

"The Scent Of My World": A Student's Perceptual Knowing Of Outdoor Experiencing

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Abstract

This paper is an inquiry into one high school student's perceptual knowing in an outdoor adventure education classroom. Holly's perceptual knowing emerges through stories, conversations, and poetry while on sea kayaking, bicycling, and winter camping trips. The research contributes to an understanding of human outdoor experiencing through an enactive interpretation of embodied awareness/actions. Our embodiment of action is not separate from our social history of experience. Nor is it separate from emergent interactions with the environment which bring forth a freshness of perception. It is my hope that this paper opens possibilities for thinking about the emergent ways of interacting within many educational contexts. Further, an enactive interpretation of outdoor experiencing is a laying down of a path in perceptual knowing.

Introduction

This paper offers one student's perception of a relationally complex experience in an outdoor adventure education program. While (re) presenting phenomena of experiencing for Holly, we begin to (re) experience our own perceptions and knowing through emergent interpretation. The translation of that experience is inseparable from participation and knowing—it is a boundless, re-iterative interpretative process that weaves one's history of experiencing while "laying down a path in walking" (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). In this sense, the phenomena of experiencing is never one fixed event but an ongoing interpretative inquiry. Exploring an enactive interpretation¹ of student's experience in outdoor education may offer insights for understanding human experience within a multitude of contexts and environments. Further, outdoor education may link traditional education classroom practices with the outdoor environment.

In order to have an ecologically sustainable human future, we need to regain our experience of connectedness to the natural environment instead of our practices of disconnection (Abram, 1996; Bowers, 1995; Capra, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Orr, 1992). In this sense, how might educational programs better connect human experience to the outdoor environment? Few programs actually utilize outdoor adventure education, but as educators, we may want to consider what this experience can offer traditional school practices. As Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards (1997) offer,

¹ An enactive interpretation refers to the participants, writers, and readers interpretive perceiving and knowing that arises through experiencing or embodying actions with phenomena. The embodiment of actions is not separate from human experience, social history, or the interaction with the environment (Varela et al., 1991).

"research on adventure programs can provide insights which might inform 'regular' educational contexts. Adventure programs have been conducted as if they operated in isolation from the educational world" (p.77). On the other hand, my doctoral work explores a program housed in a Vancouver public secondary school.

My paper presents an understanding of one student's experience with/in the first semester of the outdoor adventure education program so that educators might consider the benefits to adolescent education. Holly shares her perceptions of her experience in interviews, journal entries, poetry, and a conversation with me at the end of the program. The enactive interpretation of a student's perceptual knowing includes experiencing a series of outdoor trips over a five-month period. In unveiling Holly's voice, I hope to enhance pedagogical perspectives and inform other educational research and curriculum development. The aims of this paper are:

- to examine Holly's reflections of embodied experiences on the trips, and
- to explore Holly's perceptions of her experiences, actions and interactions with/in the program.

However, before we learn more about the context of the study, we need to understand how enactive theory informs our interpretation of perceptual knowing.

Experiencing the outdoor classroom

The program is an outdoor adventure and environmental education curricula for a hundred and eight grade ten students. Students participate in two half-year semesters. In the first semester (September-January), half the students are in the regular academic classroom, while the other half are in the outdoor portion of the program. In the second semester (February-June), the two halves of the program switch.

The outdoor adventure education classroom is uniquely decorated with couches instead of desks. The walls are decorated with student paintings, pictures, and environmental posters from previous program students. Along with fifty-three other grade ten students, Holly began the program as a participant in a combination of outdoor activities from sea kayaking, rock climbing, biking, to winter backpacking. Students spend the first month of the program learning the skills of camping, cooking, self-rescues, belaying, etc. They are randomly assigned tenting / cooking partners and are responsible for packing all their own signed-out gear and food for outdoor trips. The stories and experiences focus on the first seven-day sea-kayaking trip that Holly participated in along with twelve other students. One kayak guide, a male teacher from the program, and myself as female instructor / researcher were the three adults on Holly's trip. This paper portrays many other activities and interactions occurring during the seven days, which shows that the trip was much more than just sea kayaking.

In brief, this paper brings to light the possibilities for perceiving and interpreting the phenomena of experiencing through narrative stories, poetry, and text which reveals the voice of one student. Some of the themes that arise from Holly's journey include:

- her feelings of loss of control;
- her willingness to risk in social interaction and to trust others;
- her pushing perceivable limits;
- her heightened perceptual awareness;
- her moving beyond the fear of the unfamiliar;
- her connections to the environment; and
- other reflecting or experiencing of the program.

By bringing in a few key moments from outdoor trips, the stories unearth the intertwining of how outdoor education can push perceived physical, social, and emotional limits as well as heighten connections to the natural world. In exploring Holly's articulation of her journey within the outdoor classroom, I hope to bring forth a clearer understanding of perceptual knowing formulated through the experiencing of interactions with participants and the natural world.

Lost In the Waves

Under the waves,
I feel myself separate from all I know,
And all that is familiar.

As I float away,
I wonder if there's anything to hold on to here,
Before I am lost in the waves.

All I can see,
Is the sunless water filled with unspoken emotion,
In a sea of worry.

Somehow if I try,
I will find a way to break the silence,
And come up for air.

(Holly, Three days before the 7-day sea kayak)

Loss of control

We curl up on the vinyl chairs in the back of the ferry on our way to Nanaimo. I sit across from Holly and Trisha. I wonder what these students are experiencing as we embark on a week long sea kayak journey into the wilderness. It is raining and I am nervous, hoping I have packed everything properly to keep dry in the kayak. Also, I feel the pressure to interview students before we get into the sea kayaks. I ask Holly how she is feeling and what it was like to get ready for the trip.

Holly describes the food and ziploc bags taking up the entire floor of her room at home. She depicts her experience in getting ready for the sea-kayaking trip as a feeling of a loss of control or fear, a 'panicking' because she has to rely on what she knows and remembers from the skills learned in the first month of the program. Her fear stems from the possibility of forgetting some item of food, shelter, etc. that might be life threatening. As the ferry arrives in Nanaimo, we travel by school bus toward Clayoquot Sound.

The skies grow darker as the rain continues to increase. We set up camp in a local park near Tofino. The rain was making that familiar sound as it hit the large group tarp our group was huddling under. After everyone dispersed to retire to warm, dry sleeping bags, Holly comes to me in tears. She said she was so disorganized she couldn't find anything. As she writes in her journal,

"The first night, I was disorganized, unhappy, and unhelpful. Nothing went right and I had no hope that it ever would."

Feeling loss of control, fear, and being overwhelmed with the unknown and the newness of the experience are stressful. However, Holly was able to relax at one point when her gear was in one place, on the roof of the program bus enroute to Tofino. She said it hadn't occurred to her that this trip "might be fun." Holly's struggle to have all her gear neat and organized was continually challenged by the packing and repacking of gear required when moving to new campsites and fitting it all in the compartments of a sea kayak.

Social interaction---risk & trust

It has been raining most of the night and well into day three. The winds are predicted to reach gale force and safety means staying on land. We are on Rassier Point in Clayoquot Sound off the west side of Vancouver Island. The thirteen students and three instructor/teacher leaders are practising reading maps and attempting to stay dry under the huge, white tarpaulin on the beach. The afternoon brings swirling clouds and the sun shines brightly for an hour, warming up the earth. Soon most students are in their bathing suits running in the sun and getting ready for a swim in the ocean. Even though it is the beginning of October, they encourage each other as a group and designate this as their "bonding" experience. The sunshine brings out all kinds of behavior. Students are having running races up

and down the beach, coating their bodies in mud, washing themselves in the ocean, and girls shaving their armpits and legs to clean themselves of the dirt and grime of camping for one night. Taking pictures of all these events, I capture Holly sitting apart from the group on a huge log reading a book and soaking in the warmth of the sun's rays.

I wonder what is happening for Holly and why she is not coming down to the beach to join the group. As she tells her teacher in a personal interview on day five,

I don't mean to rather be in a book than with people. It takes me a long time to adjust....the unfamiliar. I am not used to being in a group, not like that. I am not into the clique thing.

Holly indicates in a later interview that she deals with stress by panicking and freezing. Her book provides a way to relax.

While I read a book, I go places... traveling. I don't want to come back from it like a good dream, like pressing the snooze button....Reading is like I am going back home for a minute, not escaping where I am but reflecting on what else there is...like a letter from my parents that I am reading.

Interacting in the group is a *risk* for Holly. She struggles with the notion of her book not being looked at in a good way, as she knows she should be participating with the group. Holly perceives her peers taking on a group persona when they are together as opposed to when they interact on an individual basis. Holly sees herself as separate from the large group and stays to herself because she doesn't know if she can trust people. She feels as though she is learning to rely on herself. She writes in her journal:

I may be getting more out of this trip as an outsider, than I ever would in any group. That I know.

The pressure for Holly to blend into the group revolve around her not wanting to say anything to her peers about immature or 'annoying' behaviors, so she wanders off to read or write in her journal rather than put up with, for example, dirty joke telling. Holly and her assigned tent/cooking partner have been struggling the whole trip to collaborate. The second night camping, Holly switched tent partners because she did not want to set up her tent on the fine sandy beach, but instead up in the woods. When Holly has to switch back to her original partner for the rest of the trip, the partner's open objections add to Holly's tensions to fit into the group. She feels the anxiety to set up the tent and tarp before having fun or socializing, even if it means doing the tasks by herself.

On the last afternoon of the trip, Holly actually gets in the middle of a group of girls letting down their hair to pose by one of the boys for pictures as part of his birthday celebration. Holly's comment shows her new

reaction to people, "They are more similar to me than I think."

To interact as a group member with people you don't know is a risk. Struggling with relationships while living with a group is unavoidable. Holly's perceptions of being the outsider move to realizing she is not that different. In sharing social interactions, Holly begins to realize that she is not separate from the systemic community web. It is also important to note that, although she doesn't express this explicitly, Holly's supportive relationship with both the research and her teacher are integral to her struggle toward new ways of knowing. She finds herself in new surroundings, pushing limits and dealing with unsteady relationships.

Pushing limits

Today, day five, it took students four hours to get up, cook breakfast, and pack a day pack. They were moving in slow motion, not wanting to go on the hike to Ahous Bay on Vargas Island. The weather again is preventing the group from kayaking around to Ahous Bay. After pushing themselves to start the hike and engaging in the adventures of seeing huge waves, sighting whales, and exploring new beaches, students are hiking back through the lush environment to the campsite. Although we never made it to Ahous Bay because of the high tides, students are in joyous moods around their dinner tables constructed of flotsam and driftwood.

The community comes together each day under the large white tarp for cooking. A group of girls are rolling sushi while two other groups are making a different version of cheesy pasta. A male student sits across from me, watching as I concoct a meal of creamy scalloped potatoes with fresh green beans, toasted almonds and copious amounts of herbal tea. As students gather in their cooking groups to boil water, they engage in sharing various responsibilities and the stories of the day.

In personal interviews with their teacher earlier in the afternoon, each student was asked to articulate their perception of their experience in the last five days as a journal entry. Holly comes in under the large overhanging tree and sits up on the moss covered log across from her teacher with her journal in hand. Although Holly says that she is doing better than she was on day one, she is still overwhelmed by responsibilities for making her own meals three times a day and the realization that if she doesn't do things, no one will. She still struggles with putting up the tent and tarp and is slowly realizing that it is okay to ask for help. Holly perceives that she is pushing herself harder than she thought she could.

It's encouraging to know I'm not going to have a limit to where I can't do anything anymore.

Holly's expectations affect her perception of experience, in particular, her view of how hard things

are and her ability to enjoy the experience are a challenge. She even talks of her parents becoming aware of her new strengths and how she has pushed a lot of limits.

As students push themselves, new ways of knowing arise from this direct experiencing of being responsible for their own food, shelter, and safety. The outdoor classroom continues to teach the value of skills while pushing perceivable limits. After students push themselves to participate in the physical activities of the day, which they do not want to do at the moment, they alight with the feelings of accomplishment.

Perceptual awareness

The tide is slowly ebbing out. The land around the island that was once surrounded by water is turning into mud flats that extend far out into the bay. Holly sits atop a large boulder in her thermarest chair writing furiously in her journal. The final light of the day softly lights her face of concentration. I wonder what she is writing and how her reflections in her journal contribute to her perceptual knowing and understanding of her experiences on this trip. At the end of the program, Holly shares her journal with me and I gain new awareness of her experiencing. Holly's perceptual awareness of her continual change during the sea-kayaking journey is evident in her poetic writings.

Progress

As the ocean crashes against the surf,
I long for the familiar.

The scent of my world,
The one I still love,
Regardless of its flaws.

I know I have changed,
And I know that for me,
I am doing well.

And at least I know that perfection is not for me now,
I am proud of what I've done.

I'm more proud to be me,
Than I have been in a long time.

And for me,
That is progress.

Holly's perceptual awareness is brought forth through the interaction of experiencing and perceiving. The knowing itself is articulated through Holly's poetry and her conversational interviews as we share our thoughts about the collective experience. Tales told after an experience tend to be narrated to present the events in the most positive light (Fine, 1992). In our conversations, Holly describes perception as a "point of view or how you think you should see experience" and where conveying how something 'really is,' includes even the bad things. Holly is referring to how other students merely describe an experience as fun, leaving

out the struggles along the way. She tries to relate her perceptions of experiencing in the program to include her difficult moments. Most participants I talked with remembered the rich moments of social bonding when the sun came out on the beach at Rassier Point. We will learn later that Holly is interacting more with the natural surroundings during this time.

Moving beyond the fear of the unfamiliar

The morning starts out with the waves forming these four foot troughs and building. Timing the surf we paddle out through some kelp and rocks. The wind is strong and we are on the exposed point lining up in H formation with all the boats close together. My kayak is continually being bumped into as I am in the middle of the two parallel rows of kayaks. We paddle into the wind and around the point taking about an hour. Now the weather is changing and we can see glimpses of blue sky and fast moving clouds. The wind has subsided since our early morning paddle. We are in a long line, the ducky formation. Holly and Ed are leading in their double kayak following the shore while they set a consistent group pace. Here Holly leads the group. I wonder how Holly feels about this responsibility as I reflect back on our previous conversations. When I was talking to her on the ferry before the trip she was worried about fitting all her gear into the kayak, now she is in charge of the group. She had even asked if anyone has not been able to finish a trip while I was talking to her on the first night.

As the days pass in the trip, Holly realizes that she will make it to the end simply because she sees her improvement from day one. Not only in her struggles with sea kayaking, but biking up huge hills, and telemarking up the sides of mountains, Holly begins to move beyond her fear of failing and to perceive these activities as less difficult. She talks to me in a later interview, indicating that in explaining what she has been doing in the program to family and friends, she realizes how amazing it is that she has actually done so many things.

As Holly explores the unfamiliar, she describes the program as "fun, discovery, interesting, and the highest learning experience she has ever known." Her interpretation of fun does not suggest that the experience was easy or "a walk in the park" but that she was no longer feeling overwhelmed or struggling as hard. Fun to her means "growthful." Her original perception of the program, *being out of her league*, has changed to being the most valuable experience. She suggests her ability to problem solve as an example of an important learning experience from participation in the program. When things get hard, Holly feels she will now have more solutions. The potential or qualities that Holly perceives she has developed from her outdoor experiences in the program are demonstrated best in her own words.

[The program] has taught me that there is no obstacle too big. You can do

anything if you just try hard enough. Even if you don't succeed, there is no harm in trying. To try and fail is better than not to try at all. If you try there is a greater chance that you will succeed than there is if you fail.....if you are really motivated---you will succeed. [The program] taught me stick to--a-tive-nesspersistence. The journey you are going on is not going to be 'familiar'.

Holly finds herself in new surroundings, pushing limits, dealing with relationships that are unsteady, and charting unknown waters where perceptual knowing arises through the experience. Wilderness situations challenge Holly's traditional ways of thinking and being in the world, where experiencing opens perceptual awareness.

Connections to the environment

Walking on algae coated rocks, my boots turn into roller skates. As I carefully totter, slipping and sliding across the rock ledges exposed from the escaping tide, I finally hit the soft comfort of sand grabbing my feet. My long cajoule protects my entire body from the wetness of the day. A few of us, including Holly are out exploring the beaches and tide pools next to our campsite. The sea life on the West Coast is growing before my eyes, huge in size compared to the East Coast, with which I am familiar. I peer into this little pocket of water on one of the rock ledges and there are the most elegant tube worms about 3 inches long waving up at me. We find sea sponges, crisp purple sea urchins, and sea stars firmly attached in various patterns all over the rocks at the lowest edge of the tide line. Holly is writing poetry in the sand near the waters edge with a stick,

Dawn of a new era
Because I could not stop for Death,
he kindly stopped for me.

[By Emily Dickinson]

*All I can do is promise never to forget
you,
the bright little star.*

Holly's expressions are carried out as the tide changes and slowly ebbs at her words neatly carved in the sand.

Holly connects her struggles and growth to the natural world. She writes in her journal, 3 October 1998, as part of her assignment to compare herself with nature:

Before [the program] I was like a piece of driftwood, in one place until something moved me, full of water, but still strong inside. Now I am like the tides, strong but unsure of my power, sometimes calm but often lashing out and breaking down uncontrollably. In the future I hope

to be like a Douglas Fir tree; strong,
proud, content, beautiful, and not afraid
to stand on my own.

Holly enjoys these comparisons. She likens herself to water that she describes as powerful in that it can kill, maim, but is also beautiful. She compares herself to water, sort of mixing around everywhere and being powerful without knowing it. She looks at the trees as living a long time but always in impending danger; the notion of herself as fragile even though she may look strong. The sea creatures are viewed as always living to survive as she herself is trying to do with this trip, and must forget about having fun. Her experience of writing poetry is embodied in writing in the sand and letting the water carry out her words. Holly draws parallels between her experiences in nature with other animate and inanimate experiencing forms; a perceptual knowing that evolves through her outdoor interactions.

As Gary Fine (1992) indicates, our being in nature has an element of the lack of human control where a tension exists between the fear and the demand for perceptual clarity. Consider Holly's perceptions of the ocean world in her poetry:

Ocean World

Standing on the sandy beach,
I realize how small I am.

The world is powerful,
Threatens to crush me if I don't respect it.

I'm glad I can respect this place,
The trees older than I will ever be,
The land purer than anything I have ever known.

I breathe in the smells of the ocean,
Wishing I could live on the air alone.

The world watches me and,
I watch the world,
And I am no longer small.

It is through the interpreting, conceptualizing, and re-experiencing of Holly's perceptions of her sea kayaking journey that we begin to see the possibilities for looking at an embodied way of knowing. A knowing that is not separate from the relational body-mind actions and interactions with the outdoor environment, but where experience, action, and awareness flow into/with perception. Disembodied knowing, in contrast, would perpetuate a Cartesian interpretation of the mind as separate from bodily actions and interpret experience as representations fixed in time and events. However, with perceptual knowing it is not only the feeling of self-actualization that can be experienced, but also the merging of action and awareness. The flow of interaction is a time spent with the wilderness as an intense focusing of attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Reflecting or experiencing

Deep in the Woods

Deep in the woods,
I learn to be afraid for real.

On the water,
I find the true meaning of serenity.

In the darkness,
I learn to find light.

At the core of my weakness,
I find my strength.

At the end of my knowledge,
I learn to know myself.

When I find my dependence,
I learn to rely on myself.

Deep in the woods,
I find a better person.

(Holly's journal, 7
October 1998)

In our interviews, Holly speaks of her respect of nature and learning to respect the unnatural or human made parts. She acknowledges what humans have made of nature, and her ability to enjoy city life; the city being just as good. She likes to think of herself as connected to the rawness of nature but still prefers the comfort of the city and her acceptance of changing nature. She talks of the wilderness like dreams with no distractions, no way to tune out things, and the stillness of nature.

"When everything else is silent, your head is speaking to you a lot louder than it usually does, and all your thoughts are there and they are not going anywhere soon."

Holly talks about the wisdom of accepting things and not always having to analyze them. For example, she is accepting things without having to know or be like it (nature); it's more a respecting of natural things. In rock climbing she "wanted to thank the rock for giving [her the] opportunity," not to conquer the rock but to "experience it."

However, Holly's interpretation of nature is that it is not something you can describe but have to be a part of. She indicates that humans are a part of nature, yet separate, like a visitor.

We are part of nature that has been taken out and put into some place that is completely different from nature, so I think of it like a whale in captivity. If you were to put two whales, one that lived in the wild all its life and doesn't know anything of the other world, and one that

lives in an aquarium with people watching it all day....and performing tricks...I kind of think we are like that. We still have the qualities that nature does, but we're so different from it now because we have been away from it for so long....I don't know if we are part of it anymore. I think if we were to go back to it, we would have the same problems that a whale in captivity its whole life would ...if you released it to the wild. It wouldn't know how to fend for itself in a place where it came from....How do we become more of nature as well as having this world?

Holly describes her experience in the world as being separate from the natural world. The analogy of the whale is like her experience in the program. She struggles with the traditional classroom world and her transition to the new outdoor classroom (community) world. She talks about her feelings of failure with grades and how she moved beyond doing things for a grade; doing things well for herself and also helping others.

In a later conversation, Holly referred to her experience on a bike trip. She relates how she tries to capture with words the sunset and a tree leaning across the water: "Nothing you can say describes it." Holly talks about trivializing this experience when you put it into words as it "wants to 'be' like it is." Nonetheless, she tries to capture this scene by taking lots of pictures. She has figured out that she has a different perceivable strength in herself, and that she is getting along more with people and is less afraid to ask for help. She talks about the need to be independent, but that everybody is sharing the struggles; her notion of support is the happy medium of self doing and helping. In addition to Holly performing her daily trip tasks on her own, she is helping others in a way that makes her feel a part of the shared community.

She views nature as a reflection for what you see outside as reflecting the inside. She describes nature as working like life:

"It has storms and has really bad weather,
but the sun always comes out
afterwards."

Even though life as a teenager is often confusing, Holly sees the experiences in the program as opening up teenagers to something that is unquestionably real instead of sinking into a world that is "sugar coated".

The wilderness experiences, though difficult, give Holly and her peers the opportunity to come to know more about life. As Holly expresses:

Teenagers need to know this (experience) as they are trying to figure out their place in the world.....All of a sudden you have these goals, potential and you know so much. The outdoors is dangerous and risky.....safe, not harmful.....not

avoidance, it smacks you in the face. It's not an illusion.

Holly's experience speaks to the opening of the invisible, the perceptual knowing we are experiencing in the outdoors. As she points out, the wilderness

"shows you a world that is not confusing which is hard to find. Nothing describes it."

Interpreting outdoor experiencing

This paper has examined, through one student's reflections, how experiencing outdoor adventure education can influence perceptual knowing. As perceptual knowing is a continuous re-iterative process, where knowing occurs through experiencing and re-experiencing, students begin to articulate in words their understanding of their interactions with all phenomena including peers, the outdoor environment, and the interrelationships as being places for growth. This place for growth is an unfolding enriched through the facilitating of flexible thinking, personal motivation, and initiative in participants (Neill, 1999).

Additionally, theory, and in particular enactive theory, links human experience with perceptual knowing providing an opening to interpretation. That is, enactive interpretation brings together theoretical understanding, making our stories, poetry, or narratives of human experience inseparable from the interrelationship of body, environment, and social history. Thus, embodied knowing never separates the mind from the body from the world (environment). In *The Embodied Mind*, Varela, Thompson, & Rosch (1991), use the idea of embodiment first introduced by Merleau-Ponty (1962) to outline an alternative "enactive" orientation. Embodiment has a double sense of the body as living and the body as the experiential structure or context of cognition which Varela et al. view as the path toward transformative experiences for humans.

In a nutshell, the enactive approach consists of two points: 1) perception consists in perceptually guided action and 2) cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided (Varela et al., 1991, pp.172-173).

In other words, perception is an active process, not a pre-given property independent of the world (Varela et al., 1991, p. 173). Senses are "experiential, consensual, and embodied dependent upon the biological and cultural history of structural coupling" (Varela et al., 1991, p. 171). Structural coupling refers to the structure that emerges from the coupling of human experience and social history (Varela et al., 1991). Varela et al., (1991) considers embodied experience as the coupling of physical (forms) and mental aggregates (feeling/sensations, perceptions,

dispositional formation, and consciousness) (pp. 113-115). Perception arises out of sensual experience.

Perception comes forth from our experience of synaesthesia, referred to as the "flowing together of different senses into dynamic and unified experience," requiring active participation to form the structures of perception (Abram, 1996, pp. 125, 130). Merleau-Ponty (1962), moreover, refers to perception as the chiasm between the senses, which couple and collaborate with one another. Merleau-Ponty expresses perception as

a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things (p. 320).

Experience is not grounded in the body but arises through our movements, such as we come to understand through Holly's perceptual knowing.

My study focuses on young people's perspectives of the process of experiencing which few studies have looked at (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995). Holly illustrates ways in which interactions within groups can bring about personal and social development of young people, and that challenges in wilderness settings can bring about group bonding and cooperation (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995). Further, these interactions are embodied as Abram (1996 p. 117) states, "To directly perceive any phenomenon is to enter into relation with it, to feel oneself in a living interaction with another being". Living interaction relates to mindfulness in that we may perceive the bringing forth of our sensorial experience as a way of knowing. A way of knowing can be the coupling of synaesthetic experience, in which we see, hear, and feel a sentient world. To perceive is to be mindful of our experiential participation with the world or the natural environment.

Another important element of outdoor adventure education programs is that participants may "try out new ways of behaving and thinking" without the hindrance of previous patterns of interaction when they are with a group of people that they do not know (Neill, 1997, p. 5). In addition to the influences of previous social interactions Holly brings with her, the articulation of perceptual knowing seems to be connected to personal maturity, the relationship she forms with me through our experiences, and the conversations we explore along the outdoor journey.

The possibilities found in emergent ways of interacting bring forth a freshness of perception. The enactive approach offers an interpretation of human experience in both its reflective, immediate living aspects, opening insight into perceptual knowing. Enactive interpretation is a way of thinking, acting, and perceiving which constantly arises in the momentary flux of experience not grounded but groundless. Varela,

et al. (1991 p. 144) say groundlessness is found in everyday experience, "that is, in knowing how to negotiate our way through a world that is not fixed and pre-given but that is continually shaped by the types of actions in which we engage". Through the lens of the "enactive," our perceptions in turn bring forth embodied actions of our experiencing/ theorizing. Our embodiment of actions is not separate from human experience, social history, or the interaction with the environment. As exemplified through Holly's perceptual knowing, we see an embodied respect of the relationships between human bodies and landscape bodies.

Even though Holly's experience connects with the natural environment, we need to explore further how this will impact her choices for the future. Holly's experience within the outdoor program happens at a pivotal time in her growth and development as an individual. Holly's level of personal risk and challenge, her assumption of leadership roles, and her engagement of reflection in journals influence the evolution of knowing for her while in the outdoor program.

Finally, enactive theory suggests that experience is groundless in that it is continually shaped by our actions in which we engage, instead of the view that our inner and outer representations are fixed in a final sense. Viewing the mind, body and world as interconnected, the enactive perspective validates perceptual knowing and the possibilities that arise in groundless and emergent ways of interacting within many educational contexts. Interpreting outdoor experiencing becomes very much a laying down of a path in the wilderness of perceptual knowing.

Wilderness

This is beauty at its best.

*The powerful ocean crashes the fine sand,
Lit by the light of a cloudy moon.*

*Slowly clouds roll by...
The trees outlined by a sky of velvet silk.*

*A bird perches to sleep on a branch,
Observing all that goes by...*

*I sleep and breathe in the peace of the water,
And the life of the forest,
Undisturbed in the night.*

*(Holly, Day 2 of
the 7-day paddle)*

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