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# **Autoethnographic stories for self and environment: reflective pedagogy to advance ‘environmental awareness’ in student outdoor practitioners.**

## **Abstract**

There is increasing pressure on academic staff in this economically competitive world to enhance the graduate capabilities of students, rendering them employable as morally informed global citizens, in addition to enhancing their disciplinary knowledge and understanding. The BA Outdoor Adventure Education degree programme at Plymouth Marjon University, includes the module, Environmental Awareness through Adventure Sport, as one focus to engage students in the environmental ethics discourse of outdoor adventure and explore how adventure activities are managed with specific consideration to ethical environmental practices (Module Descriptor, 2016). We aim to achieve this through learning, teaching and assessment that includes autoethnography as pedagogy and research method. This approach enables students to experience nature through an adventure activity, in this instance, rock climbing. This is a human experience in a social and cultural context, in, of and for nature. Students are asked to engage with nature ‘making-meaning in, about, and for the various environments’ (Payne and Watchow, 2009, p. 16) as outdoor practitioners and leaders. These lived experiences in nature have prompted us to develop a framework where future students and other outdoor leaders can develop understanding and interrogate, the multiple, complex and nuanced ways outdoor activities can engage people with nature.

## **Key Words**

Environmental ethics, environmental awareness, autoethnography, reflective journal, outdoor practice

In 2013, Robbie Nicol asked in the pages of this journal, “is autoethnography a useful approach for outdoor educators in promoting pro-environmental behaviour?” By chance this question appeared in print as we were part-way through our first attempt at using autoethnography with students to interrogate their experiences in, of and for nature through rock climbing (Couper & Porter, 2016). In this paper we draw on those students’ accounts – both their autoethnographic essays and the reflective journals from which those essays grew – to articulate the range of ways that outdoor adventure connect people with nature and, consequently, what environmental awareness in outdoor leadership might mean.

This focus on the personal deeper understanding of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in outdoor leaders seems increasingly important in the context of the global biodiversity crisis (Marcos, et al, 2016; Davis, Faurby & Svenning, 2018), with many biologists now accepting that a sixth mass extinction event is underway (Barnosky et al 2011). Driscoll et al (2018) explain that biodiversity loss is driven by human population increase and resource consumption, both of which are shaped by society and government. They frame ‘society’ as encompassing (but not limited to) beliefs, cultural attitudes, individual choices and actions. The ‘government’ dimension focuses on political systems, political leadership and governance. In practice, of course, both components will reflect prevalent attitudes and values. Picking up on this cultural dimension other authors (see Adams, 2006, 2007; also, the review by Tam, 2013) point the finger at an increasing disconnect of people from nature, driven by urbanisation and mechanisation. For many, particularly in the Global North, human dependence on and interrelation with the non-human world no longer figures prominently in our day-to-day existence. If disconnect is the problem, it follows that increasing engagement with, and connection to nature, must be part of the solution.

It has long been recognised that propositional ‘knowledge of’ the natural environment and environmental issues does not necessarily result in pro-environmental behaviours (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Robinson and Greenough, 2009; Siegel, Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, & Bellert, 2018). Rather, research indicates that what is important is an emotional connection to nature; a sense of personal relationship with nature, or environmental identity (Pritchard, et al. 2019). It is this relational thinking that brings about the connections, the connections of human to human and humans to non-humans, the human being is ‘...a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships.’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 4) The focus of this paper is the relationship between humans and nature. ‘Nature connectedness’ has become a well-established construct in environmental psychology (Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Mackay & Schmitt, 2019; Tam, 2013), although the means through which such connectedness develops is still very much the focus of research. At the time of writing we are in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, yet it is believed there is ‘...a thread of silver lining. We’ll have more time for each other and nature’ (Louv, 2020). ‘Our relationship with nature has emerged as one of the most valuable sources of resilience and pleasure during lockdown’ (Collier, 2020). A few minutes of contact with nature, in some cases, has been shown to increase connection (see Scott, 2010), however, this ‘brief contact with nature may not be a strong enough manipulation to create a sense of oneness and deep sense of identity that fully captures nature connection.’ (Mackay & Schmidt, 2019, p. 7)

Work by Prévot et al. (2018a) found that everyday experiences of nature, particularly those that are embedded into life-routines, are important and that such experiences early in life are influential in later life (Prévot, Clayton & Mathevet, 2018b). An extensive review by Lumber, Richardson & Sheffield (2017) highlights the importance of activities that involve ‘contact, meaning, emotion, compassion and beauty’ with engagement in such activities

being ‘both indicators of, then pathways to nature connectedness’ (p. 21) (see also research by psychologist Miles Richardson and colleagues, Richardson et al. 2016; Richardson & McEwan, 2018). Many outdoor activities clearly fit this description, and so the evidence would suggest that those involved in and leaders of outdoor adventure education have potential to contribute constructively to a pressing global challenge.

All of this leads us, as educators, to the important question of how we might best support developing outdoor leaders to become effective agents in enabling others to connect with nature, where individuals who feel connected to and appreciate the values of nature are more likely to exhibit pro environmental behaviour (Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Clayton, 2003; Dunlap et al, 2000; Nisbet, Zelinsky and Murphy 2009). It can be argued that outdoor adventure education is ideally suited to achieve this ambition as it may impart knowledge, skills and frames of understanding that help us to comprehend, make sense of and live more sustainably in a super complex world (Barnett, 2000). The governing bodies that frame such activities do stress environmentally sustainable practices and promote understanding of the natural world (e.g. the Institute for Outdoor Learning, IOL, 2017; Mountain Training, MT; 2018 & the British Mountaineering Council, BMC), but we think there could be more to it than this. Our contention here is that student leaders’ *own* experiences of and feelings about nature provide an effective starting point for further understanding how outdoor activities connect people with nature. Through autoethnographic interrogation of their own lived experience stories, our students collectively reveal the multiple and complex ways we encounter nature through outdoor activities.

It is important to recognise context and positionality here. We have already acknowledged that lived experience of separation from nature is characteristic of life (for some) particularly in the Global North, but the *idea* of humans as separate from non-human nature is also culturally specific, characteristic of Anglo-European traditions of thought (e.g. Ingold, 2000;

Descola, 2013). As Ingold (2000, p. 2) highlights, ‘human beings are organisms whose life and reproduction depends upon their interaction with organisms of other species, as well as with abiotic components of the environment...’; the perceived separation of humans from the rest of nature, then, is culturally learned. It follows that we cannot make claims in this paper to any kind of universality. Rather, our conclusions focus on the outdoor sector within this cultural context.

The next sections of this paper offer some explanation of autoethnography and the autoethnographic pedagogy we implemented. We then turn to the empirical content of the students’ work, coded to identify emerging themes. Finally, we consider implications for developing environmentally oriented outdoor leaders by proposing a framework through which student outdoor leaders and others could investigate how they, and those they work with could be engaged with nature in a pro-environmentally way.

### **Autoethnography**

Reed-Danahay (1997, p. 2) explains that autoethnography emerges from three distinct writing genres: ‘native anthropology’, whereby researchers interrogate their own cultural context; ‘ethnic autobiography’, in which members of minority groups articulate their own stories; and ‘autobiographical ethnography’ which involves anthropologists enriching ethnographic writing with personal experience. These three genres reveal the inter-relating dimensions of the self (auto), culture (ethno), and the research process (graphy) (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Humberstone, 2011). As emphasis on each dimension varies, the resulting autoethnographic accounts will differ in style (Wall, 2006). Foregrounding relations between self and other, the self ‘moves fluidly from centre to periphery and back’ (Humberstone 2011, p. 499). Autoethnographers thus attempt to understand others, revealing something of the socio-

cultural context, through a focus on the self (Duckart, 2005). In doing so they take up two identities, as researcher and participant (Hoppes, 2014). Autoethnography thus becomes a powerful tool for practitioners whose work is dependent upon human relations and their socio-cultural settings, including social workers, educators, counsellors and others (Chang, 2008).

As a form of analysis, autoethnography begins with the lived experience of the self, yet seeks to articulate or perhaps critique, culture and cultural practices (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016, Humberstone and Nicol, 2020). This move beyond the self – the combination of ‘introspection and cultural analysis’ (Hokkanen, 2017, p. 27) – distinguishes it from personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is thus a matter of ‘zooming in’ to personal, embodied experiences and ‘zooming out’ to wider cultural concepts and framings (Chang, 2008, see also Bahadir, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), ‘In this process you zoom in on the details of your life and zoom out to the broad context.’ (Chang, 2008, p. 137) When required to zoom in this often means embracing vulnerability, presenting an intentionally vulnerable subject, although Jones et al (2016) note that choices may also be made to mitigate vulnerability and potential exposure to criticism. This makes it a particularly challenging form of qualitative research (Wall, 2008).

In writing, the key to autoethnography is reciprocity. An autoethnographic account seeks to establish a reciprocal relation with its audience, where the reader identifies with the lived experience(s) of the author (Jones et al, 2016; Humberstone, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this respect autoethnography is

an artistically constructed piece of prose, poetry, music or piece of art work that attempts to portray an individual’s experience in a way that evokes the

imagination of the reader, viewer, listener [...as...] observer of their own story and its social location (Muncey, 2010, p. 2).

These highly personalised accounts, drawing on personal experience, thus connect with others to extend socio-cultural understanding (Sparkes, 2000).

### **Autoethnography as pedagogy**

The module experienced here is a Level 5 module that meets the requirements of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The module entitled Environmental Awareness through Adventure Sport has eighty percent of the assessment based on the autoethnographic essay. The students produce this essay following a series of lectures that include both theory and practice where students follow an autoethnographic pedagogy. The advantages of using qualitative methodologies, in which researchers aim to ‘capture authentically the lived experiences of people’ (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2008, p. 275), are now more widely recognised in relation to their potential contribution to outdoor adventure education.

In adopting an autoethnographic pedagogy, we were explicitly asking students to begin with their own experience, paying attention to the affective domain and to their own actions and ways of being. The intention is that writing about this experience pushes them to interrogate it, as students decide how to represent and reconstruct their experiences, social and environmental worlds (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Sparkes, 2000). This interrogation goes beyond the self, the reflexive analysis has a performative function, in this instance addressing engagement in and with the environment. This may bring about a change, a reconsideration of approach and action (Jones et al. 2016; Humberstone & Nicol, 2020). ‘Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we



discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable' (Richardson, 1994, p. 516).

The autoethnographic pedagogy situates the teacher in their own teaching and in the students' learning; and the students situate their learning in their own selves and the teacher's teaching (Armstrong, 2008). In this instance the experience is shared by the students and the teacher who facilitates the learning and engagement in and with the environment. The teacher is part of the experience, this may be through participative enquiry, where students and teachers learn and act together where the educational challenge is in connecting memories, experiences and theories of the world and understanding how these are structured in the places that we visit (Carr, 1995; Nicol, 2013; Humberstone & Nicol, 2020). 'Outdoor experiences are physical, emotional, intellectual, social and sometimes spiritual experiences'. (Martin, Franc & Zounkova, 2004)-Adopting an autoethnographic approach in this module asks students to explore their experiences in whatever ways they choose, encouraging curiosity and understanding to explore their own environmental awareness, pro environmental and sustainable practice.

The teaching of autoethnography and autoethnographic pedagogy can lead to 'a critical explication of human experience' which may result in 'building theories and theorems of knowing' that in turn may be 'cross-applied in everyday living and can serve as evidence of academic knowing' (Bryant, 2016, p. 538). This approach has the potential to help students foster connections between lived experiences, academic study and their social worlds (Moriarty and Adamson, 2019).

The auto-ethnographic outputs of the students once complete are assessed, despite Sparkes (2000) concerns over how to pass judgement on such narratives. He suggests they need a 'form of theoretical abstraction or conceptual elaboration' (p. 24) where specific criteria may

be called upon to inform judgement calls. This module sits within the confines of an undergraduate degree that has socially constructed norms and expectations. The learning outcomes are set out in Table 1, and the autoethnography is assessed through the first two, paying attention to students' application of qualitative research methods and critical appreciation of environmental ethics in practice.

*Table 1: Module Learning Outcomes.*

The form of assessment is an autoethnographic essay, with students instructed that this should discuss their 'experiences and interactions within the outdoor climbing environment' (unpublished coursework guidance). Within this framing the students select the themes they wish to explore through collaboration with staff and peers, drawn from their lived experiences and personal journals.

The importance of reflection in learning has roots in the work of the renowned philosopher of education John Dewey (1933), who argued that experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning. Our pedagogy prompts students to engage in a triangulation of practice, discussion and reflection to make sense of their experiences (Moriarty & Adamson, 2019). They are required to keep a journal in their preferred medium throughout the module. This is not dissimilar to the approaches of Cook (2000) and Park (2003), in their use of learning journals, except here: i) we do not assess the journals, and; ii) this non-assessment does not detract from students' engagement with them. Keeping a journal ensures the learner is at the centre of the module: they have ownership of it and are thus empowered to engage in ways that help them to make sense of their own thoughts and ideas. Students submit the journal as an appendix to their autoethnographic work and are expected to make direct reference to it in

that work. In effect, the learning journal provides an evidence file of the experiences articulated in the autoethnographic accounts.

There is a growing body of research in higher education that points to the benefits of journal writing in supporting students' self-reflection, critical thinking and writing, as well as development and demonstration of professional values or skills (Hubbs & Brand, 2005; Jarvis, 2001; Morrison, 1996; Ning Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Keeping a journal can help to connect theory and practice, facilitating reflective practice (Noveletsky, 2006). Ning, *et al* (2011) note increasing interest in the use of journals 'as part of a reflexive metacognitive strategy' (p. 519). Students develop personally and professionally through reviewing their own learning strategies and behaviours, connecting theory and practice and developing higher-order thinking skills (Connor-Greene, 2000; Gleaves, Walker, & Grey, 2008; Jarvis 2001; Kerka 1996; Mills 2008; Schön 1983).

In practice, the use of personal journals on the module offers students the opportunity to be reflective, before, during and after an experience. At the start of every practical session, including the first, students are asked to reflect on their feelings at that moment in time, their preparation for the day ahead and their expectations. The coursework guidance makes it clear that the journal should not just be a bland description of objective facts; students are asked to put *themselves* into it, and to consider how they prefer to capture their experience – using other media such as photographs, headcam, video or audio recordings, if they wish to.

Guidance on the kinds of things they might consider (Table 2) are intended as prompts to get them started. During the day students have freedom to develop their journals at a time and moment that suits them and the moment, either alone or with others. This embeds an implicit message that reflection is something that can/should happen all the time, encouraging students to see reflective practice as a normal state-of-being. As with other fieldwork there are opportunities through these extended periods with students for more informal, as well as

formal discussions to take place, that may add to the richness of their experience. After the experience (including on the journey back to campus) students are encouraged to reflect on the day, whether their expectations were met, and how their feelings may have changed. This approach is similar to the examination of a slow pedagogy undertaken by Payne and Watchow, (2009).

Students are encouraged to capture their experiences as quickly as possible before other events take over minimising the influence of other experiences. For the purpose of the students learning and the making meaning of their experience for the autoethnography, in this instance, students are expected to spend time on their journal outside of timetabled sessions. This may be alone or with others and seminars are built into the module to review journals and discuss themes that may be arising.

*Table 2: Prompts for reflective journals (Unpublished coursework guidance).*

With the personal nature of autoethnography it is necessary to consider the ethical implications of such work. Sikes (2015) suggests that ethical issues and questions of ‘truth’ can be more complex than when using other research strategies. In our case, the students are never working in isolation. In the telling of their own stories, other students and staff may potentially be identified. Preparation for the assessment thus includes attention to such issues. We use guidelines adapted from Sikes (2015), reproduced here in Table 3. We specifically ask students to consider the care that needs to be taken when including others (friends, colleagues, perhaps even family) in their writing.

*Table 3: Prompts for ethical consideration (adapted from Sikes, 2015, p. 2).*

Reflexive methodologies that allow for flexibility and seek deep understanding of a specific phenomenon lend themselves to outdoor adventure education research (Wrigglesworth, 2018). If autoethnography requires attention to self-and-other, it ‘holds self-conscious introspection ... as invaluable’ (Brandy, 2014, p. 32). Through this module we are specifically asking students to pay attention to themselves and non-human others: to develop self-awareness and environmental awareness through *self-in-environment* awareness. They are drawing upon their experiences and feelings, making connections that allow the cultural contexts to unfold (Humberstone, 2009). Students can tell the story as they see it, from their perspective and as they wish to re-present it, but the ethnographic move of autoethnography asks them to zoom out to think beyond themselves.

In the next section, we draw on students’ autoethnographic accounts and their journals. Rather than analysing the effects of the autoethnographic approach on students’ learning, in this paper we treat their journals and autoethnographic essays collectively as a corpus of work that gives insight into personal interactions with, and understandings of, the natural environment through rock climbing. Through thematic coding, we aim to articulate not what dominates or might be generalizable to all, but the diversity of these interactions and understandings, and what we might learn from this diversity.

### **Experiencing nature**

Among the descriptions of climbs and climbing in the students’ work, there were many references to the technicalities of the activities. This was entirely anticipated, as the practical components of the module are designed to advance students’ skills in the field of traditional rock climbing, whatever their starting point. Many were learning to use elements of climbing gear for the first time – including, in some cases, climbing shoes:

“It was quite a difficult climb but the grip you get from the shoes was amazing. This has definitely increased my climbing ability and my confidence as I can trust in my equipment to keep myself safe and not fall/slip off the rock!” (student journal, after purchasing some climbing shoes)

The module focuses explicitly on the natural environment, yet propositional knowledge of the environment has low presence in the journal entries. References that are incorporated are restricted to recognition of a particular plant or bird species being present:

“Throughout the morning (probably because I was so quiet and thoughtful) I was really aware of the birdlife that was calling around us. Tits, robin, crows and other calls I didn’t recognise.” (student journal)

But comments such as these are infrequent. There were, however, instances where this cognitive propositional knowledge moved into an *embodied* cognitive knowledge, articulating cognitive knowledge in terms of its implication for bodily climbing capacities:

“I remember thinking about the ‘veins of mica’ which run through the granite, my foot had slipped using those last week, and I didn’t want to make the same mistake, so I reminded myself not to use mica as a foothold because it has a polished feel to it.” (student journal)

This illustrates that human perception of the world is ultimately embodied: *understanding* inheres in the intersection of body-and-world. In the words of Merleau-Ponty (1962), ‘Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of “I think that”, but of “I can”’ (p. 15). Through bodily experiences of the environment, we both perceive the world and learn how to move our bodies, and this knowledge becomes sedimented into our bodies (see also Ingold, (2010), and Brown and Humberstone, (2018), for corporeal experiences of the sea). Human

knowledge of the world is thus predicated upon our bodily being and capacity to act in it, our body our “only metric of the physical world” (Merleau-Ponty 1995/2003, 213). Merleau-Ponty thus challenges both the mind/body dualism and notions of body/environment separation.

There was some evidence of rule-based ethics guiding interactions with the non-human environment. This is illustrated here when comments are made on a ‘desire line’ (where walkers and climbers have taken a shortcut to access the climbing area):

“...this spoilt the environment for me as other routes could have been taken and then there would have been no evidence of outdoor adventure use and no criticism from the environmentalists of our activities. This is very important to me personally.” (student journal)

This reflects the ‘leave no trace’ ethos that is commonly promoted within the sector and codified in governing body guidance (e.g. IOL, 2017; MT, 2018 and the BMC). Indeed, there were instances where students made direct reference to such documents. This is unsurprising, as familiarity with this kind of guidance is inevitably embedded in the students’ taught programme.

An aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment was very much in evidence in the students’ work:

“The views from the top of the cliff were brilliant, you could see all the way to Brixham and the calm ocean emphasised the beautiful landscape.” (student journal)

“The sounds from the environment played an important role for me today as the river nearby and the birds were very soothing and relaxing. I loved hearing the

sound of the water and it makes you feel so far away from the world.” (student journal)

This undoubtedly reflects cultural values, in terms of: i) culturally held attitudes towards the natural environment evolved from Romanticism, entailing a valorisation of ‘wild’ nature; ii) these cultural values in turn being embedded in many outdoor adventure practices, for example (in the case of this module) implicitly shaping the places we choose to climb. Students are generally unlikely to be aware that their perceptions of nature are culturally ascribed in this way prior to the start of the module; we introduce social constructions of nature during the module.

In contrast with the relative paucity of comments articulating propositional knowledge of the environment, a more prominent theme in journal entries entailed a different kind of recognition of non-human others, acknowledging the presence of non-human ways of being:

“I wonder how many birds and squirrels have sat on that pinnacle” (student journal)

“Trees were supporting themselves on inhospitable rock faces by their strong network of roots both anchoring them and giving them life. An up-rooted tree lying at a gravity defying angle across the rocky path was a stark reminder of how each foot or hand-hold could give way at any time.” (student journal)

“I sat on the top of a stack, listening, the wind was whirling around me and I watched as a crow was flying into the wind trying to hover to land on another stack.” (student journal)



At times, this recognition of non-human others was taken up in adapting climbing practices to avoid doing harm. It thus extended to an ethic of care:

“To avoid damaging a spider’s web across one of the cracks I was going to use as a handhold, it seemed only right that I located a different crack even though this made my climb much harder.” (student journal)

What is important here is the *acknowledgement* of the other, not as I-it but as I-thought, an ethical acknowledgement that exceeds subject-object relations, implying something more reciprocal (see also Adams, 2006). This has some connection with our next theme, which was by far the dominant in students’ work, including in their autoethnographic essays: accounts of the natural environment impacting the self.

Outdoor, adventurous activities by definition involve a bodily engagement with, or immersion in, the natural environment. This corporeal experience was evident in the writings of all students, and it is here that the autoethnographic requirement to embrace vulnerability is particularly pertinent:

“There was so much to contend with when seconding the climb, it had just started to rain, and the rock had become slippery. Instead of feeling like I could dance on the rock and really perfect my flexibility on the rock, I felt like an animal on ice, slipping all over the place. Everything I had finally become confident and comfortable with had gone out of the window.” (student journal)

“As I came up onto the pinnacle section my right leg started to shake from all the strain, I only had one foothold and I was trying to place gear in a crack next to my foot. The wind was picking up and I felt like I could fall at any time. I could no longer hear my partner’s voice; it was just a murmur down below. I worked

my way slowly round on the slippery edge and found a crack for my number 3 cam. Stuck it in, I felt safe. This experience felt like a struggle, I was being tested by the forces of nature, but it's through these struggles I gain a deep respect for nature." (student journal)

This embodied, material engagement clearly has affective implications, and over the years of running the module, 'fear' has been quite a popular choice of theme for students to explore. However, the affective impact is by no means always negative:

"It is amazing how the outdoors affects your behaviour and mood." (student journal)

"I felt like a child again, I enjoyed sitting in silence under a huge boulder I could peer out through a hole and see the whole world. My secret hiding place." (student journal)

For some students (and at some times), immersion in nature seems to prompt a heightened self-awareness:

"...climbing the route 'pinnacle chimney' where you come up onto a pinnacle, and you stand up on it. It was crazy! The sensation was incredible, I was 'a flood of senses' when standing on it, you feel really exposed, you can feel the wind ripping against you, it feels like you are going to be swiped off the pinnacle! (student journal)

"I felt actually part of the environment with the river below, the birds, the wind, and fresh natural smells and exhilarating sensations of being free and independent." (student journal)

“Rock climbing is a very spiritual and sensuous thing where my usual logical approach is challenged. I feel different, as if I had an invisible inner strength.”

(student journal)

Such experiences of mind/body absorption and ‘oneness’ with the natural environment (or spirituality) are already acknowledged in outdoor literature (Humberstone, 2011; 2013). The key thing here seems to be that immersion in the natural environment, foregrounding non-human nature, provides for a recontextualization of the self. The natural world is not only ‘the environment’ where outdoor practitioners operate, an insensible or impervious canvas that leaves us untouched. The hermeneutic principle applies: interpretation is always self-interpretation (Utsler, 2014).

The autoethnographic pedagogy, then, in asking students to both focus on themselves *and* consider themselves in a socio-environmental context, reveals a whole host of different engagements with nature. These multiple ways of experiencing nature in and through outdoor adventure activities are summarised in Table 4. They reflect the themes within the student journals ranging from the technical and rational, through embodied, ethic aesthetic, emotional and affective experiences, to a relational self-in-nature position – and perhaps even beyond, to self-*as*-nature.

It is important to acknowledge that these are, in effect, ‘etic codes’; themes that have emerged from the students’ accounts of their experiences and our academic framing of them. Our students have not necessarily described their activities in these terms themselves, although some have explored related themes through their autoethnographies. The important point is that Table 4 offers a framing that engages with the position student outdoor leaders are starting from in their environmental awareness. We offer this as a tool for helping future

student outdoor leaders to further understand, and interrogate, the multiple, complex and nuanced ways outdoor activities can engage people with nature.

*Table 4: Perceptions of nature through outdoor activities*

### **Concluding comments**

Robbie Nicol's intervention in 2013 queried whether autoethnography might be useful in promoting pro-environmental behaviour. Our answer, based on our experience is yes, but not only (and perhaps not even primarily) in its potential to prompt a desire to want to 'know more about' the natural world. Scientific and rule-based knowledge is not enough for fostering pro-environmental action at an individual level and while undoubtedly essential and helpful, it has so far proved insufficient for fostering pro-environmental cultural (and ultimately political-economic structural) change at societal level. The reflective journal and subsequent construction of an autoethnography by students has illustrated that individual interactions with, and perceptions of nature through outdoor, adventurous activities take many forms. It follows that environmental awareness or environmental orientation among outdoor leaders is/should be multiple and complex. If outdoor leaders are conscious of, and able to recognise such a spectrum of engagements with nature, they will surely be even better placed to reconnect people with nature, and thereby act for positive change in the world.

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