

Carpenter, C. & Pryor, A. (2004). A Confluence of Cultures: Wilderness Adventure Therapy Practice in Australia and New Zealand. In Boedorf, S. (Ed.) *The World of Adventure Therapy*. Proceedings of the Third International Adventure Therapy Conference. (Published).

A Confluence of Cultures: Wilderness Adventure Therapy Practice in Australia and New Zealand

Cathryn Carpenter & Anita Pryor

Abstract

In exploring where profession meets passion, practitioners in Australia and New Zealand agreed that *Relationships, Culture, Land, Healing, and Journeys* within the heart of our work. This paper presents the discussions of 76 wilderness adventure therapy practitioners attending the South Pacific Regional gathering near Melbourne (Australia, 2002).

Histories, landscapes, and cultural factors have influenced the evolution of wilderness and adventure therapy programs in New Zealand and Australia. Practice is different in each country yet over the course of four days - *with place, space, and time enough*, practitioners from either end of the Tasman Sea experienced a confluence in practice, where commonalities were found, uncomfortable clashes were explored, and agreement reached on certain personal, professional and cultural implications for the field in this region.

This paper offers a summary of passionate conversations, a collation of shared elements of practice, and presents agreed-upon strategies and recommendations for further consolidation of the field in this region. The structure of the paper follows a merging of practice:

I. Being in the Land - understanding the contexts in which these discussions occurred, including the importance of place, land, culture and spirit.

II. Making Connections with people and place - exploring the what, how and why of wilderness and adventure therapy programs in this region.

III. The Journey Ahead - impediments, future directions and possibilities as we contemplate the where to next.

I. Being in the Land.

In a world where our vision becomes ever more blinkered by the dominance of a single cultural way and where such dominance threatens the survival of other ways of thinking and being, there is an urgent need for more stories. (Taylor, cited in Neidjie, 1989, p.v).

At the 2nd International Adventure Therapy Conference in Germany (2000), delegates attending the South Pacific Regional meeting agreed that the content of presentations and issues being debated was stimulating and relevant, but in some cases didn't necessarily reflect the heart of practice in our region. Amongst other elements, access to 'people-free' places, with relative freedom to explore and with relative freedom to innovate, were seen as opportunities peculiar to our contexts. As Bunce had articulated, "In the case of New Zealand, we are increasingly aware of our unique cultural identity, and are finding that some imported theories and models of practice do not fit for us". (Bunce, 1997, p.46) These experiences provided the impetus for the South Pacific Forum.

In April 2002 seventy-six people from all states and territories of Australia, and from both islands of New Zealand gathered for a South Pacific Regional Wilderness Adventure Therapy Forum in Victoria, Australia. The invitation was directed towards practitioners and others using activities and adventures in the outdoors for specific therapeutic purposes. Primary aims for the forum included to share practice, to plan for a consolidated regional approach, to increase our understanding of the heart of practice in this region, and to disseminate outcomes at the 3rd International Adventure Therapy Conference.

A pre-forum questionnaire helped to shape the four-day event, facilitated by a professional from outside the field. Questions posed in community sessions led to smaller, self-facilitating discussion groups, which in turn fed back to the larger community. A practitioner from Europe assisted us to critique our own conversations through 'fishbowl debates'. In this way, the forum was made up of *shared conversations* rather than formal presentations, enabling delegates to attend as both practitioners sharing their expertise, and as participants engaged in learning. Emergent 'areas of interest', 'hot topics' and the 'heart of our work' are ultimately what guided the experience. All discussions were documented and compiled by forum organisers, as '*Shared Conversations*' (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002). A database of practitioners, and a website for the field in this region were further outcomes. www.therapeuticadventure.com.au

In examining the heart of practice, delegates were asked what they saw as significant in shaping the work, practice, programs and experiences for participants in this region. A summary of answers includes:

- Ready access to National, State and Regional Parks.
- Parks are large enough to provide a sense of remoteness and "naturalness".
- Provision of a non-judgemental and supportive environment within programs.
- 'Time, Place and Space' to explore new coping mechanisms, relationships, and

- definitions of self within programs (especially in wild places).
- Essential elements: Relationships (with Self, Others and Environment), Process / Processing, Choice, Risk, Experience/ Experiential, Personal Responsibility, Reflection, and Healing/Growth.

These elements individually are not necessarily unique to the South Pacific Region. When practitioners explored how these elements interact within the heart of their practice we all gain insight into the unique approaches within the South Pacific experience of wilderness adventure therapy.

During our shared conversations, Land, Culture and Spirit emerged as major undercurrents in our practice. These themes at times caused small ripples that seemed to slide by with little notice, then suddenly reverberated within the group, forcing participants to re-examine their own practice in the light of these issues. Threading their way throughout the course of the forum, whatever the topic or question raised, these same themes bubbled to the surface of conversation across the community. “Being in the land, and connecting to the whole experience, culturally and spiritually is connection that most of us with Euro-Celtic heritage have forgotten in the last 500 years” (Ellis-Smith, 1999, p. 54). Obviously, the forum provided an opportunity for many to remember these aspects in our work, and it became clear that in future attempts to understand how practitioners see their field or profession, we must further explore themes of land, culture and spirit.

1. Land - the first significant theme included discussions on the words we use (or don't use), to describe wild places we access for our work. The use of the word *wilderness*, could be interpreted as ignoring the traditional habitation and spiritual connections of the Maori and Aboriginal people. Talk of ‘people-free places’ was discussed as implying ‘culturally-free’, thereby again ignoring traditional heritage. During the course of the forum, the words *land*, *country* and *bush* became more commonly used by many to describe the wild places accessed for the work. As an indigenous participant at the forum explained, “you just need to say land and it brings up so much” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.51). Some believe land, country, bush, are at the heart of their practice. Small groups of delegates defined their practice in the following ways:

- *“Using the Earth’s gifts and its magic to help heal people. All with a big dose of human compassion and awareness” (p.26)*
 - *“Bush Change Experiences” (p.27)*
 - *“Listen to the land –learn and know. Build this. Be honest with program experience. Grow something authentic. Rituals are of the land” (p.33)*
 - *“Reconnecting people to the land in which we live”(p.33)*
- (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002).

2. Cultural Presence - the second significant theme was acknowledgement (or lack of acknowledgement), of the cultural presence inherent in the Australian and New Zealand landscapes, as well as the traditional custodians of the land we access for our programs. Adopting indigenous ‘Rites of Passage’ experiences, and ‘telling traditional stories’

emerged as ethical dilemmas for those practitioners seeking to respect the traditions, cultures, languages and rich indigenous histories associated with the land. This issue is of international concern for some, as Wilson-Schaefer (of mixed North American heritage) stated, “white minds tend to seek out ceremonies, rituals or magic as a fix... when this knowledge is not deeply grounded in the worldview of its own culture it loses all meaning and power” (Wilson-Schaefer, 1995, p. 6). As a participant of the forum suggested, “don’t take our rituals, create your own” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.34). Whilst it appears that ‘seeking permission’ from cultural custodians is embedded within practice in at least northern New Zealand and the Northern Territory in Australia, during the course of the forum more practitioners came to understand this as an ethical and moral imperative in their work. One practitioner from New Zealand (NZ), stated, “How I work and operate in wilderness and outdoors areas is based on the treaty of Waitangi, a cornerstone of practice and belief, and a wonderful vehicle for how NZ people work” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p. 33).

3. Spirit - the third significant theme that emerged within various discussion groups was that of the importance of spiritual connection with the land for participants and staff within programs. There was some talk of the need to agree that this concept has different meaning for people from different cultures, but spirit is central to the heart of practice for a significant number of practitioners. “Land is not real estate...land is part of the essence of who indigenous people are. It needs to be understood within the context of their spirituality and their holistic sense of creation and humanity” (Wilson-Schaefer, 1995, Feb 16). For a small group of practitioners their practice was defined as, “Cleansing of the spirit and soul with excitement” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.25).

In examining where land, culture, and spirit meet, we must somehow include the dynamic processes surrounding an experience where intuition, feelings, history and trust play a part. Perhaps honouring of culture and land, creation of space and time, and trust in the natural processes at work, within an experience of country is a way of connecting these themes. Along with an examination of our behaviours and use of language, these elements become important in shaping a cultural identity of practice for any region. If we seek to gain broader understanding of wilderness adventure therapy, developing a shared language over time will be critical to a sense of collective identity. As Brookes states, “the language we use does not merely convey our thoughts; it shapes our thinking” (1994, p.25). During the forum, Gilsdorf also reflected, “Reconciliation is a deep process. The essence of what you are doing is about reconciliation – from an outsiders perspective this might be fundamental” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.35) to understanding the heart of practice.

II. Making Connections with People and Place.

“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come to help me because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Aboriginal Activist Sister, cited in Loynes, 2002, p.123).

This section summarises current practice in the region, including how and why programs operate, an overview of both participants and providers, as well as typical programs experiences. A summary of essential elements of practice is also presented. It needs to be acknowledged that this provides only a general representation of programs within the region, as the information is limited to only those programs and organisations that enabled practitioners to attend and/or those practitioners who elected to attend the forum.

1. Program Settings:

Programs represented at the forum operated as small businesses or not-for-profit organizations. Several possible implications arise from this fact. Firstly, the relatively small size of organizations may make programs more vulnerable to changes in political and social climate. Secondly, economies of scale would suggest that smaller organizations may be relatively resource-intensive, whereas larger programs may find greater efficiency in operating structures thereby making their programs cheaper to run overall. In addition, without collaboration, smaller programs and organizations may be less likely to have models and practices incorporated into broader social service structures (for example, in health and education) and may therefore remain reliant on shorter-term financial support.

2. Program Staff:

Programs represented at the forum generally employ 2 – 4 full-time staff and 2 – 6 part-time staff. Diverse educational and training pathways for staff were identified, with over 40 different qualifications listed by practitioners. The fact that practitioners undertook so many educational or training pathways to reach their current positions speaks of certain conditions and implications worthy of consideration. Firstly, this fact may make for rich diversity within staff teams, leading to diversity in practice styles and/or approaches. (Carpenter, Cherednichenko, & Price, 2000). This factor may also reflect greater employment mobility, which may be due to job opportunities or the move towards short-term funding in the social services. On the other hand, broad ranging educational and training pathways for staff may reflect a relative lack of education and/or training options, and may lead to inconsistency in practice standards (Crisp, 1997). These ideas are yet to be rigorously tested within the region.

3. Program Clients:

Programs represented at the forum provide services for 50 - 80 clients each year (including pre- and post-experience services). Where programs involve wilderness /outdoors / bush experiences, groups are made up of 8-10 participants, with 2 to 4 staff in attendance. Clients are drawn from both urban and rural environments. It appears that programs in the South Pacific recruit clients experiencing broad-ranging health and life issues. Reasons for engaging with the services represented at the forum included the following client issues, as described by practitioners:

- ‘Adolescence’ – including health and well-being.
- Self-esteem -and other issues related to sense of self.

- ‘Behavioral issues’.
- Personal management –including personal, social and living skills.
- Substance misuse and abuse, and related health risks and issues.
- ‘At risk’ indicators –personal, social, environmental, emotional, legal.
- Grief and loss.
- Unemployment.
- Social, family and educational system breakdown.
- Poverty, disadvantage, lack of supporting services and opportunities.
- Loss of culture, identity, discrimination and racism.
- Confusion over ‘place in the world’ –including sense of belonging.

In a closer examination of the reasons participants engage with services, we gain insight into the issues faced by community members within this Region. Handley argued “that two important aspects of Australia enable outdoor programs a high probability of success. These are: the abundance of rugged wilderness environments, and the perception of a need for programs that address issues such as juvenile justice, homelessness and increasing crime” (Handley, cited in Reddrop, 1997, p.167).

These issues are generally seen as common across wide-ranging communities in many contexts, including for indigenous and non-indigenous members. Some see these as problems associated with the deficit of an individual, and therefore interventions seek to ‘treat’ the individual. Others would argue that these issues are symptoms of a breakdown in community structures that traditionally gave members a sense of connectedness, belonging, and a role within economic and social structures. Interventions from this perspective seek to build healthy communities, which therefore promotes resilient individuals who have meaning, purpose and sense of belonging. “It is not the individual who needs healing; it is the social and societal arrangements” (Brookes, 1994, p. 27). Perhaps these different approaches could be envisaged as a continuum, with individual deficit at one end, and community building at the other.

4. Program Aims:

In attempting to understand the ways in which organizations in this region prepare for and attend to the needs of participants/clients, delegates were asked ‘What are the values that guide your practice? and ‘What leads you to develop programs in the ways you have described?’ Delegates were asked to share the ‘philosophical approach, rationale or mission statements’ of their programs. The following list was developed from program documentation and illustrates the wide diversity in aims for programs in this region.

- *“To provide a safe but challenging environment that encourages young people to make changes that will enhance their life chances”.*
- *“All journeys are made, by and for young people, to get the self respect, trust, courage and skill to have a good life because grog, sniffing, violence and crime are no good”.*
- *“To respect people, self and land”.*
- *“To experience a journey about challenge and choice”.*

- “To enable individuals to recognize their personal worth and to support and encourage them in working towards realizing their full potential in life, as identified by them”.
- “High quality, safe, challenging wilderness and adventure experiences can provide ‘at risk’ young people with an opportunity to learn and discover, and experience themselves, others and their environment in new and positive ways”.
- “We will be holistic in our attitudes and universal in our approach, and provide as many facilities, options and stratagems as possible. We will ensure that not one aspect or one single basis for change will dominate the whole”. (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.69).

There are numerous challenges apparent when reading this list. How do we collate such aims and approaches without watering-down individual approaches? How do we articulate the unspoken idealism apparent within the South Pacific Forum? ‘Enhancing young people’s lives’ might be seen as a dominant assumption, rationale or mission for these organisations, and as a worthy social service. Perhaps the ‘challenging experience’, or the ‘journey through land’ are seen as generally ‘empowering processes’, through which individuals are enabled to ‘value themselves more’ or ‘find greater satisfaction in life’. These statements also resound with moral and/or ethical value imperatives. To synthesise these philosophies might be to say that some programs consciously and unconsciously assist individuals to reconnect with the land, culture and spirit as integral to enhancing connections for people. Very important to a synthesis of common practice is to follow Brookes line of questioning, “What are our tacit assumptions? What is the background hum of social change and stability at work within these words?” Brookes (1994, p.26).

5. Program Processes:

The aims of organizations in this region are, as you would expect, generally closely related to the identified needs of participants. Although a reasonable percentage of practitioners (more than half) were recorded as having undertaken training in therapeutic techniques, or held recognized clinical therapist qualifications, noted was a lack of use of the terms *therapy* and *therapeutic* for describing the work. Practitioners in this region described the processes and methods of their work in the following ways:

- *Interventions* –for change.
- *Support* -to re-integrate into schools and society.
- *Improving* -the participants’ self-management skills.
- *Focusing* -on participant successes, finding solutions.
- *Assisting* -the process of change and personal growth.
- *Strengthening* -connections to others and community.

It is interesting to note that these processes may as well imply educational or social change experiences as therapeutic experiences or a conscious intentional process of therapy. Perhaps, as Crisp identified, “while the authority of a therapist is a relative ‘given’ in the UK and USA, this is often a source of tension with Australian clients”

(1997, p. 64). Whilst requiring further investigation, this tension may also describe a cultural characteristic for people/clients in this region as being less willing, less able, or less interested in accessing or paying for ‘therapy’. For a small group of delegates practice was defined as “to facilitate healthy change and personal growth rather than therapy” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.38).

6. Program Venues:

All of the programs represented at the forum used outdoors, remote or isolated bush environments, yet only one emphasized the “wilderness”. Discussions explored how the modern understanding of *wilderness* may more closely represent a *remote conceptual space* rather than an *area of land*, or physical location. As mentioned earlier, delegates experienced turmoil over the terminology used for places accessed by their programs (i.e., is it wilderness, land, country or bush?). One group chose to explore this theme more closely, and explored why programs use land, how programs related to land, and what participants gained by experiencing land. The following list explores the significance of the natural landscape, as described by practitioners during the forum:

- “*We operate in remote locations in order to foster disequilibria, group dynamics, a sense of connectedness to the earth and each other*”
- “*Provides a great dimension to challenge clients in physical and emotional ways*”
- “*Connection with the land inspires and teaches*”
- “*Journeying through remote, natural environments lies at the heart of our programs, the relationships that emerge, evolve beyond the duration of the experience*”
- “*The outdoor environment is the learning medium for the journey, exploring the cycle of land, self and others*”
- “*Bush/ land/ wilderness permeates all aspects of the experience in conscious and unconscious ways*” (Pryor & Carpenter, 2002, p.70).

North American practitioners describe one of the main uses of wilderness for therapy as ‘fostering disequilibria through a use of unfamiliar environments’ (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Gass, 1993; Luckner & Nadler 1997). Clearly this is also a factor in South Pacific, however the Australian and New Zealand practitioners appear to describe a *different* approach to wilderness, and a different use of place, whereby natural places are not just an alternative venue for therapy, rather, the heart of the therapy itself.

7. Essential Elements of Practice:

In an attempt to understand what practitioners felt were critical components in program development and delivery, a group brain storming process brought out wide-ranging essential elements within our collective practice. These elements were refined through further group processes, until eight conceptual components emerged:

- a) Relationships- Self, Others and Environment.
- b) Process / Processing.
- c) Choice.

- d) Risk.
- e) Experience/ Experiential.
- f) Personal Responsibility.
- g) Reflection.
- h) 8.Healing/Growth.

Each element was expanded to connect with stories of practice, key words of meaning and current theoretical frameworks. These words obviously contain multi-layered meanings, as well as diverse definitions. Without wanting to oversimplify or undermine complex program processes or in-depth discussions, one initial way of interpreting this collection of essential elements into a general statement about collective practice in this region, might be to say that within programs, individuals are readied to accept responsibility, make choices, take risks, reflect on their relationship with themselves, others and the environment, allowing healing or growth to occur. The practitioner may be said to support individuals by encouraging opportunities for transition to occur, within the experiential process they are providing. These elements are clearly worth investigating further, in order to more closely examine the heart of practice in this region.

III. The Journey Ahead

“We need the knowledge the pakeha [white people] brings from all over the world as well as the sense of belonging and the whakapapa [genealogy /history/culture] of the Maori. The separate paths our people have trod can unite in a highway to the future that is built on the best of both”.
Dame Whinia Maori elder (Wilson-Schaef, 1995 Feb 22).

In addition to exploring the ‘heart of the practice’, the South Pacific community of practitioners examined challenges and future directions for the field here. Together, delegates explored the question ‘What holds us back in our work?’ and examined Areas for attention and action. These conversations led to ‘Community Decisions’, made by the entire community of practitioners attending the forum, towards further consolidation of the field in this region.

1. Impediments to Practice:

Delegate experiences at the first International Adventure Therapy Conference (Perth, 1997) and more recent local experiences have shown that practitioners in this field find it difficult to move forward with a shared approach. Delegates of this forum were asked ‘*what are the obstacles, problems, impediments and systemic issues that get in the way or bog us down?*’ Program concerns included the typical effects of working in the outdoors (employment conditions; fatigue; stress; isolation; time away from home; lack of a union to tackle these issues) and the challenges of working with ‘sometimes difficult people’, including difficult personal feelings; emotional safety; setting aside personal judgements; and reconnecting back with ‘normal life’ after programs.

For those who called this a Profession, concerns included: program isolation, a lack of clear professional identity and credibility, a lack of clear educational pathways for employment, a lack of national guidelines and standards, a lack of ethical guidelines, a lack of accountability (except to the coroner's court!), a lack of effective evaluation and research relevant for this region, the 'ego' of some practitioners, and the 'dodgy-ness' of other practitioners. For those who described this as a Field, concerns included: a lack of shared language about the work, different cultural perspectives, a lack of good descriptions for promoting the work to others (including participants), a lack of knowledge/options about program evaluations, the difficulty of dispelling myths and assumptions in the community about the work, the difficulty of defining the field, and the frustrations of having others define the field for us.

From a social or political perspective, various problems were identified including inflexible education systems; labelling and stigmatising of participants; the breakdown of families; the creation of welfare-dependent citizens; lack of adventurous options for older people; community perceptions of wilderness adventure therapy; a conservative political climate; and short-term, tightly targeted, competitive tendering for funding were seen as impediments or difficulties affecting work. Regarding the natural environment, concerns about sustainable land management, high use of natural resources, increased regulation of public land, and growing lack of space were seen as impediments for this region. From these problems came passionate discussion about what was needed in order to consolidate and move the field forward in Australia and the New Zealand.

2. Areas for Attention and Action:

Delegates agreed on issues of greatest concern, and were invited to participate in small working groups of interest. Each group brought their recommendations back to whole community. Working groups explored issues of:

- a) *Ethics* - standards, lack of a professional association, boundaries, responsibilities, core values, principles, best practice.
- b) *Research and Evaluation* - development of shared resources, research database, evaluation tools, establishment of a working party.
- c) *Land* - 'respect', 'permission', belonging, roots/family, balance, connection, conservation, reconciliation.
- d) *Cross-Cultural Practice* – understanding, respect, listening, relationships, recognition of traditional cultures, beliefs, uncomfortable issues, processes for cross-cultural practice; and
- e) *Staff Skills* – core competencies, 'therapist', skills, accreditation, quality control, educational pathways to wilderness adventure therapy, the need for teams, Australian standards, collective identity.

While groups met and focused their discussion on the above topics, common field development themes came through. Emerging themes for attention and action included training, qualifications, standards in practice, research, literature, evaluation, ethical practice, cross-cultural practice, words/definitions, management issues, staff exchanges,

community networks and links, and funding submissions. These themes were determined to be priorities for the field, across a range of practitioner positions, experience and interest.

3. Community Decisions:

On the last morning of the Forum, delegates considered current needs and future directions: *'How will we further consolidate practice in this region?'* Although no time-lines were set, delegates agreed to work towards the following goals in small action groups:

- a) To develop a research resource.
- b) To form a group to gain funds for collaborative research, including for a review of evaluation tools.
- c) To embed Cross-Cultural Practice in our work now, including respect, permission, and invitation.
- d) To develop a set of ethical guidelines for the field.
- e) To continue to work on the following significant issues:
 - i. Clarifying who we are and what we do (identity, collective body).
 - ii. Australian standards for practice.
 - iii. Opportunities for staff exchange and peer supervision.
 - iv. Developing beyond this forum.

4. Future Pathways:

Now more than a year since the South Pacific Forum, some movement towards these aims has taken place. The upcoming 2nd South Pacific Forum will no doubt illuminate outcomes towards a clearer identity for the field here. The following list comes from later discussions particularly within the Bush Adventure Therapy Network of Victoria, and incorporates practitioners' hopes for action yet to be taken:

- a) A collection of the 'Histories of Practice' in this region.
- b) A study of current programs and 'Current Models of Practice' in this region.
- c) Development of efficient dissemination strategies, enabling open sharing of information in this Region. Includes development and maintenance of website, for information, dissemination, efficiency and interactive educational purposes: www.therapeuticadventure.com.au
- d) Encouragement of local, regional and national networks.
- e) A meta-analysis of research already undertaken in the field in this region.
- f) A Survey of current evaluation tools for practice and programs in this region (This to include culturally-specific tools, tools for process evaluation as well as outcomes, and tools that assist programs maintain the integrity of program processes within evaluation processes).
- g) Development of a professional association of wilderness adventure therapy practitioners to support good practice and nurture high standards.
- h) Sharing of practice between others and ourselves.

Conclusion: Journeys to the Heart of Practice

Wilderness and Adventure programs are gaining worldwide recognition as an effective approach to engaging people struggling with a variety of difficult life circumstances, in a participatory process of change. At the 2nd International Adventure Therapy Conference, approximately twenty Australian and New Zealand delegates agreed that an apparent lack of emphasis on ‘wilderness’ within international Adventure Therapy practice might reflect an inherent cultural or regional difference for practice in the South Pacific. In order to encompass this possible regional difference, the forum upon which this paper reports invited those within the field of ‘Wilderness Adventure Therapy’ to participate. Discussions reflected rich reasons for why natural environments are important to the ‘heart of practice’ in Australia and New Zealand, leading to deep debate around issues of Land, Culture, and Spirit.

Practitioners discussed, argued, shared, and challenged understandings of their own practice and the practice of others. Along the way, delegates ‘teased out’ and somehow ‘got at’ the characteristics of practice occurring within this region, across the breadth and range of practitioner experiences and programs represented.

For some practitioners living in Australia and New Zealand, practice could be summarized as an organic merging of:

- Programs *to consciously and unconsciously assist individuals to reconnect with the land, culture and spirit, integral to enhancing connections for people and their communities.*
- Practice *where individuals are readied to accept responsibility, make choices, take risks, reflect on their relationship with self, others and the environment, allowing healing and growth to occur.*
- And Practitioners *who support individuals by encouraging opportunities for transition to occur, within a shared experiential and/or therapeutic process.*

The terminology remains contentious: Are we therapists, practitioners or workers? Are we working in wilderness, nature, the land or bush? Are we a profession or a field? However, it seems practitioners in this region are committed to working towards a shared understanding of similarities and differences. This summary of shared conversations provides an early attempt to describe the essential elements of practice occurring within this region. From these conversations it would seem that practice in this region rests on foundations broader than the terms wilderness, adventure and therapy, and must include terms such as healing, journeys and relationships in attempting to articulate the means, methods and aims of practice in this region.

Confluence of Culture goes beyond the South Pacific region. These findings have implications for international practice, networking and research. It appears important, for example, that we attempt to value the unique evolutions of programs spawned in diverse cultural contexts, and seek to understand the differences. As this field continues to develop and grow, questions of theory and practice need to be explored alongside questions of land, culture and spirit. Appropriate evaluation methods and tools need to be

developed in order to define and describe the different cultural contexts and their implications for program development, delivery and outcomes. Ultimately, to examine practice without an understanding of the contextual conditions from which practice evolves may be to ignore the heart of practice.

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Authors Acknowledgments.

To the participants who brought their energy and passion to the South Pacific gathering, thank you! These stories represent your experience and expertise in the field of wilderness adventure therapy in Australia and New Zealand. We hope you will use your shared stories for better understanding of your own work and the work of others. We look forward to catching up again at the upcoming 2nd gathering, in Tasmania (July, 2004).

Author's Biographies.

Anita Pryor currently co-ordinates The Outdoor Experience Program (of Jesuit Social Services), an alternative program for young people experiencing difficulties associated with drugs/ alcohol. Within this role she supervises delivery of a therapeutic wilderness program and development of community-based adventure and wilderness programs, co-facilitated with a range of youth services.

Cathryn Carpenter currently co-ordinates and teaches within the Masters of Education - Experiential Learning and Development Degree, which includes a study sequence in wilderness adventure programs. She also coordinates the Outdoor Education subjects within the Bachelor of Education P-12 degree at Victoria University in Melbourne Australia.