial phases of the experience. For some the construction of a shelter was rudimentary; for others it was an epic mission requiring a lot of trial and error. Not surprisingly there was a variety of student experiences, with boredom states not to the fore in the early stages of the solo. Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) speak of the multiple phases to an outdoor experience. The Tihoi solo saw boredom surfacing in times when there was indeed nothing to do; when basic shelter, personal comfort needs, and adequate sleep had been achieved.

Soloists defined boredom in different ways, with the general thrust being: nothing to do, nothing to keep occupied, having to stay in one place, and frustration or annoyance with the lack of excitement, adventure, or fun. These were experience states the students made effort to avoid; the notion of just ‘being’ on solo was somewhat foreign for all, though Zach was fortunate to have the spiritual skills to utilise his time and space to deep effect at times. Boredom is an important experience-state on solo, according to practitioner Kelk (1994), and needs to be embraced rather than regarded as necessarily negative. Yet for the soloist’s boredom was construed overall as a negative experience state.
In his classic text *Between boredom and anxiety* Csikszentmihalyi (1975) discussed the very real opportunities for achieving a flow state as one negotiates the boredom–anxiety continuum. The inference clearly was that a state or states of flow can be achieved between the two contrasting experiences of boredom and anxiety. Csikszentmihalyi promoted nine characteristics of the flow state, which many outdoor adventure researchers have been able to identify with as transcendent moments with the merging of action and awareness (see Boniface, 2000, for example). Yet on solo it is difficult to discern such flow experiences beyond the cathartic experience of Martin and possibly Paul as they adventured high in their respective trees. The emphasis upon the action dimension of flow was for the most part missing, and the soloists danced between anxiety and boredom seemingly without the achievement of flow.

Zach demonstrated moments of apparent and relaxed joy at times which, following Boniface (2000) might not represent flow but could well indicate something of a peak experience. Maslow (1971) introduced the term ‘peak experience’ to conceptualise “moments of the highest happiness and fulfilment” (Boniface, 2000, p. 58). The peak experience within the adventure experience, Boniface summarises, describes moments characteristic of seven key facets: “Loss of fear with no fear of failure; sensation of being totally absorbed in the activity; effortless performance; a sensation of complete control; a time-space disorientation (time usually seeming to slow down); a perception of the universe being integrated and unified as if in some moment of special insight, and; a perception of the experience being unique, temporary and involuntary” (Boniface, 2000; 58).

Utilising these descriptors it again appears that solo does not easily fit with such psychologically-oriented attempts to classify the outdoor experience. Matters related, for example, to joy, relaxation, personal responsibility, fun, spontaneity, fear, boredom, or anxiety are not adequately embraced through a ‘peak experience’ window. Even the experiences of Zach do not seem to represent anything of a peak experience(s), despite his conformity to solo rules and completion of all tasks expected of him whilst also embracing prayer and meditation in the interests of spiritual renewal. Simply put, the solo experience has been far more varied.
and complex than positive experience phenomena (such as a peak experience, a peak performance, or a flow state) might represent.

Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) report that outdoor recreation experiences represent multitude states of mind, rather than a single state, and that those mind states are dynamic, evolving, and somewhat dependent upon context. Building upon that work, Devorak and Borrie (2007) note that social and cultural dimensions influence the quality and meanings of outdoor experience far more than earlier research into ‘satisfaction’ or ‘benefits based’ recreation has indicated. The inference is clearly that negatively construed moments within an outdoor recreation experience might contribute to the complexity inherent, and that quality of experience is “influenced by other entities and subject to a variety of cultural and social forces, such as institutional structures, personal values, social norms, and cultural stereotypes” (Devorak & Borrie, 2007, p. 13). Not surprisingly, experience states on solo have been widely varied, dynamic, and sometimes quite temporary. Boredom was experienced negatively but only fleetingly before reversals of experience occurred and soloists filled their time more constructively.

Dewey’s contributions to the early discourse around the nature of experience have been significant and remain current. As described in his book Art as Experience (Dewey, 1934), the human-as-animal’s primary concern is with the satisfaction of any disequilibrium or disharmony that might be currently experienced. For example, if a person is hungry they then consciously satisfy that hunger. In the case of a negative experience of boredom on solo, the soloist’s primary concern becomes embracing a busier, more positive experience. Dewey’s reference to the human ‘as animal’ suggests humans will experience animal-like responses to environmental conditions but without any lesser intelligence or rational functioning. His point was that a transition from disequilibrium to harmony was a primal response for humans. Dewey referred to the transition variously as ‘a recovery of union’; ‘moments of fulfilment’ and; ‘a complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events’.

In Art as Experience Dewey (1934) might well have been discussing the solo experience rather than aesthetics in terms of resolving disequilibrium: From boredom emerged journal
reading and writing, from fear emerged (eventual) sleep, from hunger emerged snacking, from boredom emerged carving the tree or personal feelings associated with climbing trees, from loneliness emerged interaction with others, etc. Dewey’s notion of disequilibrium is particularly useful for understanding the interactions between the felt negative and positive sensations aligned with the solo. It is inclusive of less-positive experience states that infuse the solo, acknowledges the often dynamic and contrasting dimensions of the experience, and gives credence to the solo participant for interpreting their own experience and making it personally useful or rewarding.

Dewey’s ‘disequilibrium’ points toward a potential pedagogical link between negative experiences states such as boredom and more positive states that might lead to personal learning or insight. The transition from disequilibrium to harmony, as Dewey (1934) describes, is a primal response that has seen soloists dealing with physiological and safety needs to enact a more favourable experience. Later Dewey (1964) promoted learning being precipitated by desire; that there is an emotional response to current circumstances and so the presence of unsettling feelings creates the desire for change. Dewey notes when matters are progressing smoothly desires do not arise and “without desire to learn there is no need for the effort and struggle involved with learning” (1964, p. 87).

As Davis-Berman and Berman (2002) acknowledge “productive avenues to growth and change exist, based on participants’ safety and security” (p. 310), and that taking care of basic needs and operating within personal emotional comfort zones is critical. Said differently, positive gains are highly unlikely when soloists are struggling to maintain their physiological and safety needs and / or when they are required to deal with anxiety. Dewey’s disequilibrium idea highlights the natural propensity for adolescents to transition from moments of negativity to operating in relative harmony, thus allowing for a more pleasurable, purposeful, and meaningful experience.

In the traditional adventure education discourse, coping with the dissonance arising from risk-evoked uncertainty or anxiety is said to promote personal learning (Ewert, 1989; Ewert & Garvey, 2007; P. Martin & Priest, 1986; Priest & Gass, 2005). Yet Davis-Berman and Berman
(2002) highlight that anxiety is an inhibitor of learning and needs to be carefully minimised, and they join an emerging critique for the risk–reward model of adventure (see M. Brown, 2008a, for an overview). Walle (1997), in highlighting a number of inconsistencies in adventure-risk theory, acknowledges the work of Maslow in identifying that humans will only seek opportunities for higher learning and satisfaction when their lower-level needs are met. For Walle, the concept of humans foregoing personal comfort and safety needs to seek the rewards from deliberate risk seeking adventure is counter-intuitive. He promotes an ‘insight’ model for adventure that acknowledges the search for insight as the key quality of an adventure rather than the deliberate quest to overcome risk and anxiety. Many of the stated aims of solo experiences within adventure education appear related to opportunities for insight for participants, and Tihoi’s is no exception. Whilst Walle’s ‘Insight Model’ for adventure is discussed in more depth later, it seems that there is a logical coherence between ‘an adventure’ and ‘learning from that adventure’ when basic needs are well taken care of.

Dewey’s (1934) ideas around humans consciously seeking states of equilibrium highlights the capacity for soloists to naturally shift from negative solitude moments to more balanced states of experience. ‘Equilibrium’ resonates with the experiences of Tihoi soloists who generally reported experience states that were more negative than positive and who regularly sought to improve their own experience states.

Similarly Walle’s (1997) ideas around humans seeking insight as a motive for adventure, once basic physiological and survival needs are met, further highlights the dynamic qualities of the solo experience and the potential opportunities for positive experience states. There has clearly emerged a dynamic complexity of experience states from the Tihoi solo. These affirm some of the insights provided by Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) to the dynamic, multi-phased, complex nature of an experience such as solo.
PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 4: Solo as insightful reflective space

**PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT:** The process of journalising the personal meanings arising from a five month outdoor adventure education programme, coupled with the deliberate placement of an extended solo towards the end of that experience, creates an insightful opportunity for students at Tihoi Venture School. The set tasks, the alone-time, the stillness, and the fresh air present a significant reflective space that is solo. Solo is a key pedagogical strategy that presents Tihoi students with considerable opportunity for personal insight. Yet, as former Director John Furminger has described at interview, Tihoi students typically “...need to be shown the mountain” in terms of securing lessons from their experiences. However, a deeper journey of self-examination, self-discovery, and self-reconstruction via introspective reflection is unlikely for adolescent males without the skills or life experience to adequately process their own self discovery (Larson, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003).

The two-day, two night solo experience at Tihoi clearly presents formal and informal opportunities for students to reflect upon their broader Tihoi experience. Time and space facilitates the reading of reflective journals and the undertaking of a variety of written tasks designed to support students think deeply about their Tihoi ‘journey’, their future, their relationships with themselves, and their relationships with others. The deliberate placement of solo late in the programme coupled with the written tasks that are expected to be completed reinforces solo as a key pedagogical strategy. This strategy involves alone-time, stillness, fresh air, a bush environment away from the Tihoi base, and social silence to promote internal reflections on the lived experiences at Tihoi.

Solo thus attempts to provide opportunities for learning via reflection in at least five key ways: (i) students are encouraged to read their Tihoi journal to remember and to think about their many and various achievements, frustrations, and highlights; (ii) students are encouraged to complete a solo booklet that is laced with inspirational words and oriented to taking stock of personal strengths and setting goals for the future; (iii) students are encouraged to craft a ‘letter to self’ (for postage around each students’21st birthday) to encourage thinking about their reality in five or so years; (iv) students are encouraged to write letters to others (family
and friends) for the purposes of thinking beyond self and projecting outward thoughts and feelings, and; (v) rules are established for the purposes of facilitating reflection while maintaining student safety (John Furminger, interview 1; Christine Furminger, interview 1). Post solo there are also opportunities for students to complete their journal writing around the solo experience, and this writing is then perused by one of the Tihoi Directors. These are specific tasks designed to stimulate and enhance reflective processes, and they both contribute to and resist classic experiential education thinking.

Classic experiential education within outdoor adventure education has traditionally emphasised the brief-activity-debrief model, or a ‘experience-reflect-learn’ approach (Panicucci, 2007; Priest & Gass, 2005; Prouty, 2007). Such a strategy provides a sequence of activities that couples with some form of reflective process to make sense and meaning of the experience as relevant to the individual. Various models and theories have emerged that seek to explain this activity-reflect-learn process, with Kolb’s (1984) four-stage cycle often combined with Honey & Mumford’s (1992) learning styles ideas to presuppose individuals might learn differently at different stages of the cycle. Yet Beard and Wilson (2002) acknowledge the complexity of learning via experience. They present experiential learning as an interplay of many ways of learning, including: the varied forms of intelligence that humans hold; the varieties of emotions arising from experience; the wide-ranging responses to varied adventure places, and; the qualities of the experience.

Whilst Kolb’s (1984) model has widespread acceptance by adventure educators as “an almost taken for granted theory of learning” (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 36) it has come under increasing scrutiny (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Fenwick, 2000, 2001; Loynes, 2002; Miettinen, 2000; Quay, 2003; Seaman, 2008). Drawing on the work of Miettinen (2000), Beard and Wilson (2002) suggest that experiential education based upon Kolb’s cycle is fundamentally limited through isolating experience and reflection, and further separating the potential for learning from other humans and the environment (physical, cultural, social, and historical). Thus Beard & Wilson argue, Kolb’s neatly laid out ‘circles’ (and other models based upon a cyclical or step-wise learning process) neither adequately represent the historical contributions of early
education theorists such as Dewey (1938) nor do they adequately represent the complexities of the learning process.

Most of the outdoor pursuit components of the curriculum at Tihoi have staff actively ‘processing’ the adventure experience via a brief-activity-debrief method. This involves staff working in teaching teams with small groups throughout and sitting down post-activity to assist students make sense and meaning from their experiences. The students then are encouraged to acknowledge their learning and held meanings arising from experience using their Tihoi journals. Thus there is surrounding most outdoor activities at Tihoi “a preoccupation and concentration on the individual as an agent for change” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 8).

Expectations around completing journals, to be read by one of the co-Directors, determine that the individual journals seek to capture the ‘growth’ of individual students. These are institutional processes that Bowers (2005), cited in Seaman (2008), believes represent an indoctrination through narrowing the conceptions of both experiencing and learning to fit with Tihoi frameworks / morals. Many students at Tihoi hesitate to write what they really feel they want to in their journals. Knowing they will be read by Tihoi Directors places some emphasis upon what they think Tihoi needs or wishes to hear.

Knapp (2005b) promotes quality briefing and debriefing processes as critical for solos to become learning experiences. As detailed in chapter 2, significant attention is given to the solo brief at Tihoi; indeed there are multiple briefings for solo, such is the care provided to ensure students are well prepared. The preliminary six-hour solo mid-intake could also be regarded as a form of briefing. Yet there is little by way of a solo debrief at Tihoi, either collectively or individually. Students are encouraged to make sense and meaning of their experience via writing (in journals, letters, solo booklets, and potentially via poems and sketches) if they feel so creatively inclined. The expectation is that journals will be completed either during or after solo. Thus the Tihoi solo is ‘processed’ differently in terms of making sense and meaning from the experience. The entire framing of the experience is facilitated by one senior Tihoi staff member prior to departure and students are encouraged to complete the above listed tasks under the guise of reflection. Post-solo there is no classic reflective ‘end’; no processing in the form of a group debrief nor one-on-one post solo discussions. Beyond journals, which were to
be read by Tihoi co-Director Christine Furminger, once students went on their next adventure there is little compulsion to complete any reflective written work on solo.

Whilst some students wrote in their journals on solo, most actually completed their solo journal entries the day after their return. More commonly written were letters home to family, detailing their solo in general terms without any startling revelations to the specific lived experience of solo. Of the soloists who wrote home during solo, Brent engaged in an enormous emotional outpouring that reflected his solo emotional state. He was focussed upon using letter writing as a way of coping with his alone-time.

Soloists crafting ‘letters to self’ were encouraged, and seven of the nine students in this study completed this task. Yet each was generally a poorly crafted non-descript letter to be posted to ‘self’; letters largely devoid of future insight when compared with other writing associated with solo. I have no doubt that the adolescent soloists struggled to make sense of what their life might be like in five years time.

Most students noted the difficulty they had with being comfortable writing, and the texts were particularly messy. Some journals were started on solo and most were finished in the classroom the night after solo, at the insistence of co-Director Christine Furminger. Thus most of the journal reflections were tidy, coherent, and sometimes deeply insightful to the Tihoi experience in general terms. However, for capturing the lived experiences of solo the journals proved particularly limited. On solo all students, barring Brent, did not write nearly as much as they thought they would. Aaron chose not to write at all in his journal as he did not wish for it to get wet, such was the pride he had in what was a living representation of his many Tihoi achievements.

Reading and re-reading Tihoi journals was the most productive reflective exercise undertaken on solo. The social silence and stillness (as opposed to physical activity), the thoughtfulness in the presence of nature, and the lived space and time of boredom all undoubtedly facilitated reflection. However, it was journal reflections on solo (via reading and the associated memory work triggered by reading) that emerged as the most powerful reflective catalyst. Individual interviews clearly established the reading of journals as the
mechanism for reflections about Tihoi, personal achievements, relationships, shared experiences and hardships.

Bevington (2005, p. 75) states that “Solo is good. It provides guaranteed reflection”. Yet, as Tihoi co-Director John Furminger has shared (interview 1), the Tihoi students have required clear support and guidance for their reflections upon experience earlier in the programme. From John Furminger’s perspective (interview 1), reflection is not an automatic component of experience. The recording of detailed journal entries throughout the Tihoi experience, and then the reading of the journal on solo has been Tihoi’s primary pedagogical strategy for programme reflections. Without the journal the solo would undoubtedly have been a different experience. While it is easy to assume that other reflective processes have been productive, the Tihoi soloists clearly identified random thoughts and reflections throughout their experience and most soloists had to cope with anxieties and other challenges including attempts to avoid boredom. Much of their time was spent keeping busy, and that busyness might not necessarily correlate to learning. So Bevington’s (2005) inference that reflection is not only automatic but that soloists might obtain something of a universally positive solo experience appears a significant overstatement.

In actuality the post solo interviews were opportunities for students to contemplate their solo experience in ways they had not considered. Much of the reflective work on solo was about other aspects of the Tihoi experience, and so the reflective interview provided insights to solo experience that would very unlikely have been brought to consciousness in other ways. This accounts in part for the difficulty soloists had for adequately expressing their solo experiences and thoughts at post-solo interview. In terms of those interviews, all nine students embraced the completion of the 44-hour solo timeline exercise. This was a specific research intervention designed to promote memory recall at interview, and the timeline provided key moments for discussion. While they were specific to this study, the timelines were an important methodological tool for capturing student experience, allowing for occasionally deep insights to emerge. Experience sampling timelines have promise as reflective tools to assist young soloists make sense and meaning of their experiences. I
As I have briefly mentioned, there has been widespread critique of constructivist foundations of adventure education practice and the technical-mechanistic approaches to processing the outdoor learning experience in the interests of promoting individualised knowledge acquisition (Brookes, 2003a; M. Brown, 2009; Fenwick, 2001; Loynes, 2002). Seaman (2008) suggests that these critiques are now so pervasive that the various step-wise models emerging from Kolb and others’ work are better considered as an ideology of experiential learning rather than a philosophy or theory, as is currently the accepted view. Seaman (2008) also acknowledges that learning cannot be separated from the cultural-historical context in which it exists, while others similarly acknowledge the problematic pre-occupation of adventure educators with emphasising the ‘self’ over ‘community’ and ‘place’ (Brookes, 2003b; M. Brown, 2009; Quay, 2003).

The Tihoi solo presents some promise in terms of placing the experience within the socio-cultural, ecological, and historical context that is Tihoi and broadening the experience beyond the self. Indeed both the pedagogical intent of solo and the experience of solo reach far more broadly. For example, soloists Alistair and Bevan have engaged with history in terms of the Māori Pa site locally and the history of the forest. Zach has enabled religiously-oriented connections to his solo site that were quite profound. Brent and Paul have reflected upon their social relationships within their houses. There has not been a limiting stepwise action-reflection process engaged via solo, though there are components inherent that have the potential to be. Rather, Tihoi has chosen to let the experience speak in ways relevant to each individual or not at all. The lack of post-solo ‘debrief’ is a deliberate strategy to not try and box the Tihoi soloist into making post-experience learning statements that they think the Tihoi staff might wish to hear (Christine Furminger, interview 1). This may well separate Tihoi from a mechanistic brief-activity-debrief model of processing the experience, resisting traditional outdoor adventure education practice. Paradoxically the expectation for students to then complete journal entries based upon their experience, that are to be read by Tihoi staff, buys back into such philosophy.

Whilst the use of the journal for acknowledging learning experiences may well be a mode for the indoctrination of experience towards Tihoi philosophy (Bowers, 2005, in Seaman,
2008), it also acts as a catalyst for the acknowledgement of learning that is more situated (M. Brown, 2009) and individualised (R. Zink, 2005). That is, the socio-cultural, ecological, and historical context of Tihoi and the surrounding forest can be promoted as a central facet of the solo experience as related to the individual. Solo has provided space and time to assist students understand their Tihoi experience in a more situated way, though this has not been an explicit pedagogical strategy employed and appears more intuitive than deliberate. In this regard there are opportunities for Tihoi to further strengthen a more situated understanding of place via solo.

Notwithstanding the above point, the experience-reflection dimensions of solo appear in contrast to many of the other adventure components as facilitated by Tihoi. This holds some pedagogical promise in terms of building a reflective / facilitative model for outdoor education at Tihoi that is situated (Brookes, 2003b; M. Brown, 2009). That is, it would not require a quantum leap for Tihoi to take stock of the “specific geographical, social, political, cultural and personal circumstances” of place (Brookes, 2003b, p. 130). This is particularly relevant to connecting solo with many of the science, geography, maths, social studies, and history classes that form the base Tihoi curriculum.

One final experiential point arising from solo relates to the role of writing in the reflective process. Tihoi students have come to appreciate the opportunities they have been provided for writing. As described in chapter two, writing letters home and journaling experiences are standard pedagogical strategies that encourage students to think, to be creative, and to enjoy the craft of writing. All solo students interviewed valued the connections established with parents and extended family through reciprocity of letters, and they have demonstrated pride with their journal writing efforts. As former Director John Furminger (interview 1) has described, Tihoi students typically “need to be shown the mountain” in terms of securing lessons from their experiences. In many respects the journal has been the reflective modus operandi throughout the Tihoi experience and, come time for solo, the depth of care and skill with writing about and from their experience prepares students well for solo reflection. While this has been mirrored in the high calibre of journal reflections on the Tihoi experience generally, other modes of reflective writing developed during the solo are not
nearly as eloquent. Knowing that Mrs. Furminger would read the journal was more than likely the catalyst for the care employed.

A clear inference within the literature on adolescence is that the soloists will unlikely hold a depth of reasoning capacity to make pedagogical sense or meaning from their solitude experiences (Larson, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003). Missing the life experience of adults, children and adolescents only have a limited knowledge of the world to reflect their experiences against. However, it appears obvious that Tihoi students are well ordered into their journal writing process throughout their five month Tihoi experience. While they have difficulties projecting those experiences forward, as evidenced by their rather average ‘letters to self’ to be posted for their 21st birthdays, the wealth of written reflections and insights arising from post-solo interviews clearly highlights that reasonably advanced reasoning experiences are possible for adolescents.
PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT 5: The Tihoi solo is an adventure

PLAUSIBLE INSIGHT: The solo at Tihoi has the ingredients of the classic ‘adventure’ experience, including risk, uncertainty, challenge, anxiety, and fear (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Wurdinger, 1997). While solo lived-experiences reinforce the prominent place solo holds in the Tihoi curriculum and the many qualities and educational opportunities that are presented for students, they also highlight the potential of solo to be a risky and occasionally fearful experience. This may not necessarily be in terms of participants being exposed to objective dangers or hazards, though they do exist. Rather the risks can be more of a psychological-emotional kind; risks that may be perceptions of reality that for the soloist feels very real and which require careful support (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002). With that support, the solo experience becomes a site rich with educational opportunity (Brown & Fraser, 2009) and adventurous insight (Walle, 1997). Solo allows for a reconceptualisation of adventure that is more inclusive of ecology and place and less focussed upon uncertainty of experience.

Decades ago Mair (1978) stated that one of the challenges of adventure was to fight consciously to control the fear:

This fear or level of anxiety may well be irrational because the danger may only be apparent and not real. But this does not alter the fact that if it feels dangerous then as far as the person who is experiencing the fear is concerned it is dangerous (p. 94).

In a similar vein, Mortlock (1984) stated that an adventure was:

a state of mind that will initially accept unpleasant feelings of fear, uncertainty and discomfort, and the need for luck, because we instinctively know that, if we are successful, these will be counterbalanced by opposite feelings of exhilaration and joy (p. 19).

More contemporary definitions of adventure within adventure education remain laced with the verbs risk, excitement, uncertainty, fear, and challenge, with elements of danger, risk, and uncertainty of outcome (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Holyfield & Fine, 1997; Priest & Gass, 2005; Wurdinger, 1997). In terms of etymology, the word adventure arises from ad venio “whatever comes” (Zweig, 1974), providing some inference to notions of uncertainty as well as
opportunity. The Tihoi solo is a deliberate pedagogical strategy that embraces the concept of learning through adventure; to deal with ‘whatever comes’ whilst embracing programme reflection. It is the reflective educational opportunity that is presented on solo that makes it acceptable to expose soloists to dimensions of risk.

Much of the risk discourse within New Zealand adventure recreation and outdoor education has centred upon the negative associations of uncertainty, with an emphasis upon better managing real risk to avoid negative outcomes emerging from adventure experiences whilst promoting risk perceptions to enhance the adventure feeling (M. Brown, 2008a; M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; R. Zink & Leberman, 2001). The Tihoi solo does embrace many of the ingredients of the classic ‘adventure’ experience, including risk, uncertainty, challenge, anxiety, and fear (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Priest & Gass, 2005; Wurdinger, 1997) though the reality is that students have not been exposed to life threatening hazards. The lack of serious hazard is an important quality to the solo experience, deeming ‘luck’ as an unlikely requirement for a positive experience (Mortlock, 1984, see quote above) and providing Tihoi solid ethical ground for not closely supervising participation. Yet there clearly have been perceptions of risk and accompanying feelings of lived fear and anxiety, which a growing literature commencing with Mair (1978, see quote above) suggests needs to be carefully considered (D. Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; R. Zink & Leberman, 2001).

This section examines the Tihoi solo through an adventure lens, highlighting that it has been an adventure involving far more complexity than traditional adventure education theory suggests. Commencing with discussion on how the Tihoi solo is packaged as an adventure, solos shall then be discussed in terms of what an adventure might be to include: ‘educational opportunity’ (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009); ‘insight’ (Walle, 1997); ‘embodied aesthetic experience’ (Stranger, 1999); ‘playful activity’(Becker, 2007), and ‘fun’ (Rohnke, 2000).

As Tihoi co-Director John Furminger (interview 1) states, “solo, it kind of epitomises Tihoi in that it is a mini Tihoi in three days”. Indeed the Tihoi solo is a packaged adventure; a form of predictable adventure experience as an educational commodity (Humberstone, 2009; Loynes,
Loynes describes the packaged ‘adventure’ to be one where the actual risks are supposedly removed and the experience becomes predictable, with participants projected risk ‘perceptions’ to foster notions of uncertainty. There has been academic critique of the packaged adventure as a denial of local geography / place (Brookes, 2004; Wattchow, 2006a), for treating adventure places as a resource (Brookes, 1993), and for denying learners adequate opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning conditions (H. Brown, 2000; Loynes, 1996). In terms of taking responsibility for their own experience and to adequately cope with “whatever comes” (Zweig, 1974) soloists have been provided a sequential programme of outdoor and bush-specific training, and a detailed series of activity briefings including a six-hour ‘practice’ solo experience. These are elements of the solo package at Tihoi. Despite all of these package elements, as detailed earlier, the Tihoi solo has remained as an experience that can be laced with uncertainty, risk perceptions, and feelings of fear for some.

There are intuitive beliefs held by adventure educators to the value of students managing hardship, digging deeply, and coping with inner dilemmas. Certainly Tihoi is not immune to this, and the solo experience package is clearly a programme component that encourages the management of uncertainty and fear to gain reflective insight on the broader Tihoi programme. But what aspects of the solo experiences of uncertainty and fear, paraphrasing Dewey (1938), deem them educational? As Brown and Fraser (2009) detail, few theorists have attempted to provide a sound educational rationale for risk taking. Discourse around negative feelings (such as fear and discomfort) and how they might contribute to personal learning through adventure is to a large degree absent from the academic literature.

Brown (2008a) joins a growing body of academics critical of the heightening of risk perceptions in order to place students out of their comfort zone and into some assumed ‘growth’ zone (see, for example, D. Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; R. Zink & Leberman, 2001). At least five of the nine soloists in this study would acknowledge being stretched in terms of their comfort zone at times. Of interest is that there were no deliberate attempts to accentuate risk perceptions by Tihoi staff, beyond stories of the ‘slasher’. The solo as it was presented by Tihoi, despite all of the preparatory work provided to students, challenged students to dig deeply at times. For the likes of Aaron, who
spent all of his time seeking to manage his physiological and safety needs, the solo was essentially a debilitating experience (D. Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005). Aaron’s solo was perceived quite negatively and as adversity not adventure. His experience contrasts with that of Paul, who was at ease with his bush-craft skills and shelter building capabilities and who had a particularly positive and introspective solo.

As mentioned earlier, Loynes (1996, 2002) has been especially critical of the dominant voice of risk in outdoor education. Yet the ‘comfort zone’ model or paradigm is widely accepted within outdoor adventure education literature (Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Priest & Gass, 2005; Prouty, Panicucci, & Collinson, 2007). For example, as described in their influential (North American) text for adventure leaders, Priest and Gass (2005) promote the notion of structuring risk so that participants perceive risk to be higher than it actually might be as both ethically and educationally appropriate “for producing functional change and growth” (p. 19). The comfort zone privileges risk within adventure, with the premise that when adventure participants are placed into challenging, uncertain situations that they not only respond to that challenge but will grow as individuals.

As Brown (2008a) has detailed, some adventure educators and writers have taken a rather creative interpretation of the various theories that have been promoted as underpinning the comfort zone idea. He highlights there is no comfort zone theory per se, yet the idea of adventure being inherently connected to risk is pervasive. Whilst Brown (2008a) is not promoting the removal of challenge from education he is acknowledging that the conceptions of risk within adventure are diverse and complex. Like Humberstone (2009), Walle (1997), and others, Brown confirms ambiguity within the adventure discourse. Loynes’s (1996, 2002) challenge to educators to consider that risk need not be a central feature of the adventure education experience remains entirely appropriate. The following seeks to broaden understandings of the solo as an adventure beyond the risk discourse.

Solo as Insight

Walle (1997) presents an ‘insight model’ of adventure, whereby the notion of adventure is broadened to enable a passive activity such as solo to be embraced as an opportunity for
clarity of perspective. Walle, like Stranger (1999), acknowledges the presence of danger and the overcoming of risks as side effects to the true purpose of adventure being the striving for insight. Drawing extensively from the work of nature writers Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), John Muir (1838-1914), and Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), Walle’s insight model acknowledges the role of adventure in nature for gaining intuitive knowledge of self and ones place in the world. Walle promotes ‘insight’ as a counter theory to the traditional outdoor adventure education discourse whereby uncertainty and the overcoming of risk enables learning. The subtle merging of nature and human endeavour presents opportunities for insight more-so than exposure to elements of risk and uncertainty. Walle is critical of the discourse within traditional adventure literature being centred upon risk taking at the expense of other important motives and behaviours.

The wisdom of insight is, as Kohak (1984) notes, something that emerges from the mundane. Solo at Tihoi has been an adventure of a different sort, and one that has enabled opportunities for insight. It has been far more than an ‘uncertainty education’ experience. Like Walle (1997) infers, there are insights from experience that are lost when the programmes emphasise uncertainty and risk. The Tihoi solo speaks loudly in support of Walle’s challenge to broaden the conception of adventure and to tone down the risk emphasis inherent. There were many ‘less-classical’ ingredients to the Tihoi solo that contribute to it being an adventure; indeed solo has been an adventure for all students. Even Kerry, who read about 120 pages of his novel as an escape from the solitude, still had many moments of uncertainty laced with reflective insight. Indeed his was an adventure deep within. He thought a great deal about not engaging fully in the experience; there were inner tensions he focussed upon. He read and re-read his solo journal, and he reflected upon his life at Tihoi. A big part of that was looking forward to it all being over, recognising that it had all been important in terms of his life somehow, but not yet fully understanding how or when or why. For Zach solo was an adventure of the spirit. His background afforded him spiritual strength, and the space and time away from others was cathartic in reconnecting to matters bigger than himself. For Paul solo was freedom: freedom from his house-mates, freedom from the routines of Tihoi, freedom to manage himself in any way he wished, including climbing trees for the pure fun of it. Martin
felt less of a sense of freedom, but his tree climbing was cathartic and full of the intrinsic qualities that adventure educators oft strive for: self confidence, self reliance, personal pride in achievement, awareness and connection with his surroundings. For Alistair solo was a mind thing; his adventure was deep within for much of the time as he engaged with the tensions within, and also the tensions outside of himself when his mind refocused. There was uncertainty around the spiritual aliveness of the bush, uncertainty around his relationships with his dad, uncertainty around what he would do in the future, uncertainty with his friend given only months to live.

In short, there have been many examples of solo being an adventure for the participants and not all of those adventurous moments were necessarily laced with uncertainty, anxiety or fear. But does this mean the Tihoi solo-as-adventure was educational? Certainly solo was not the high energy - high physical challenge experience other outdoor weekends may have been at Tihoi. Yet there were many personal decisions required to be made and mundane matters to cope with. These may ultimately be more realistic in terms of educational ends, with real life relevance (M. Brown, 2008a) as opposed to other more traditionally adventurous programme components.

**Solo as ‘educational opportunity’**

Brown and Fraser (2009) suggest alternative approaches to risk in outdoor adventure education that might promote educational opportunities. Beedie (1994), in Brown and Fraser (p.68) points to the need to view risk “as part and parcel of everyday life rather than the potential for physical harm”. Thus it is the encouragement and support of the educator that equips the student to manage their own risks and so the student takes responsibility for their own learning. In many respects the Tihoi solo affords educational opportunity, by virtue of the careful support provided to individuals and the trust afforded them to manage their own risks.

Tihoi has, in my view, made something of the pedagogical shift Brown and Fraser promote that sees solo not as a plethora of risks to be managed but as a setting presenting each student educational opportunities. The Tihoi instructor’s role with solo is less about being an “...external orchestrator of risk events to a much more nuanced, interactive and responsive
role” (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009, p. 72). As Tihoi co-Director John Furminger acknowledged (interview 1), the latter third of the Tihoi programme is about the boys leading themselves, which the solo is clearly an exemplar of, and the real lessons might well emerge years later. Certainly the solo requires less directive leadership in terms of managing identified hazards than with many other outdoor programme activities. This sees the leader / facilitator letting go of a ‘command and follow’ didactic-style of teaching, as might be typical of other outdoor activities, to become a supporter of educational opportunity.

Much of the educational opportunity of solo rests with the ability of individuals to adequately internalise their own experiences, and Tihoi resists attempting to make sense and meaning of the solo on behalf of students. Indeed, there is no assumption from Tihoi that specific outcomes will emerge from solo; just the general understanding that solo is an important time for individuals to make sense and meaning from the wider Tihoi experience. Learning that may emerge from the solo experience becomes far more personalised, taking perspective from the social environment that is Tihoi and the broader social world of the student. In that regard, it is worth acknowledging that the process of solo reflections remain highly personalised with the use of journaling rather than any large group discussion post-solo to draw learning from the experience. From the objectives set through to the emphasis upon post activity personalised meaning – making, the Tihoi solo is clearly oriented to the educational opportunities that might inherently reside more-so than the risks that might potentially be presented (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009). There are education opportunities undoubtedly being missed by solo participants and by the staff, yet the structures Tihoi employ with solo to support learning opportunities appear encouraging for each individual.

There is a clear tension in adventure education whereby the quest for risk-seeking adventure may in fact be inhibiting educational opportunities. As Leberman and Martin (2003) have highlighted from their research into Outward Bound programmes in New Zealand and the Czech Republic, activities that are designed to push participants outside their comfort zones are typically not the activities that lead to peak experiences. Rather a range of social, creative, and reflection activities were more specific to personal learning within the courses they investigated. Their research reinforces the critique of the comfort zone idea, and calls for a
broader understanding of the experience that is a learning adventure. In terms of the Tihoi solo, perceptions of risk arising from the solo have been particularly subjective and have varied significantly between individuals. There is not a formulaic leadership approach to solo that might guarantee a learning experience, and participant responses to risks will unlikely be consistent (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002).

**Solo as ‘embodied, aesthetic’ adventure**

The notion of an embodied experience is central to van Manen’s (1997) lifeworld existential of ‘lived body’ or corporeality and connected also to the existential of ‘lived other’. Indeed Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggested that we perceive and conceptualise everything bodily, thus abolishing the imaginary separation of mind and body. The Interpretive synthesis of the nine solo experiences as presented in Chapter 7 recognises the qualitative dimension of human experience as embracing aesthetic and embodied dimensions (Todres, 2007). The solo was lived through the body; as lived apprehension and fear, as lived nature observations, as lived thoughtfulness, as lived joy etc. For Zach his meditation practices on solo demanded stillness and focussed intellectual attention and those were embodied moments. For Martin his tree climbing pursuits meant an active body totally absorbed in the activity which led to a new embodied perspective of the Tihoi bush. For Alistair lying on his back and observing the ‘big thing’ going on was an embodied recognition of his immersion in nature. For Bevan his prayers on solo were the catalyst for thinking about the bigger questions around religion in relation to his science classes and the messages of the St. Paul’s Chaplain.

Stranger (1999) examined the sensory embodied experiences of surfers, highlighting that risk was only a by-product of experience. More dominant understandings of surfer participation centred upon appreciations of the sublime in nature as a form of sacred play, and surfers experiences of the sublime. Those experiences were not distant observations, rather “surfers experience the sublime in union with their object of appreciation of the sublime” (p. 271, italics in original). Interestingly, risk was not a necessary requirement for surfing transcendence, and that some surfers reached such states on waves well within their experiential limits and during environmental episodes where hazard or danger was not
present. Whilst Stranger notes that risk can be an effective catalyst for achievement of transcendent states, it is the aesthetic-ising of surfing that “facilitates risk taking in the pursuit of an ecstatic, transcendent experience” (p. 265). The pursuit of the aesthetic experience in surfing, according to Stranger, distorts conventional thinking around risk taking. Said differently, “if the wave is perfect you’ll go out no matter how big it is” (Stranger, 1999, p. 273).

It is difficult to categorise the Tihoi solo as a transcendent experience, or indeed as an experience of the sublime, beyond the experiences of a few. Yet there were insights to sensory, embodied experiences in nature on solo and these formative transcendent moments are important dimensions of the experience. There are somatic connections between body aliveness and a revival of ecological consciousness (A. Morrison, 2009). The experiences of some soloists with dancing, singing, meditation, tree climbing, exercising, and other mind-body-centred activities have been adventures of an essentially risk-limited kind and provide potential for and evidence of ecological connection. As Varley (2006) details, qualities of an outdoor adventure include a “multi-sensual engagement with nature” (p. 187), having to cope with “the vagaries of the natural environment on its terms” (p. 188) and some form of “romantic connection with the natural environment” (p.188). These qualities have been omnipresent in the embodied solo experience and indeed represent solo as an adventure.

Solo as fun, enjoyment, play and adventure

The concept of solo as fun, enjoyment, and play similarly resonates with notions of adventure. The play of children has been well researched, and insights to the pedagogical role of play through adolescence to adulthood are emerging. As Farne (2005, p. 179) notes:

*it is possible to state that play, more than any other human activity, is what characterises the whole life of human beings: even though it is during childhood that play has a specific and deep educational role, there is not an age which can be considered free from play experience.*

Rohnke (2000) suggests that play, both as a noun or a verb, resists scientific analysis and should not be distilled in seeking to understand the essence of the term. Rather adventure educators should learn to recognise when play is occurring and to replicate that occurrence
again and again. In a keynote conference address, Rohnke (2000, p. 169) stated that “throwing spears is play for me that borders on meditation.” Later he suggested that play results “when you are doing something by yourself, or with others, that has no intrinsic purpose other than healthy enjoyment of the moment” (p. 169).

Becker (2007, p. 85) argues that most adventure is “playful activity”, and this concept is similarly promoted by Stranger (1999) when he highlights surfing as a fundamentally playful act with aesthetic qualities. On solo the efforts to communicate with other soloists via stag roaring was play, just as carving spears from sticks, throwing stones, climbing trees, and imagining hunting birds were playful acts amongst many others. Whilst play, enjoyment, and fun are different terms, Zach’s statement upon return to Tihoi that “solo was fun, I really enjoyed it” blurs the boundaries somewhat.

There have been isolated attempts to place a pedagogical value upon aspects of fun and enjoyment in adventure education. Bisson and Luckner (1996) note that while the dimensions of challenge, risk, and anxiety might be promoted as key in the adventure literature, the experience itself can be a source of fun. They state that the interaction of fun and play work to diminish social barriers and interpersonal stress while generating intrinsic motivation and relaxation. Rohnke (1996, p. vii) provides a somewhat whimsical acronym for fun as FUNN or “Functional Understanding’s Not Necessary”, acknowledging that it is appropriate to occasionally have fun in adventure education for no other reason than experiencing laughter and social enjoyment. Later Rohnke (2000, p. 168) states that “play mitigates fear”, and he promotes play as an important dimension of the adventure experience in providing a relaxed dimension and social support quality to an otherwise scary experience.

In his research into Outward Bound programmes internationally, Martin (2001, p. 255) has acknowledged the role of play and fun as important programme dimensions in debunking traditional notions of adventure:

*the findings from each of the three parts of this present study indicated that the atmosphere was fun, safe, positive and supportive, which was in contrast to traditional outdoor adventure courses where the emphasis was on perceived*
fear (Mortlock, 1984) and pushing participants physically out of their ‘comfort zones’ (Nadler, 1995).

Martin’s research points to the relevance of a holistic adventure learning model that is an amalgam of play, games, and adventure activities without the overt manifestation of uncertainty or lived fear; a model Martin has labelled ‘Dramaturgy’. Subsequent published findings arising from his initial study along with allied research (Leberman & Martin, 2003; Andrew Martin & Leberman, 2005; A. Martin, Leberman, & Neill, 2002) strengthen the case for the integration of play and non-physical games to contrast with, and to diminish any lived uncertainties of, more traditional pursuit-type adventure programme elements.

Despite their 44 Hour Solo Timelines providing opportunity to discuss lived experience states during interview, the soloists did not generally couch their responses utilising the terms fun, play or enjoyment. Their solos did reflect positive efforts to avoid boredom, and consequently there were actions that could be construed as fun, play, and enjoyment. Yet as-lived those actions were generally perceived by the soloists themselves as remaining somewhat negative. Solo for most of the soloists was not essentially enjoyable, though there were lived dimensions for most participants that had fun elements.

As Bisson and Luckner (1996) note, one of the key differences between fun and enjoyment lies with the temporal qualities of experience; fun being a temporary experience state while enjoyment is more enduring. An important observation post-solo was the rapid transformation of experience from a somewhat negative state into a more positive condition with re-immersion into the Tihoi social collective. The celebratory chatter as students regrouped post-solo involved (overheard) stories of action, bravado, and playful endeavour during solo. The human mind has an amazing capacity to transform an adventure experience into a positive, heroic story; to valorise experience and hardship and to couch it in more playful terms to the outside world. Unfortunately, one-on-one post-solo interviews did not adequately capture the essence of this valorisation of experience. Longitudinal research into the enduring qualities of a solo experience, including determining the transformation of experience states over time if at all, appears warranted.
By way of a summary to this section, academics have promoted outdoor adventures as existing somewhere along a continuum of experience types between the ideal, pure forms of deep adventure to more shallow forms of adventure aligned to the tourist or post-adventurer (Fletcher, 2010; Varley, 2006). Authenticity debates have emerged regarding what outdoor ‘adventure’ might consist of and represent (Ewert, 1989; Walle, 1997). As I have discussed, there have been many ‘less-classical’ ingredients of adventure within the solo experience. For example, opportunity for ecological observations and insights arose from states of boredom and moments of catharsis arose from revisiting experiences within the mind as soloists read their journals. Moments of anxiety, fear, and apprehension and thus uncertainty have also been lived, as have periods of introspection, observation, and sleep. The solo has been far more than an ‘uncertainty education’. Whilst this study has not explicitly attempted to measure learning arising from the solo experience, the lived experiences of soloists during their solo highlight that the solo has indeed been an adventure. Such an ‘adventure’ includes the classic components deriving from risk and uncertainty as well as other dimensions including opportunity, insight, play, fun, enjoyment, embodiment, and aesthetic experience.
Chapter 9, Conclusion: SOLITUDES WITHIN

*He made no sound, he was alone in the sky and at one with all he could see and feel; all senses were in harmony, he was a part of nature and never before had he known such ecstasy. There were no tastes in his mouth, nor weight in his limbs, and his skin was smooth and white. He lost awareness of his body, he was instead the air, the clouds, the sun itself, the multitude of colours; he was the breeze and its coolness... and he would live here, he would never let his mind separate itself from this exquisite world about him and in supreme delight he would remain always.*


The internalised nature-solitude experiences of his adolescence remained with Paul, the protagonist in Hilliard’s *Power of Joy* (1965), well into later life. His embodied experiences and the associated sensory images of his times alone provided Paul solace in the city. For Paul-as-adult, solitude provided virtual opportunities for escape when he could not. *Power of Joy* is a novel, yet it is also a celebration of the gift of nature-based solitude and of the enduring qualities of authentic nature experience.

Most influential solitude writers speak of alone-time as a fundamental developmental and biological need (eg. J. Barbour, 2004; Buchholz, 1999; Dowrick, 1997; Storr, 1988). Solitude provides essential fuel for the quest towards becoming fully realised humans, which Naess (2008), Drengson and Devall (2008) and Seed (1988) help us to understand involves a realisation of self with the greater Self well beyond anthropocentrism. Yet the western world remains focussed upon communication and attachment, and the concept of spending time alone brings with it connotations of loneliness and isolation (Long & Averill, 2003) at a time when westerners are existentially separated from their natural homes. So what of the experiences of young people with solitude? Can formative solitude experiences in natural places indeed engage young people in the manner that Hilliard (1965) so eloquently describes in *Power of Joy*? What are the moments within the solitude experiences of young men at Tihoi that might become pedagogically significant in their later lives?
This study has explored the lived-experiences of students embracing a period of two days and two nights alone in the New Zealand bush, with the research question centred upon the ‘meaning and significance of the forty-four hour solo as-lived’. The intent has been to expose the essential qualities of the solo experience (van Manen, 1997, 2000) in order to ‘see’ the deeper significance or meaning structures inherent (van Manen, 2002). Typically such a phenomenological quest for experiential transparency requires the researcher to adopt an angle of repose (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008) that represents how they might see the world. In chapter one I have described facets of my own philosophy and professional experiences in outdoor adventure education, and with solitude, to enable a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Gadamer, 1989) between my own pre-understandings of solitude and those held elsewhere. While Heidegger (1962) is explicit that our background meanings and practices can never be made fully explicit, those pre-understandings are essential dimensions of the interpretive process and they assist rather than limit the inquiry (T. Koch, 1995; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008).

My experiences with outdoor education and solitude are also linked to the socio-cultural milieu in which I am enmeshed. Thus my language, my interpretations, and my meaning structures might well deviate from similar studies elsewhere and the academic solitude discourse. Chapter two, *Tihoi Solitudes*, has provided a socio-historical examination of Tihoi Venture School and preliminary insights to the solo component of their five month programme. While the chapter is the result of sustained ethnographic inquiry, it has been presented in the form of pre-understandings (van Manen, 1997, 2000) to further elucidate my background conceptions, understandings, and interests. As Koch (1996) indicates, there should be no attempt to hide behind data or to disguise personal insights. *Tihoi Solitudes* further acknowledges my own background meanings of solo, providing a research context descriptor that is experientially rich enough to enable it to be read in relation. Significant to that chapter, though not made explicit elsewhere, is the obvious ethic of care and sustained professional support provided by Tihoi staff throughout the solo experience.

Similarly Chapter 3 *Solitude, Nature, and Adventure* is presented as academically informed pre-understandings, placing this work clearly within the New Zealand outdoor
education context and amongst the academic body of solitude knowledge. While a richness of research into general loneliness and solitude exists, I concur with Nicholls (2008) that within outdoor adventure education and therapy the research informed literature on the solo experience is both sparse and based predominantly upon anecdotal evidence. Of additional importance to this study, those solo literatures have been founded almost exclusively upon the adult experience.

Chapters four and five address matters related to philosophy, rigour, and representation when assuming a hermeneutic phenomenological posture. Gadamer’s (1976) term ‘a fusion of horizons’ demands that insights from the literature, researcher preconceptions, and field data all merge and fuse during the writing process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Representation is one of the key dimensions to rigour in hermeneutic phenomenological work, and dictates the researcher participates in the hermeneutic circle of inquiry (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Gadamer, 1989; Heidegger, 1962; Kerry & Armour, 2000). As I have acknowledged in the chapters on methodology and method, there are strengths and weaknesses to any mode of inquiry. However, embracing the challenges of phenomenology for examining experiences of solitude has returned academic and personal reward. An alternative mode of inquiry, such as a pre-test / post-test research design that addressed the efficacy of the solo programme for reaching some predetermined end, might well have delivered a shorter research programme yet it would not have exposed the broader lived qualities of the solo as experienced.

As I have detailed in Chapter Six Alone in the Bush, nine unique student experiences have framed this work. Their individual background stories have been shared, and a synopsis of their solo experience provided alongside a chart of theme statements and linguistic transformations crafted from student’ experiential accounts. The essential dimensions of solo for adolescents are captured within those rich descriptions and acknowledge nine distinctly different solo experiences. Chapter seven, Interpretive Synthesis, delves deeper into those experiences via the ‘Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix’ to filter dimensions of experiential ‘time’, ‘space’, ‘body’ and ‘other’. The synthesis is an interpretive fusion of experience with the intent of bringing the essences of the solo experience to consciousness while resisting overtly reductionist endeavour to arrive to a list of theme statements (van Manen, 1997, 2002). An essence is a
central meaning of experience that makes that experience what it is, and hermeneutic phenomenological need not be reduced to thematic residues of meaning (Gadamer, 1989); van Manen (1997) encourages the written text to be the purveyor of the lived quality of experience.

Whilst many other insights might well have emerged for the reader through the previous chapters, Chapter Eight *Solitude Speaks* deals with five plausible insights that appear of particular relevance to the field of outdoor, adventure education. This chapter now emphasises the contributions arising from this study for pedagogical practice, for theory, for methodology, and for life. It commences with a section of specific insights to experience before discussing matters of pedagogical importance arising from the five plausible insights as discussed. The contributions of this study to adventure education theory and to research methodology are then made explicit before a final philosophical piece on solo and adventure is presented.

**The Tihoi Solo: Specific insights to experience**

In short there have been many vital insights provided to the lived experience of the Tihoi solo, as more fully articulated earlier. Some of the generalised adolescent ‘lived’ solo experiential understandings include:

- Solitude for adolescents at Tihoi has been, at times, far from the spiritually-rewarding and deeply insightful experience typically promoted in the solitude literature for adults. Solo has been a challenging personal time that was endured more-so than enjoyed, though there have been exceptions. The adolescent solo experience appears significantly different from the adult experience, based on published literature;
- Solo has evoked strong emotional responses within adolescents, including moments of lived alertness, insight, and joyful happiness as well as moments of lived fear, apprehension, and uncertainty.
• Regular moments of sadness, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and confusion are linked to feelings of stress, tension, and fear. These feeling states represent negative solitude (Long, et al., 2003) and have been prominent during the long, winter nights. The darkness, and especially the sounds of the bush at night, has accentuated soloist’ anxieties and fears. Adolescent soloists are as scared of the dark as they are inwardly of solitude (Kohak, 1984), with stranger danger and aspects of the unknown / supernatural as predominant fears. Sleep has been the primary strategy for dealing with the uncertainty of the darkness. Soloists have reported sleeping for at least half of their time alone, in addition to drifting in and out of thoughtful consciousness in their sleeping bags for many of the remaining hours.

• Moments of lived freedom, contentment, pleasure, joy, exhilaration, happiness and fulfilment have occasionally emerged during solo, when soloists have been active in body, mind and / or spirit. Positive solitude experience states have been more prevalent during the daylight hours;

• Adolescents are scared of becoming bored, and soloists have actively escaped from boredom states whenever possible. This has been an unconscious process of moving from a negative state to a less-negative state when possible. From boredom has emerged insight by way of constructively passing the time with writing, meditation, singing, breaking rules, and watching nature;

• Breaking solo rules by way of climbing trees and carving initials into a tree provided glimpses of freedom, escape, and resistance for three soloists. These were formative edgework experiences (Lyng, 2005) and promoted feelings of pleasure, joy, exhilaration, happiness and fulfilment as well as the sensual embodied experiences and aesthetics of place;

• Prior spiritual and meditative experience supported experiences of pleasure, joy, exhilaration, happiness, and fulfilment to one soloist;

• Dreaming-awake during the days and nights was common. Soloist’ thought processes were random and often uncontrollable, sometimes taking them places in their minds they did not wish to go. Unmanageable anxiety pushed three of the nine soloists to
return to the base for outside support. Other soloists contemplated also returning to the Centre at various times;

- Soloists were not alone on solo: Thoughts drifted to immediate family, friends, lost ones, dying ones, and to God and religion. Soloists were surrounded with the aliveness of the bush, and there were occasional visits from other soloists;

- The movement of soloists from their solo sites were motivated primarily by the need to communicate with others, born more from apprehension and anxiety than from boredom;

- The notion of living simply without physical activity, sophisticated equipment or technology coupled with the slower pace of solo in relation to the balance of the Tihoi programme forced students to just be at times. This was an uncomfortable state at times and represented boredom;

- Boredom and other passive experience states have been insightful, particularly in terms of nature awareness and lived understandings of the relative insignificance of humans in relation to the bush. The mundane dimensions of the solo may well be some of the most pedagogically significant moments;

The Tihoi solo: Towards pedagogical competence

So what are the dimensions of the solo experience for the young men at Tihoi that are of specific pedagogical relevance? This section utilises the five plausible insights emerging from this study to frame the specific contributions of the Tihoi solo for outdoor adventure education and to identify opportunities for pedagogical refinement. Contributions to theory and methodology follow later.

For the adolescent participants the Tihoi solo has not been pedagogically significant for the fostering of deep connection with the natural world. Yet snippets of ecological insight touched all of the soloists and the experiences of one student provided something of a model for what is possible. Biophilia (Wilson, 1986) decrees that nature connection exists, or latently exists, for all humans and there are challenges for Tihoi in assisting adolescents move beyond
eco-latency whilst retaining the emphasis upon programme reflection. Both of these pedagogical ends are possible; indeed programme reflection will undoubtedly be enhanced through a more relaxed and in-touch-with-nature solo.

Payne and Wattchow (2008) framed the term ‘slow pedagogy’ to promote a place-sensitive education within post-traditional outdoor education. Boys Go Bush affirms that solo is a slow pedagogy that has potential to support the opportunity for quality connections to place, though those connections require pedagogical tact and awareness of the social, historical, and ecological dimensions of place. Currently those dimensions of place are essentially missing from the Tihoi solo. However, the general absence of technology, competition, and sophisticated equipment coupled with the contrasting slower pace relative to many other programme dimensions at Tihoi has forced the soloists to just be at times. Indeed boredom and other passive experience states have enhanced ecological interest almost by default.

The Tihoi solo thus has some hallmarks of a slow pedagogy, yet important elements are missing. In their recent text A pedagogy of place, Wattchow and Brown (2011) present a number of signposts for a place-responsive pedagogy for outdoor education. “Being present in and with a place” (p. 183) suggests a need for intimacy with place, out of which shall emerge a sense of belonging rather than a sense of disconnection. Such intimacy, as Wattchow and Brown state, is unlikely “if they (participants) feel threatened by unknown hazards they imagine will be found there” (p. 183).

From Boys Go Bush it is clear that when soloists have felt reasonably relaxed and comfortable they have been able to focus outside of themselves and to engage with nature somewhat. Those soloists who struggled with providing for their own basic needs and comfort have struggled to contemplate nature and natural processes in any meaningful way. As Davis-Berman and Berman (2002) note, students in outdoor adventure contexts will respond in terms of growth and change when they feel safe and secure, and when there is a healthy degree of certainty in the learning environment. The experiences of solitude at Tihoi lend support to the voices critical of the hiking of risk perceptions to create uncertainty (see, for example, D. Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005). Soloists need not operate outside of comfort
zones in terms of their ability to manage their personal physiological and safety needs. This study recognises the important shift away from a survival emphasis in many solo programmes worldwide (Bevington, 2005) to achieve other programme objectives such as reflective contemplation or ecological immersion.

The fostering of intimacy with a place, as Wattchow and Brown (2011) promote, is not automatic and needs careful scaffolding in terms of pre-solo training. The pre-solo experiences of Zach provide some glimpses of possibility, in terms of meditation and prayer allowing him to resonate with his solo site in a relaxed, intimate manner. Whilst not necessarily advocating for spiritual training along the lines of meditation and prayer, there are ecologically therapeutic resources and programmes that could infuse the solo through assisting participants recognising their separateness from nature. Building upon the dramaturgy work of Martin et al (2002) could see the infusion of pre-solo bush experiences with environmental games and activities (see, for example, Cornell, 1979, 1989; Knapp, 1999; Van Matre, 1990). Eco-therapy has a lot to offer adventure education in healing its anthropocentric ideals, and programme staff might well embrace the deeper ideas of Michael Cohen (M. Cohen, 1989, 1997a, 1997b) prior to any efforts with refining the solo curriculum. Ultimately, however, the best resource for the Tihoi solo is the local bush itself inclusive of the social community surrounding it and the merging of the local stories, histories and ecologies (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). The five month programme presents significant scope to come to intimately know the Tihoi bush in a deeply compassionate sense. With a deeper ecological-adventure emphasis the ‘ecological self’ and the ‘intrapersonal self’ of adventure education can essentially become the same thing (R. Henderson, 1999).

A solo can reflect some of the issues and challenges that adolescents might face every day, and the Tihoi solo has presented difficulties and challenges for some students that at times seemed insurmountable. Yet adolescents can and do cope with an extended period of time alone, though some better than others. During the Tihoi solo adolescents were challenged to draw upon personal resources, but with far more loneliness, fear, anxiety, and
boredom than the traditional literature on solo suggests. The solo was, in short, something that was endured by most students rather than an experience to be savoured and enjoyed.

Facilitators of solo experiences for children and adolescents need to be cognisant of the very real fears and apprehensions carried by participants, and to the potential inhibiting affect that anxiety might bring to an educational experience. Solo was the key activity individuals were most apprehensive about prior to the commencement of the programme. It was a recognised Tihoi challenge surrounded with reputation and story, and a long weekend alone in a reasonably unfamiliar location was something that none of the adolescents had previously experienced. Certainly there was widespread apprehension pre-solo and students typically under-reported their anxieties and fears, although a baseline of fear of boredom and loneliness was disclosed. The pre-solo fear of loneliness was greater than the loneliness actually experienced during solo. In fact, some soloists did not experience any feelings of loneliness despite their initial apprehensions. The completion of the solo generally fostered a more relaxed and relieved openness with the sharing of information and stories, and so post-solo there was acknowledgment of significantly more apprehension and fearfulness than revealed in pre-solo conversations.

Soloists did, however, experience many moments of apprehension and fear leading up to and during their solos. These included fear of being attacked, fear of not knowing what will happen to them or how they might cope, fear of what others will think of them if they return early, and fear of failing the solo challenge and letting themselves down. During solo there were other anxieties regarding the adequacy of shelters in relation to wet weather conditions and the real likelihood of clothes and sleeping bags getting soaked. There were many reported increases in heart rate and serious fears for personal safety in relation to sounds heard outside the shelter, and a general unease with the long dark nights. Solo was a hard survival exercise for some, while easier for others with the skills and capacity to look after their physiological and safety needs. Opportunities for soloists to better understand the Tihoi bush prior to solo will significantly reduce lived fears, anxieties and apprehensions for future solos. A series of short duration Quiet Times (V. Nicholls, 2009) might well enhance preparation for the bigger solo. Indeed it makes sense to infuse other adventure activities with short duration reflective
periods in relative solitude, so that soloists come to recognise the potential for identification and attachment with multiple locations. Students need to be comfortable in the bush alone, day or night, and the nights of solo need to be carefully prepared for and celebrated (Bliss, 2009). Experiences in the bush at night as a group and individually pre-solo would likely remove at least some of the uncertainty of the darkness.

The soloists were not alone on solo; rather they remained in the metaphorical company of others throughout. This typically included immediate family, and occasionally friends, who were never far from consciousness. The virtual presence of others’ gave most of the soloist’s strength, yet paradoxically points to the deep need for connection more-so than a celebration of alone-time. Adolescents have struggled with non-voluntary time alone, and pre-solo experience with micro-solos appears a logical pedagogical step (V. Nicholls, 2009; Potter & O’Connell, 2005).

One other dimension of solo warrants comment in relation to anxiety born from the supernatural. There were lived apprehensions around the haunting of the solo bivy by ghosts, reports of a presence inside shelters, and two white neon images individually reported inside shelters. Whether the reported ‘supernatural’ experiences were real or merely perception it seems that adventure educators need also to be aware of dimensions of the supernatural and the potential impact upon participants.

As this study highlights, solo rules coupled with institutional strategies for checking on the soloists provided a solid safety management system for students. I have discussed the ‘panoptic gaze’ that such a management structure has provided for the Tihoi solo in terms of maintaining surveillance of participants. Yet despite such surveillance, all Tihoi soloists in this study broke at least one of the solo rules and some broke a number. Campbell (2010) sought to address rule breaking in her work with tertiary students during extended solitude experiences, trialling a no-rules regime and outlining a consequences-not-rules approach. This initiative supported students with determining their own guidelines for personal behaviour on solo. Tihoi as an institution for adolescents does require safety structures by way of
accountability, yet if supporting students to lead themselves during the latter third of the programme (John Furminger, interview 1) is indeed a programme philosophy then steps should be made to handing over more accountability to students albeit within non-negotiable parameters. Currently the list of solo rules is quite exhaustive, and not surprisingly students are flaunting some of them.

Facilitators of solo experiences need to accept that individuals will wander from solo sites at times, will communicate with other soloists, and might well obtain support from their peers before seeking support from programme staff. This study suggests the movement of soloists from their sites appear motivated by the need to communicate with others, born more from apprehension and loneliness than boredom.

Strategies for avoiding boredom have led to rule breaking of an adventurous kind. Tree climbing and carving initials into a tree were the more serious physically-risky activities Tihoi soloists engaged in. These have been cathartic experiences in their own right, and the voluntary decisions made have led to self reliance and some profound experiences. Tree climbing in particular demonstrated personal confidence, climbing efficacy, personal safety management, and aspects of fun, freedom and insight. These were important experiences for the soloists who took the opportunity to challenge themselves, and they represented formative dimensions of edgework behaviour (Lyng, 2005).

Other soloist experiences were laced with apprehension, frustration, and fear as described, and these negative solo experiences appear to have been inhibitors for personal insight. Those soloists who managed their physiological and safety needs encountered moments of boredom, with periods of nothing to do paradoxically engaging students with natural space observations, introspection, daydreaming, reading, reflecting from journals, and sleep. Indeed sleep was a popular solo activity, and a common strategy for soloists to manage boredom and to avoid their fears of the darkness.

Students drifted in and out of sleep states, providing a relaxed contrast to the balance of the Tihoi programme. The adolescents dreamed while awake at times; not a mindful streaming of consciousness but a collation of random thoughts. Solo provided space to think backwards
and occasionally to contemplate the future. Reading personal journals were the catalyst for programme reflections, and there was a particular pride in the physicality of Tihoi and the impact upon developing physical bodies. Writing was a strategy used to pass the time for some soloists, and there was a commitment to crafting letters for family and friends as well as a real pride in their Tihoi journal. Some chose not to write their journal on solo, yet all dedicated themselves to completing the journaling challenge later.

The solo was a multiple-phase activity, with soloists experiencing a complex and dynamic range of experiences (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001) that were all quite unique. Despite a sequential programme of solo preparation, the Tihoi solo was not a homogeneous experience.

The solo space provided isolation from peers and Tihoi social processes, providing opportunities for freedom of thought and reflective processing. Coupled with the fresh air and the sights, sounds, and smells of nature the solo was ripe for reflective insight. Tihoi had promoted student reflections on their broader Tihoi experience in a multitude of ways, however, the perusal of personal journals was without doubt the catalyst for quality reflection and endless daydreaming. Soloists spoke with pride via their journals of their achievements at Tihoi, yet the journal entries written during solo were not particularly insightful to the solo experience per se. Personal pride in the journal, and the reality it would likely be read by one of the Tihoi Directors meant soloists took care with what they committed to text. All students completed their journal writing the day after their solo experience, demonstrating pride and care with their writing. The journal may well have been a mode for the indoctrination of experience towards Tihoi philosophy (Bowers, 2005, in Seaman, 2008). That is, students might well have written what Tihoi expected them to write. In reality the reading of journals on solo acted as a significant catalyst for the acknowledgement of individualised experience (R. Zink, 2005).

Soloists struggled to write on solo in terms of comfort, yet most had come to appreciate their skills with writing and so letters to family and friends were a common strategy for passing the time. However, letters written to self for posting on a designated birthday in the future
were not pedagogically useful. The adolescents struggled with comprehending what they might be doing in five or more years into the future, and consideration needs to be given to the usefulness of the exercise for adolescents. Indeed with the emphasis upon writing throughout the Tihoi experience, and the fact that some student wrote to counter boredom and to keep busy, perhaps de-emphasising the written demands of solo might foster yet deeper reflective insights.

Briefings for the solo were comprehensive and ensured students were logistically prepared for solo (Knapp, 2005b), if not psychologically. Yet post-solo there was little by way of reflective processing which, in accord with Knapp, I view as problematic. The specific tasks Tihoi has designed to stimulate and enhance reflective processes have been particularly useful for reflections upon the Tihoi experience. However, for an in-depth understanding of the lived solo experience the journals were essentially irrelevant. To enable deep reflections upon the solo experience would require a pedagogical re-alignment, which would subtly shift the emphasis of solo away from making sense and meaning of the broader Tihoi experience.

Post-solo interviews were pedagogically useful, and for Tihoi the use of post-solo interviews could enhance the solo through assisting bring to consciousness some of the underlying ineffable qualities of individual experience. Currently all processing of experience is done internally by students, with a Tihoi director perusing reflective accounts of experience from time to time. There exist opportunities to broaden the support of students with post-activity meaning making by more of the Tihoi teaching staff. Those with responsibility for the student houses have ready access to a small cohort of students each and could support those individuals bring to consciousness dimensions of all Tihoi experiences, including solo.

*Boys Go Bush* has explicitly detailed lived dimensions of the solo experience. Some of those experiences have represented ‘negative’ solitude whilst others represent ‘positive solitude’, with the broader understanding that the solo has been an adventure. Authenticity debates have emerged regarding what outdoor adventure might consist of and represent (Ewert, 1989; Walle, 1997). A continuum of adventure types range between the ideal, pure
forms of deep adventure to more shallow forms of adventure aligned to the tourist or post-adventurer (Fletcher, 2010; Varley, 2006).

The form of adventure described within the traditional adventure education literature is rich with risk, excitement, uncertainty, fear, and challenge, with elements of danger, risk, and uncertainty of outcome (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Holyfield & Fine, 1997; Priest & Gass, 2005; Wurdinger, 1997). Such a classic view of adventure is not adequate in capturing the qualities inherent in the Tihoi solo. Boys go Bush supports the reconceptualisation of the term adventure within adventure education, so that the term is more inclusive of the complexities inherent within an outdoor experience such as solo; a matter to which I shall return in the following ‘theory’ section.

The boosting of risk perceptions is clearly unwarranted in the Tihoi solo. The experience contains adequate levels of uncertainty, which will likely manifest in more healthy levels of apprehension and fear which students shall be able to manage without excessive apprehension, anxiety and lived fear. To push students out of their comfort zone into some fantasy ‘growth zone’ denies the opportunities of solo for programme reflection, as well as other inherent educational opportunities (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009) and insightful moments (Walle, 1997). The perpetuation of stranger-danger stories is unwarranted and serves no pedagogical purpose beyond the preparation of soloists with an event such as a visit from an outsider. Pre-solo preparations appear prudent for such a scenario, but in a manner that is grounded in reality and not horror story.

There are undoubtedly virtues in managing hardship, digging deeply, and coping with inner dilemmas during solo but these negate some of the desired outputs from solo in terms of programme reflective experience. There appear better pedagogical periods during the Tihoi experience for including such ‘classic’ adventure moments rather than during solo. Aaron’s experience of solo as “nightmare” speaks to a debilitating experience (D. Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005) that has precluded opportunity for authentic engagement. Boys Go Boys supports the call from a growing body of academics critical of the heightening of risk perceptions in order to place students out of their comfort zone and into some assumed
‘growth’ zone (D. Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; M. Brown, 2008a; M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; R. Zink & Leberman, 2001).

The insight model of adventure (Walle, 1997) broadens the notion of adventure to enable a passive activity such as solo to be embraced as an opportunity for clarity of perspective. Like Stranger (1999), Walle (1997) acknowledges the presence of danger and the overcoming of risks as side effects to the true purpose of adventure being the striving for insight. Pedagogically there appears merit in celebrating the mundane (Kohak, 1984); to embrace the insights able to emerge when a soloist embraces the notion of ‘being’. The Tihoi solo speaks loudly in support of Walle’s challenge to broaden the conception of adventure and to tone down the risk emphasis inherent.

Walle’s (1997) insight model embraces other dimensions of the solo such as embodied understandings and aesthetic experiencing. As I have discussed there are somatic connections between body aliveness and a revival of ecological consciousness (A. Morrison, 2009). Experiences of soloists with mind-body-centred activities such as dancing, singing, meditation, tree climbing, and exercising have been adventures of an essentially risk-limited kind and provide potential for and evidence of ecological connection. Similarly, as Varley (2006) details the outdoor dimension of solo can facilitate a “multi-sensual engagement with nature” (p. 187), and some form of “romantic connection with the natural environment” (p.188). These qualities have NOT existed for all Tihoi soloists, with only occasional glimpses of multi-sensual engagement and romantic connection. These qualities should be encouraged rather than inhibited via an unnecessary attention to risk (Loynes, 2002). Martin and Leberman (2005) provide evidence that a holistic pedagogical strategy termed ‘dramaturgy’ (A. Martin, 2001) can effectively realign adventure from a paradigm of risk to a more educationally rich orientation. In such a model, adventure activities are infused with play and non-physical games. Negative solo experience states as-lived might then be balanced with the more positive qualities of play, fun, embodied experiences and aesthetics.
Contributions to outdoor adventure education theory

This section is predicated on the question, do we know enough about the solo experience to prepare students adequately for it? What follows is an expanded list detailing how Boys go Bush has contributed to the theoretical body of knowledge surrounding solo experiences within adventure education.

Despite the proposition from Kaplan and Kaplan (2002) that adolescents tend to be less interested in nature experiences than at other stages of childhood, Tihoi adolescents were interested in nature and natural processes during solo. There was not the ‘time out’ as Kaplan and Kaplan suggested was typical of adolescence. Rather the isolation and the boredom at times meant soloists indeed spent time observing nature. Sure the experience was typically not the emotionally recharging, spiritually rewarding nature experience that is so often purported in the adult solitude literature. Yet the Tihoi soloists remained interested in their surroundings, and a clear variety of engagements with nature emerged. That engagement was in reality more oriented to an “I-It” relationship rather than the “I-thou” level of identity as discussed by Buber (1971).

This study concurs with Fox (1999) that a deep quality of connection with nature is only possible when the adventure participant feels safe and has dealt with any fears and anxiety. One of the Tihoi adolescents demonstrated the capacity for a deep, spiritual relationship with nature, as was suggested as possible by Mergen (2003), though it is obvious that previous experiences with religion was the precursor.

The solo has been yet another outdoor experience in a long stream of challenging and adventurous encounters for the adolescent students of Tihoi Venture School. All the soloists survived the experience, and some enjoyed it, though solo was not the romantic, spiritually rejuvenating experience that the solitude literature is so upbeat about. Research into nature-based or wilderness solitude in recent decades has almost exclusively examined the adult experience, and the adolescent solo is distinctly different. This study provides important insights into the likelihood of negative emotional states for adolescents embracing a solo experience.
References to solo in student journals do not adequately describe feelings of anxiety or fear, yet post-experience interviews were the catalyst for the sharing of the more negative dimensions of experience. Lived anxiety and fear permeated the solo, and solo was at times a scary experience for adolescents.

Stories of random strangers shared by Tihoi staff pre-solo saturated the psyche of most of the soloists. Lived anxiety meant time dragged on for most, and the challenges of weather meant students tended to remain in their shelters for a lot longer than they anticipated. These dimensions of experience provide some serious challenges for solo facilitators. Experiences of stress, tension, and fear, as Long, More, & Averill (2006) acknowledge, are representative of ‘negative solitude’ and stand in contrast to adult solo experiences as depicted in the literature. Negative solitude has not been addressed adequately in the solitude literature within adventure education and therapy.

It is clear that the heightening of risk perceptions for solo is unnecessary. Sufficient evidence from this study acknowledges the many and varied inherent challenges that create uncertainty for adolescent soloists. As discussed earlier, a growing body of literature is critical of adventure programmes that deliberately build perceptions of risk in an attempt to create a cognitive dissonance for participants to overcome. This study supports that critique and promotes pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact in minimising levels of anxiety and fear for participants.

Adolescents are prone to boredom. Yet the Tihoi solo has highlighted the inherent ability of adolescent soloists to ‘reposition’ their fear of lived boredom into more positive experiential states. From boredom has emerged endeavour from soloists to not become bored, leading to observations, introspection, and insight. Dewey’s (1934) notion of equilibrium may provide a theoretical explanation to such experience transitions.

Whilst the solo involved dimensions of boredom and anxiety, flow states and peak experiences were not an experiential component. The solo experience has been far more complex than positive experience phenomena might represent (such as a peak experience, a peak performance, or a flow state). The emphasis upon the action dimension of flow was for
the most part missing, and the soloists danced between anxiety and boredom seemingly without the achievement of flow states. That said, the Tihoi solo has highlighted that sensual embodied pleasures and aesthetics as a component of experience can occur during a solo. The tree climbing efforts of two soloists broke solo rules yet presented insights into the ecological and spiritual dimensions of adventure. Formative ‘edgework’ experiences (Lyng, 2005) on solo reinforced the capacity for soloists to achieve self development in a creative and personally managed manner.

When risk is explored through a sociological lens there is opportunity to understand an experience beyond ‘what can go wrong’ or ‘what risks need to be managed’. Indeed the concept of risk within solo is incredibly complex. This study has highlighted that when the focus of leading an activity such as solo is centred upon ‘what educational opportunities might exist’ (M. Brown & Fraser, 2009) then scope arises for understanding experiences differently.

Walle’s (1997) idea that adventure is fundamentally about insight is particularly relevant to the Tihoi solo. There is a logical coherence between ‘an adventure’ and ‘learning from that adventure’ when basic needs are well taken care of. Meeting safety and physiological needs on solo has been an important stage in facilitating educational insight. The ethic of care provided by Tihoi staff meant students were closely monitored, and the programme provided a sustained and sequential pre-solo preparation. Yet solo remained both challenging and empowering for most. Unfortunately those students unable to adequately live solo with their security needs met did not experience solo in the insightful manner that other soloists were able.

An inference within the literature on adolescence is that they will unlikely hold a depth of reasoning capacity to make pedagogical sense or meaning from their solitude experiences (Larson, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003). Missing the life experience of adults, children and adolescents are said to only have a limited knowledge of the world to reflect their experiences against. This study acknowledges that adolescents can write reflectively and with good introspection. Post-solo interviews similarly highlight that reasonably advanced reasoning
experiences are possible for adolescents, though the adolescent capacity to articulate thoughts and feelings at interview proved challenging.

As discussed, discourse around the negative dimensions of solo is largely absent from the literature. Research into negative emotional states (such as anxiety, fear and discomfort) and how they might contribute or inhibit personal learning through adventure is required. Certainly this study has indicated that soloists have regularly experienced negative emotional states. The adolescent solo experience is fundamentally different to the adult solo experience and certainly not the deeply rejuvenating, quasi-spiritual, celebration of time alone that the adult solitude literature speaks of.

This study adds to the growing critique of the ‘comfort zone’ idea of adventure. Soloists have had exposure to sufficient risk as a component of experience and the enhancement of risk perceptions has not been necessary for solo. Solo has been a debilitating experience for at least one student unable to cope with satisfying basic needs. Walle’s (1997) challenge to distance the concept of adventure from the traditional adventure-as-risk discourse appears to hold significant promise for embracing solo as an opportunity for educational opportunity and insight.

**Contributions to methodology**

There have been no groundbreaking methodological revelations arising from this work. *Boys Go Bush* confirms the relevance of a hermeneutic phenomenological research framework in the contemporary outdoor education setting. It has provided rich opportunities for accessing the lived experiences of humans in an outdoor education context. Hermeneutic phenomenology has provided latitude for the interpretive researcher-as-*bricoleur* to embrace research tools that can provide important insights and knowledge, and which fit the nature of the question(s) being asked (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). *Boys Go Bush* has been an interpretive process shaped by my own pedagogical understandings and which has utilised two such
research tools: the ‘My 44 hour Solo Timeline’, as adapted from Kelk (1994), and; a Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix, as developed from the work of van Manen (1997).

A Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix has provided an important theoretical tool for this work. The matrix provides an experiential - theoretical model for understanding the experience of solitude as lived, and appears of usefulness for future investigations into the lived experiences of solitude. van Manen’s (1997) Lifeworld Existentials have provided an important theoretical framework for the matrix. Following Wattchow (2006a) especially, but also Hyde (2004, 2005), Boys Go Bush has been explicit in terms of how that lifeworld inquiry framework has been utilised to interrogate the student experience. Most phenomenological studies have not been explicit in discussing the specific use of the lifeworld existentials for meaning making (Kerry & Armour, 2000), including research dissertations where editorial space limitations have been less of a factor than for other published work. The Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix has been an important theoretical and reflective tool for understanding the experiences of adolescent nature-based solitude.

As I have mentioned earlier, van Manen has been subject to critique for being overtly anthropocentric (Wattchow, 2006a), particularly in terms of viewing the lifeworld existential of corporeality as limited human to human rather than body to world (inclusive beyond the human). While Wattchow is right that van Manen’s anthropocentrism is a potential limitation, such critique appears unwarranted on two fronts. Firstly, to intimately examine a human experience such as solitude should involve the researcher, as bricoleur, to operate in a participatory mode of consciousness (Ballard, 1997; Heshusius, 1994) and clearly as the primary analytical tool. Thus the researcher should be able to deploy some reflexivity in best meeting the research agenda, and van Manen’s (1997) frameworks clearly encourage that possibility. Secondly, van Manen’s work emerged at a time when matters of sustainability and human domination of nature were not at the forefront of global consciousness nor pedagogy. Hermeneutic Phenomenology a-la van Manen (1997) similarly empowers the researcher to be responsive to socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-ecological dimensions of an experience.
Wattchow (2006a) himself ‘corrects’ van Manen’s anthropocentrism in terms of corporeality being limited to human relations. He embraces van Manen’s philosophy of reflexivity through an extension of corporeality to include encountered and embodied experiences that are inclusive of relationships in and with place, nature, and the non-human other.

In Boys Go Bush I have resisted adding an additional ‘ecocentric’ lifeworld existential to the four that van Manen (1997) promotes, though this may well be the next methodological development for hermeneutic phenomenology in response to the global ecological issues that are touching human consciousness. It is my belief that a researcher shall only ever adequately deal with matters beyond the human when a personal ‘ecosophy’ (Naess, 2008) allows for more of an ecocentric fusion of horizons (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). That is, researchers need to stand firmly upon their own ecologically informed research platform before being able to adequately deal with anthropocentric matters related to human experience. Wattchow (2006) has been able to achieve that through his phenomenological work examining relationships to river places. Similarly Hyde (2005, 2006) has extended corporeality beyond the human in his work examining spirituality in children through his own interpretation of corporeality as including others beyond the human. I fear that adding an additional lifeworld existential, such as ‘eco-reality’ or ‘spirit-reality’, might paradoxically further separate humans from the other. This clearly would not have been the intent of van Manen when he first published his influential text Researching Lived Experience in 1984. In short, van Manen’s use of the four lifeworld existentials of lived ‘body’, ‘time’, ‘space’, and ‘other’ remain particularly relevant for investigating human experience in the contemporary world.

The 44 Hour Solo Timeline has proved itself as a basic yet highly effective experience sampling method when coupled with post-solo interviews. Kelk (1994) promoted a timeline tool as one strategy for assisting students to recollect any positive and negative moments that arose during their solo experiences. The Tihoi solo timeline was not an especially invasive intervention; however, it did require students to focus temporarily from the experience to recording key moments. Those recordings, in the form of an X on a laminated card and an associated label, provided important points for post-solo discussion. Other experience
sampling methods (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Y. Lee, 1999; McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998) have enabled access to the lived experiences of adventure participants in remote outdoor settings. Yet there have been issues associated with the technological invasiveness of the variety of electronic modes employed, as well as the technical issues associated with battery powered electronic devices in outdoor settings. Kelk’s (1994) solo timeline has provided an accessible and less invasive alternative which, when coupled with qualitative interviewing, has facilitated access to the student lived-experience.

One other methodological matter deserves reflection, for making sense and meaning of adolescent male interview transcripts was especially challenging. Despite a great deal of energy being spent with fostering rapport with study participants prior to their solo experience, their silences, grunts, monosyllabic responses, and their inability to adequately articulate thoughts and feelings permeated transcripts. The insights of Nairn, Monroe and Smith (2005) proved significant, with their suggestion of analysing the silences within the transcripts adding qualities of insight and meaning. Whilst the texts I have created to articulate the ‘silences’ for each student were ultimately not incorporated into this work in any verbatim manner, the interpretation of the silences provided a richness that allowed me to view the interviews with fresh eyes.

**Future research opportunities emerging from this work**

(i) There exists scope to better understanding the experience of boredom for adolescents in outdoor adventure education. Certainly prior to solo at Tihoi the adolescents were particularly concerned to avoid boredom states. Yet this study has established a link between boredom as experienced and some potentially formative edgework behaviours. Boredom also led to opportunities for students to observe nature when they typically would not have. Is there a place for boredom in a slow pedagogy of solo? Does boredom have pedagogical value?

(ii) There is scope to better understand the deeper experiences of fear and anxiety on solo and to determine the degree of both positive and negative influence that such fear and
anxiety might bring to the experience. This is particularly important for better understanding the lived experiences of solo for adolescents or younger children. Not enough is known about the lived solo experience for younger people, and this study acknowledges that the adolescent solo is significantly more challenging than the academic literature reports for adult participants. Better understandings of lived experiences that are negative within outdoor education are needed.

(iii) Research examining the pedagogical blocks and links between pedagogical fear-induced uncertainty and learning is necessary. Uncertainty is such an accepted dimension of the tradition adventure education experience, yet it is clear that excessive anxiety has been an inhibitor of opportunities to effectively reflect upon the Tihoi experience during solo.

(iv) Tihoi did not employ any techniques or initiatives specifically oriented to enhancing relationships with the place where solo occurred. There is opportunity for Tihoi, and other solo programmes, to follow the lead of T. Smith (2005a) amongst others to embrace ecologically oriented initiatives aligned with solo. The tracking of the implementation of these initiatives presents research opportunity.

(v) Investigating the influence of scary stories and other culturally mediated understandings of ‘nature as a scary place’ would be an interesting study. Certainly adolescents have been socialised into thinking about the bush as a scary place, yet it need not be.

(vi) Dewey’s ‘disequilibrium’ points toward a potential pedagogical link between negative experiences states such as boredom and more positive states that might lead to personal learning or insight.

(vii) Walle (1997) speaks to the importance of adventurous activities in providing insight and as a counter theory to adventure as uncertainty. Understanding the pedagogical dimensions of adventure in the context of generating insight would be a useful contribution to adventure education and might well lead to a broader re-conceptualisation of the term adventure.
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the programme, the place, and the curriculum that is Tihoi warrant international research attention. As an outdoor educator it has been a privilege to have been provided glimpses into the broader Tihoi lifeworld via this work; glimpses of a programme of international significance for the education of adolescent males especially but also in terms of a place-specific pedagogy.

**Final thoughts: On solo and adventure**

Ecologist David Orr highlights three consequential dangers of modern education, in terms of the manner in which humans live on the earth (Orr, 2004, pp. 24-25):

- That formal education will cause students to worry about how to make a living before they know who they are;
- That it will render students narrow technicians who are morally sterile;
- That it will deaden their sense of wonder for the created world.

Orr had previously stated that “no student should graduate from any educational institution without a comprehension of things like... the basic principles of ecology... environmental ethics... practical things necessary to the art of living well in a place: growing food; building shelter; using solar energy; and a knowledge of local soils, flora, fauna, and the local watershed” (Orr, 2004, p. 14). As Aldo Leopold once asked (Leopold, 1966, p. 210), “If education does not teach us these things, then what is education for?”

Such philosophical-educational challenges appear a long way from outdoor adventure education and the Tihoi solo experience. But are they really? Colin Mortlock, UK outdoor educator, adventurer, and author reflects on his life of outdoor teaching and personal journeys in terms of the corresponding inner journeys that he has travelled in parallel. Mortlock, in *Beyond Adventure* (2000), discusses the potential of nature to provide profound insights to one’s relationship to others and to place. He presents a personal framework of values for living that have arisen through his life adventures. Of interest to this study is that Mortlock’s framework speaks on two levels: he arises to some of the challenges to education presented
both Orr and Leopold as I articulate above, and; Mortlock’s framework has emerged from outdoor experience which have included his own extended solitary journeys as well as many years of facilitating nature-based solitude experiences for others.

Mortlock (2000) states that outdoor education urgently needs “an overall concept or framework that accepts humanity is at least part of Nature and not separate from it” (p. 121, capital in original) and that “the first responsibility of any outdoor instructor is to give those in his or her care a sense of awe and wonder of all that surrounds them in the natural environment, and a sense of their own potential” (p. 121). These are significant ecological steps forward from an adventure educator who has unabashedly promoted classic adventure education rhetoric through his earlier works (Bowles, 2002). While Mortlock has been influenced by folks such as Arne Naess, Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm and the like with respect to his values framework, Beyond Adventure is not a deeply critical academic text. Notwithstanding, Mortlock offers a connectedness between adventure, solitude and the non human other that is refreshing in the context of adventure education. He has made the paradigmatic shift away from the focus upon risk that Loynes (2002) has advocated for adventure education.

The Tihoi solo has the potential to stretch the student ‘beyond adventure’, paraphrasing Mortlock, in terms of promoting a place-sensitive solitude (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) and fully realising humans to the understanding that they are natural beings in their own right (Naess, 2008). This study has highlighted that adolescents have some interest in nature; an interest facilitated for some via the presence of boredom. That nature-interest and awareness, though latent in some, appears fundamental to human existence and possibly born of genetics. Yet it exists. Biophilia, as Wilson (1986) reminds us, supposes that humans are innately attracted to nature. Thus biologically, and perhaps even in a gendered sense, Tihoi soloists remain as hunter-gatherers with ineffable desires for immersion experiences with nature.

The denial of opportunity for a deeper relationship with nature for adolescents is counterintuitive, as well as destructive, and the solo needs to connect rather than separate. Solo has the capacity to be an adventure of a different form; an adventure that is inclusive of,
not destructive or denying of, place understandings. Indeed promoting solo as an adventure of an ecocentric, place-as-kin, kind might well be exciting for adolescents in a time of a purported and evolving nature deficit disorder (Louv, 2008).
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### Appendix 1: Solo Lifeworld Inquiry Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIVED OTHER (RELATIONALITY)</th>
<th>LIVED SPACE (SPATIALITY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lived Other (relationality)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lived space (spatiality)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“what is important to me?” “who / what do I want to be with?”</td>
<td>“where do I belong?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on the quality of relationships with others’</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the solo ‘geographical’ space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on the quality of relationship with the bush</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the ‘feelings’ around the solo place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on encounters with other humans on solo</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the atmosphere of the solo place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on encounters with non-human ‘beings’ on solo</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the ‘emotions’ associated with the solo place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on God or a higher being</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the built space that is the bivy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on ‘being-with’ others on solo</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the natural surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on self and what’s important in life</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on ‘other’ spaces and places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on friends and the qualities of friendship</td>
<td>≈ Reflections of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ at the solo place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIVED TIME (TEMPORALITY)</th>
<th>LIVED BODY (CORPOREALITY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lived time (temporality)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lived body (corporeality)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“who am I in relation to time?”</td>
<td>“what am I?” “who am I?” “where do I belong?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections related to the clock... the meaning of forty-four hours of solo</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on the feelings of physically being on solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on not having / secretly having a watch</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on connections or disconnections with surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on the speed of solo</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on beliefs about ‘self’ while on solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on times of boredom, apprehension, excitement</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on activities completed on solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on past, present &amp; future events</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on suggested /planned activities not completed on solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on others in the past, present, &amp; future</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on being alone in the bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on natural cycles and time</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on being surrounded by things / separate from things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≈ Reflections on the words and language used about time</td>
<td>≈ Reflections on feelings of contentment / discontentment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIVED TIME (TEMPORALITY)</th>
<th>LIVED BODY (CORPOREALITY)</th>
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<td><strong>LIVED BODY (CORPOREALITY)</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Appendix 2: My 44 hour Solo - Timeline

My 44 Hour Solo – Timeline

Use this to record all of the good and bad / positive and negative / scary and exciting things that happen on SOLO.

Place an X at the right spot and a brief comment so you can remember what happened.

Positive stuff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walking in</th>
<th>Setting up</th>
<th>first night</th>
<th>next day</th>
<th>second night</th>
<th>second day</th>
<th>packing up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Negative stuff
Appendix 3: Ethical Consent Forms and Information
NEW ZEALAND YOUTH AND WILDERNESS SOLITUDE

[PhD Research Project: John Maxted, University of Otago]

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS OF TIHOI STUDENTS

As you are well aware, students at Tihoi undertake a programme of bush-craft activities that includes an overnight solo experience. I am a researcher seeking to explore and better understand the solo experiences of Tihoi students.

This research project is a part of my Doctoral Studies within the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago. I am currently employed by the University to teach outdoor education and have worked in residential outdoor education centres in New Zealand and overseas as well as teaching at the Secondary School level. My interest in solos has developed from this experience, and by the fact that whilst many schools and outdoor centres utilise solos in their programmes there appears to have been no published research on the experiences of solos for School-aged youth.

The University of Otago Ethics Committee has granted permission for this study. There is no expectation for students to be involved with this research project and they are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are unhappy about your son participating in this solo study then please complete and return the form attached.

It is likely that results from this study will be published, though no reference shall be made to an identifiable, specific participant. Names in any final report(s) shall be fictitious. Tihoi Venture School and St. Paul’s Collegiate will receive copies of the final reports, and study outcomes may be summarised in various School publications.

I have attached a copy of the information students shall be given about this project. If you would like further information about this study please contact myself, John or Chris Furminger (Tihoi Venture School Directors), or my supervisors, as listed below. Many thanks.

John Maxted, PhD Student, School of Physical Education, P.O. Box 56, DUNEDIN

Project Academic Supervisors

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Senior Lecturer, Outdoor Education
School of Physical Education
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(03) 479 9056 direct phone

Professor Anne Smith
Director, Childrens Issues Centre
University of Otago
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(03) 479 5087 direct phone

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago.
NEW ZEALAND YOUTH AND WILDERNESS SOLITUDE

[PhD Research Project: John Maxted, University of Otago]

PARENTAL NON-CONSENT

IF YOU **DO NOT** WISH FOR YOUR SON TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY please return this section to John or Chris Furminger (Tihoi Venture School).

This page can be faxed to (07) 372 8417

NEW ZEALAND YOUTH AND WILDERNESS SOLITUDE

[PhD Research Project for John Maxted, University of Otago]

I request that no field notes, journal entries or interviews be conducted with my son during his solo experience.

Name of student ___________________________________ Date ____________________

Signed ___________________________________________ (Parents / Guardian)

Name of Parent / Guardian _______________________________ (please print)
INFO SHEET FOR TIHOI STUDENTS

What is the aim of the project?
The aim is to examine and to better understand your solo experience – what you think, feel and do during solo AND what the experience might mean for you.

This research project is a part of John Maxted’s Doctoral Studies within the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago. His interest in solo’s has developed from many years of outdoor education teaching and instructing, and by the fact that whilst many schools and outdoor centres utilise solos in their programmes there appears to have been little written on the experiences of solo’s for School-aged youth.

Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

What types of participants are we after?
Any Tihoi student interested in discussing his solo experience.

What will the participants be asked to do?
You will be invited to take part in three things…

1. a group discussion before your solo experience where John will ask you about your expectations for solo, any concerns or fears you may have, about things you are looking forward to or perhaps dreading during solo.
2. During solo there is an opportunity to write, sketch or craft a little about your solo experience (in your journal). John would be interested in viewing and discussing aspects of your journal after your solo, assuming you have kept one and are interesting in sharing the contents.
3. Immediately after your solo John is hoping to chat to you for less than an hour about what you did or thought about during your solo. If you want a friend could be there for the interview too. A day or so later John may return for a second interview if you are interested.

Note that at any time during the solo research project you can stop being a participant if you want. You will NOT be given a hard time for this!

What if you change your mind and withdraw from the solo research project?
You can stop being involved at any time if that is your wish. You will NOT have to explain why you don’t want to be involved and pulling out won’t disadvantage you.
What information will be collected and what will happen to it?

The group discussion will be recorded and John may also make some notes. If you are happy for him to, John may also make a copy of your journal or at least take notes about it. The interviews after solos will be recorded on tapes and listened to again. The questions to be asked will all be about your solo experience, though to start with John might ask you to share some information about your life and outdoor experiences.

If you are ever asked a question you do not wish to answer then you can say “pass” and John will move one to the next one. If he asks questions that make you feel uncomfortable then it is fine for you to stop the interview or ask him to ask other questions. Remember you always have the right NOT to be in the study and won’t get a hard time if you decide to not be involved.

Information that John finds out about solo will eventually be written up into a thesis and some articles that others may read. Your information will be mixed in with other information, so that your name will not be in any written material. However if you ever wanted to see what John was writing up from the information you have given him then all you have to do is ask.

Once all of the interviews have finished then all of the information will be stored away safely back in Dunedin and only John and his supervisors will be able to see it all. From that information a report will be written. A copy will be sent to St Pauls Collegiate and to Tihoi Venture School where you will be able to read it. After five years all of the information from our project shall be destroyed (except for the final reports).

If you (or your parents) would like further information

Please contact John Maxted, his supervisors, or John or Chris Furminger (Tihoi Venture School Directors).

Thanks for your support with this project!

John Maxted (Researcher)
PhD Student, School of Physical Education, P.O. Box 56, DUNEDIN
jmaxted@pooka.otago.ac.nz  e-mail (03) 479 8649 phone

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(03) 479 5087 direct phone

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago.
I have read the information sheets about this solo research project. I have enough information about the study but know I can ask for more information at any time during the project.

I also understand that…

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. I am free to withdraw myself from the project at any time without any explanation or disadvantage to myself;

3. the information (data) will be stored safely for five years then destroyed;

4. all information obtained will be confidential and my name would NOT be in any subsequent publication(s);

5. this project will use interview questions that have not been determined in advance but which will relate to the solo research and its aim, and;

6. I am free to stop any interview if I feel uncomfortable or offended by the line of questioning being taken.

Most importantly, I understand I am able to withdraw from the research project at any time without question.

I agree to take part in the ‘New Zealand Youth and Wilderness Solitude’ research project.

Name of STUDENT: ________________________________

Signed: _________________________________________

Date: ____________________
CONSENT FORM FOR TIHOI / ST. PAUL’S COLLEGIATE SCHOOL STAFF

This research project seeks to better understand the meanings and significance Tihoi students obtain from their solo experience. Your support in providing background information and critical insights to the student solo experiences are especially valid and appreciated. Please complete the form below if you are comfortable being interviewed for this project, thanks.

I have been provided necessary information about this solo research project. I have enough information about the study but know I can ask for more information at any time during the project.

I also understand that…

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. I am free to withdraw myself from the project at any time without any explanation or disadvantage to myself;

3. The information (data) will be stored safely for five years then destroyed;

4. All information obtained will be confidential and my name would NOT be in any subsequent publication(s);

5. This project will use interview questions that have not been determined in advance but which will relate to the solo research and its aim, and;

6. I am free to stop any interview if I feel uncomfortable or offended by the line of questioning being taken.

Most importantly, I understand I am able to withdraw from the research project at any time without question.

I agree to take part in the ‘New Zealand Youth and Wilderness Solitude’ research project.

Name of STAFF MEMBER: _________________________________________

Signed: __________________________________________ Date: ________________