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Reasons given by year 9 girls for the non-selection of outdoor education in a selected government school

Janene Walton
Edith Cowan University

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**REASONS GIVEN BY YEAR 9 GIRLS FOR THE NON-SELECTION
OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN A SELECTED GOVERNMENT
SCHOOL**

BY

JANENE WALTON B.A. (Ed)

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Award of**

Bachelor of Education with Honours

at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: November, 1995.

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature:

Date: 20-11-95

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the reasons why fewer girls than boys are selecting outdoor education units in Year 9 in a selected government secondary school in Perth, Western Australia. Outdoor education has attracted increasing enrolments across all years since units were introduced at lower school level in 1987. However the percentage of girls enrolling has declined over the same period. The participation rate for Years 9 to 12 has consistently been about two times greater for boys than for girls.

The study utilised group interviews as a means of data collection to document the girls' reasons for not selecting Outdoor Education. A sample of female students volunteered for the interviews and were divided into groups of four. The interviews were conducted over two consecutive years with the intention of obtaining the perceptions and ideas of students from two Year 9 cohorts.

The factors that emerged as the major reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education were based primarily on the 'unappealing' nature and content of Outdoor Education; the influence of significant others; the personal experiences of the respondent; and the process of gender-role stereotyping.

Recommendations based on the findings and the literature are directed to three key groups, namely, the Education Department of Western Australia; tertiary institutions; and schools. The suggested measures to address the problem focused on the education of teachers, parents and students; the provision of increased input into the physical education programme 'offerings' by students and parents; reviewing the class groupings of physical education and outdoor education; and the identification and introduction of female role models.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study addresses the reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education by Year 9 girls in a selected government school. The following chapter will provide a background to the study; the purpose and significance of the study; the delimitations of the study; and the research questions that provided the focus for the research.

Background to the study

Outdoor education is both a subject and an approach to education concerned with the development of student abilities to successfully manage the physical challenges of the natural environment. It involves the experiential process of learning by doing, and the emphasis is placed on relationships - interpersonal (with others), intrapersonal (with the self), ecological (ecosystemic interactions), and ekistic (interactions amongst people and natural resources). Outdoor Education has been categorised into four approaches: environmental education; adventure education; outdoor pursuits; and residential and expedition activities. Truly functional outdoor education incorporates aspects of each approach (Priest, 1985).

Outdoor education programmes, as experiential processes of learning, offer a number of benefits to students. These include: fostering personal traits of self-esteem, cooperation and leadership (McRae, 1990), developing self-actualising skills (Loynes, 1991), encouraging students' development of communication and problem-solving skills (Ministry of Education, 1990a), addressing the issues of "alienation", "empowerment" and "community" (Kiewa, 1991), and stimulating the development of self-reliance, self-discipline, judgment, responsibility, relationships and the capacity for sustained practical endeavour (Cumbria Education Authority, 1984). Thus, it

has been accepted by many educators that outdoor education provides a vehicle for students to grow and develop in ways which are uncharacteristic in traditional schooling (Gray & Perusco, 1993) and therefore should be included as an essential component of the school curriculum.

In Western Australia, outdoor education has been available in four sequential units at lower-school level since 1987. The subject was accredited by the Secondary Education Authority (S.E.A.) for Years 11 and 12 in 1989. The Ministry of Education (1990a) stated the goal of outdoor education in the school curriculum as being:

to develop students' abilities to manage the physical challenge of the natural environment ... with the common factor of all outdoor education programmes being the method of learning; one of learning through direct experience in the natural environment. (p.1)

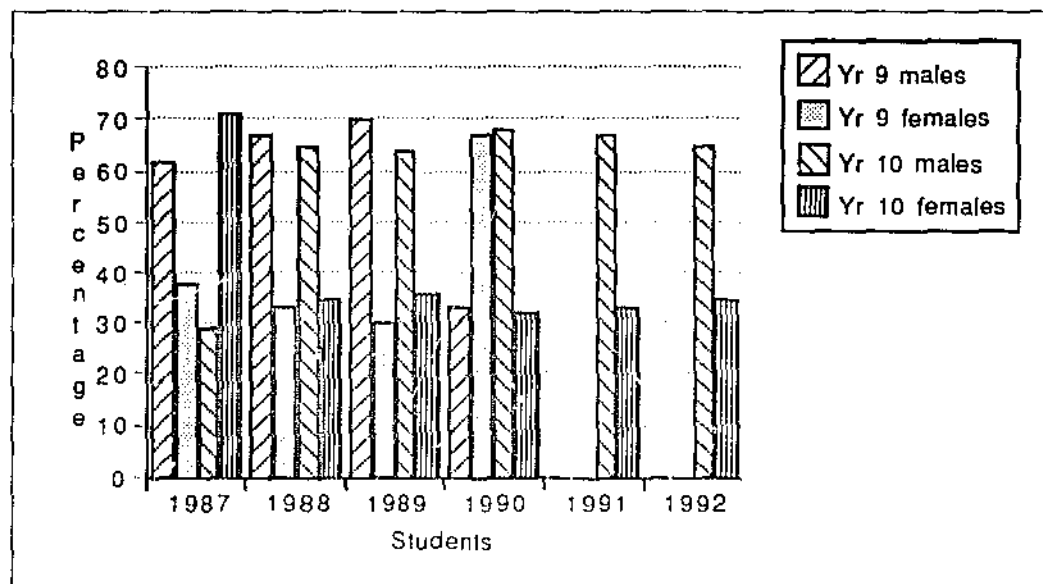
Equal opportunity and gender equity are two issues that arouse concern in the education of males and females in subjects such as outdoor education, yet they have been relatively untouched in research. Therefore, there is a need to examine the concepts of equal opportunity and gender equity in outdoor education and how these relate to the imbalance of participation rates of boys and girls. This is in line with the stated objective of the *Social Justice in Education Policy for Gender Equity* that:

gender is no longer a variable affecting patterns of student participation, achievement and post-school options. (Ministry of Education, 1991, p.5)

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the factors leading to fewer girls than boys selecting Outdoor Education as a Year 9 subject in a selected government school. Through examination of statistics collated by the Secondary Education Authority from 1987 to 1992, an enrolment imbalance

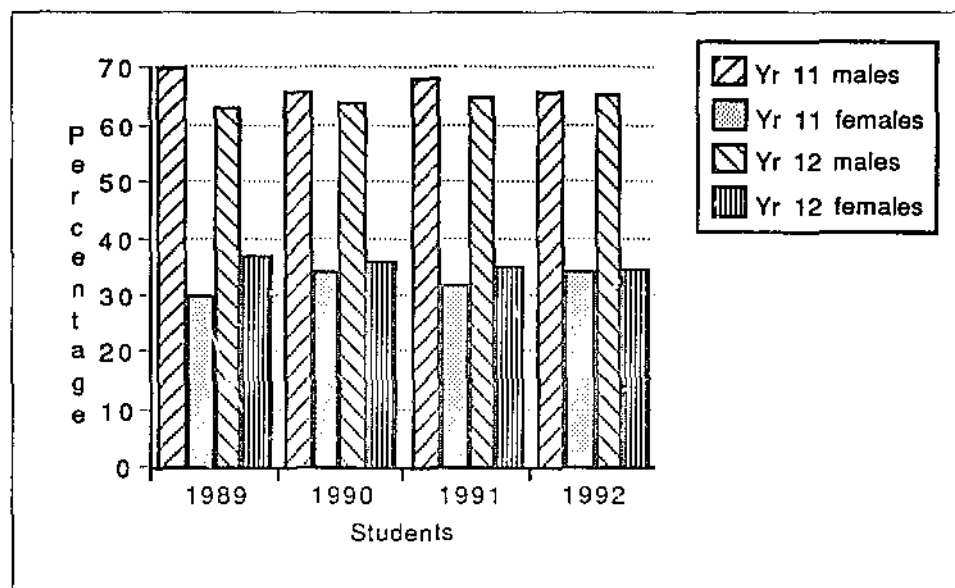
emerged. As shown in Figure 1, these statistics reveal that the number of boys enrolled in lower school outdoor education has consistently exceeded the number of girls enrolled, at a rate of approximately two to one. In 1991 and 1992 only Year 10 data were available, and neither Year 9 or Year 10 data have been available since 1993.



(Secondary Education Authority, 1988-1993)

Figure 1: Participation patterns in Years 9 and 10 Outdoor Education by sex (1987-1992)

Furthermore, the participation rates of Year 11 and 12 students in Outdoor Education have been similar to those of the lower school students, that is, enrolment numbers revealed a participation ratio of about two boys to one girl as indicated in Figure 2.



(Secondary Education Authority, 1990-1993)

Figure 2: Participation patterns in Years 11 and 12 Outdoor Education by sex (1989-1992)

The Ministry of Education recognises the value of learning through direct experience in the natural environment in its commitment to developing and implementing the K-12 Outdoor Education curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1990a, p. 1). Moreover, *The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* remains the Education Department's endorsed policy relating to gender equity.

A major objective of the Education Department in regards to gender equity is to ensure that gender is no longer a variable affecting patterns of student participation, achievement and post-school options. It is hoped that this objective will be achieved so that:

there is a significant increase in the participation of girls in higher level mathematics, physical sciences, technology, manual arts and physical education. (Ministry of Education, 1991, p.6)

Accordingly, the consistent and significant imbalance of girls' and boys' enrolments in outdoor education at all levels in secondary schools needs to be addressed.

Significance of the study

If as previously stated, outdoor education programmes offer a number of significant benefits to students, and if it is accepted that outdoor education is a worthwhile subject in the curriculum, then one must question why enrolment numbers are consistently at a ratio of two boys to one girl. If outdoor education is of such great value to boys, it certainly should be of value to girls. Why are Year 9 girls not selecting Outdoor Education?

This study will determine reasons for the non-selection of outdoor education as a Year 9 unit of study, through collecting qualitative data focusing on aspects of the curriculum, policies and procedures within a metropolitan senior high school. If the results can provide meaningful answers as to how teachers can take action to increase enrolments of girls, it will have been a worthwhile investigation. Furthermore, the findings from this study may provide a focus for further research into outdoor education, and, in particular, those factors influencing the participation of girls.

Delimitations of the study

1. Only Year 9 girls were selected for the study.
2. Only Year 9 girls not enrolled in outdoor education were interviewed.
3. Only one metropolitan government senior high school was involved in the study.

Research Questions

The questions which initiated and directed the following research were:

General Research Question

What are the reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education by Year 9 girls?

Subsidiary Research Questions

1. Do girls perceive outdoor education as a male or female-oriented subject?
2. Does the risk factor in outdoor education activities affect girls' non-selection of Outdoor Education?
3. Does the sex of the teacher affect girls' non-selection of Outdoor Education?
4. Does the character of the teacher affect girls' non-selection of Outdoor Education?
5. What other factors affect girls' non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature is reviewed under the headings of the development of gender identity; gender issues in sport and physical education; girls and outdoor education; and perceptions of equal opportunity and gender equity in outdoor education.

The development of gender identity

Males and females are exposed to a life-long process of socialisation. This process and its associated patterns and agencies is particularly significant in the early and teenage years of life. It is during these years that individuals firmly establish their attitudes, values and beliefs, and discover "who" they are, through such influences as their family, peers, school and the media. Individuals develop a gender identity and an understanding of gender roles, that is, knowing that they are male or female, with the associated gender-appropriate behaviours, as young as five or six years of age (Jordan, 1992).

Dyer (1982) defined this socialisation process as:

the basic social process through which individuals learn and internalise the attitudes, values and behaviours appropriate to the society in which they live and which are expected of them as responsible participating members of that society. It is a life-long process which is carried out through such agencies as the family, peer group, school, church, media and the multitude of social organisations to which individuals belong and with which they come into contact. (pp. 100-101)

Girls tend to be socialised to be dependent upon others and emotionally expressive. They have been socialised to play quiet, supportive roles where they help others achieve their task goals. Girls come to believe that they are not capable of thinking analytically, being physically skilled, or making decisions (Jordan, 1992).

On the other hand, boys tend to be socialised for independence and an orientation towards task. Boys learn to be physically active, think critically, speak out and make firm decisions. They learn to think analytically, take risks, and cause actions to occur (Jordan, 1992).

Males and females are often socialised into, and internalise these gender roles, and respond according to stereotypical patterns (Griffin, 1989; Knapp, 1985). Furthermore, Dyer (1986) suggested that all the agents of socialisation, for example, the family, peer group, school or media, seem to discourage girls' participation in physical activities and sport in our society.

The implications of gender-role socialisation on outdoor education are apparent. As a result of socialisation, females tend to adopt attributes associated with the feminine gender role, such as gentleness, cooperativeness, passivity, dependence and nurturance. Males however, tend to adopt attributes associated with the masculine gender role, such as toughness, leadership, decisiveness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, autonomy, independence and strength. (Griffin, 1989). Thus, in outdoor education programmes and activities, there may be evidence of male domination which results in differences in the participation and achievement levels of males and females.

A further consideration for outdoor educators is the development and level of self-esteem in students. Dyer (1988) stated that girls in general have poorer self-concepts and body images, and lower self-esteem than boys. A number of studies in Australia (Connell, 1975; Edgar, 1974; Taylor, 1981) have found that adolescent males have both a more positive self-concept and higher self-esteem than adolescent girls. Dyer (1988) suggested however, that this situation can be changed.

According to the Australian Sports Commission (1991) "there is an interaction between self-esteem and sports participation. Positive self-esteem makes it easier to participate in sport and playing sport has the potential to enhance self-esteem" (p. 8). Furthermore, the experience in the outdoors is an effective medium for increasing self-esteem. Increased self-esteem is said to lead to empowerment which is the process of being invested with power (Mitten, 1992). A major goal in education is to empower the individual to make the growth choice instead of the fear choice (Kiewa, 1991). Outdoor education develops the process of empowerment in females and males which enables an individual to choose growth, with all its attendant risks and insecurities. Subsequently, the female's self-esteem may increase and thus she may feel accessible to, and capable of dealing with, opportunities equal to that of the male.

Gender issues in sport and physical education

"Gender is a socially and historically constructed set of power relations" (Hall, 1990, p. 223). The way in which gender is constructed in our society promotes divisive concepts to do with appropriate "masculine" or "feminine" behaviours, abilities and relations (Humberstone, 1986a).

The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls has been established to improve educational outcomes for girls. It has outlined eight new priorities for the period from 1993 to 1997. Priority one is to examine the construction of gender in society. According to the Australian Education Council (1993):

Through their everyday behaviour, girls and boys begin to learn their place in an unequal society where masculine characteristics, including the exercise of power and dominance, are valued for men, and feminine characteristics, such as service, nurturing and intuitive reasoning are devalued. In our society these gender constructions form the basis of unequal relations between males and females. (p. 7)

Schools therefore need to be aware of the key role they play in constructing gender through language, beliefs and practices.

The particular gender images which are portrayed through traditional sport and conventional physical education foster social attitudes about females which help to define and reinforce females marginal position in society. Traditional sport is a gendered cultural form which has been dominated by men (Humberstone, 1986b). Consequently, the participation levels of females in sport and physical education has been significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. The following discussion focuses on the factors which influence girls' participation in sport and physical education.

Firstly, physical education and sport remain male domains (Australian Sports Commission, 1991; Dyer, 1986; Griffin, 1989; Humberstone, 1990b; Ministry of Education, 1991). In all aspects of sport and physical education, that is, from participation to administration and organisation statistics, it is evident that males are dominant. "Within schools, girls have low participation rates in both physical education and sport" (Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, 1992, p. 89). These low participation rates are exemplified by research suggesting that girls' enthusiasm for, and participation in, all forms of physical activity, including sport, decline rapidly during their early high school years (Australian Sports Commission, 1991; Dyer, 1986; Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, 1992). Furthermore, male dominance is evident in the administration and organisation of sport (Theberge, 1985). For example, in Western Australia in 1991 only eight percent of positions as Head of Department of Physical Education were held by women (Browne, 1991).

Secondly, the range of sports and physical activities available to girls in schools is invariably smaller than that for boys (Australian Sports Commission, 1987; Dyer, 1986; Griffin, 1989). The range of sports made available to girls in physical education programmes is sometimes limited, as schools tend to restrict girls' opportunities and involvement to traditional female activities, such as, netball, softball, gymnastics and dance. Thus, girls may be reluctant to participate in physical education as they may not be able to experience sports of particular interest to them.

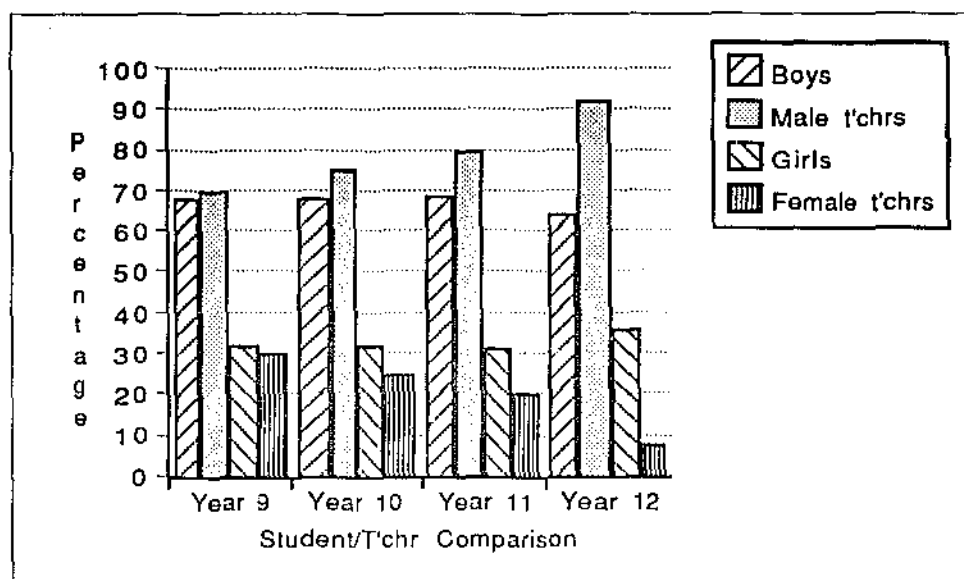
A third factor influencing girls' participation in sport and physical education is the lack of appropriate role models for female students in physical education (Dyer, 1986; Jobling & Macdonald, 1987). According to Dyer (1986):

role models are those individuals whose values, attitudes and social behaviours are significant examples for individuals to follow and imitate during their lives (p. 26).

In sport and physical education, girls have few women on whom they can model themselves and who can encourage them to participate. In 1991, males outnumbered females in secondary physical education positions in Western Australia by 312 to 252 appointments respectively (Browne, 1991). As a result, girls' participation levels may decline as they are unable to readily identify with, and receive direction and encouragement from, a female teacher.

A study conducted by Tye and Rynehart (1991) indicated that the number of male teachers in outdoor education was more than double the number of female teachers in 1991, with the student participation patterns being at a consistent ratio of approximately two boys to one girl. The percentage of male teachers increased from 65 to 90 over Years 9 to 11, whilst the percentage of female teachers decreased from 30 to 10. Comparatively, there

were fewer female outdoor education teachers, and it was unlikely that a girl enrolled in Year 12 Outdoor Education would be taught by a female teacher. (Figure 3)



Data from Schools Survey (Tye & Rynehart, 1991)

Figure 3: Participation patterns of students and teachers by sex and year level in Outdoor Education (1991)

Fourthly, it is evident that "within schools there is less time, less space, less equipment, less money and less interest in girls' sport than boys' sport" (Dyer, 1986, p. 83). Generally within schools and society there appears to be much less publicity and financial support for all levels of girls' sporting and other physical activities. Furthermore, teachers have more interaction with boys than with girls (Griffin, 1989). These occurrences may reduce girls' interest in sport and physical education, and consequently participation levels may decline.

A fifth factor influencing females' participation in sport and physical education is the media. Media coverage is usually more trivial, sensational, and sparse for women and girls in sport (Australian Sports Commission,

1987; Dyer, 1986; Theberge, 1985). Furthermore, the media generates ideas about body image that may adversely affect girls' opinions and appreciation of sport and physical education. Females may feel inadequate if they are compared with the body image of an ideal or elitist female athlete. As a result, their participation and enthusiasm for sport and physical education may be reduced.

A final influential factor on girls' participation in sport and physical education are parents. The results of a survey conducted by the Australian Sports Commission (1991) suggested that parents play a key role in stimulating children's interest in sport and motivating them to begin participating. Parents' expectations also have an influence on teachers and vice versa. If both agree about the value of sport, then it is easier to promote sport in the school.

According to the Australian Sports Commission (1991), "many parents consider some sports are more suitable for boys than girls ... and have greater expectations of boys regarding sporting achievement" (p. 2). As the family is the most important socialising agent, parents will significantly influence which sports their children play. "A general finding is that high parental involvement in sport and high parental value for sport both increase the degree of sports role socialisation in children" (Dyer, 1982, p. 103). Thus, as parental influence is apparent, girls may be socialised into playing only those sports of which their parents approve. Consequently, girls may "drop out" as they lose interest in those sports in which they are forced to be involved.

These factors appear to represent the most significant factors influencing girls' participation in sport and physical education.

Girls and outdoor education

Although outdoor education is a component of the physical education programme in schools, it is treated separately and, because of the recency of its inclusion into the curriculum, it has been the subject of comparatively little research. Examination of the available literature revealed a considerable interest in technical skills, leadership, motivation, philosophy, legal liability and programmes. However, it was rare for differences in the experiences of girls and women in, for, and about the outdoors to be addressed.

The literature suggested some specific areas in which girls experienced barriers to involvement in outdoor education. Firstly, the outdoors has been associated with, and described as, a male domain (Knapp, 1985). Consequently, girls may be less likely to participate in the subject, as they may feel it is more appropriate for boys, or believe they are incapable of performing the requirements which constitute outdoor education.

Secondly, research indicates that positive role models are an important part of any person's experiences, especially in outdoor education (Austin, 1993; Dyer, 1986; Humberstone, 1986a; Johnson, 1990). In Western Australia, it is evident that there are few women involved in outdoor education, and even less teaching it. There is a lack of female representation at various levels of management and teaching in outdoor education (Humberstone, 1986b). As many girls have a low self-concept, particularly in relation to physical activities, they are more likely to try an activity where they have the support and encouragement of a woman demonstrating the activity (Dawes, 1985). Therefore, due to the lack of female teachers in outdoor education, girls may be reluctant to participate in the programme.

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that boys present a barrier to girls in outdoor education. Girls are constantly experiencing put-downs from boys, which adds to their reluctance to participate in an outdoor environment for fear of appearing foolish (Dawes, 1985). Therefore, it could be assumed that girls tend not to enrol in outdoor education so they can avoid embarrassment arising from their so-called incapacities.

With little research of gender issues in outdoor education, there were few reasons to suggest why girls were not selecting it as a unit of study. The outdoors as a 'male' domain; the lack of positive role models; and boys 'putting-down' girls, were indicated as the main reasons for fewer girls than boys selecting outdoor education.

Perceptions of equal opportunity and gender equity in outdoor education

The issue of equal opportunity is one which needs to be examined in relation to outdoor education. That is, we need to be aware of the equal opportunity legislation, and further develop our understanding as to how we can provide for such equality in outdoor education.

Section 18(2) of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 stated:

It is unlawful for an education authority to discriminate against a student's sex, marital status or pregnancy -
by denying the student access or limiting the student's access, to any benefit provided by the educational authority.

The equal opportunity legislation stated that all students should have access to education, and that schools should continue to review their present practices in sport and physical education to ensure that both sexes are treated equally. According to Scraton (1986), "the equal opportunities approach encompasses physical education initiatives such as mixed physical education and equal access to facilities, activities and curricular/extracurricular time"

(p. 88). In reviewing the literature, it is evident that the provision of equal opportunities in outdoor education can be implemented in a number of ways.

Firstly, it is recognised that much of our present curricula exclude content and experiences that are female-centred. "The curriculum in schools is gender-biased, and is a key factor in determining educational access, participation and outcomes for girls" (Australian Education Council, 1993, p.21). *The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997* suggested that curriculum reform is necessary in order to provide access for girls to all areas of the curriculum. The policy proposed that schools should implement a gender-inclusive curriculum in all learning areas, that equally values and incorporates the preferred learning styles, interests and achievements of both males and females. For outdoor educators this implies developing a curriculum that considers the needs, interests and abilities of both girls and boys. Furthermore, the physical education policy should state that males and females, both staff and students, have equal access to all areas of the curriculum and that no gender biases exist.

A number of guidelines to promote equal opportunity and gender equity in secondary schools have been provided (Macdonald & Jobling, 1992; Ministry of Education, 1990b). These guidelines offer a focal point for discussing how equity and equality can be achieved in outdoor education.

1. Practise a combination of coeducational and/or single-sex programmes, units or lessons dependent upon the activity offered in Years 8 to 12. Browne (1986) stated that the coeducational classes being conducted in many secondary schools met the requirements of the Act. In such classes, boys and girls received equal opportunities for participation. Knapp (1985) supported

this concept of coeducation by suggesting that the very nature of coeducational outdoor programmes is a subtle supporting factor in reducing sexist behaviours.

More recently, Browne (1992) reported on reasons given by teachers for supporting coeducation. Coeducation ensures equal opportunities for girls in all curriculum offerings; the more proficient girls obtain better competition, a greater challenge and the opportunity to realise their potential; girls overcome the stereotypes of female and male participation patterns; and coeducation provides a socialising atmosphere and encourages communication between girls and boys and the acceptance of girls as team members.

Browne continued that equal opportunity in curriculum offerings such as outdoor education can be provided within single-sex classes as long as both girls' and boys' classes undertake the same activities, and there is the provision of nontraditional activities to overcome stereotypical female and male participation patterns.

2. Ensure there is an equal acknowledgement of efforts by boys and girls in the publicising of their outdoor experiences and sporting achievements.

3. Ensure the sexes have comparable dress requirements for outdoor activities. The clothing worn by boys and girls should be comfortable and allow for participation without embarrassment.

4. Consider the utilisation of human and physical resources:

- * Ensure the use of facilities and equipment is on an equal time basis.

- * Insist that boys and girls receive equal attention with regard to the

provision of competent specialist staff.

*Attempt to have an equal representation of female and male teachers in outdoor education in the school.

*Allocate an equal distribution of funds for sporting and outdoor equipment among activities for males and females.

5. Ensure that the outdoor education programme includes equity as a goal, and that this goal has been clearly articulated to all students.

6. Ensure that the language used conveys the message that it is equally desirable for girls and boys to be physically active, and ensure that equal time is spent interacting with boys and girls.

These six guidelines present a number of ways as to how equal opportunities and gender equity can be achieved in outdoor education.

In summary, the literature review investigated the issue of females and their participation in sport, physical education and outdoor education, firstly addressing the socialisation process to which females are exposed throughout their lives. The development of gender identity and gender-role socialisation were considered to be significant factors influencing the behaviour and participation patterns of males and females in sport and physical activity.

Factors which influenced girls' participation in sport, physical education and outdoor education were examined by the researcher to reveal seven contributing factors: sport, physical education and the "outdoors" as male domains; the limited range of sports for females; a lack of positive female role models; the lack of time, effort, money and encouragement for female

sport and physical education; the reduced media coverage for females; a lack of parental support; and specific barriers experienced by girls that affected their involvement in sport and physical activity.

The review concluded with six guidelines which may provide for the achievement of equal opportunity and gender equity in outdoor education.

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework, deriving from the information obtained from the literature review, has been developed to demonstrate the inter-relationship of a number of broad areas which may affect the non-selection of outdoor education by Year 9 girls. The four main areas, the development of gender identity; gender in sport and physical education; girls and outdoor education; and perceptions of equal opportunity and gender equity in outdoor education, may influence girls' non-selection of outdoor education.

It is proposed that the socialisation process and low self-esteem of girls significantly influences the participation of girls in sport, physical education and outdoor education. The gender construction of masculine and feminine characteristics by males and females form the basis of unequal relations between the sexes. Consequently, male domination in almost all aspects of sport and physical education becomes evident.

The participation levels of females in sport, physical education and outdoor education appear to be primarily influenced by two factors. Firstly, the belief that sport and physical activity are male domains and secondly, the lack of appropriate role models for females in physical education and outdoor education. A number of other factors are considered to influence girls' participation and these include: the limited range of sports made available to

girls; lack of time, effort, money and encouragement for female sport; the media; and parents.

The final area which could affect girls' selection or non-selection of outdoor education, is the level of provision of equal opportunity and gender equity. Equality and equity can be provided by: the provision of a gender-inclusive curriculum; coeducation or single-sex classes as appropriate; equal acknowledgement of boys' and girls' achievements; comparable dress requirements; equal distribution of human and physical resources; equity as a goal in the programme; avoidance of sexist and biased language; and equal interaction with girls and boys.

Figure 4 highlights a number of areas that may contribute to girls not selecting outdoor education in schools.

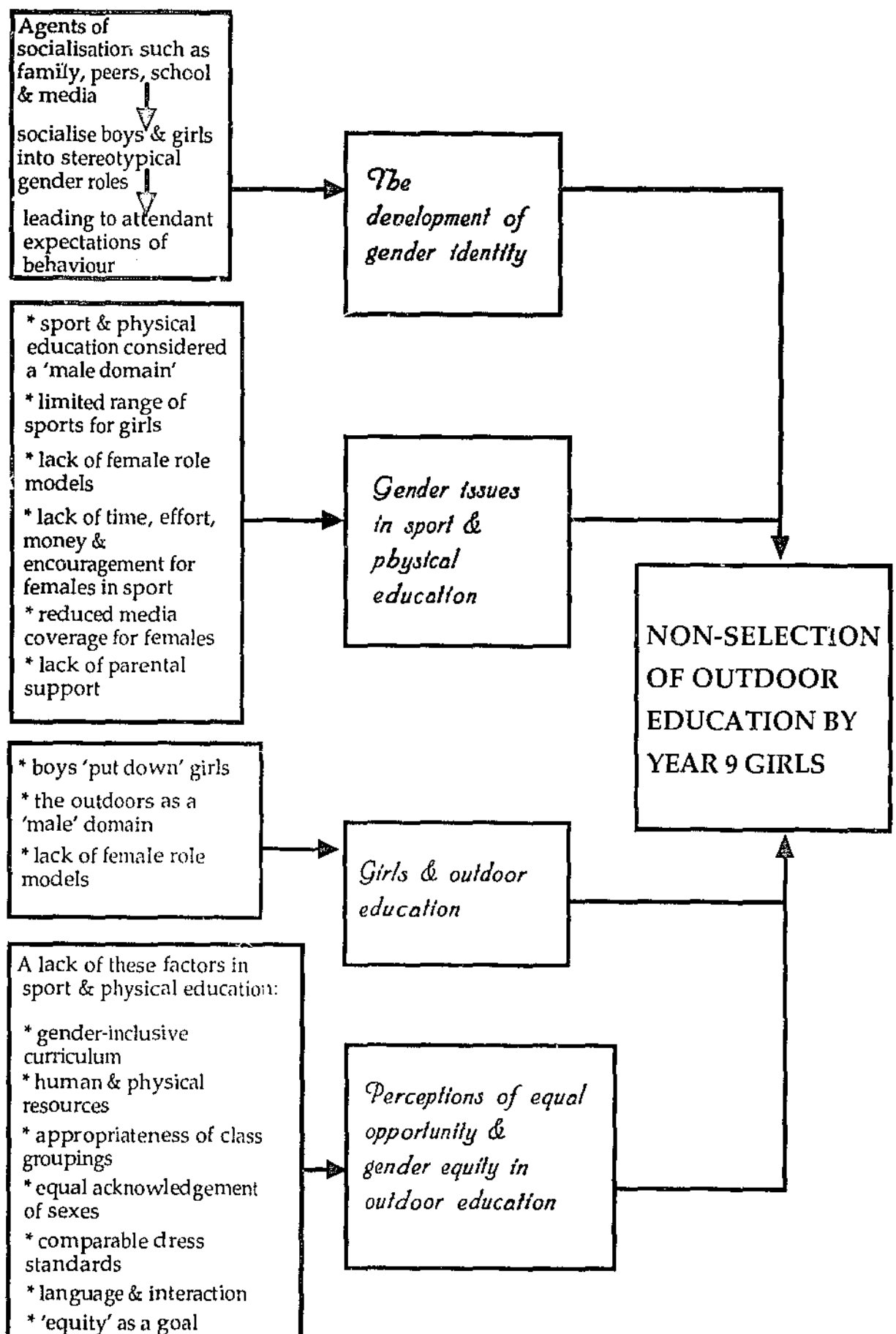


Figure 4: Areas affecting the non-selection of Outdoor Education

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This section is divided into six subsections which describe the design of the study; subjects and setting; instrumentation; data collection; data analysis; and the limitations of the study.

Design of the study

The research design was interpretive in nature, using qualitative methods for data collection and analysis in order to discover 'reasons why' so few Year 9 girls select Outdoor Education at a selected government senior high school in Perth, Western Australia.

According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993) interpretive research involves:

descriptions of, explanations for, or meanings given to phenomena by both the researcher and the study participants . . . These studies emphasize analysis of language and discourse; they use semantic description rather than probabilistic statistics. (p. 32)

The study utilised group interviews for data collection, with a descriptive analysis being presented to explain the reasons for non-selection of Outdoor Education by Year 9 girls.

The study was not concerned with establishing generalisability across the state, or even across the metropolitan area. It aimed to provide a source of information relative to a particular school, which could be used by others in the field to determine the relevance of the findings to their own situation. It is essentially an exploratory study upon which further research could be based.

Subjects and setting

Subjects for the study were Year 9 female students at a selected government secondary school in the metropolitan area. The school was chosen because it accurately reflected the enrolment imbalance of boys and girls in outdoor education, as depicted in the Secondary Education Authority statistics from 1987 to 1992. Permission was obtained from the principal and physical education teachers at the school through detailed letters and personal communication explaining the purpose and procedures of the research.

The study was conducted over a period of two years. In 1993 and 1994, six groups of female students (three groups in each year) from all other unit areas (excluding outdoor education) volunteered for the interview process. The study was conducted over consecutive years to ascertain whether there were differences in responses from students in two different Year 9 cohorts.

When asked, the subjects voluntarily made themselves available for the interviews, and when the groups were established, contact was made to explain the purpose of the study and to arrange interview times. The interviews were conducted in a private location within the school during fourth term of the 1993 and 1994 school years.

Instrumentation

The group interview was used as the means of data collection. The group interview is a type of in-depth interviewing which "gathers together a group of informants and provides them with the opportunity to engage in discussion" (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990, p. 97). It was decided to pursue the group interview technique, after consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of individual and group interviews.

Advantages of group interviews have been outlined by Cohen and Manion (1989), Isaac and Michael (1981), Patton (1990) and Sidhu (1990):

- * They are more efficient and economical in terms of time than individual interviews
- * In a group setting, interviewees can stimulate the productivity of other group members. Individuals can help one another recall, verify or rectify items of information
- * The group interview can bring together people with varied opinions, yielding a wide range of responses
- * The results can reflect group behaviour and consensus
- * The group interview reveals group interaction patterns
- * They provide some quality controls on data collections in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that can eliminate false or extreme views
- * Focus groups tend to be highly enjoyable to participants

The researcher's initial intention was to use individual interviews as the method of data collection. Both individual and group interviews were used in the pilot study, with the group interview proving to be more informative. The students were considerably more relaxed and carefree in the group situation, as compared to the one on one situation. In the group interviews, the girls provided detailed, verbose responses to any questions directed at them, and they often stimulated each other's conversation. However, in the individual interviews, the girls were inhibited, providing one word answers to the majority of the questions. The researcher found that there was a need for prompting of answers, and therefore researcher bias could have been a problem.

An interview schedule using a guided approach was considered the most appropriate form of interview to obtain information from the selected Year 9

students. The interview guide outlined a set of issues that were to be explored with the respondents. This semi-structured approach was considered the most advantageous as the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously and to establish a conversational style with the subjects. According to Patton (1990, p. 283) "the interview guide is especially useful in conducting group interviews as it keeps the interactions focused but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge". The interview guide in the pilot study was very specific in the questions that were asked, hence it was amended after the pilot study was conducted, to become a less-structured, more guided schedule for the group interviews to be carried out. The interview guide is attached as Appendix A.

Background questions were dealt with at the conclusion of the interview. (See Appendix B). Patton (1980) suggested that these types of questions have a tendency to be boring and perhaps embarrassing. Since the purpose of qualitative interviewing was to encourage the respondents to provide descriptive information as soon as possible rather than becoming conditioned to short-answer, routine responses, the background details were gathered by means of a survey sheet completed by the respondents at the conclusion of the interview (Bloot, 1992).

The interviews were conducted over a period of two years, during October and November of 1993 and 1994. Locations for each interview were private within the school, and the duration of the interview sessions ranged between forty minutes and one hour. Confidentiality was assured.

Data collection

Qualitative research offers outdoor educators a way to bring legitimacy to traditional claims, some of which could not be confirmed employing quantitative approaches (Rowley, 1987). This study used the group interview as the method of data collection.

Audio-recorders were used so the verbatim responses of the subjects could be recorded. One microcassette recorder and one large tape recorder were used and these were pretested with the respondents to ensure a quality reception. This increased the accuracy of the data collection, as a permanent record of the account was obtained, and the reliability and validity of the responses were enhanced.

The interviews were forty minutes to an hour in duration, conducted in a private location chosen by the researcher. The respondents were aware of the purpose of the interview having already been informed as to the nature of the research at the time of contact. Immediately following the interview, background information was collected.

On completing each interview the researcher spent a period of time reviewing the recorded data and noting appropriate comments regarding observations made during the interview, or immediate thoughts and feelings regarding the responses obtained.

The recorded interviews were then fully transcribed in order to provide the most accurate data possible for interpretation and independent analysis. The interview transcripts were returned to the respondents for verification and to provide the participants with an opportunity to make any desired changes and additional comments.

Reliability and Validity

It was recognised that there can be difficulty in establishing that the responses, interpretations and findings of an interview are valid and reliable. In this study these issues were of particular concern as the interview was the sole method for data collection, and findings were not therefore corroborated through triangulating methodologies.

Guba and Lincoln (1988, p. 84) asserted that naturalistic enquiry is often attacked as untrustworthy, because of its unusual axioms and the apparent softness of its postures. To establish trustworthiness in the findings of this study, the asking of contrast questions and cross-examining during the interviews was employed by the researcher. Furthermore, credibility was increased by asking the informants to verify the transcriptions prepared by the researcher after the interviews.

Dependability, or reliability, is difficult to establish for naturalistic researchers though they would expect stability in their findings. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984) "reliability in ethnographic research is closely allied to replication and is dependent upon the resolution of both external and internal design problems" (p. 210).

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) identified a number of factors, that, if handled appropriately, can enhance the external reliability of data. These were researcher status position, informant choices, and methods of data collection and analysis.

As replication of the study relies on future researchers occupying a similar role as in this study, the researcher clearly defined her status in relation to

the informants. It was evident that the position of the researcher enabled the informants to relate unbiased and relevant data without fear or prejudice.

It was possible that informant bias could have posed a threat to reliability, however this was addressed by providing descriptions of the informants and the decision processes made in their selection.

Replication is impossible without precise identification and thorough description of the strategies used to collect data. Reliability in this study was enhanced by the researcher providing a clear outline of the methods of data collection and analysis.

Internal reliability, according to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), relates to the question of whether, in a single study, different observers will agree. Five suggested strategies to reduce threats to internal reliability were: verbatim accounts of participant conversations and raw data such as direct quotations from documents; the use of multiple researchers; the use of participant research assistants to confirm observations; peer examination of results to corroborate findings; and the use of mechanical devices to record observations. For the present study, data were collected using an audio-recorder to provide verbatim accounts of respondents' conversations and facilitate accurate transcription; and peer examination of results was utilised in order to corroborate findings. The results were reliable to the extent that these measures enhanced reliability.

Internal validity addresses the problem of whether researchers are observing what they think they are observing. It refers to the "extent to which scientific observations and measurements are authentic representations of some reality" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 20). Campbell and Stanley (1963)

identified several threats to internal validity in experimental research which Schumacher and McMillan (1993) believed to be equally applicable to qualitative research. These included history and maturation effects; observer/researcher effects; selection and attrition effects; and alternative explanations.

The first of these threats to internal validity was history and maturation, that is, the extent to which phenomena initially observed are the same as those observed subsequently, incorporating developmental changes in individuals over a period of data collection (Bloom, 1992). According to Gay (1993, p. 303) "the longer a study lasts, the more likely it is that it will be a problem". Since data for the present study were collected over two years, 'history' may initially have posed a problem. However, Schumacher and McMillan (1993) suggested that one strategy to increase internal validity was a "lengthy data collection period" (p. 391), as this provides opportunities for continual data analysis and comparison. Thus, with the data being collected from six different groups of girls over a period of two years, history and maturation effects were countered to an extent.

Secondly, observer/researcher effects must be considered. Data obtained from the respondents may represent a particular view or may be influenced by the researcher. It is important that the interviewer acts in a nondirective manner and acts only as a facilitator. In each case the interviewer was known to the respondents as a teacher and a postgraduate student conducting research to determine reasons why Year 9 girls were not selecting Outdoor Education as a unit of study. Furthermore, Schumacher and McMillan (1993) suggested that "many sources of invalidity can be minimised if the researcher spends enough time in the field and conducts a number of ethnographic interviews" (p.393). This study is characteristic of these

suggestions, in that the research was conducted over two years with a total of six group interviews.

Thirdly, selection and attrition effects occurring as a result of the particular participants chosen for observation may pose a threat to internal validity (Bloot, 1992). To avoid such threats the researcher ensured that interviewees met certain criteria, for example: they did not do outdoor education; they had a thorough understanding of the purpose of the study; and they were willing to give information on a voluntary basis.

Finally, the researcher may draw conclusions and develop alternative explanations based on the information obtained from the interviews. These effects were decreased to the extent that the respondents were given the opportunity to verify interview transcripts, and clarify their responses.

Threats to the external validity of qualitative research are those effects that reduce or obstruct a study's translatability and comparability. "External validity depends on the identification and description of those characteristics of phenomena salient for comparison with other similar types" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 51).

Comparability refers to "the degree to which the research design is adequately described so that researchers may use the study to extend the findings to other studies" (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 394). Translatability is "the degree to which the researcher uses theoretical frameworks and research strategies that are understood by other researchers" (p. 394).

Schumacher and McMillan (1993) identified a number of sources of potential invalidity and these included selection, setting, history and theoretical effects. These problems were addressed in the following ways. The first problem to be addressed was that of 'selection effects'. The researcher, in providing a description of the characteristics of the groups to be interviewed has accounted for this threat to invalidity.

Secondly, the physical environment or 'setting', and the way in which the respondents react to it, can present potential difficulties resulting in varied responses. Whether the location chosen for the interview is familiar to the interviewer or respondent may affect the formality and privacy of the interview situation and consequently the responses (Bloom, 1992). For the present study, interviews were conducted in a private location within the school, chosen by the interviewer.

Finally, the researcher addressed the history and theoretical effects of external validity by clearly stating the nature, purposes and procedures utilised to conduct the present study. Reporting such details "alerts other researchers (as to how the study was conducted) when they use these findings (for further research)" (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 396).

The sources of potential invalidity were accounted for as far as possible throughout the study.

Data analysis

Data analysis was assisted by making an audio-recording of each interview to enable an exact and verbatim transcription. Careful analysis of each interview was therefore possible. Data analysis was conducted according to the following steps:

Firstly, taped interviews for all groups were transcribed. Secondly, the transcriptions of the interviews were read and reread to detect suggested lines of analysis and to point to connections with the literature. Thirdly, the data from the interviews were coded. This is the process of categorising and sorting the information and serves as a shorthand device to label, separate, compile and organise the data. Fourthly, the emergent patterns or themes were identified by using open, line by line coding. Fifthly, cognitive mapping was used as a means of modelling the categories in diagrammatic form. Finally, the data were interpreted by examining the emergent trends, similarities and differences.

The respondents were then asked to verify that the verbatim reports were an accurate representation of the interviews.

Limitations of the study

1. The use of interviews contains an inherent limitation. An interviewer effect may result from interaction between the interviewer and the respondents, that is, interviewer bias may occur.
2. The group interview technique could affect the responses of the girls involved. Group interviews can cause conformity and hence agreement in responses.
3. Access to students was subject to the normal constraints of a school environment, for example, timetabling, school hours and absenteeism.

CHAPTER 4

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE SCHOOL AND RESPONDENTS

The following chapter presents the background information of the school and the respondents, namely the school's physical education department; the respondent's subjects studied at school; outside school camping and outdoor experiences; and out of school sporting involvement.

All respondents who participated in the interview process were girls aged 14 years, who had not been involved in outdoor education in their secondary schooling. The school was located in Perth in a middle to high class socioeconomic area. Of the respondents, sixteen (65%) had been at the school for two years, that is, since the start of Year 8, and eight (35%) had been at the school for one year, that is, since the start of Year 9.

The Physical Education Department

The school's Physical Education Department consisted of six teachers, that is, four males and two females. The staffing remained the same for 1993 and 1994. The Head of Department was a male. The teachers' ages ranged from 28 years (Teacher 1) to 50 years (Teacher 6). All of the teachers had taught at the school for more than five years, with the Head of Department having been at the school for approximately 20 years.

The subjects taught by each teacher were based on their qualifications, experience, enthusiasm and desire to teach that particular subject/s. The Outdoor Education teacher was a male.

The subjects taught by the physical education teachers is summarised in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
SUBJECTS TAUGHT BY PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

| Teacher | Sex | Subjects taught |
|---------|-----|--|
| 1 | F | 8-10 Physical Education, 8-10 Health Education, 11-12 Recreation, Health Education Coordinator |
| 2 | F | 8-12 Dance, 9 Health Education, 10 Physical Recreation |
| 3 | M | 8-10 Physical Education, 11-12 Recreation, 8-9 Health Education |
| 4 | M | 8-10 Physical Education, 11-12 Recreation, 8-9 Health Education, Year 8 Coordinator |
| 5 | M | 9-10 Outdoor Education, 8-10 Maths, 8-10 Social Studies |
| 6 | M | Head of Department, 11-12 Physical Education Studies |

Year 9 Student Enrolments

Year 9 students at the school could choose units from seven component areas. These were English; Mathematics; Personal and Vocational Education; Physical Education; Practical and Creative Arts; Science and Technology; and Social Studies. Some areas such as English, Mathematics and Physical Education were compulsory. Other areas such as languages, Home Economics, Art, Theatre Arts, Music, Physical Recreation and Outdoor Education were optional.

Table 2 provides a summary of the units taken by the respondents in Year 9. The two most popular units were those of Theatre Arts and Art. Cooking

and French proved to be the next two most frequently chosen units. Health Education was a compulsory unit hence the total number of participating students was 100%. One health unit had to be taken in either semester one or two, depending on where it fitted on each individual's gridline. Half of the respondents took Physical Recreation, with 83% of these being in the 1993 cohort. To meet the needs of the study, no respondents were enrolled in Outdoor Education.

TABLE 2
UNITS STUDIED BY RESPONDENTS

| Unit | 1993 | 1994 | Total | % |
|---------------------------|------|------|-------|-----|
| <u>Physical Education</u> | | | | |
| Outdoor Education | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Physical Recreation | 10 | 2 | 12 | 50 |
| Dance | 6 | 0 | 6 | 25 |
| Physical Education | 12 | 12 | 24 | 100 |
| Health Education | 12 | 12 | 24 | 100 |
| <u>Languages</u> | | | | |
| French | 11 | 3 | 14 | 58 |
| German | 3 | 3 | 6 | 25 |
| Japanese | 3 | 2 | 5 | 21 |
| <u>Arts</u> | | | | |
| Art | 7 | 10 | 17 | 21 |
| Theatre Arts | 11 | 8 | 19 | 79 |
| Media Studies | 5 | 2 | 7 | 29 |
| Music | 0 | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| <u>Other</u> | | | | |
| Computing | 4 | 4 | 8 | 33 |
| Cooking | 7 | 7 | 14 | 58 |
| Typing | 6 | 6 | 12 | 50 |
| Photography | 7 | 6 | 13 | 54 |
| Jewellery | 2 | 4 | 6 | 50 |
| Woodwork | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| Metalwork | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| Money Matters | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 |

Outside school camping and outdoor experiences

It should be noted that prior to data collection in 1993, the researcher organised and attended a camp with the girls (and some Year 9 boys) within this Year 9 cohort. The camp activities included horseriding, abseiling, surfing and a high ropes adventure course at Merribrook in Busselton.

Of the 24 respondents, 12 said that their families had taken them camping 'at some stage in their lives'. However, all the girls stated that the camping occurred during their primary school years, and it had not taken place since then.

Six of the girls had been involved in the Brownies between the ages of eight and twelve years. Four of the girls had been involved in some type of church camp experience with their families, at least once in their lives. The responses indicated that the amount of family experiences in the outdoors was minimal.

Out of school sporting involvement

The sporting involvement by the respondents covered a wide variety of activities ranging from individual sports such as dancing, running and weights workouts, to team sports such as basketball, volleyball and netball. 23 out of the 24 girls had at least one sporting interest. Only one student expressed a strong dislike for sport and any physical activity.

The most popular sporting interest was swimming (18%), and the most popular team sports were those of basketball (12%) and netball (10%). This information was unexpected because:

a) basketball and netball were two sports to which the girls were exposed in physical education, and yet, more than 70% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this programme; and b) swimming was the most popular sporting interest (18%). However, none of the respondents selected Outdoor Education because the survival swimming, which constitutes at least 20% of the Outdoor Education programme, appeared to be unenjoyable and too much hard work.

Dancing was a popular individual sport (10%), and among the more popular 'social' sports were horse riding (10%), sailing (10%) and tennis (8%). Table 3 presents a summary of the out of school sporting involvement of the respondents.

TABLE 3
OUT OF SCHOOL SPORTING INVOLVEMENT OF RESPONDENTS

| Sport | Responses | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Aerobics | 1 | 2 |
| Basketball | 6 | 12 |
| Dancing | 5 | 10 |
| Gaelic Football | 1 | 2 |
| Horse Riding | 5 | 10 |
| Netball | 5 | 10 |
| None | 1 | 2 |
| Rollerskating | 1 | 2 |
| Running | 1 | 2 |
| Sailing | 4 | 8 |
| Soccer | 2 | 4 |
| Softball | 2 | 4 |
| Swimming | 9 | 18 |
| Tennis | 4 | 8 |
| Volleyball | 1 | 2 |
| Walking | 1 | 2 |
| Weights workouts | 1 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 50 | 100 |

Note:

1. Percentages are rounded

2. Girls were sometimes involved in more than one sport

This discussion has presented some background information of the school and the respondents who took part in the present study, with particular emphasis on the physical education department and the respondents' unit selection, sporting involvement and camping experiences outside the school confines.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of data collected from the six group interviews, as to the reasons why Year 9 girls were not selecting Outdoor Education at a metropolitan government school in Western Australia.

The analysis is presented in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Groups A, B and C were interviewed in 1993, and groups D, E and F were interviewed in 1994. Each student was identified in her group and is referred to in the text as either student 1, 2, 3 or 4.

Group A

When the respondents were asked why they chose not to do Outdoor Education the most commonly stated reason was that the content of Outdoor Education looked "boring"; it didn't sound like fun; it looked like it would be too hard; and it would have been unpleasant to do things like survival swimming. Furthermore, some of the girls were forced to choose between Outdoor Education and Physical Recreation, with the latter being selected because it sounded like "much more fun". Thus the content in Outdoor Education was perceived as unappealing by the girls.

Moreover, the girls felt that because they were already doing General Physical Education and Physical Recreation, the selection of Outdoor Education would mean they would be doing "too much sport". Three out of the four girls in this group said that they did not like sport, and preferred to do other subjects like Theatre Arts and Media Studies:

I don't like sport...I want to do as less of it as possible, because I don't really want to, I hate doing it. You know how you have to do the normal sport, well like I hate doing that, especially tennis. (A1)

I prefer to do things like Theatre Arts...my main priorities were Art and Photography, Media and Theatre Arts. (A3)

Throughout the course of the interview it became apparent that the girls were unimpressed with the content of the General Physical Education, Outdoor Education and Physical Recreation programmes, and the overall structure and organisation of the Physical Education Department. In terms of the content of the various physical education programmes the girls stated:

I didn't think it (Outdoor Education) would be that good or interesting...I reckon you'd get sick of abseiling after one week. (A2)

Survival swimming looked yucky...it looked like too much hard work. (A4)

My Phys Rec was really boring. It was kinda like a chore. It was so boring. Badminton and golf were really boring...Things like badminton and golf you can do anytime. You can just do them anytime you want and they just get boring after a while. (A3)

I don't like normal boring sport. (A1)

A common theme emerging from the interview was that the repetition of sports led to the girls becoming bored and frustrated with physical education.

They do the same things in sport all of the time, but after one time you get sick of it...I mean once you know how to do it, you know how to do it, you don't need to do it over and over and over...if you do it every week it is boring. (A1)

Suggestions made by the girls to improve the quality of the programmes and the status of the Physical Education Department included:

I reckon they should have it more organised - I mean in summer they should use the gym more because it's too hot outside like, everything gets swapped around, like it's cold and we go swimming and in hot weather you sit outside and play tennis. (A1)

I like things which are different and more of a challenge rather than playing stuff like soccer...when you have to do things, it just makes it so much harder, you just don't want to do it. (A2)

I think people should choose more...we just don't have enough choice - I think they should give you a selection of the classes and then you can do whatever you want. (A3)

That's what I definitely think - people should choose what they want to do, 'cos that would make it much more enjoyable if you're doing what you want to do. (A4)

Sometimes when you give them a choice like you can do this or you don't have to do it, more people will do it. (A1)

Yeh, 'cos that means you chose it and that it's your fault if you don't like it. (A2)

I like the team sports the best. (A3)

When the girls were asked about the camp conducted in 1993, their satisfaction with team work and working in small groups became apparent, in that all of the girls reported they enjoyed the camp immensely. They inferred that the camp was fun and exciting, the activities were different and challenging, and working in groups was good. Positive comments included:

The camp activities were more fun kind of - they were different - you don't normally do those kinds of things. (A2)

With little groups like on camp, like everyone encouraged each other on the high ropes. (A3)

Our group was so nice - I mean I didn't know some of the people, but everyone was really nice. (A1)

The characteristics of the teacher had a strong influence on the quality and level of enjoyment of sport and physical activity, and the non-selection of outdoor education by girls. Half the girls supported the fact that classes would be much more enjoyable and rewarding if the teacher was an active participant:

It would be better if the teachers actually did it with you. (A1)

Moreover, the girls believed that if teachers displayed certain characteristics reflecting a warm personality, they would consider selecting that subject. The girls stated that in sport and physical education, the character of the teacher was considerably more important than the sex of the teacher. The girls described the essential teacher characteristics as:

encouraging; understanding; friendly; not pushy; clear and concise in instructions and demonstrations; patient; active participant; fun; approachable; and, able to treat you as an equal.

According to the girls, it was more important to have a teacher who displayed some, if not all of those characteristics, rather than having a specific male or female teacher for physical education and outdoor education. There was no preference in the sex of the teacher, but she or he had to be "nice" in order for the girls to consider selecting that particular subject.

The girls preferred single-sex classes for sport, physical education and outdoor education:

In boys' classes it's all competitive, but in the girls' it's comfortable. (A2)

It's alright with just girls...it's more fun and less competitive.
(A3)

Single-sex classes were preferred because the girls weren't teased; they avoided the competitiveness of sport; and they felt comfortable in the presence of girls. Consequently, the presence of their friends in classes had a

particular influence on their enjoyment of a subject and their avoidance of some other subjects, such as outdoor education. Some of the comments included:

If all of my friends were doing it (Outdoor Education), it would be really fun, but like it's all these people that I didn't like, so I definitely didn't do it. (A2)

You can do more I reckon if you have got all of your friends with you. (A3)

I reckon it's better with all your friends in your class because when you're like with people you don't know or people you don't like, you just sit there thinking "Oh my gosh when is this going to be over". You don't have any fun or anything. (A1)

The girls suggested that self-esteem could be greatly enhanced through the encouragement and support of class mates, especially friends. They all felt more comfortable and capable in their physical education classes, when they were in a single-sex environment, with their close friends. However, the activities on camp, for example abseiling and the high ropes course, were done in mixed groups where moral support and encouragement was high, and teamwork and comradeship was credible. With this support from their group the girls felt their self-esteem and self-confidence were significantly enhanced:

I felt so good after I had done all of those activities. I felt really happy. (A2)

I reckon it was really good once you knew you had done it. You felt really good. (A3)

No one teased each other, they just encouraged each other. It was really good because everyone was being really nice to each other. (A4)

Yeh you made lots of friends out of it. We started off as virtual strangers and at the end of the camp the whole group was really close. (A1)

This interview has provided a number of reasons as to why girls chose not to select Outdoor Education, with the primary reasons being the unappealing content of the Outdoor Education programmes; the lack of friends doing Outdoor Education; and the characteristics of the teacher. The girls claimed that a subject was selected more often if the teacher was nice and possessed a number of personal qualities and characteristics. Figure 5 illustrates the main reasons for the non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education.

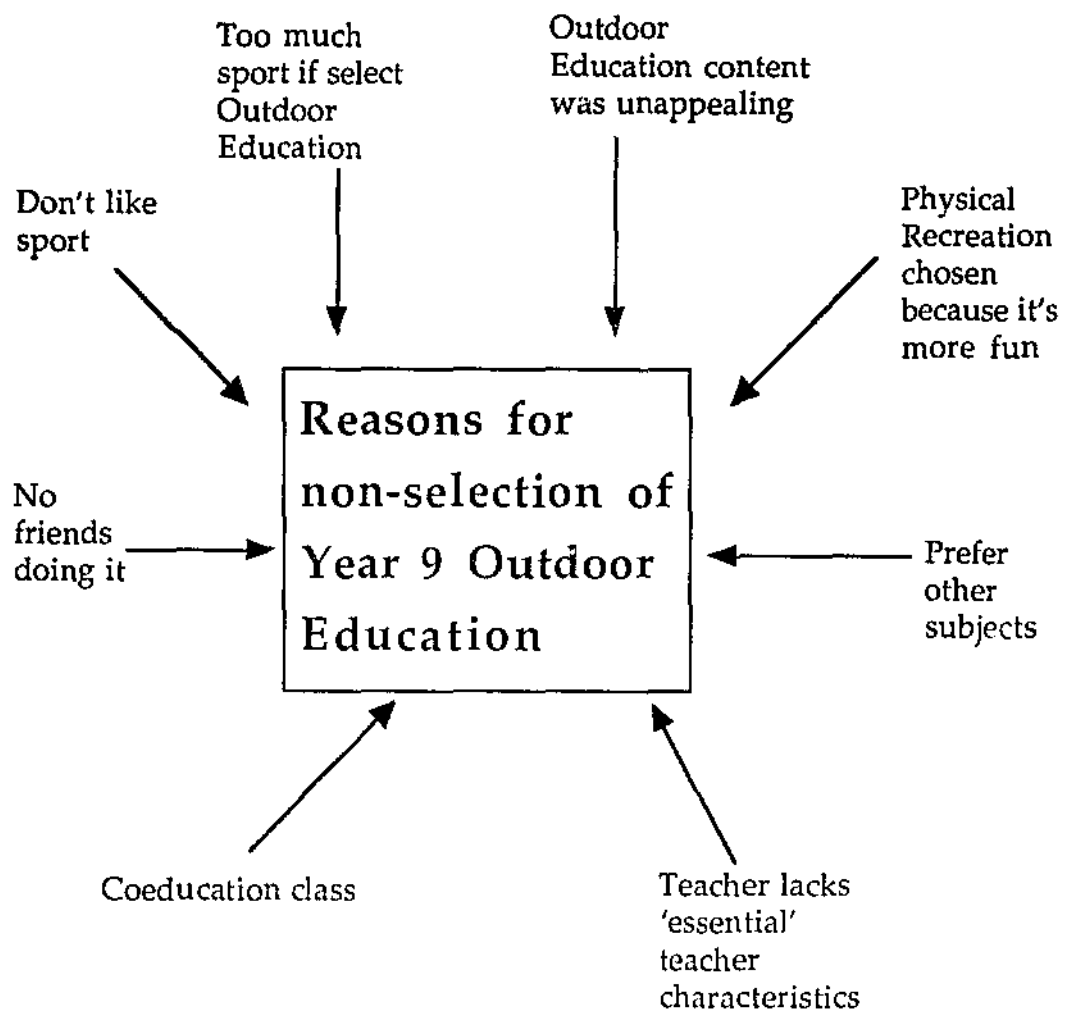


Figure 5: Reasons for non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education - Group A

Group B

When the respondents were asked why they chose not to do Outdoor Education the common response was that they "prefer other subjects". Other units on the gridline were judged to be more enjoyable, more practical and more fun.

I prefer the other subjects on the gridline, like Dance and Phys Rec.

I find them more interesting. (B1)

It became apparent that when the students were forced to choose between Outdoor Education and Physical Recreation, they would choose Physical Recreation, for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons included:

The options were out of Phys Rec or Outdoor Ed, and Phys Rec was sailing and I thought "cool". It just seemed more enjoyable, more fun. (B2)

Things like sailing and iceskating. I mean they are pretty easy. You just sit there and do nothing basically and it's sort of more fun. They are the sort of activities you do even when you are not at school. (B4)

Outdoor Education seems more like a pressure. You know you're safe, but it's still a pressure because the activities in Outdoor Education don't seem to be easy or enjoyable ... they just seem like too much hard work. (B1)

It was evident that the girls' previous family experiences in outdoor activities were minimal. The main sport the girls and their families focused

on was dancing. The parents enrolled the girls into dancing at a young age, and consequently the girls continued to do it throughout their primary and secondary schooling. The parents' interest and enthusiasm for camping and the "outdoors" was minimal.

Camping just doesn't quite happen. I can't see my sisters or my parents going camping. My dad likes to but my mum doesn't at all. She's into sport and exercise but not the outdoor ed stuff. (B3)

We go away together as a family but we never go camping. Never! We're not really into that sort of stuff. (B2)

All of the girls' parents encouraged them to do a language, and Typing or Computing, with little consideration given to Outdoor Education:

My parents encouraged me to do French and Computing, but I'm not doing Computing. (B3)

Mine said to do things like Typing, that sort of thing and French, but not the other things like Outdoor Ed. (B2)

My parents told me to do things like Typing and languages because they are things that I could use later on in life, and Outdoor Education you can't. (B1)

Another significant influence on the girls' unit selection process was their friends. All of the girls agreed that if you didn't have your friends in the class it was unlikely that you would consider selecting that unit, as was the case with Outdoor Education. When the girls were asked whether there had been

anyone who had significantly influenced their unit selection one student replied:

If you're sort of the only one that's going to be in that class, you sort of think "No way!", especially something like Outdoor Education or Phys Rec where you have to pair up or go in groups. So we all sort of got together in a group and figured out what we were going to do. (B2)

Evidently, the girls enjoyed being with their friends, and yet they expressed a strong desire to have boys in their physical education classes. The girls preferred coeducational classes for sport and physical activity:

It's good to have guys in the class. It's more fun. (B2)

It gets a bit boring with just the girls. (B4)

However, one student expressed her discontentment with coeducational classes for sport and physical education:

The boys think they are so much more superior than you. They show off and think that we aren't capable of doing anything.

They really annoy me. (B1)

When asked whether she agreed with the statement that sport is only for the boys, she replied quite adamantly:

I don't think it is true because I do PE just as much as any guy, and I am quite capable of doing Outdoor Ed. It just doesn't suit with my options, and besides, I just don't want to do it. (B1)

Another influencing factor of concern to the girls in their selection of units was the teacher. It became apparent that the characteristics of the teacher was much more important than the sex of the teacher. There was no preference for a male or female physical education teacher, it was their character which influenced the girls' enjoyment and selection of a unit:

If you don't like the teacher, then you don't like the subject.

Well, you sort of like the subject, but it's much more enjoyable if you like the teacher. (B3)

In summary, it was evident that the girls' preference for other subjects; the limited family outdoor experiences; and the parents' and friends' influence, were strong contributing factors as to why these girls did not select Outdoor Education as a unit of study. Figure 6 illustrates the factors which contributed to the girls' non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education.

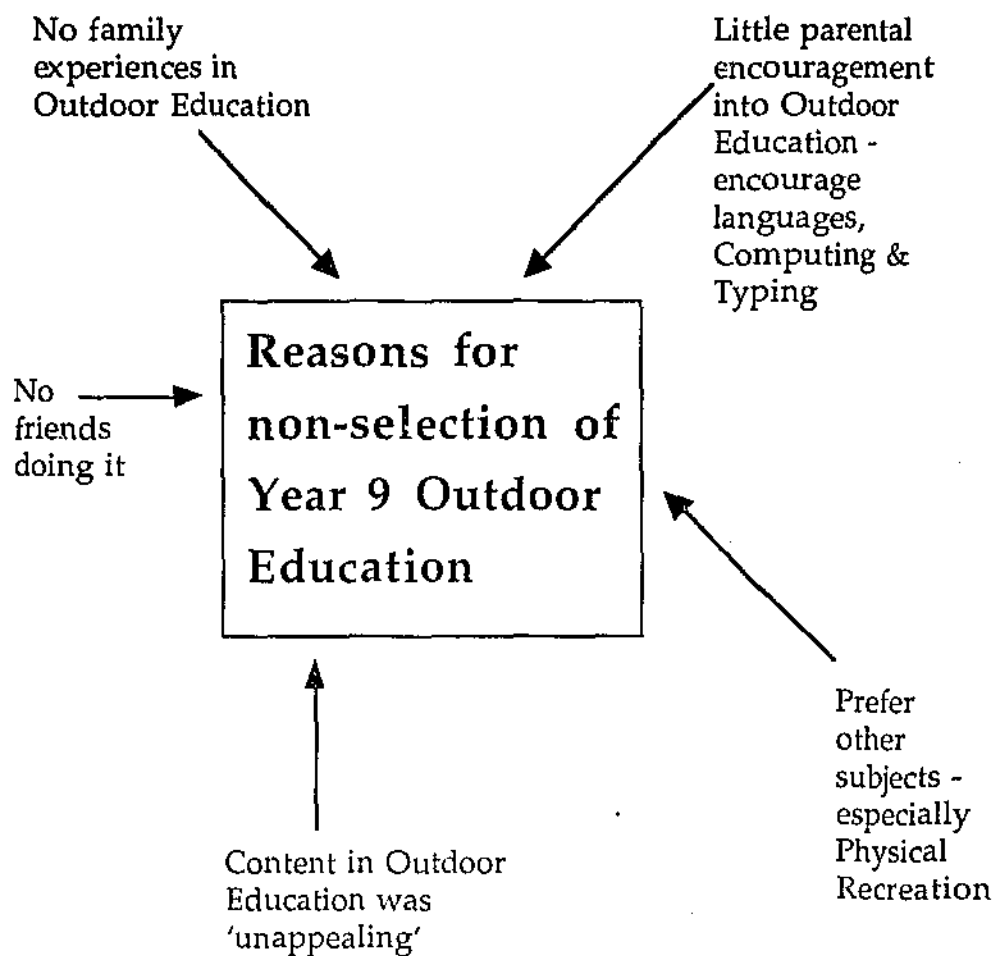


Figure 6: Reasons for non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education - Group B

Group C

The physical education units offered at this school included General Physical Education (compulsory), Outdoor Education, Physical Recreation, Specialised Physical Education (basketball and volleyball) and Dance. According to the girls the most popular units were Physical Recreation and Dance. All of the girls in this interview were doing Physical Recreation, and half of them were doing Dance.

Prior to the girls selecting their units, the Student Handbook (see Appendix D) was read thoroughly, thus their understanding of each physical education unit was comprehensive. When the girls were asked what Outdoor Education meant to them they responded with comments such as outdoor activities, boating, compass reading, abseiling and:

Activities that you don't usually do. (C4)

It was evident that they understood what activities they would have been doing, had they chosen to enrol in Outdoor Education.

When the girls were asked why they had chosen not to do Outdoor Education the major reason was that the content of Physical Recreation was much more enjoyable, sociable and practical than that of Outdoor Education. The reasons underlying the girls' decision to not select Outdoor Education are described in the following comments:

There were better options like Phys Rec. Girls just don't like it (Outdoor Education). It's just the things you do in it, like survival swimming would be yucky. Phys Rec was just better. (C2)

Phys Rec has better things in it like sailing, and in Phys Rec it's fun. It's not hard work. I chose to do Phys Rec 'cos I like the things that they do. (C1)

One of the good things about Phys Rec is it is more sociable than other subjects. (C4)

Many people choose Phys Rec more because it is something you could do everyday. I mean you could go out and do it. You could go out sailing or bowling or ice-skating, but you can't really go out abseiling. (C3)

According to all the girls, Outdoor Education is a "scary" subject, but the perceived risks associated with it were by no means a deterrent for them. Some of the comments included:

Outdoor Education is scary, very scary, but that's not why we don't choose it. (C4)

You just don't even think about the risk. (C2)

It's not like it's even that risky anyway. (C3)

It's not risky at all really. (C1)

The girls proposed that there were very few risks involved in outdoor education. However, they implied that outdoor education was a subject which incorporated and developed skills which could be used later on in life.

One student stated that:

It does involve co-operation and co-ordination, and you have to get on with other people because with co-operation and teamwork you will get through life easily and happily. (C2)

Despite their thorough understanding of Outdoor Education, and the knowledge that it was relevant to their lives outside of school, the girls remained disinterested with the subject, and did not select the unit in Year 9 or Year 10. Physical Recreation was selected by all of the girls for Years 9 and 10, because it was more fun; practical; not scary; and a very sociable experience.

When the girls were asked if there were any significant people that influenced their unit selection, the most commonly stated response was their friends. As with the previous two groups, these girls also tended to select units which their friends had selected.

You just pick what everyone else picks. You do what all your friends do. (C4)

You want to be with your friends. You don't want to be with people that you don't like. (C3)

Yeh, most things your friends choose, you do too. (C1)

Moreover, when the girls were confronted with the issue of "boys in sport" a number of interesting comments were made.

Boys are stronger and they are usually better, although sometimes they just think they are better. (C1)

Girls don't try as much as boys at sport. The guys just get into it a lot more than we do. (C2)

When you think of Physical Education or Outdoor Ed, I don't know, you just wouldn't think of it as being a boys' subject. (C4)

The girls maintained that boys were generally bigger, better, stronger and tougher than they were at sport, but girls were just as capable. On camp, the girls were surprised to find that boys could be just as scared as they were on the abseiling and high ropes activities.

You wouldn't think a guy would chicken out, but a guy was on top and then he couldn't do it, so he came down. (C4)

They just think they are all macho and then they get up there and they think "Oh, oh". (C1)

It's so unusual to see them like that, because they are always saying how good they are. They think they are better. (C2)

It became apparent that this group of girls constantly experienced put-downs from the boys.

They put us down all the time. They make little smart comments about things you have done, and you sort of think "Well what do you mean by that?". They think they know you really well and they can say it and they are only joking, but we don't like it and we don't take it as a joke. (C4)

Furthermore, the girls found it was embarrassing to be around boys when they were in their bathers:

The only problem is when you're in your bathers. It's like "Don't look at me". (C3)

Despite this, all the girls preferred coeducational classes for sport and physical education. One student stated:

I definitely prefer coed, so you can all help each other, you know. Well we're at a coed school, so what is the point in having single-sex classes? (C2)

When the girls were asked whether there was a preference for a male or female teacher for the physical education units, the entire group implied that it depended more on the teacher's character, rather than the sex of the teacher. All of the girls preferred a teacher who was nice, understanding and experienced in his/her area of expertise. Half of the girls believed that if you didn't like the teacher then you wouldn't do the subject:

If you don't like the teacher, then you don't like the subject and you're not going to do it. (C2)

Yeh, otherwise everyday you will sit there going "Oh, oh, oh". (C3)

However, if the teacher was "cool" and knew all about the subject he or she was teaching, the respect of the girls was earned, and it wouldn't matter if the teacher was male or female.

This interview has discussed several reasons as to why girls were not selecting Outdoor Education in Year 9 and these are summarised in Figure 7. The main reason evident here was that the content of Outdoor Education was boring and too hard, whilst Physical Recreation was fun, exciting and enjoyable. According to these girls, Physical Recreation will always be selected over the unit of Outdoor Education.

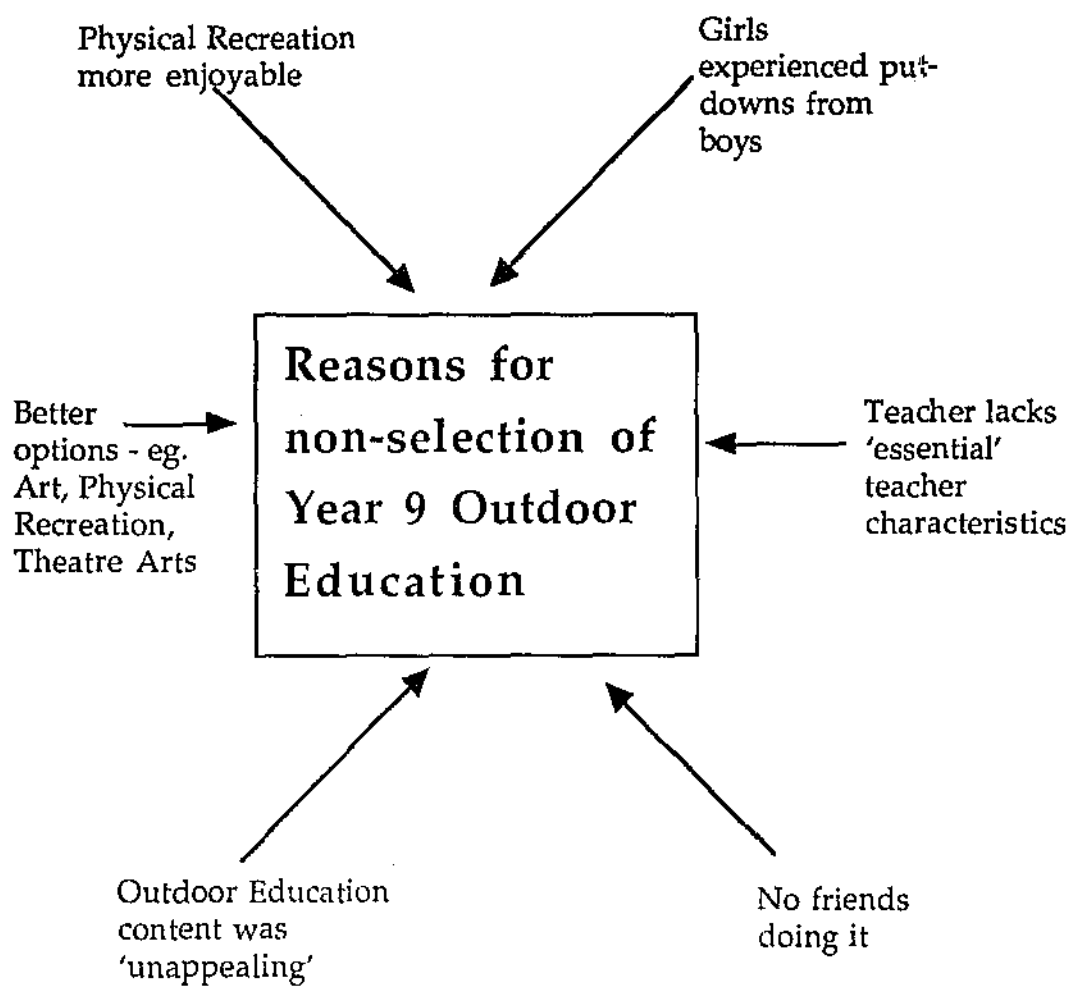


Figure 7: Reasons for non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education - Group C

Group D

When the girls were asked why they chose not to enrol in Outdoor Education they gave several reasons to clarify their non-selection, with the main contributing factors being "too many options" on the timetable; the structure, content and teacher of Outdoor Education; and parental influence.

The issue of too many options posed a problem for one student who commented that:

There are so many options. I mean you have got compulsory stuff, like PE and Health, and then there are so many others to choose from. It makes it very hard to decide. (D4)

However, some students found their decision-making much easier, in that they knew precisely the units they wanted to do. As one student stated:

It definitely wasn't Outdoor Ed. (D2)

The influence of the girls' parents had a significant impact on the units which they selected. All the parents encouraged their daughters into units such as languages and Computing. Some of the comments included:

My dad wanted me to do Computing, 'cos my dad he's um totally paranoid about my grades so he always wants me to do all this really hard stuff. (D1)

I had to do a language, except I told them I didn't want to do it...I still did it though. (D2)

My parents said that I had to do a language. There was no choice and I hate languages. They said I had to do Japanese. (D3)

Moreover, the concentration on Outdoor Education from each family, and family experiences in the outdoors, were minimal. One student stated:

The most we do in the outdoors is go on picnics every now and then. Mum and Dad aren't really into that sort of stuff, and so neither am I. (D1)

When asked which class grouping they preferred, the girls insisted that a single-sex environment with a female teacher was more favourable, especially in subjects involving sport and physical activity. They implied that boys were naturally better and physically stronger at sport than girls. Consequently, they found it embarrassing and intimidating having males in the class. The fact that outdoor education at the school was coeducational and had a male teacher, was evidently a deterrent to all of the girls in this group. Some comments included:

It's like you don't feel as embarrassed with the girls just there. You can sort of try a lot more. It's just so horrible being in your bathers for swimming and the boys are there. It's embarrassing. (D1)

It's easier working with the girls. You can put more opinions in with just girls and they don't think that you are stupid. You don't have to worry about messing up. (D3)

I think it would help (having single-sex classes). There would be more people wanting to do it then, 'cos they think "Oh well we can do it".

And you wouldn't be left behind when it came to something like swimming. (D2)

The girls were adamant that having boys in physical education and outdoor education classes was embarrassing and annoying because:

They are just watching you all of the time...They are the biggest showoffs. (D1)

They are really sarcastic. (D3)

One reason why girls did not enrol in Outdoor Education was because they experienced "put-downs" from boys. This was apparent within this group of girls with comments such as:

They are such showoffs. There is nothing worse than when there's a group of thirty of them, and you can't do something, and they are all just standing there watching you. It's just their actions. Some are worse than others. (D3)

Some of them make you feel really self-conscious. (D4)

Moreover, the girls displayed feelings of inadequacy when they compared themselves with boys in sport. There was a general feeling that the boys tended to try a lot harder in sport and consequently were a lot better than girls at any physical or outdoor activities.

We don't focus our lives on sport but guys do. They really like to play sport a lot more than we do. (D1)

The boys try harder at it more often...and besides, they are naturally built for it. (D4)

The lack of positive female role models in Outdoor Education affected one student's decision to not select the unit. She stated:

I think there is more of a need to have a female teacher in Outdoor Ed for the girls, 'cos women understand more and it's better to have a female for swimming. It's also good because they should just show you that we can do things that the other guys are doing, and... do it better. (D2)

The content of the Outdoor Education programme was unappealing to the girls in that it was primarily based on water activities, and none of the girls enjoyed survival swimming. When they were asked their opinion of the Outdoor Education programme, some of the students replied:

It had lots of swimming stuff in it, and I really hate swimming. (D3)

Yeh, I hate swimming too. I'm not really strong at that. (D4)

It sounded so boring. (D2)

Conversely, the Physical Recreation unit was well received by the girls. They expressed several reasons as to why they would choose Physical Recreation before Outdoor Education. The general consensus was that Physical Recreation was a more enjoyable, sociable and easier unit than Outdoor Education. Some of the comments included:

Phys Rec is more of a bludge class. You don't have to do any written stuff or anything. It's just great because you don't have to listen to anybody. It's like, you can just do what you want. (D1)

I just like the stuff that you do there like sailing and stuff like that. (D3)

You don't have to work as much. You just sit back and hang out with your friends and do whatever you have to do. Outdoor Ed, I think it's more of a survival sort of thing, so you really do have to listen. (St 2)

When the girls were asked whether the perceived risks associated with Outdoor Education deterred them from selecting the unit, several interesting comments were made.

Yeh well I'd be like really scared doing stuff like that, but after I'd done it I'd feel really good and stuff and I'd want to do it again, but it's just doing it the first time. (D2)

You know in Outdoor Ed how it's dangerous, well I don't get put off by dangerous things just 'cos I've done some stuff like that before. I've done parasailing and abseiling and hiking camps. (D4)

The positive effects that outdoor education activities have on an individual's self-esteem were recognised by all of the girls. Some comments included:

You just feel so good knowing you have achieved something. It (abseiling) looks so hard and you get to the bottom and you're sort of like "Oh my gosh - I've done it!" and you are so happy. You look quite stupid, but it's fun. (D3)

Outdoor Education helps develop communication skills, life skills and learning to go through life as a team. (D1)

It was evident that the girls were aware of the many benefits that Outdoor Education holds and yet they did not select it as a unit of study.

The issues of coeducation, teacher sex, "too many options" and parental influence were the strongest contributing factors in this group, for their non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education. These are summarised in Figure 8.

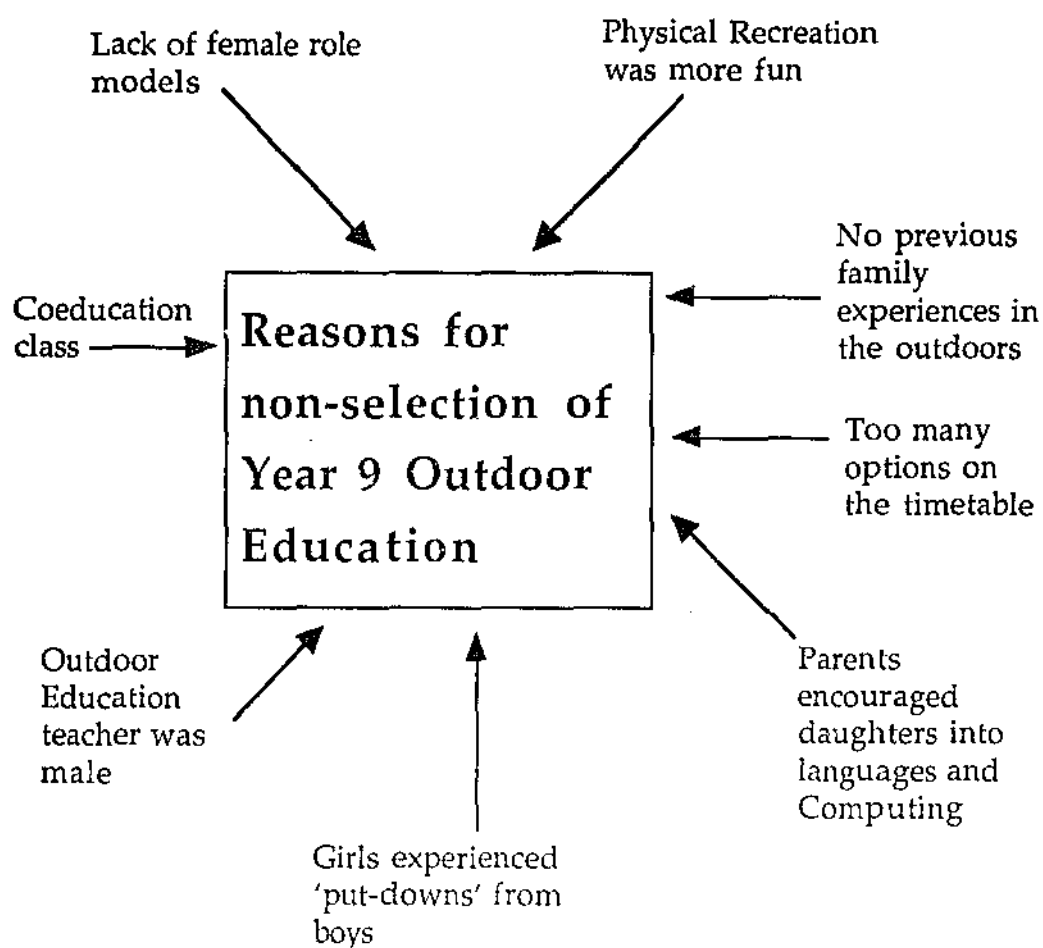


Figure 8: Reasons for non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education - Group D

Group E

When asked to explain why they did not select Outdoor Education, the major reason given by all the girls was the "way in which their parents brought them up". Their parents had a significant influence over the units they chose and the sports in which they were involved. Furthermore, the girls didn't like the content or class structure of the Outdoor Education programme and there were other subjects that they wanted to do more. These were the main reasons why the girls did not select Outdoor Education as a unit of study.

According to the girls, Outdoor Education was a unit which involved abseiling, bushwalking, learning new things, survival courses and survival skills. Thus, their understanding of the unit's content was sound. Despite this clear understanding, none of the girls selected Outdoor Education, with the common reason being that their parents encouraged and supported their brothers more when it came to participating in sport and physical activity. Moreover, they believed that society has had a significant influence on where boys' and girls' priorities lie, that is, girls' focus was (or should be) more academic, whilst the boys' was (or should be) more on the sporting field. Some of the comments included:

My dad, he knows what he should say, like he goes "Oh I don't think there is anything wrong with girls' sports", but he encourages my brother constantly, he pushes him, and he never does any of that with me. I mean I love sports, I love it, a lot more than my brother and he's always pushing my brother and not me. (E3)

Guys have always been told to get out and do sports and stuff when they were little. (E1)

All the girls were involved in the Brownies at some stage in their lives. They insisted that their involvement in the Brownies taught them little about the outdoors, whilst the boys, many of whom were involved with cadets, were continuously taught about survival skills and enjoyed many outdoor experiences and activities:

Yeh, like in Brownies and stuff you just learn how to tie knots and stuff, but with cadets, you get out there and you experience it - survival skills. (E4)

I think society has caused that (more boys enrolled in Outdoor Education) because I mean in Brownies and stuff there is never nothing like that survival stuff for girls. (E2)

Moreover, when the girls were asked why they thought more boys were involved in Outdoor Education than girls they replied:

It's pretty much that guys do it (Outdoor Education) because they have already had experience with it, like they know what is going to be in it. (E3)

Because guys just have a lot more experience with survival stuff and that. (E2)

More boys tend to do it than girls because they don't want to do anything else...they don't want to work. There might be languages or something but they don't want to do that. They would rather go somewhere else where they don't have to think so much. (E1)

More opportunities are given to the guys, more than the girls,
like in sport they are pushed much harder. (E4)

It was apparent that these girls believed boys were encouraged more into sport and physical activity than themselves, with the two strong influencing factors being parents and society. These reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education relate back to the process of socialisation.

Furthermore, the nature and content of Outdoor Education at this school was unappealing to this group of girls. Outdoor Education was boring; it contained too much theory; it was a coeducation class; and it had a male teacher. All of these factors were strong influences in the girls choosing not to select Outdoor Education.

The theory in Outdoor Ed is a bit of a turn-off, especially when all you want to do is the sport, you don't want to have to do all the theory. (E3)

Furthermore, there were some subjects that they wanted to do more than Outdoor Education:

I wanted to do my subjects in another area. I wanted to do some subjects more than Outdoor Education. (E4)

I like Phys Rec better 'cos it's a "bludge". You just don't have to think. (E4)

In Phys Rec there was iceskating and sailing, and I just love iceskating and sailing...and in sailing you learn how to manoeuvre a boat, and you're with your friends and you can do what you want basically. It's not strict. (E2)

Physical Recreation was perceived by the girls as being fun and enjoyable, whilst Outdoor Education was strict and boring. Moreover, the fact that Outdoor Education at this school had a male teacher and was a coeducational class, tended to deter girls from the unit. The girls were adamant that a single-sex class of Outdoor Education or Physical Education, with a female teacher would be much more enjoyable and personally rewarding for them. They believed that boys were intimidating, embarrassing and:

...a bunch of showoffs. (E2)

When the girls were asked what class grouping they preferred, they replied:

It's better all female, because the guys just completely overpower you and they just stand there, and so you don't try your best. Boys are just so bossy, and they like showing off. (E4)

All you want to do is have some fun without competing too much, but boys are much stronger and they usually beat you at most things and they make sure that you know when they have beaten you. (E1)

I think it would help (single-sex classes) because you don't need a guy's help and besides, they would laugh at you. (E3)

They are pretty embarrassing. They just go "Oh you're hopeless!" and "You can't do this". (E2)

Evidently, the girls' experienced 'put-downs' from the boys and they felt embarrassed having them in their physical education classes. This explained the fact that all the girls preferred single-sex classes, in an environment where they were surrounded by their friends:

If your friends aren't going to do it (Outdoor Education) then you don't want to do it. If there is no one you know in that class then you would rather not be in it. You are just not going to enjoy yourself. (E2)

Yeh, you have got to have someone you can sit and talk to. You just can't be there by yourself. (E3)

As the girls preferred single-sex classes, it became apparent that they also preferred a female teacher. The main reason for this was that female teachers were more understanding than male teachers:

I prefer women teachers teaching PE and stuff because they are more understanding (E4)

It's just easier to talk to them about stuff. Well you don't want to go up to Mr P (Outdoor Education teacher) and say "Oh I've got my period. Do I have to go swimming?" (E2)

Furthermore all the girls agreed that the present Outdoor Education teacher at the school was:

too old (E1); and

...not capable of teaching outdoor education stuff anymore. (E4)

The character of the teacher was also important, in that he/she should be friendly and understanding to maximise the girls' participation and enjoyment levels in sport and physical education classes.

They have to be friendly, like outgoing, like they don't care what you're saying as long as you're doing your work and you get things done, but they are just nice to you...they are just friendly. (E2)

They don't expect you to do the best. They don't expect you to do things perfectly the first time. They should be able to explain things a couple of times and give you time to get good at it. (E1)

They should be encouraging...and understanding. (E4)

In summary, it is evident that the socialisation process and therefore the parents and friends of the girls; the content and the class grouping of Outdoor Education; and the teacher of Outdoor Education were all strong contributing factors as to why these girls did not select Outdoor Education as a unit of study. These factors are highlighted in Figure 9.

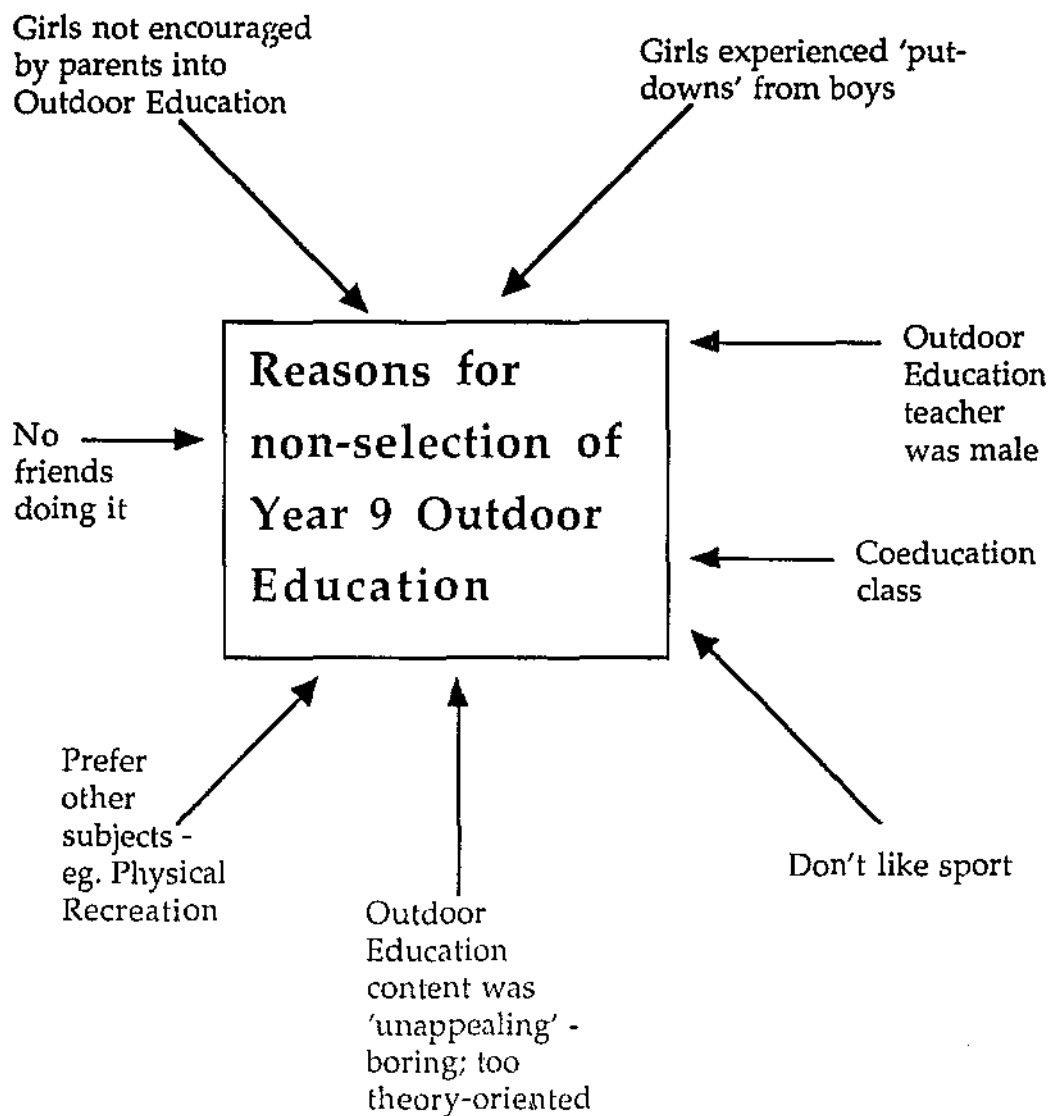


Figure 9: Reasons for non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education - Group E

Group F

All the girls in this group expressed disinterest and a lack of enthusiasm for the sport and physical activity they were exposed to at school.

I hate sport...I like football, but I don't really like sport. (F3)

I don't like water sports and stuff. (F4)

Every year we do basketball like for six months, and it is just so boring. Athletics and tennis are a real pain too. (F1)

Their personal interests focused more on "different" sports such as Gaelic football, Irish dancing and rollerskating. Furthermore, because the girls were forced to do General Physical Education, and their participation in sport outside of school was considerably high, there was a general consensus that if they selected Outdoor Education, they would be involved in too much sport. Some students expressed their frustration with having to do so much physical activity at school, through comments such as:

I don't see why it's such a big deal to do it (Physical Education), and why we have to do it, and we have to do it so much. (F2)

Yeh, but I realise it's something that we all have to do, but it's just that we do too much of it. (F1)

Moreover, the content of Outdoor Education at this school was primarily based on water activities, and this was ultimately a deterrent for all of the girls. They don't enjoy swimming and most water activities, and all the activities included in the unit, such as roping, water rescues and survival

swimming sounded boring. Some students stated that:

All of the activities sounded so boring. (F3)

I don't like water sports and stuff - and I always remember there seems to be a lot of swimming stuff in Outdoor Ed, and I just don't like that. (F4)

It just says that Outdoor Ed is canoeing and swimming, and it's like...they are both so boring. (F2)

Furthermore, the activities in Outdoor Education appeared to be rather strenuous as one student stated:

It looked like a lot of hard work, and I just like sports where you don't have to do too much. (F1)

The parents of these girls encouraged their daughters to select units such as languages, Cooking, Music and Art.

These are subjects which our parents say we can use later on in life, and Outdoor Ed we really can't. (F4)

Consequently, there had been little encouragement to select physical education and outdoor education. Moreover, the amount of family experiences in camping and outdoor activities was minimal.

We used to go camping when I was a little girl, but not anymore. (F2)

We've done it once or twice, but we don't really get into it that much...and with camping, I mean spending so long in such a small environment with people, gets a bit much. (F4)

Another significant influence in the girls' decision-making process was their friends. It became apparent that the units the girls selected, their friends would select also. All of the girls believed that it was a lot more fun and exciting when they were in a class with their friends. Thus, when choosing their units very little consideration was given to those units where their friends weren't enrolled, hence Outdoor Education suffered. When the girls were asked why they didn't select Outdoor Education, some replied:

I haven't got any of my friends doing it, so I'm not doing it. (F3)

Yeh, it's much better doing things with your friends 'cos you have a lot more fun doing it, and none of my friends are doing it, so neither am I. (F2)

With a class like Outdoor Ed, which I'm not sure that I'm going to enjoy, then I'd like to make sure that I had my friends in it just to kind of make it a little bit more better. (F4)

When the girls were asked their thoughts on boys and sport, a number of interesting comments were made. The common ideas shared by all the girls were that boys were showoffs; boys 'put-down' girls; boys want to do sport more than the girls; and boys were too competitive. Thus, the preferred grouping for physical education and outdoor education classes was single-sex. Some of the comments included:

I like it with just the girls because the boys try and show off and stuff...and they are too competitive. (F2)

I like it better with girls. Boys are always putting you down. (F3)

Boys just always seem to do sport naturally. They seem to want to do it more and they like it more than girls. (F1)

According to the girls, the character of the teacher was more important than the sex of the teacher, as one student stated:

If the teacher is really mean then you don't want them, but if they are really nice, then it doesn't matter what sex they are. (F1)

However, the majority of the girls preferred a female teacher in the physical education units because they were:

...usually much nicer (F1); and

...they are more understanding. (F3)

Furthermore, the girls believed that female role models were important for young girls, because it showed them that girls were just as capable as boys of doing sport and physical activity.

It is sometimes good to have a female teacher there so that they can show that the girls can do it as well and not just the guys, and we can be even better than the guys. (F2)

Moreover, the girls believed that the male teachers of physical education and outdoor education were both sexist and condescending in nature. When the girls were asked in what way were male teachers sexist, one student replied:

They think that the boys are better than the girls, that the girls have to have more of a chance. They can be really patronising and condescending towards us. (F4)

According to this group of girls the perceived risk factors associated with outdoor activities did not deter them from selecting Outdoor Education.

There is a risk, but it doesn't stop you from doing it. (F3)

Yes it is risky, but there are precautions you can take. (F4)

The benefits of outdoor activities seemed to outweigh these risks. Some students commented on the effects that physical activity had on their self-esteem:

Doing something like abseiling makes you feel really good about yourself. (F2)

Yeh, well anytime you do anything good in Phys Ed, you feel really special. (F3)

Despite these positive comments regarding sport and physical activity, the girls remained disinterested with both physical education and outdoor education, and therefore did not enrol in the latter. The issues of content in Outdoor Education; parents and friends influence; preference for single-sex

classes; and involvement in "too much sport", were the main reasons why these girls did not select Outdoor Education as a unit of study. These reasons are summarised in Figure 10.

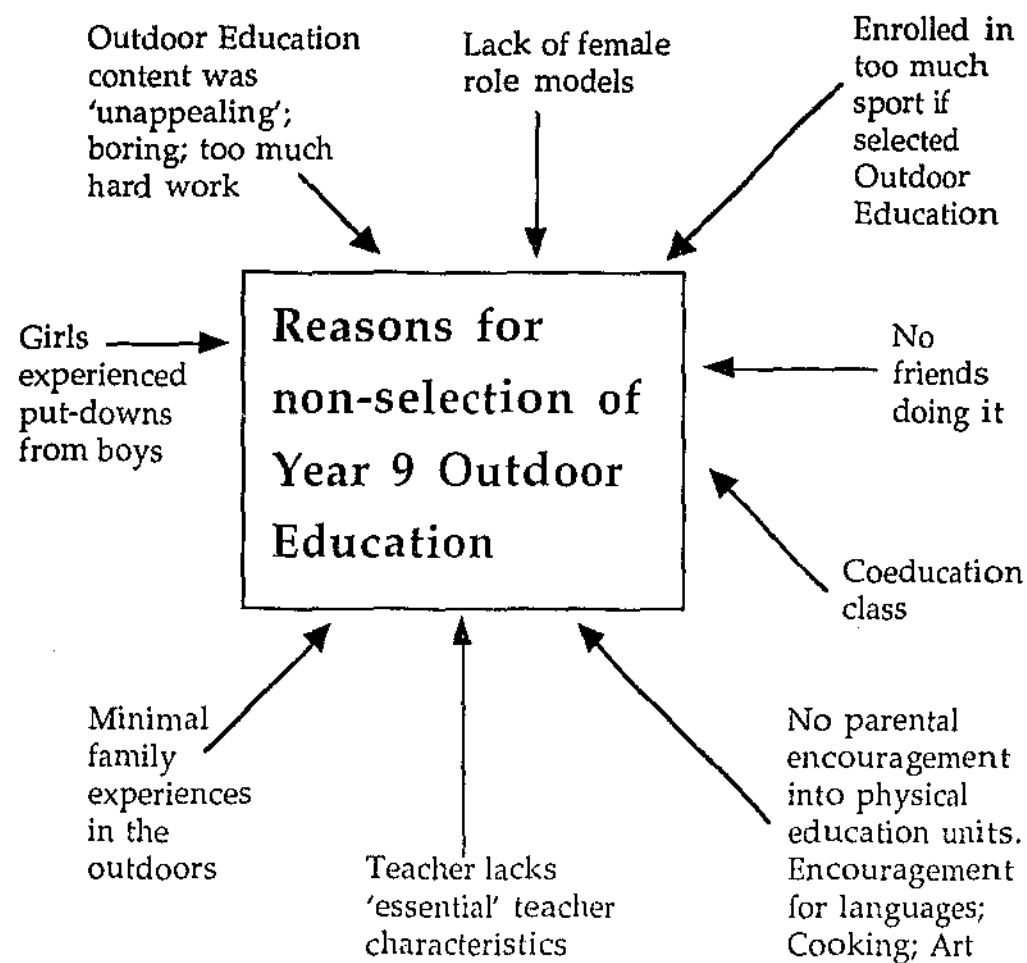


Figure 10: Reasons for non-selection of Year 9 Outdoor Education - Group F

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study focused on the reasons why Year 9 girls were not selecting Outdoor Education in a selected government secondary school in Perth, Western Australia. The most recent statistics indicate that enrolments in Outdoor Education units, in both lower and upper secondary school, reflect a ratio of two boys to one girl.

Initially, it was thought that these enrolment imbalances, as highlighted in the literature, were based on gender orientation and images of sport and physical education as a "male domain"; the gender socialisation of individuals; and the perceived risks associated with outdoor education. The following discussion will address these issues, with a primary focus being on the main reasons given by selected Year 9 girls as to why they did not select Outdoor Education.

The three main reasons, common to all interviews, for the non-selection of Outdoor Education were: the content of Outdoor Education was 'boring'; 'too hard'; too 'theoretical'; and 'not enjoyable': the girls' preferred other subjects, for example, Physical Recreation, Theatre Arts and Media; and their friends were not doing Outdoor Education and therefore the unit was not selected.

The content of the Year 9 units Outdoor Education 3.2 and Outdoor Education 4.2 at the school were similar for both years and there were detailed descriptions of these units and the subsequent two units (5.2 and 6.2) in the Student Handbook (see Appendix D). The primary focus of the outdoor education course was on water-based activities.

The content in the Outdoor Education programme in 1993 and 1994 was unappealing to all of the respondents for a variety of reasons, mainly that "it sounded so boring" (D2; F3). A number of other content-related reasons for non-selection are presented below:

I didn't think it would be that good or interesting. (A2)

Survival swimming looked yucky. It looked like too much hard work. (A4)

Outdoor Education seems more like a pressure. The activities in Outdoor Education don't seem to be easy or enjoyable. They just seem like too much hard work. (B1; F1)

Girls just don't like it. It's just the things you do in it, like survival swimming, would be yucky. (C2)

It had lots of swimming stuff in it, and I really hate swimming. (D3; F4)

The theory in Outdoor Ed is a bit of a turn-off. (E3)

The general consensus was that the content of Outdoor Education was not appealing and therefore the units were not selected. Survival swimming was an obvious deterrent for all the girls. Moreover, the theoretical nature of the unit was uninviting because it presented students with the idea that Outdoor Education was a lot of hard work; it was a 'pressure' subject; and it wasn't 'easy' or 'enjoyable'. The non-selection of Outdoor Education by the respondents in the present study, was primarily due to the nature and

respondents in the present study, was primarily due to the nature and content of the theoretical and practical aspects of the Outdoor Education programme at the school.

The second reason for non-selection was a corollary of the first in that all the respondents said they preferred other subjects. There were 'better options' such as Physical Recreation, Theatre Arts, Art and French which were more appealing to the girls than Outdoor Education.

The number of subjects available to the students was large. There were 31 different subjects from the component areas of media; languages; personal and vocational education; physical education; practical and creative arts; and computer-related studies. The only units which were compulsory were General Physical Education and Health Education.

A number of reasons to suggest why the respondents did not select Outdoor Education due to alternative preferences were:

I prefer to do things like theatre arts. (A3)

I prefer the other subjects on the gridline, like Dance and Phys Rec. I find them more interesting. (B1)

Phys Rec just seemed more enjoyable, more fun. (B2; C1)

There are so many options. It makes it very hard to decide. (D4)

I wanted to do my subjects in another area. I wanted to do some subjects more than Outdoor Education. (E4)

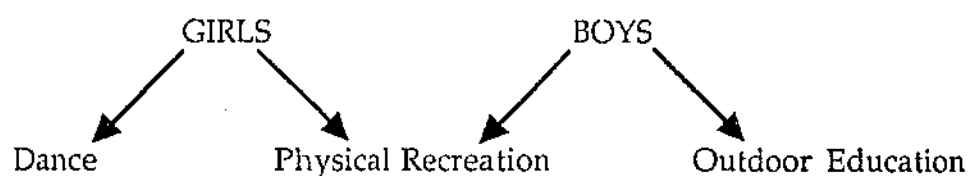
Consequently, when the girls were forced to choose between Outdoor Education and Physical Recreation, the latter was always chosen because the subject and its content were perceived as more enjoyable than that of Outdoor Education. The girls inferred that when students were forced to choose between Dance, Physical Recreation and Outdoor Education, the girls would tend to enrol in the first two units, whilst the boys would always enrol in the latter two, as highlighted by the respondents in Group C.

We have a choice out of Dance, Phys Rec and Outdoor Ed...I think that's the reason why so many boys are in Outdoor Education. (C2)

Yeh because none of the boys are going to do Dance. (C3)

Yeh and yet all of the girls like Dance. (C1)

The typical pattern of unit selection by females and males is illustrated below:



That is, if the students were forced to choose between these physical education units, the girls tended to select Dance and Physical Recreation, whilst the boys tended to select Physical Recreation and Outdoor Education.

The respondents' preference for other subjects was a major factor affecting the non-selection of outdoor education. Their main focus was on subjects such as Art, Theatre Arts, Cooking, French and Physical Recreation. The

status of Outdoor Education in the eyes of the respondents was low when compared with other subjects on the gridline.

A strong factor influencing the non-selection of Outdoor Education by the respondents was their 'friends'. The presence of friends in classes was an important consideration when selecting units. All the respondents shared the opinion that if their friends were not doing Outdoor Education, then they would not select the unit. Moreover, they insisted they would not enjoy a subject unless their friends were with them. Some of the comments included:

I reckon it's better with all your friends in your class because when you're with people you don't know or like, you don't have any fun or anything. (A1)

If you're the only one that's going to be in that class, you think 'No way!' especially something like Outdoor Education where you have to pair up or go in groups. We all got together in a group and figured out what we were going to do. (B2)

You pick what everyone else picks. You do what all your friends do. (C4)

Yeh, basically most things your friends choose, you do too. (C1)

If your friends aren't going to do it then you don't want to do it. If there is no one you know in that class then you would rather not be in it. You are just not going to enjoy yourself. (E2; F2)

I haven't got any of my friends doing it (Outdoor Education), so
I'm not doing it. (F3)

These comments indicated that the students found it very important for their friends to be in their classes. Consequently, none of the respondents selected Outdoor Education because none of their friends had selected it. It became apparent that some girls might have selected Outdoor Education, had some of their friends selected it also. One student stated:

If all of my friends were doing it, it would be really fun, but it's
all these people that I didn't like, so I definitely didn't do it. (A2)

'Peer group pressure' obviously influenced the girls' decision-making process. The influence of friends at this age was extremely strong, as it was evident that 'friends' played an important role in shaping the girls' decision to select or not select certain subjects at school.

There are a number of other reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education by the respondents, and these include class groupings (single-sex versus coeducation); lack of family experiences in the outdoors; parental encouragement into other fields/subject areas; and the notion that if Outdoor Education was selected, then the respondent would be involved in "too much sport". Each of these reasons will be discussed below.

Firstly, the preferred class grouping was single-sex. Four out of the six groups interviewed preferred single-sex classes for physical education and outdoor education. The other two groups preferred coeducational classes. The Outdoor Education unit at the school was conducted in a coeducational grouping, which was a deterrent for the majority of respondents. The

presence of boys in physical education and outdoor education classes was a barrier to the girls, in that they felt threatened by them. The respondents implied that boys were too competitive; they were showoffs; and they intimidated the girls. Some comments included:

In boys' classes it's all competitive, but in the girls' it's comfortable. (A2)

I like it with just the girls because the boys try and show-off ... and they are too competitive. (F2)

I like it better with girls. Boys are always putting you down. (F3)

Most of the respondents found it enjoyable to have only females in their classes. There was a general consensus that girls felt less intimidated and enjoyed their sport and physical activity more, when they had the support and encouragement of girls only. Some students stated:

It's alright with just girls...it's more fun and less competitive. (A3)

...you don't feel as embarrassed with the girls just there, you can sort of try a lot more. (D1)

It's easier working with the girls. You can put more opinions in with just girls and they don't think that you are stupid. (D3)

It's better all female, because the guys just completely overpower you and they just stand there, and so you don't try your best. (E4)

On the contrary, two of the groups interviewed preferred coeducational class groupings for sport, physical education and outdoor education. The respondents supported the coeducational setting by saying that it was more fun with boys in the class, and that the boys could help the girls (and vice versa) when help was needed:

It's good to have guys in the class - it's more fun. (B2)

It gets a bit boring with just the girls. (B4)

I definitely prefer coed, so you can all help each other. Well we're at a coed school, so what is the point of having single-sex classes? (C2)

With the majority of the groups preferring a single-sex environment for physical education and outdoor education, it became apparent that the coeducational class grouping at the school was a major reason why the girls did not select Outdoor Education.

Secondly, parental influence was evident in the majority of the groups interviewed. The girls implied that their parents encouraged them to select subjects that 'they could use later on in life', with Outdoor Education not being considered as such a 'worthwhile' subject. The focus was on subjects such as French, Computing and Typing:

My parents told me to do things like Typing and languages because they are things that I could use later on in life, and Outdoor Education I can't. (B1)

Mine said to do things like Typing, and French, but not the other things like Outdoor Ed. (B2)

My Dad wanted me to do Computing. He always wants me to do all of this really hard stuff. (D1)

My parents said that I had to do a language, there was no choice. (D2; D3)

It became apparent that these subjects were seen to be more practical, useful and relevant to a student's future. Moreover, they were considered to be more 'academic' than a subject such as Outdoor Education. The lack of parental encouragement into Outdoor Education was a factor which influenced the girls in not selecting it as one of their elective units. Parents tended to view subjects such as Computing, Typing and languages as more 'rewarding' and 'beneficial' to the girls' lives. With this parental encouragement into other subjects, enrolments in Outdoor Education suffered, as many girls chose not to select it as an elective subject.

Additionally, half of the groups indicated that they had had few family experiences in the 'outdoors':

We go away together as a family but we never go camping - never - we're not really into that sort of stuff. (B2)

Camping just doesn't quite happen. I can't see my sisters or my parents going camping. (B3)

...Mum and Dad aren't really into that sort of stuff (Outdoor Education), and so neither am I. (D1)

It became apparent that the majority of the respondents had at least once experienced the 'outdoors', through activities such as picnics and camping, with their parents in their primary school years. However, these experiences did not continue in all the girls' families in their secondary school years. This lack of family experiences in the 'outdoors' was considered by the researcher to be a factor in the non-selection of Outdoor Education by the girls. It was proposed that a lack of experience in the outdoors contributes to a poor understanding and a lack of knowledge regarding the many benefits that Outdoor Education holds for young people.

Furthermore, students in Group E stated that their parents, and societal expectations, considerably influenced their decision to not select Outdoor Education. The opinion shared by all the respondents was that boys, from an early age, were encouraged into the outdoors and to play sport. One student stated that her father continually encouraged her brother into sport, whereas she was never encouraged to do any sport, even though she liked it much more than her brother:

My dad, he encourages my brother constantly (into sport) and he never does any of that with me. I love sports, a lot more than my brother, and he's always pushing my brother and not me. (E3)

Also, the boys' involvement in cadets exposed them to the nature, content and benefits of the 'outdoors' and 'survival' activities. However, the girls' participation in the Brownies exposed them to basic skills, such as, tying

knots, and therefore their knowledge and understanding of outdoor education was limited. Some comments included:

Guys have always been told to get out and do sports and stuff when they were little. (E1)

In Brownies and stuff you just learn how to tie knots and stuff, but with cadets, you get out there and you experience it - survival skills. (E4)

I think society has caused that (more boys enrolled in Outdoor Education) because I mean in Brownies and stuff there is never nothing like that survival stuff for girls. (E2)

It is proposed that parental encouragement into other subjects, and the lack of family experiences in the outdoors were two important reasons as to why the girls did not select Outdoor Education.

A further reason shared by half the groups interviewed, was that if Outdoor Education was selected, then the students would be enrolled in 'too much sport'. There was a consensus that General Physical Education provided the girls with a sufficient amount of physical activity, and that doing Outdoor Education would result in more physical activity, which was unnecessary.

I don't like sport. I want to do as less of it as possible. I hate doing it. You know how you have to do the normal sport, well I hate doing that. (A1)

I don't see why it's such a big deal to do it (General Physical Education) and why we have to do it, and we have to do it so much. (F2)

I realise it's (General Physical Education) something that we all have to do, but it's just that we do too much of it. (F1)

General Physical Education was compulsory at the school, and the units of Physical Recreation, Outdoor Education and Dance were optional. The respondents implied that they were already involved in a sufficient amount of sport, as physical education was compulsory. Consequently, they did not readily select the other 'physical' subjects, because they believed that they would be doing too much sport and physical activity if they selected these subjects as well.

The characteristics of the teacher were an important factor influencing the non-selection of Outdoor Education. Four out of the six groups interviewed believed that a teacher's character was more important than the sex of the teacher. There was no preference for a male or female teacher for physical education and outdoor education, however, the teacher must display a number of characteristics to be accepted by the students. These were summarised by the students in Group A as encouraging; understanding; friendly; not pushy; clear and concise in instructions and demonstrations; patient; active participant; fun; approachable; and able to treat you as an equal.

If a teacher displayed such characteristics, the students were more inclined to choose a particular subject. The respondents stated that if they didn't like a certain teacher, then they would not like the subject or they may not select the unit because of the teacher's character. Some comments included:

If you don't like the teacher then you don't like the subject.

Well, you sort of like the subject, but it's much more enjoyable if you like the teacher. (B3)

If you don't like the teacher, then you don't like the subject and you're not going to do it. (C2)

If the teacher is really mean then you don't want them, but if they are really nice, then it doesn't matter what sex they are. (F1)

The Outdoor Education teacher at the school presented a deterrent to one particular group of students, who stated that:

...he is too old (E1); and

...not capable of teaching outdoor education stuff anymore. (E4)

It was evident that the outdoor education teacher did not display the 'essential' teacher characteristics, and consequently, Outdoor Education was not selected.

Two of the groups expressed a preference for female teachers for physical education and outdoor education. The importance of female 'role models' was recognised by some respondents as vital to their participation and enthusiasm for sport and physical activity. According to the respondents, female teachers were important because they acted as role models by proving to both male teachers and students that females were just as capable as males in participating and performing in sport and physical education. Some comments included:

I think there is more of a need to have a female teacher in Outdoor Ed for the girls, because they should just show you that we can do things that the other guys are doing and do it better. (D2)

It is sometimes good to have a female teacher there so that they can show that the girls can do it as well and not just the guys, and we can be even better than the guys. (F2)

Furthermore, female teachers were considered by the respondents to be more understanding and 'nicer' than male teachers:

They are usually much nicer (F1); and

I prefer women teachers teaching PE and stuff because they are more understanding. (E4; F3)

According to the respondents, female teachers were generally more approachable and the girls felt more comfortable with them for activities such as swimming. As one student stated:

It's just easier to talk to them about stuff. Well you don't want to go up to Mr P (Outdoor Education teacher) and say 'Oh I've got my period. Do I have to go swimming?' (E2)

Moreover, one student inferred that the male staff of physical education and outdoor education at the school of the present study were sexist and condescending in nature. This presented an immediate deterrent to this student (and others) to selecting Outdoor Education. It was implied that:

The male teachers think that the boys are better than the girls, that the girls have to have more of a chance. They can be really patronising and condescending towards us. (F4)

The character of teachers of physical education and outdoor education, had an obvious influence in the selection processes of the respondents. The majority of the girls believed that the characteristics of the teacher were more important than the sex of the teacher. Consequently, as the teacher of physical education and outdoor education lacked the perceived 'essential' teacher characteristics, Outdoor Education was not selected.

With the groups of girls drawn from the 1993 Year 9 cohort being involved on camp in outdoor education activities, and with their prior knowledge of the outdoor education content, it was assumed by the researcher that the risk factor in these activities could be a deterrent for them. However, this was not the case. The general consensus was that although students felt scared or anxious about doing outdoor education activities, they knew they were safe, and therefore it was not a contributing factor in the girls not selecting the unit. Some of the comments included:

Outdoor Education is scary, very scary, but that's not why we don't not choose it. (C4)

You just don't even think about the risk. (B2)

It's not like it's even that risky anyway. (B3)

There is a risk, but it doesn't stop you from doing it. (F3)

You know in Outdoor Ed how it's dangerous, well I don't get put off by dangerous things. (D4)

Outdoor Education was generally thought to be 'risky', but this was considered by the girls to be an attraction, rather than a deterrent. The respondents in the present study implied that the perceived risks associated with Outdoor Education were not a deterrent. Therefore, risk was deemed not to be one of the major reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education by Year 9 girls.

Conversely, the perceived risks associated with Outdoor Education had a positive influence on the self-esteem of the respondents. During the 1993 camp, the girls participated in a number of activities including abseiling, a high ropes course and horseriding. All the girls found the camp to be extremely rewarding and the activities had a positive influence on their self-esteem.

I felt so good after I had done all of those activities. I felt really happy. (A2)

I reckon it was really good once you knew you had done it (abseiling). You felt really good. (A3)

Furthermore, the positive effects on an individual's self-esteem through physical education and outdoor activities, were recognised by the respondents in 1994. (Two students participated in abseiling outside of school). Some comments included:

You just feel so good knowing you have achieved something. It (abseiling) looks so hard and you get to the bottom and you're sort of like "Oh my gosh - I've done it" and you are so happy, you look quite stupid but it's fun. (D3)

Doing something like abseiling makes you feel good about yourself. (F2)

Anytime you do anything good in Phys Ed, you feel really special (F3)

The majority of the respondents recognised the benefits of physical education and outdoor education on their self-esteem and personal development. The perceived risks associated with outdoor education were seen to be a contributing factor to a positive self-esteem, and therefore were not considered to be a reason for the girls' non-selection of the Outdoor Education unit.

When asked whether girls perceive outdoor education as a male or female oriented subject, the respondents disagreed with the notion that sport, physical education and outdoor education were predominantly for the males. The girls claimed that they were capable of doing any sport in which the boys were involved, however, they believed that boys were generally more inclined to participate in sport and physical activity than girls. Some of the comments included:

I don't think it is true, because I do PE just as much as any other guy. I am quite capable of doing Outdoor Ed, it just doesn't suit with my options, and besides I just don't want to do it. (B1)

Girls don't try as much as boys at sport. The guys just get into it a lot more than we do. (C2)

When you think of PE or Outdoor Ed, I don't know, you just wouldn't think of it as being a boys' subject. (C4)

Boys just always seem to do sport naturally. They seem to want to do it more and they like it more than girls. (F1)

The respondents stated that the main reason for boys participating in sport, physical education and outdoor education more than girls was due to the way in which they were 'brought up'. According to the girls, parental influence and societal expectations played crucial roles in where an individual's priorities and interests were focussed. It was stated that the boys were encouraged to play sport from an early age, whilst girls were encouraged into other areas, especially the academic field:

Guys have always been told to get out and do sports and stuff when they were little. (E1)

Guys just have a lot more experience with survival stuff and that. (E1)

More opportunities are given to the guys, more than the girls. Like in sport they are pushed much harder. (E4)

It was suggested by the respondents that boys felt more capable and comfortable doing sport and physical activity, than studying more academic subjects such as a language. The girls believed that boys were capable of excelling more on the sporting field than in the classroom, hence more boys

enrolled in Outdoor Education units than girls:

More boys tend to do it (Outdoor Education) than girls because they don't want to do anything else. They don't want to work. There might be languages or something but they don't want to do that. They would rather go somewhere else where they don't have to think so much. (E1)

Moreover, the girls believed that the boys had a 'mentality' whereby girls should not be doing sport because they were not capable. Also, they insisted that the boys were intimidated and frightened by girls participating in sport, because they feared that the girls may be better than themselves. One student summarised these thoughts by saying:

When it comes to sport a lot of boys have the mentality that boys are better at sport and girls shouldn't even be trying. With most things though they are not like that but with sport they are more inclined, because sport is one thing where they feel they are not very academic and so sport is something they can excel at. They don't want girls to muscle in on their territory, especially if they are better than them. (E2)

Despite the fact that more boys than girls participated in sport, physical education and outdoor education, the respondents assured the researcher that these were not predominantly 'male' subjects. Factors such as parental and societal expectations were influential in the girls' selection process, and not the conjecture that outdoor education was predominantly a male-oriented subject. The majority of the girls claimed that they were just as capable as the boys of doing a subject such as outdoor education, however, this was simply not their priority.

Group A (1993) raised three points of contention which indicated incongruity in the girls' reasoning for not selecting Outdoor Education:

- * The girls stated that they thoroughly enjoyed the camp activities which included such activities as abseiling/horseriding/high ropes course, and yet they don't select Outdoor Education units

- * The girls stated that they enjoy activities which are different and are a challenge, and yet they don't select Outdoor Education units; and

- * The girls stated they enjoy team sports and group work. Outdoor Education units incorporate teamwork, cooperation and group skills, and yet they do not select them.

This discussion has presented the main reasons why Year 9 girls are not selecting Outdoor Education units at a selected government school in the metropolitan area. These reasons included:

no friends were doing it; the content of Outdoor Education units was 'unappealing'; other subjects were preferred; Outdoor Education was a coeducation class, whereas the majority of the respondents preferred single-sex classes; the lack of family experiences in the 'outdoors'; parental encouragement into other subjects; if the girls selected Outdoor Education units they would be enrolled in too much sport; and the characteristics of the Outdoor Education teacher were a deterrent.

Consequently, the perceived risks associated with Outdoor Education units were not a deterrent for the respondents. All the girls acknowledged that there were risks associated with outdoor education, but the positive effects of

outdoor activities on an individual's self-esteem were recognised and thus, risk was not considered to be a reason for non-selection.

Furthermore, there was a general consensus that sport, physical education and outdoor education were not 'male-oriented' subjects.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the major findings of the study; makes recommendations concerning measures to increase the number of girls enrolling in Outdoor Education units; offers suggestions for further research; and provides final comments.

Major Findings

A number of inter-related reasons emerged from the present study as contributing to the non-selection of Outdoor Education units by Year 9 girls.

- * Boys were stronger and better at sport and physical education activities.
- * Outdoor education was a coeducation class whilst the majority of the girls preferred single-sex classes for sport, physical education and outdoor education. The girls constantly experienced 'put-downs' from boys, and they believed the boys were 'showoffs' and they were too competitive, thus single-sex classes were preferred.
- * The content of Outdoor Education units was boring, too hard and too theoretical.
- * There was a lack of female role models.
- * There was a lack of family experiences in the outdoors.
- * The presence of friends in classes was considered essential, therefore all of the girls chose units which their friends had selected.

- * Parents encouraged their daughters into other units such as languages, Computing and Typing. These were perceived as more appropriate to the girls' futures.

- * Physical Recreation was more enjoyable.

- * The girls preferred other subjects such as French, Theatre Arts, Physical Recreation and Art.

- * Societal expectations were influential, as the girls stated that boys were socialised into sport from an early age, whilst girls were encouraged more into the academic field.

- * The girls stipulated that the characteristics of the teacher were more important than the gender of the teacher. There were a number of 'essential' teacher characteristics that were necessary for a student to select, and enjoy, a unit at the school.

- * Girls preferred female teachers.

- * The girls thought that if they selected Outdoor Education they would be involved in too much sport.

The extent of the present degree of influence of these reasons as to why Year 9 girls are not selecting Outdoor Education as a unit of study is illustrated in Figure 11.

The diagram represents the perception of the researcher as to why Year 9 girls are not selecting Outdoor Education. The findings from this research are difficult to quantify, thus the profile permits the reader to view a graphic explanation of the reasons for non-selection, and the extent of influence of each of these reasons. This diagram allows the researcher and the reader to rapidly identify the major reasons for non-selection of Outdoor Education by girls in two Year 9 cohorts.

The content of Outdoor Education, the lack of friends doing Outdoor Education, and a preference for other subjects were the main reasons as to why the Year 9 girls in the present study did not select Outdoor Education units. The preference for single-sex classes, parental influence, teacher characteristics, and the notion that if Outdoor Education was selected then they would be involved in 'too much sport', were also given as major reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education. Further important reasons for non-selection were the lack of family experiences in the outdoors, Physical Recreation was more enjoyable, there was a preference for female teachers, the negative influence of boys, and the lack of female role models in sport, physical education and outdoor education.

The perceived risks associated with Outdoor Education units were cited in the literature as being a major reason for the non-selection of outdoor education. In the present study, however, this was not the case. The 'risks' associated with Outdoor Education were not considered a deterrent to the respondents in this study.

Consequently, the main identifiable theme underlying the reasons for non-selection was gender-role stereotyping. Gender-role stereotyping is the social process which attributes particular behaviours, attitudes, values and beliefs

to one sex rather than the other (Bloot, 1992). This process appears to be largely responsible for the sex imbalances in enrolments in Outdoor Education. Societal expectations, parents, significant others, and the school environment all play an important role in the development of the individual and consequently, his or her involvement in sport and physical activity. Females are socialised to be cooperative, passive and dependable, and are encouraged into the academic subjects at school such as languages and computing. Males however, are socialised to be tough, aggressive, and strong, and are encouraged into sport, physical education and outdoor education where they can exert their physical prowess.

Traditionally, the outdoors has been associated with and described as a male domain (Knapp, 1985). This is predominantly due to the process of gender-role stereotyping. This process was evidently influential in the respondents' selection processes, as the majority of the girls interviewed stated that 'the way in which their parents brought them up' was a significant reason for them choosing not to select Outdoor Education units.

The Equal Opportunity Act (1984), the Sex Discrimination Act (1984), the National Policy for the Education of Girls (1988), the Gender Equity Policy (1988), and the Social Justice in Education Policy (1991) are some of the major policies that attempt to deal with the issues of equity, equality, and the present gender imbalances in sport, physical education and outdoor education.

The present study reveals that these policies have had some impact on the respondents to the extent that the issues of gender equity and equal opportunity were not suggested as reasons for non-selection, nor did they appear to be underlying causes, for the non-selection of outdoor education.

The respondents implied that the content of the Outdoor Education units was a deterrent. Moreover, the respondents' personal experiences influenced their decision not to select Outdoor Education. According to the respondents, the issues of equity and equality were catered for with the only cause for concern, review and possible change, being the introduction of alternative class groupings for physical education and outdoor education.

Overall, it was the intricate inter-relationship between all the identified reasons and the cumulative impact of their varying degrees of influence that was responsible for the frequent non-selection of Outdoor Education by Year 9 girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study give rise to a number of recommendations which attempt to address the non-selection of Outdoor Education units by girls. The recommendations, incorporating solutions offered by the respondents, the researcher and other research findings where relevant, are directed at the school of the present study, tertiary institutions and the Western Australian Education Department.

Recommendations for schools

*** Provide the students with increased opportunities to be involved in the selection of the content of physical and outdoor education programmes**

Instituting a system whereby students have an increased input into which activities will be included in the physical education and outdoor education programmes would increase their overall enjoyment of sport and physical activity. For example, provide a list of activities that could be included in the physical and outdoor education programmes and ask the students to rank them in order of preference. Decisions can then be made regarding the

programme's content, in accordance with the activities that are the most popular. Consequently, there should be an increase in the likelihood that girls would choose other physical education units such as Outdoor Education, because the activities in the programme would be more pleasurable and appropriate for them.

*** Review the class groupings of physical education and outdoor education classes**

Schools should try to provide a combination of single-sex and coeducational classes for Physical Education and Outdoor Education units. The practice of alternative class groupings would depend on the activity being offered. Some of the respondents in this study expressed discomfort with being surrounded by males when they were doing swimming, thus for activities such as this, single-sex classes may be more appropriate. The physical education staff should discuss the activities to be included in the programme/s, and decide which class groupings would be the most suitable. A combination of single-sex and coeducation classes would possibly increase the likelihood of girls choosing more physical education units, such as Outdoor Education.

*** Educate students and parents regarding the benefits of sport and physical activity**

The school should educate the parents and the students, especially the girls, as to the many benefits of sport, physical activity, and in particular, outdoor education, through such channels as:

- i) Health and Fitness Week incorporating various activities that promote the benefits of physical activity
- ii) Outdoor Education 'Outings', for example:
canoeing/bushwalking/abseiling days and/or camps which are open to all

students and their families to increase their awareness and participation in outdoor activities.

In order for young women to gain a sense of value of outdoor experiences and a chance to perceive themselves as able to learn skills in an unknown area, we advocate the provision of a range of non-traditional outdoor experiences within school programmes. Skills confidence and familiarity can be developed so that outdoor experiences become both a 'known commodity' and potentially a lifelong interest. (Cosgriff & Thevenard, 1993)

iii) Parent education days or evenings should be conducted to provide information to parents on the benefits of sport, physical education and outdoor education for children and provide an opportunity for them to increase their input and participation in the sporting and outdoor activities held within the school.

*** Identify and introduce role models for girls**

According to the literature and findings from the present study, females currently lack role models in sport, physical education and outdoor education. It is important for girls to see female instructors in action and to have women working on all-female courses (Johnson, 1990). By directly seeking out appropriate female role models, who could inform girls of the benefits of physical activity, especially outdoor education, and who could 'lead by example', the selection of Outdoor Education units could be potentially increased.

*** Review the timetabling of units at the school**

Administrators should review the timetabling of units at the school, in particular, Physical Recreation and Outdoor Education. That is, they could aim to ensure that these two units are not on the same gridline, and therefore, girls would not be forced to choose between the two.

Recommendations to Tertiary Institutions

- * Provide courses to address the issues of equal opportunity and gender equity in undergraduate teacher education programmes**

Presenting undergraduate teachers with a programme that addresses gender issues in sport, physical education and outdoor education, and provides a detailed account of favourable (or 'essential') teacher characteristics, should increase the adequacy of preparation of the trainee teacher for their teaching career. Recommendation #29 from the Senate Standing Committee (1992) stated that:

The Commonwealth, through the Australian Education Council, (should) consult with State and Territory education authorities and tertiary institutions to ensure that all teachers complete, as part of their tertiary training, courses which examine the particular needs of girls in physical education and sport.

Recommendations to the Education Department

- * Introduce regular inservice training courses for schools, teachers and parents**

According to Dyer (1988, p. 98):

Inservice training courses (should) be established on a regular and systematic basis by State departments of education and school systems to-

1. Raise awareness of the issues involved in girls' participation in sport and physical education
2. Provide information and methodological help for teachers wishing to develop new ideas in schools
3. Develop a network of teachers who can exchange ideas, resources and strategies for developing girls' self-esteem and body image through physical education and sport.

This medium would provide a forum for discussion and the sharing of ideas as to how schools can increase girls' enrolments into physical education units such as Outdoor Education.

Recommendations for further research

The disenchantment and lack of enthusiasm expressed by female students to selecting Outdoor Education is cause for concern. Why did these Year 9 girls perceive Outdoor Education as such an 'unappealing' subject?

The implications of such negative perceptions for the future of Outdoor Education are serious, with repercussions for all involved - institutions and individuals. Further research regarding the image and status of outdoor education in government schools is essential. A comparative study of the status accorded outdoor education in non-government schools would also be informative.

A valuable extension to the present study would be the investigation of girls who did select Outdoor Education in Year 9. Why did they select Outdoor Education? Do they enjoy all activities in the programme? Do they enjoy the coeducational setting? Did their families encourage them to select the subject? Furthermore, the boys who selected Outdoor Education could be asked similar questions to provide a male perspective on reasons for the selection of Outdoor Education in government schools. This added dimension would provide further evidence on which to base recommendations to redress the problem of the ratio of two boys to one girl selecting Outdoor Education in government secondary schools.

Research incorporating female and male physical educators and outdoor educators in single-sex, non-government schools could provide another

enlightening comparison with respect to reasons why girls select or do not select Outdoor Education units.

Outdoor Education is a valuable programme in a school's curriculum as it is an experiential process of learning that provides a number of benefits to students. It is primarily concerned with the development of student abilities to successfully manage the physical challenge of the natural environment. It is important that the non-selection of outdoor education by females be addressed, in order to maximise the number of female enrolments in succeeding years.

FINAL COMMENTS

This research has outlined the reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education by Year 9 girls in a selected secondary school in the Perth metropolitan area.

The factors that emerged as the main reasons for the non-selection of Outdoor Education units were based primarily on the 'unappealing' content; the attitude of the respondent; the influence of significant others; and gender-role stereotyping.

Recommendations for schools, tertiary institutions and the Education Department, suggesting measures that might be implemented in order to increase the selection of outdoor education amongst females have been proposed. Also, recommendations for further research have been suggested.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this study, through its investigation as to why girls are not selecting Outdoor Education, will achieve the following outcomes. Firstly, to raise the awareness of the Education Department,

tertiary institutions and teachers, regarding possible reasons for the continued lack of females in sport, physical education and outdoor education. Secondly, to inform the relevant institutions and individuals of the implications of perpetuating this lack of female representation. Thirdly, to suggest a range of positive actions which might be implemented to redress the sex imbalances in Outdoor Education enrolments, and encourage females to select it in the future.

If the above outcomes are accomplished the findings and recommendations of the present study will act to facilitate change to achieve a more equitable balance of males and females selecting Outdoor Education.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

1. Prefatory statements

- * introduction of interviewer and interviewer's background
- * explanation of the purpose and nature of the study
- * an assurance of anonymity in written reports
- * an indication of the importance of the interviewee's responses for the findings of the study
- * the expectation that interviewees would request elaboration or clarification of questions
- * a request to take notes and tape record the session, with an explanation as to why this was necessary

2. Topics to be introduced

- * reasons for non-selection of outdoor education
- * practical activities involved in outdoor education programme
- * perception of sport/physical education/outdoor education - are they boys' subjects?
- * perceived risks associated with outdoor education - are these a deterrent?
- * influences in subject selection
- * preference for male or female teachers
- * coeducation or single-sex class preference
- * family experiences in outdoor activities
- * self-esteem

APPENDIX B
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FIRST NAME

AGE

NO. YEARS ATTENDED PRESENT SCHOOL

YEAR 9 ELECTIVES

**WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MAIN OUTSIDE SCHOOL
CAMPING/OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES?**

WITH YOUR FAMILY?

WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS

eg. YMCA, CHURCH GROUPS

GUIDES?

DO YOU INTEND TO DO YEAR 10 OUTDOOR EDUCATION?

**AT THIS STAGE WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER PLANS ON LEAVING
SCHOOL?**

**DO YOU BELONG TO ANY CLUBS OR GROUPS PARTICIPATING IN
OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES?**

SPORTING INTERESTS/INVOLVEMENT

APPENDIX C

REASONS GIVEN BY YEAR 9 GIRLS FOR THE NON-SELECTION OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN A SELECTED GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

Student's Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to determine why fewer girls than boys are selecting Outdoor Education as a Year 9 subject. A sample of female students not enrolled in Outdoor Education will be interviewed in groups to determine these reasons.

The interviews will be audio taped. Later, the audio tapes will be played back and interpreted by the researcher. You will then be asked to clarify if the researcher interpreted your answers correctly. Only a certain number of students will be interviewed and audio taped (approximately 24 girls).

The interviews will not interrupt lessons, and should take no more than an hour on each occasion. The interviews will take place in a private, comfortable and appropriate location in the school, at a time suitable to the teacher, student and researcher.

The identities of the students and teachers involved will not be disclosed at any time. The names of the participating students will be kept confidential, with only the researcher knowing who provided the information.

Very little is known about why girls are choosing not to enrol in Outdoor Education. The findings from this study may provide a focus for further research into Outdoor Education, and in particular those factors influencing the participation of girls.

Students who decide not to participate will not be disadvantaged by this decision.

Any questions concerning this research can be directed to Janene Walton, Bachelor of Education (Honours) student, Edith Cowan University: on [REDACTED]

I, _____ have read the information presented here and agree to participate in this study, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree the results may be published providing that my name will not be disclosed.

_____/_____
Participant/Parent Date

_____/_____
Investigator Date

APPENDIX D

STUDENT HANDBOOK AND SUBJECT GUIDE

The Student Handbook provides parents and students with detailed descriptions of the range of courses offered at the school under the unit curriculum scheme.

The number of subjects available to the students was large. There were 31 different subjects from the component areas of media; languages; personal and vocational education; physical education; practical and creative arts; and computer-related studies. The only units which were compulsory were General Physical Education and Health Education.

The students were required to choose four units per semester in addition to General Physical Education. The following were specific requirements:

- a) students who selected a foreign language had to select both the semester one and two units (total of three units for the year).
- b) a minimum of two units had to be selected from the practical and creative arts component area, which included Art; Home Economics (Sewing); Manual Arts; Music and Theatre Arts.
- c) the personal and vocational education component area included Business Education; Health Education and Home Economics (Cooking), in which Health Education was compulsory in either semester one or two. The students had to also select one other unit from this area.
- d) the physical education component area included the units of General Physical Education, Outdoor Education, Dance and Physical Recreation, with General Physical Education being compulsory in semester one and two; and
- e) Media Studies and Computer Studies were optional units with no specific requirements.

The Outdoor Education units - 3.2; 4.2; 5.2; and 6.2 offered at the school of the study are presented in the student handbook and are described below:

3.2 The unit is designed to develop competence in dealing with the natural environment in a safe manner. Students will be given an understanding of emergency responses and survival techniques in a number of water-based activities...including individual and group survival swimming, emergency float aids, basic roping, water rescues and safe snorkel diving.

4.2 The philosophy base for this unit is the same as Outdoor Education 3.2 ...Activities include flat water canoeing, canoe rescues and sailboarding.

The primary focus of these two units was on water-based activities, in preparation for the following two units Outdoor Education 5.2 and Outdoor Education 6.2, where the underlying theme was that of small boat handling.