

# YEAR 9 BOYS' OUTDOOR EDUCATION: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING THROUGH PLACE-BASED DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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## **Abstract**

Outdoor education (OE) holds obvious value and worth to the holistic education of the contemporary scholar. Time spent as a teacher, outdoor instructor, and personal and social growth (PASG) coach has entrenched in me this belief, despite the difficulty I've experienced in articulating the value of transdisciplinary OE to colleagues from more traditional backgrounds. I have been led to question whether outdoor educators capitalise on opportunities to learn from, and integrate learning from the outdoors into, other curriculum fields. This action research project investigated if a place-responsive digital storytelling (PRDS) project in an OE context might develop boys' social-emotional learning (SEL) competency. A learning programme that implemented PRDS was adopted for the duration of the participants' cumulative outdoor experience. Inductive analysis was utilised to analyse the collected data after categorisation and coding. The findings demonstrate that PRDS is effective in fostering SEL competencies in Year 9 boys, particularly through its capacity to inspire critical thought. Boys recognised increased self-awareness and were able to articulate their personal and social growth learning. They developed an increase in social awareness and the skills required to build relationships with their peers, parents, communities, and the world beyond. The research findings also suggest that PRDS is a means for outdoor educators to not only integrate SEL and more traditional academic knowledge, but to capitalise and add further meaning to the transformative nature of personal development that occurs through learning in, with, and about, the outdoors.

## Glossary

**Place-based:** A pedagogical approach that is grounded in the "place" where a student is located. Its cultural, historical, ecological, and economic context becomes the frame in which teaching and learning occur, and from which students are encouraged to challenge the dominant discourse.

**Place-responsive:** Similar in design to place-based education but free of the limitation of locality for learning to acquire its meaning and relevance. Place-responsive learning takes its cue from the location, but projects this learning in culturally responsive, integrative, and sustainable senses to the wider community, region, nation, and beyond.

**Digital storytelling:** Digital storytelling (DS) is a process of utilising creative skills to construct and present short stories within a platform that leverages well-known technologies, such as iMovie. DS comprises text, still images, moving images with audio, music, or graphics. Such stories are usually personal narratives, even when they include facts. DS is considered a powerful educational tool to build confidence and establish community and collaboration. Further, through creating a unique connection between complex ideas and personal ways of knowing, emotional engagement in learning is fostered.

**Whenua and moana:** Refer within Te Ao Maori (the Maori World) to a deep-seated spiritual relationship to place, in particular, whenua (land) and moana (sea), that enables Maori people to feel connected to one another and their ancestral homelands. These concepts are intrinsically linked to another Maori concept, tūrangawaewae "a place to stand," or places where they feel particularly empowered, secure, and connected. It is their home and foundation in a changing world and vitally important to a sense of holistic wellbeing (Te Ahukaramū, 2007).

**Social-emotional learning:** "[This] is a process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2017).

## Introduction

The Dilworth Rural Campus approaches teaching and learning for Year 9 boys from a holistic perspective. Equal value is ascribed to pedagogy that develops the three strands of our curriculum: academic, outdoor, and PASG. The teaching and learning curriculum is integrated, inquiry-driven, and collaborative. Integrating the three components of the

curriculum in a manner that values each on its merit and without depriving the others has proven challenging. However, we recognise the value in helping boys see the connections across the three strands more clearly and persevere with this challenging process.

Student achievement and progress is recognised through a student's Learning Journey. This is a narrative-based report, co-constructed by student and teacher, that includes data identified via feedback, feedforward, and individual reflection on learning. The report consists mainly of rubrics across all curriculum fields and enables students to demonstrate their progress through carefully curated evidence. OE is newly added to this document as an assessable curriculum with the following dispositions: Connection to whenua (land) and moana (sea), teamwork, and self-awareness.

This action research project leveraged place-based pedagogy and digital storytelling to investigate their potential to effect more agentic SEL in the outdoors. I intended to refocus the perspective of teachers and boys to better appreciate the potential of place-based pedagogy for OE. Participants required a device to record stills, video, or audio to use later in the creation of a digital story. The school, however, discourages the use of digital devices while engaging in outdoor education; the belief being that digital devices detract from being fully immersed in the experience, hinder interpersonal relationships, and pose a distraction hazard. This action research project sought to challenge that notion and seek greater alignment with contemporary digital citizenship education that suggests learning self-regulation and responsibility are the key to effective self-management. The sought-after change in practice, therefore, was twofold. I aimed to challenge an established philosophy of outdoor etiquette and also to explore an entirely new approach to teaching and learning in the outdoors that went beyond practical skill acquisition.

Whenua and moana are vital concepts entrenched within our bicultural community and identity for Maori in particular. This sense of attachment to place is also reflected in numerous other cultures. Evidence suggests that the more students feel connected to their cultural identity, the better they perform in all aspects of achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003). Furthermore, New Zealand educators are bound by an ethical and professional commitment to *The Treaty of Waitangi* to recognise and serve the best interests of Maori people.

Critical pedagogy of place locates place-connectedness within a democratic and socially just discourse that resonates with the earliest histories of OE and within experiential education as well as current understandings of wellbeing science (Dewey, 1938; Gruenewald, 2008). To this

end, I used the following inquiry question to focus my action research: *How does participation in a place-responsive digital storytelling project foster social-emotional learning in Year 9 boys?* The term, “foster” denotes encouraging or promotional action taken to develop something generally regarded as useful. Some strategies are proven successful at fostering social-emotional learning; however, within this context, the outcome was not guaranteed. Choosing this term deliberately enabled the capture of sufficient variance should the intended action not promote or encourage the development of social-emotional learning, but still render reporting on these findings valuable.

Action research is grounded in real teaching practice and resists the often abstract, theoretical imposition of most formal educational research (Mertler, 2016). It has the potential to offer practical solutions to problems that are unique to the context of the inquiry (classroom or school), while simultaneously growing and developing the practitioner’s capacity to lead change for improved outcomes in teaching and learning. Action research is adaptable and cyclical inquiry, whereby every iteration creates new knowledge and teaching practice is immediately improved (Mertler, 2016).

Educators are persistently engaged in all manner of problem-solving. Teaching is referred to as practice, not science, and therefore, all practice is individualised, while often bearing a resemblance to a body of accepted “best practice.” Thus teaching practice is suitable for study, review, and sharing with other practitioners. Small-scale inquiry enables action research to run simultaneously with the practice of everyday teaching without overburdening teachers as researchers (Mertler, 2016). The scale of action research also allows other researchers to readily mimic said research, deeming this methodology most suitable for the practitioner-researcher in a classroom or school setting.

### **Literature Review**

Locating action research within current literature promotes relevance, meaning, and efficacy in the potential action (Mertler, 2016). As such, the following areas of interest are explored in this review: the OE landscape and Place-Based Education’s role, digital storytelling, identity, and wellbeing.

The OE field locates its origins in the seminal work of educational philosopher John Dewey and progressives such as Kurt Hahn and Paul Petzolt (Roberts, 2018). The recent influence of Kolb’s “experiential learning cycle” assists in further conceptualising learning in the outdoors (Roberts, 2018). However, this variance of philosophical origins, instead of focusing the field, has hindered attempts to define it and has produced a proliferation of terms not limited to

environmental education, sustainability education, adventure education, service learning and experiential learning (Neill, 1997). Donaldson and Donaldson (in Adkins & Simmons, 2002), simplify matters slightly through their definition of OE as "education in, about, and for the outdoors" (p. 63). Priest (1986) suggests that further clarity can be gained by understanding OE as a reduction of the literature to six salient points: (1) as a method for learning; (2) as experiential; (3) as taking place primarily in the outdoors; (4) as requiring use of all senses and domains; (5) as based upon interdisciplinary curriculum matter; and (6) as a matter of relationships involving people and natural resources.

Priest's last point regarding OE as a matter of relationships is of significance in that it heralds the emergence of a new way of re-imagining OE as Place-Based Education (PBE). Authors variously recognise the genesis of PBE to be located within the subfield of Environmental Education, where it is rooted in the cultural, historical, economic, physical, and ecological context of the local environment or place (Brown, 2012b; Powers, 2004; Priest, 1986). PBE is an inclusive approach that attempts to remove the walls of the classroom and the stigmatising delineations of subject or discipline. It is inherently integrated into all aspects of learning and encourages students to see and understand the relevance of what they are learning so that they might become more engaged. Brown (2012b) revises this model of learning as place-responsive education in an attempt to overcome the potential limitation of where learning could occur, i.e. "place-based." Brown (2012a) argues further:

To respond is to enter into a relationship of mutual interdependence that requires sensitivity and empathy for place(s) and the people and broader ecological community who dwell there. It is forward-looking and considers how human actions affect, not just the present, but also the future. (p.109)

Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggests in his theory of human ecology that the locus of psychological development is at the centre of interacting and influencing ecosystems. Thus, people cannot be understood without an appreciation of the environments in which they are enmeshed (Durie, Elder, Tapsell, Lawrence, & Bennett, 2018). Larrivee (2000) and Branson (2007) build on this notion of influencing environments to suggest that the self is a construct of personal, cultural, social, and historical contexts and that self-concept or identity is shaped by past experience, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, feeling and mood, and personal agendas and aspirations. The former perspectives are, however, limited to individualistic, mono-cultural understandings of the self and do not take into account more holistic and culturally responsive models such as 'Te Whare Tapa Wha' or 'Fonua' (Durie, 1985; Tu'itahi, 2007). These models advocate a more holistic view of the self and emphasise the primacy of place-

connections and relationships to spiritual, physical, family, and mental wellbeing. The relevance of connection to place, particularly whenua (land), is supported by research conducted by Mark and Lyons (2010) that posits wellbeing suffers from conflict or trauma originating in land issues and benefits from a strong attachment to land via narrative traditions. Deficits in one facet can damage the whole, as each is interrelated, as too can strengths in the other be leveraged for the whole.

Digital storytelling is a process of utilising creative skills to construct and present short stories within a platform that leverages well-known technologies, such as iMovie (Dudacek, 2015; Sukovic, 2014). Digital stories comprise text, still images, moving images with audio, music or graphics (Dudacek, 2015; Sukovic, 2014). Such stories are usually personal narratives, even when they include facts. Further, through creating a unique connection between complex ideas and personal ways of knowing, emotional engagement in learning is fostered (Alonso, Molina & Requejo, 2013; Dudacek, 2015). Sukovic's (2014) findings suggest that a range of activities, non-prescriptive guidance on tasks, and learning with peers, best influence positive outcomes for digital storytelling projects. Further, digital storytelling is considered a powerful educational tool to build confidence and establish community and collaboration (Borgelt, Brooks, Innes, Seelander, & Paige, 2009).

Responsive teaching might use digital storytelling as a means to improve student agency and engagement in learning by providing authentic, relevant, and culturally responsive opportunities for reflection. Research by Gorlewski and Martinez (2010) indicates that boys experience a delay in achievement and school engagement when compared to girls, thus highlighting the need for improved mechanisms to leverage boys' achievement. The authors proceed to describe further findings by Mulvey (2010) that suggest the aspects of "natural" boy behaviour are becoming increasingly unsuitable for school settings and that excitement and motivation for learning decreases and are contributing to a lack of academic success. Such observations potentially support experiential and action-based pedagogies such as Place-Based Education. Of particular interest, and capitalising on models of pedagogies for effective teaching of boys (Gurian & Stevens, 2010), is the conclusion drawn by Johnson and Gooliaff (2013) regarding the tangible link between digital storytelling and the improvement of self-confidence and engagement in learning,

### **Research Context**

The project was conducted at Dilworth School, an independent boys' boarding school sited across three distinct campuses in the greater Auckland region: Junior Campus, Rural Campus

and Senior Campus. The school has an Anglican heritage and draws deeply on its Christian values to transform boys' lives. The student body comprises 640 boys who are enrolled from all over the North Island of New Zealand and are predominantly of Pacific Island or Maori descent. Every student that attends Dilworth receives a full scholarship. Selection of students is limited to boys that satisfy the conditions of the Founder's will; that boys are "from good families who are experiencing financial or personal hardship, regardless of their race or ethnicity" (Dilworth, 15 November, 1984).

The participants in this research were nine, 13 to 14 year-old boys in Year 9, who attended Dilworth Rural Campus. The Rural Campus is located on the southern edge of the Hunua Ranges, a 14000-hectare native forest in close proximity to excellent hiking, rock climbing, sea kayaking, and many other outdoor pursuits. OE is a vital strand of the school's holistic curricular approach. The participants attended a cumulative, five- day, peak outdoor experience at an isolated location on the shores of Lake Taupo during November 2018. The action took place over three weeks, consisting of five 45-minute classroom lessons, five days of expeditionary rock climbing, and five facilitated, although self-directed, half days of digital story creation. The boys selected for this research were my scheduled expedition group for 2018.

Participation in the project was entirely voluntary and students were informed that they could withdraw at any stage. Project information was shared with participants and their parents prior to the action, and their consent was subsequently obtained. Participant names were coded for anonymity and omitted entirely from report findings.

### **The Action**

Dispositions for learning in the OE Curriculum as part of our overall assessment and reporting procedures were entirely new. However, no guidance or "best practice" had yet been suggested or developed as to how teachers might deliberately design teaching and learning experiences within the context of our outdoor pursuit trips.

Place-based OE is well established as a pedagogical approach; however, with the advent of numerous new and competing pedagogies, it has remained on the periphery of innovative approaches to education. The project action involved the implementation of a place-responsive approach to our outdoor pursuit trips and use of digital storytelling as the tool to engage students, capture, and record evidence of learning with regards to developing SEL competencies. It comprised three parts and used Google Classroom to distribute and receive submissions. Part One detailed the teaching and learning of digital storytelling tools,

technologies, and techniques in a conventional classroom setting. Considerable time was spent familiarising participants with the context for learning and their understanding of digital storytelling, action research, and connection to place. Part Two included activities and stories selected to coincide with the expedition location and events planned for each day. These activities leveraged the impact of storytelling for learning within a place-responsive context, adding interest and detail to the climbing expedition that was previously otherwise focussed on the challenge of the pursuit.

Participants were equipped with a range of digital tools (cameras, mobile phones, and GoPro cameras) for collecting evidence throughout the expedition. They were encouraged to take time to reflect on the day's experiences and video log their thoughts. Part Three entailed the creation, using imagery collected and curated, of a digital story that demonstrated the boys' connection to place. The boys were free to express themselves with whatever digital medium they chose; however, all used the popular iMovie platform. The planning and drafting of material for this final product lent heavily on resources for digital storytelling produced by PBS and The National Parks Film Project, and WeVideo (Jackson, n.d.; PBS, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

A mixed methods research design was employed to collect data. Mixed method approaches combine the relevant advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection and draw on a variety of sources to better understand the research problem (Mertler, 2016). The emphasis, however, was given to qualitative methods as the inductive, interpretative, and overt actions of both participants and researcher in creating descriptive accounts naturally suited the topic of inquiry and action research methodology (Mertler, 2016).

A combination of the following collection techniques was utilised:

- Unstructured classroom observations
- Semi-structured participant interviews
- Existing documents and records
  - participant work samples
  - participant learning journey rubrics (self-assessment)
- Researcher and participant reflection logs
- Researcher field notes, photos, and videos



- Descriptive survey

Data were collected over three stages. As participants familiarised themselves with key concepts of the topic and skills to convey digital stories, Stage One entailed establishing baseline data through a descriptive survey, participant self-assessment, and unstructured classroom observation. Stage Two consisted of methods to encourage reflection on the relevance of, and connection to, place through the boys' daily experiences. Researcher and participant reflection logs provided structured, but open-ended questions to provoke introspection and reflection. Researcher field notes, photos, and video were also utilised to capture the action. The final phase of data collection employed semi-structured participant interviews. A triad (mini-group) format was used to provide support and encouragement to participants while ensuring groups were small enough to generate broad and detailed responses to the impact of the action on their learning. Triads enabled participant voice to be heard clearly without competition from participation in large groups. The descriptive survey and participant self-assessment were revisited in this final stage to extend data collection and compare effect across the course of the action.

The variety of collection techniques enabled participant voices to be fully captured. The ability to correlate data across the quantitative/qualitative divide provided an additional measure of rigour and credibility to the findings. By utilising a wide variety of sources, "polyangulation" (Mertler, 2016, p. 11) was possible within the captured evidence. Data collection occurred over a three-week period, which enabled rich, detailed, and authentic reflection in practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

The action research occurred within an open and transparent culture of professional dialogue. Pursuant to this dialogue, the research was shared with numerous critical friends, including senior leaders, mentors, colleagues, and experts within the field of OE (Costa & Kallick, 1993). Their critique and feedback were encouraged, rendering the research credible, authentic, and trustworthy.

### **Data Analysis**

Inductive analysis was utilised to interpret and gain insight into the data. This entailed anonymising the data through the assignation of participant codes. A representative letter was assigned to each student prior to organisation and analysis. Grounding my interpretation of the data entailed the viewing, reading, and transcribing of all raw data. Transcribed data were coded for emerging patterns and themes and then reshaped through categorising, using SimpleMind Lite (a mind mapping app), which provided the starting point for a framework

that represented the findings of the research. Emerging patterns and themes were utilised to describe the main features or characteristics of the coded categories from which meaning was determined. Finally, descriptive surveys, including Likert scale responses and participant self-assessments, were analysed to reveal any change in reported connection to whenua and moana, teamwork, or self-awareness through digital storytelling techniques.

### **Discussion of Results**

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed four key themes regarding the boys' creation of a digital story about "Connection to Place":

1. Critical thinking
2. Increased self-awareness
3. Social awareness of others
4. Relationship skills

#### **Critical Thinking**

Digital storytelling proved to be the medium through which boys were able to reflect on their learning, while "connection to place" provided the context through which their experiences were interpreted. The significance of critical thinking as a product of DS cannot be ignored (Akyeampong, 2018; Boase, 2013; Yang & Wu, 2012) and gave rise to subsequent themes. Critical thought was variously expressed in the research as reflection, mindfulness, and metacognition.

By reflecting on their relationships and emotions, boys were able to analyse, appreciate, and evaluate different perspectives. Their capacity to make constructive choices was reflective of the responsible decision-making competency within CASEL's integrative framework (CASEL, 2017). When speaking on the role of the digital storytelling, Boy G reflected, "[it] changed my point of view." Similar sentiments were echoed by Boy D who noted, "I...think differently about how I am with different places and how they relate to me and connect to me." Boy D's opinion also supports how the boys' capacity to think about connection to place was enhanced. Evidence to support this generalisation is also illustrated in the self-assessment rubrics completed at the start and conclusion of the project. Responses indicated that most boys perceived that their connection to place had increased. Boy G mindfully considered the joy and gratitude he experienced when he was "in the spirit of the moment." He did not want to disrupt the moment, "I don't think someone would be like, 'I'm gonna go get my camera to

take a picture or video' and then come back and it's (all) over" for fear of missing out and so adjusted his behaviour accordingly.

### **Increased Self-Awareness**

In the first stages of the project, some boys were apathetic or subversively hostile. I observed and recorded their discomfort, avoidance, and disinterest through field journaling, remarking my surprise at their lack of agency. Despite the encouragement and reassurance, I offered at the start, these same boys struggled to articulate their resistance until the final interviews, where Boy F admitted, "I thought we were going to do heaps of work," while Boy I remarked, "I thought it was going to be boring." By the conclusion of the project, they had developed the self-confidence to voice their concern and humility to admit the limitations of their preconceptions. The same boys, among others, remarked that participation "felt good - I didn't think it would feel like this" (Boy F) and that he was "keen" (Boy I) to attempt digital storytelling again. Such comments demonstrate their improved self-efficacy and self-perception, both of which are defining features of the self-awareness SEL competency (CASEL, 2017).

Boys also had little trouble identifying their emotional response to the natural environment and their experience of the project. They remarked on "how amazing" their video was (Boy H), while Boy D expressed pride in commenting that he "felt happy" because "he saw heaps of photos" of his through collaborating with others. Self-awareness also featured as a learning outcome in the OE rubric, with a number of boys determined that they had grown by a full taxonomic level as a consequence of their project involvement.

### **Developing Social Awareness**

Prior to the outdoor expedition, the boys and I co-constructed some parameters and guidelines for the use of digital devices on the trip. The need arose from school policy resisting digital devices on trips, due to safety and risk management concerns. However, for the purpose of the project, I insisted that we operate under a high trust model and I would not police device use so that we might later determine its effect. Under these auspices, we explored the impact of digital devices. Boy H noted, "If you use it too much, you don't get as much out of the trip," which suggested the limitation imposed by digital devices on taking in new perspectives. Others commented on not capturing sufficient evidence because "we were all like so into it" (Boy E), thus suggesting the precedence of social engagement over self. Boy D repeated, "it's all about trust," indicating the importance of developing respect for others through meaningful and authentic contexts. Boy D remarked further, "when you're outdoors,

you usually get to talk a lot because you didn't have devices that were distracting you." His comment highlighted the importance of societal norms and expectations around social interaction, relationship building, and appreciating one another. Further endorsing sentiments about the importance of bonding and appreciating cultural diversity through the development of multiple perspectives that provide a context for transdisciplinary, Boy E commented, "sharing about your experience... and just like talk(ing) to each other," while Boy G noted, "I like hearing stories... that have something do with our culture."

### **Relationship Skills**

To value and celebrate the boys' learning in the outdoors and to share their compelling stories with parents, teachers, experts and stakeholders, the boys planned a Film Festival at our annual Celebration of Learning Day. The film festival highlighted the improved ability to build relationships and communicate in particular between boys and whanau (family). Boy G said, "Honestly, the technology we thought was gonna be a distraction from the actual expedition but, it honestly really helped me tell stories to my dad." Boy A stated, "I think it was easier to explain to my mum...what I was doing. Normally I have to tell her and then it gets boring but that way I made something I could show her." Boarding parents struggle to stay connected to their boys and their learning (Isolated Children's Parents' Association, 2018) and digital storytelling reduced that isolation by enabling the development of relationship-building skills in addition to more effective communication and social engagement through sharing digital stories with other boys and parents. Boy H suggested, "and that might just help them feel a little bit better about the place."

Post-survey data revealed that boys enjoyed watching other people react to their story, implying the importance of developing agency through relationship building. This finding was endorsed by Boy C in an interview when he expressed value in "watching our parents' reactions to it." As members of the 'Van Dam Fam,' boys were able to establish a sense of teamwork through preparing the film festival and through collaborating on and owning their work outcomes. Boy H went so far to label this association in his film credits, while Boy A mentioned, "I didn't know what I was doing, but once I watched the other boys' stuff, I found it easier," thus demonstrating that opportunities to collaborate proved metacognitively beneficial for the boys' learning outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

In this research project, place-responsive digital storytelling proved an effective vehicle for exploring the context of learning in the outdoors. Through an improved capacity to reflect on

their experience in the outdoors, the boys' social-emotional competence grew significantly. The transformative change resulting from participating in a place-responsive digital storytelling experience became evident in the heightened mindfulness of the boys to themselves, others, and the world beyond. Digital storytelling became the vehicle enabling them with better self-awareness; it led to improved self-confidence, heightened agency, and sense of self-efficacy. In short, the boys knew more and felt better about themselves, their challenges, and achievements. Digital storytelling led to increased social awareness and the opportunities that participating in OE provided. Through reflection on their creations and those of others, the boys were able to appreciate multiple perspectives and our cultural diversity. The boys remarked on the importance of trust for establishing and maintaining positive relationships based on mutual respect, and how making and sharing the stories in an authentic context developed relationship skills. The final products improved their ability to communicate their learning experience with their peers and parents. In short, the films provided a context for collaboration, metacognition, and critique among peers that led to more teamwork and relationship building.

Such clear evidencing and alignment of the research findings with four of the five social-emotional learning competencies was a welcome and unexpected surprise. The remaining competency was not identified in the body of evidence. Neither was it sought. Subsequent cycles of action research would benefit greatly from more exploration of both self-management and responsible decision-making in the data collected from participants in digital storytelling from an OE context.

An aspect of the project rationale included challenging the stigma of digital devices for learning in the outdoors. Boys were ambivalent for the most part about the role digital devices played, except with regard to relatively simple logistical or technical fixes they could employ to achieve a more desirable digital story. Subsequent cycles of action research might explore this notion in more depth, especially with regard to whether digital devices materially improved either learning outcomes or engagement.

Digital storytelling as a means for capturing and enabling self-assessment of learning in OE was the first iteration. The effect on growing social-emotional learning is apparent in the evidence, but future inquiry might explore if there are other more “boycentric” or impactful pedagogies to employ, or even if other tools or technologies might serve just as apt a purpose. The boys were grateful for a means to express and communicate their learning around, about, and for the outdoors that overcame their perceived communication deficiency. Parents were

equally as impressed with the output of the boys' learning and the opportunity to share in an experience in which they did not participate first-hand. Future practice for Outdoor Educators should purposefully consider this event in the design of their activities and experiences, and allow for a range of expression and opportunities for sharing and participation in learning by both boys and parents.

### **Reflection**

I experienced some early setbacks in the project whereby it became necessary to rewrite my inquiry question. I struggled with this disappointment and what I perceived to be a loss of rigour within the results. However, after some time and reflection, nothing really had changed except that the action had produced results I hadn't intended. Nothing was wrong, and in fact, the findings I determined negatively correlated with a hypothesis I had established prior to the project, that perhaps nothing could foster a connection to place, as this is a deeply entrenched personal judgement dependent on a person's values. Such shifts of values only occur over a significant period of time with many instances of transformation. So, while disappointed that I did not confirm what I had hoped, I was even more pleased when I was able to pan for gold in the evidence created and perhaps established a long-term cyclical inquiry that develops that notion.

Action research enabled me to take my love of learning to another level. I love that I can role model to my boys what it means to be a lifelong learner and include them in that journey. I can express with pride my achievement and take what developments I made to my practice and share them not only with my immediate school community but with other like-minded educators. I value the opportunity to innovate and take risks. This energises me in my work and makes me strive for new ways of imagining the future of holistic education and the role of the Outdoor Educator. The experience has provided me with a jolt of vigour and enthusiasm for my work that I only realise now has been missing for some time.

I learned that the only way to eat an elephant is "one mouthful at a time," and that research need not be as intimidating as it sounds. Initially, I was really quite anxious about the project, especially as I had to do it alone. The confidence I have gained is tremendous. I am motivated to continue with research now that I have had this experience, both in a personal capacity as I complete my Masters but also to entrench Action Research within my school community.

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