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**The Heron Project:  
An Evaluation of Urban Solos within Outdoor Environmental Education**

*A Cross-Case Analysis of Eight Urban Solo Experiences*

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## Abstract

Practitioners within outdoor environmental education have been compelled to use local spaces and direct experience through place-based education and experiential learning. It is suggested that these approaches can lead to pro-environmental action and a sense of responsibility by developing place attachment to one's local environment. These approaches however, face challenges associated with certain confines of formal education. It has been suggested there is a need for more critical reflection, experimentation and creativity in diversifying the approaches; this research is in response to this need. Approached from the interpretive paradigm, this research is the creation, analysis and evaluation of what I am terming as the 'urban solo'. An urban solo is considered a counterpart to the wilderness solo commonly used in outdoor education and more recently outdoor environmental education. The objective of this research was to facilitate the 'urban solo' and investigate whether this reflective experience within an urban setting could be incorporated into the practice of outdoor environmental education. Each participant conducted a one hour-long urban solo within the Edinburgh city centre. The research draws from phenomenological and evaluative methodology and uses a cross-case analysis of the semi-structured interviews with eight participants. The themes derived demonstrated a model for 'experience of place', similar to current models of experiential learning. The outcomes reflected concepts associated with how individuals develop a sense of place. These outcomes demonstrate that the urban solo could be beneficial to the practice of outdoor environmental educational.

*Key Words: outdoor environmental education, place, experience, place-based education, experiential education, solos*

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Figure 1: Extract from personal journal on urban solo

22 August, 2012 06:00-12:00

*Getting out of bed this morning was not an easy task and yet as I began my walk to Holyrood it all seemed to invigorate me... my senses. I have realised that with walking you give yourself time and space. Things become clear.*

*Runners in vibrant colours make their way at a quick pace as I just sit.*

*This walk is a much different one than those I have taken through the woods. This thought brings me back to many memories. The thought this morning is that I should be able to do this. But now passing through my own theoretical boundaries, the theoretical being not so easy to live in, I pass into action... yet sitting still. And so becomes my first urban solo.*

Note: I have chosen to introduce you to the concept of an urban solo through my own experience, which in turn has affected the research process. The rest of my journal notes can be found in Appendix A.



# Chapter One: Introduction

## Welcome to the Heron Project

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil — to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. (Thoreau, 1862).

### 1.1 The Inspiration:

In the midst of the autumn season and countless sun showers, another group of students made their way to ‘Woodlands’, in the Highland region of Kingussie, Scotland. This group read and listened to passages of the Aldo Leopold’s (1949) ‘A Sand County Almanac’ around a tree as previous students had done in years before. They listened through lectures, ventured into the woods, and played “National Parks;” a game where a small piece of land was deemed for conservation. A discussion around park boundary lines brought upon a question; do these boundaries foster emotions of disconnection between people and nature? Natural spaces offer humans a great deal in a variety of ways, I do not deny this. Yet many who use it whether for educational or personal reasons, will return to another place they distinguish as home. While I too have felt the benefits of engaging and reflecting in such spaces and that this may deepen humans’ connection to ‘nature’, still one must ask the question; ‘have we taken the appropriate steps to directly reflect upon ourselves within our everyday context?’

### 1.2 Rationale

The rationale for this research is one of personal interest and professional development. In my experience working with people in natural settings, I have seen the gaps and theoretical inconsistencies that occur when transitioning individuals either into or out of ‘the field’. While I have watched youth have moments of profound reflection in wild settings, I am not so sure whether these revelations have returned with them to their everyday worlds. In my personal experience and love of being outdoors, I question whether individuals who engage in outdoor activity and even practice ‘living well’ through a leave no trace ethos, allow this ethos to prevail in their own urban place? I currently live in a capitalist, consumerist culture that strives for the unsustainable ‘good life’. While I try not to, a lot of the food I consume has travelled across the world and back again, making me feel that nothing is

inaccessible. I have worked a job for minimum wage and earned a lot of money for someone I do not know. I am enrolled in an education system that could be said to have its roots in inequality and I could be perpetuating this. I have also seen the goodness in individuals around me, and I have taken in the warmth of their smile. I have felt the sun on my face as I sat in a world of concrete and watched thistle seeds float by. I have listened to bird songs, wondered the stories of strangers and had moments of tears at their good will. While I wholeheartedly believe that ‘wild’ settings can offer individuals meaningful experiences and may even contribute to making them more environmentally aware, I think what is equally as important is to engage in reflection upon the lives we live every day. This concept is becoming prevalent within outdoor environmental education (OEE) through the use of place-based education (PB) and experiential education (EE). Focus has turned to the use of local spaces that people inhabit to provide direct contextual experiences and attachment to their place in the hopes of developing a sense of responsibility.

The idea of the urban solo was in light of the need for new and creative approaches within OEE and to provide a medium for critical reflection in ones’ place. A solo is considered a period solitude for an individual most often within a natural setting (Bobilya, 2005; Smith, 2005). Its roots can be found in many cultures, outdoor education (OE) and OEE having also adopted it. The time spent on a solo can vary from thirty minutes to multiple days. The intentions of the solo will differ depending on the context, but it is most often considered a time of reflection and relating to the land (Smith, 2005). The urban solo is meant to be the equivalent of the OEE wilderness solo, done within an urban setting. This brings me to my research question: can the urban solo be used within outdoor environmental educational practices? If so, what are its possibilities?

### **1.3 The Heron Project: Theory and Practice**

The Heron Project refers to the facilitation of the urban solo and the participants who were involved. A heron I walked by most mornings on my way through Lochend Park inspired the projects’ name. During this project I moved away from Lochend Park. Now I look out onto the Firth of Forth and to my surprise just out my window a heron stands amongst the lapsing waves, my solace. The Heron Project was created as a pilot endeavor to evaluate the potential of a reflective solo experience within an urban setting. This project was based on an emergent design,

which is flexible and dependent on the direction the research takes (Gillham, 2000; Thomas, 2009). The design and facilitation of the project was informed by the literature review. This paper focuses on the research and evaluation of an urban solo's potential use. There is an overview of the facilitation in Appendix B. The study was conducted from within the interpretive paradigm to engage with the complexity of the experience and is concerned with how the participants felt and interpreted the urban solo experience (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Silverman, 2005; Thomas, 2009). In drawing from phenomenological and evaluative research designs, I focused on understanding the meaning of the experience to evaluate whether it could be used within OEE.

## Figure 2: Red Umbrella Literature Review

I have in my mind a visual image of what this literature review should look like; beginning with a giant red umbrella in Lochend Park during a thunderstorm, my eyes peering out at the heron that lives there. The rain as a whole is thus representative of outdoor environmental education and the copious amount of ways it is expressed. As the rain falls onto the large umbrella of place-based education, only a small piece of ground is covered in the big scheme of things. The shade of red is that of experiential education and the way it shapes our experience of this place, Lochend Park. In this moment, to know this place and try to understand the affect I have on it and how I am affected by it. The winds of experience rush around as the Heron stands still. My eyes rest on a bird who spends most of its time solo, even amongst the chatter of the crows, moorhens, coots, mallards and many others. As I stand there in the torrential weather all of what my eyes take in and my thoughts grasp hold of is shaping my experience...my perception...my understanding.

Note: Figure 2 provides insight into my inspiration for the Heron Project as well as an outline for the literature review.

## Chapter Two: The Red Umbrella Literature Review

In a conversation one time I was told that ‘education is too important to experiment with’ to which I replied ‘education is so important that we must experiment with it’

*(Nicol, 2003, p. 88)*

The following research is being conducted under the intentionality of the outdoor environmental education (OEE) practice. The urban solo has been developed in light of the need for direct reflective experience within ones’ local place. Looking at a foundational concept of OEE, that community well-being and environmental well-being are interconnected; the health of that relationship relies on how individuals know and experience their place. I will address the importance of place and experience and their role within this research and in OEE. Within OEE these concepts are often employed through a means of place-based education (PB) and experiential learning (EL). I will review these practices and how they have informed this research project. In discussion of the solo concept, I will elaborate on how the use of the proposed urban solo could be beneficial to the practices of OEE.

### 2.1 The Umbrella of Outdoor Environmental Education

*Outdoor environmental education* is an interdisciplinary field, often utilizing natural and cultural landscapes (Szczepanski, 2002, p. 18). OEE draws from the domains of outdoor education and environmental education. OE is an interdisciplinary form of experiential learning that engages the senses and addresses the relationship between people and natural resources (Priest, 1986, p. 13). Within environmental education such thinkers as Sir Patrick Geddes had connected the qualities between environment and education (Palmer, 1998 p. 4). Geddes suggested that quality in education should be directed towards “people living and working in harmony with their communities” (Higgins & Nicol, 2009, p. 53). This notion of community well-being and environmental well-being occurs in a variety of cultures as addressed by David Abram (1996). Environmental issues and their effect on people’s health can be referred to as the ‘health pedagogic perspective’ and are important for working within OEE (Szczepanski, 2002, p. 21). Understanding the connection between the environment and community is an important premise of OEE. I will discuss in the

following sections how place, experience and solos can contribute to the well-being of the community in the hopes of benefiting the greater environment.

The domain of environmental education has been criticised for being rooted within an ideology of inequality, perpetuating societal norms (Bowers 2008; Fox, 1995; Gruenwald, 2008; Orr, 2004; Stevenson, 2007; Sanger, 1997). These societal norms are those of a western ideology that often marginalizes other cultures and classes as expressed by Bowers (2008). Issues arise within formal education in perpetuating fear of environmental catastrophes rather than fostering love and responsibility for the environment (Sobel, 1998; Sobel, 2008). OEE has also been criticized for being a set of ‘popular based approaches’ (Fox, 1995, p. 4) that just inform students of the country code, countryside interpretation, field studies or IEE courses (Nicol, 2003, p. 89). There are perceptual and physical barriers to OEE associated with formal education such as costs, qualifications, time and feasibility in accordance with curricular guidelines (Higgins, Nicol & Ross 2006). OEE has been viewed as something that occurs in far off remote place, which has implications against place attachment (Higgins, 1997).

Higgins (2007) suggests these areas need not be wild or remote but that urban can be equally as useful. The activities whether practical, interactive or reflective should “encourage students to take responsibility for learning” (Higgins, 2007, p. 2). Learning outdoors can allow practitioners to move beyond curricular lines (Nicol, 2003, p. 88) and to expand upon their subject areas (Higgins, 1997, p. 10), which is considered a good learning experience (Higgins & Nicol, 2002, p. 9). Sobel (2008) gives an example of a teacher in Vermont, U.S.A who approaches her history class through the use of local resources, oral histories, surveys and graveyards to engage her students while meeting the curricular needs. This demonstrates an example of synthesis of theory and practice (Dewey 1998; Nicol, 2003) and the opportunity to learn through direct experience (Beames, Higgins & Nicol, 2012; Falk, 2005; Higgins, 1997; Knapp, 1992).

## **2.2 The Winds of Experience**

According to Tuan (1977) “experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs reality” (Tuan, 1977, p. 8). Tuan’s (1977) model of experience comprises of sensation, perception and conception. Higgins and Nicol (2002) discuss how humans are multi-sensory animals

that, through our senses, understand and relate to events on intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual levels. Canatella (2007) suggests that the education system has reduced the time needed for individuals to engage their senses, limiting the way they construct their understanding. Diversifying experience, and thus understanding, is important as individuals build from, and generalize, past experiences to learn about new ones (Higgins, 1997).

Outdoor experiences can provide a more complex direct experience, which can provide multiple ways of experiencing and knowing it (Higgins & Nicol, 2002, p. 8). Yet “[to] experience in the active sense, requires that one venture forth into the unfamiliar and experiment with the elusive and the uncertain” (Tuan, 1977, p. 9). Thus, there is the importance of experimentation within education (Nicol, 2003). The urban solo concept is exactly that, an outdoor learning experiment in trying to understand what could potentially be a complex experience. Yet there is a need for more than just the experience (Knapp, 1992; Nicol, 2003).

### **2.3 The shade of experiential learning**

Experiential learning (EL) is considered a lifelong process involving first hand experiences connecting learners to real world issues and people (Higgins & Nicol, 2002, p. 4). I understand differences exist between experiential education and experiential learning and that the latter can be considered any form of learning rather than an intentional activity (Joplin, 1995). I am using the terms interchangeably, while relevant to understand the difference, they do not affect the research.

Kolb’s (1984) cyclical model is considered the basic guiding principle for EL as it transitions from concrete/direct experience to reflective observation to abstract conceptualization to active experimentation (Beard, 2010; Higgins and Nicol, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Chapman, et. al., 1995). Beard (2010) presents a model directed at experiential learning involving the transition from an individual’s ego to consciousness. Initially the transition occurs from ones’ outer world to their inner world via a sensory interface. Beard (2010) separates this into six dimensions: learning environment, learning activity, senses, which affect emotions, which affect the reasoning, and go onto create a change. Beard (2010) does not take into consideration the impact of previous experience within this model and how that affects any changes that may occur. Beard’s (2010) ideas of the learning environment and activity as a stimulus for change is similar to Palmer’s (1998) model of

environmental education, which involves learning ‘in/from’, ‘about’ and ‘for’ the environment to generate experience, concern, and action from learners (p.145). It is suggested that, to encourage action on behalf of the environment, learners must come to love and know their environment before they can take responsibility for it (Higgins, 1997; Sobel, 2008). Environment is not equivalent to nature (Ingold, 2000). I use this term in the idea that knowing your own local environment, urban or natural, can lead to a greater sense of place and affect one’s sense of responsibility to it. The importance of place will be addressed in the next section.

As the facilitator of the Heron Project I must consider Chapman, et. al., et. al.’s (1995) suggestion that experiential education is best understood not by definition but rather by approaches. Allison and Pomeroy (2000) state three categories: input, process and outcome, as being a framework of approaches for experiential education. This is important to consider as it suggests the impact of the facilitator, and that the role of the facilitator is important in encouraging meaningful experiential learning (Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Knapp, 1992; Nicol, 2003). The way experiential learning is taught will determine what EL takes place (Chapman, et. al., 1995). The teacher/facilitator can choose to; not interfere, to act as a prism or as a co-learner (Higgins & Nicol, 2002). I chose to have minimal interference prior to the urban solo experience and provided minimal structure (Appendix B) as suggested by Chapman, et. al., et. al. (1995). This was to allow for a more natural and emergent form of experiential learning (Loynes, 2002). Loynes (2002) expresses that structured experiential activities can sever the participant from their experience and is “counter to the organic and emergent nature of experiential learning as it takes account of environments, individuals, groups, cultures and activities and the experiences that arise from their interaction” (Loynes, 2002, p. 113). However, it is suggested that the process of reflection is critical to experiential learning (Boyde and Fales, 1983; Higgins, 2007; Knapp, 1992; Chapman, et. al., 1995). As a part of the research design, discussed in the following chapter, the semi-structured interviews will be used as a form of reflection. This could allow for participants to make connections to other relevant ideas or help individuals understand what cannot be easily understood experientially (Higgins, 2007).

According to Chapman, et. al. (1995) experiential education is at a cross-road and can either go the way of set tasks or expand the field by opening up to many learning opportunities. If EL is going to play a role within OEE than it is essential



these approaches are expanded upon. EL has the potential to help individuals develop place meaning and attachment if positively encouraged and engages with place in multiple ways and times (Kudryatsev, Stedman, & Krasny, 2011, p. 11). It is important to consider the role of place as a learning environment as it will differ between individuals as a result of their relationship with the place (Chapman, et. al., 1995).

#### **2.4 Lochend Park: The Role of Place**

The concept of place is complex and considered a ‘valuable resource for human development and environmental sustainability’ (Fettes & Judson, 2011, p. 123), perhaps because it is a factor of our attachment to a place. Place is a result of individuals’ relationship with the world and their existence (Canatella, 2007, p. 624). Place can exist both in the imagination and in physical presence (location and people) (Brown & Wattchow, 2011) and can change in appearance and attitudes (Kudryatsev, et al. 2011). To know a place intimately would be to know it in all of its shades and establish a healthy, meaningful relationship with it. Both Harrison (2010) and Tuan (1977) express that these descriptive meanings referring to moods, thoughts and other evocations are considered a ‘sense of place’. Sense of place can be created through developing “meaningful personal connections to the land” (Knapp. 2005b, p. 280), or through developing “experientially based intimacy with the natural processes, community, and history of one's place (Sanger, 1997). For Kudryatsev et al. (2011) a sense of place can be created through the combination of place attachment and place meaning and can be expressed in various types of places (Kudryatsev, et al. 2011).

Place can be considered a construction and can contribute to the identity of individuals and groups of people (Relph, 1976). This in return provides a source of security for people (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). It is suggested that developing this connection to place can encourage relationships with other people and the greater community (Higgins, 2007 p. 5). To know a place more deeply and intensely, will that change our relationship to the world and therefore our existence? If place is an experience of people’s attachment (Brown & Wattchow, 2011, p. xxi), it is important to know how people identify with, affect and are affected by their place, their community and their environment. Identifying with community place can be considered a “centre of felt value” (Tuan, 1977, p. 4), a factor of social interaction (Relph, 1976) and a product of culture (Brown & Wattchow, 2011). Place can be

understood more directly with the view of a landscape, or more subtly through reflection of human values and intentions (Relph, 1976, p.31). I would suggest however, that associating one's identity with place is not always positive. Are communities with a strong following of people who believe in racial, class or gender segregation healthy? There is an important role for reflecting on one's place, to question the identities associated with it and whether the community is healthy. There is a need to be critical (Gruenwald, 2008).

Perhaps critically reflecting on place allows for a more active engagement by individuals in the place they inhabit, otherwise known as 'place-making' (Fettes and Judson, 2011, p. 124). There is importance in building active relationships to place to generate love and responsibility for it (Fettes & Judson, 2011; Higgins, 1997; Sobel 1998; Sobel, 2008). This love is considered as knowing the details, rhythms, stories, inhabitants, and history (Fettes & Judson, 2011, p. 124). Developing this connection can lead to a greater ecological understanding of ourselves (Higgins, 1997). It is important to develop this attachment beginning, from the place we inhabit, to understand the way we view the world (Relph, 1976, p. 38). It is suggested that this sense of place can lead to pro-environmental behaviour (Kudryatsev et al. 2011). It is important to ask however; can such a relationship be developed within an urban centre (Kudryatsev et al. 2011, p. 7)? "Can we experience a state of dwelling and become deeply connected to places in the modern age of high mobility and globalization" (Brown & Wattchow, 2011, p. 55)?

## **2.5 The Rain of Place-based Education**

Place-based education (PB) is considered a valuable approach within outdoor learning (Beames et al, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Sobel, 2008). PB engages with local environments on "social, cultural economic, political and natural (Smith, 2002, p. 30) levels and allows learners to experientially know a place "through ecology, cultural history, geology, geography, place-names, story, interactions with local community, work projects and more" (Harrison, 2010, p. 7). The aims of PB are focused on developing a sense of place (Harrison, 2010) and to live well in a place, through knowing it, observing it, developing a sense of care and appreciation for the land and those who live on it (Harrison, 2010; Orr, 1992).

David Gruenwald (2008) now known as Greenwood, stresses that there is a need for critical reflection within place. He has synthesized the pedagogies of place-

based education and critical pedagogy to create *critical pedagogy of place* (CPP). Greenwood (2008) explains that critical pedagogy will offer an understanding of, and challenge, systems of power within a society whereas place-based education will offer a greater ecological and social understanding of place. Within the system of formal education Higgins (1997) stresses that we must be aware of the effect the expectations of society have on the education system. To address these deeper issues, students should be engaging critically (Stevenson, 2007) and should take charge of their own learning (Higgins, 1997). Writers such as C.A. Bowers (2008) challenge the idea of CPP as being an oxymoron, being philosophically rooted in a westernized perspective that assumes superiority and neglects other cultural ways of knowing. While Bowers (2008) creates a strong case, there still appears to be a need for individuals living within such a society to critically reflect on these social domains. PB and community-based education can be said to overlap as both seek to develop more meaningful educational programmes within one's local place rather than creating a de-contextualized experience (Beames, et al. 2012; Smith & Sobel, 2010). It is suggested that CPP, PB and/or community-based education could challenge the rooted inequalities and bring together "classes and community agencies" (Beames et al. 2012, p. 67).

So what converts an experience of place into PB? Similar to EL, the role of the facilitator can shape the experience of place in how they focus their approach (Harrison, 2010, p. 11). Some common features of PB are the need for multiple visits to one locale, the activity being primarily student led and the importance of recording the experience (Harrison, 2010). The importance of documenting the experience, as Holland (2006) explains it allows individuals to take in what they are experiencing. Knapp (1992) also expressed the importance on incorporating such reflective practices as a method for learning. Reflective learning is a way of exploring one's thoughts, which could be a result of an experience and can lead to a change in perspective (Boyde and Fales, 1983, p. 99). In review of the literature, the urban solo is a participant led activity. While I have asked participants to engage in the activity, the place, time and process was of their own choosing. I also asked for the participants to document the solo in a way they wanted (Appendix C) to encourage taking in the experience and reflecting upon it. Due to research constraints more than one visit was not feasible. Next, I will draw on the role of solos and how the literature informed the facilitation of the urban solo.

## 2.6 The Heron: The Solo

The concept of a solo has many different cultural origins and understandings. Within some First Nation cultures of North America it can be known as a ‘Vision Quest’ acting as a rite of passage and a strengthening of the community (Knapp, 2005a; Smith 2005). The de-contextualization of vision quests for outdoor education could be considered a form of desecration (Henley, 1996; Oles, 1995). The concept of ‘urban solo’ could seem culturally naïve or insensitive to such important traditions, and so I wish to tread softly in this realm. I am approaching the solo from an outdoor educational perspective, which traditionally considers a solo as a solitary experience in the wilderness (Smith, 2005, p. 5) otherwise known as a wilderness solo (Bobilya, 2005).

It is suggested that spending time on a wilderness solo can create a special connection to the land (Smith, 2005), away from ‘man-made intrusions’ (Bobilya, 2005, p. 62-63), or a ‘time out’ from one’s everyday place and pressures associated with western society (Campbell, 2010, p. 34). It is often used as a “space to explore personal thoughts and feelings, to reflect on one’s relationship with others and with the natural world” (Campbell, 2010, p. 34). Use of natural spaces, from a sustainability point of view, is becoming more difficult to justify (Campbell, 2010 p. 36). Most people who engage in a wilderness solo will return to somewhere else they call home (Bobilya, 2005 p. 63) Conversely Bobilya (2005) expresses that by solely disappearing into the wilderness does not mean solitude is achieved, but solitude is from within (Bobilya, 2005 p. 63). If solos offer alone time, this alone time is a convention of the mind that connects an individual to their experiences thus, “connecting self to environment and environment to self” (Hammond, 2005, p. 52).

Similar to the aims of OEE, PB and EE, Knapp (2005a) considers that traditionally the vision quest, while a solitary act, was “a social gesture closely tied to their communities” (Knapp, 2005a, p. 20). Solitude was also about being comfortable on one’s own, as people are not meant to live solely in companionship or solitude (Bobilya, 2005, p. 65). Solitude is a part of forming a complete human being as “complete human beings are the foundation of a caring and productive society” (Bobilya, 2005, p. 66).

In facilitating the urban solo, emphasis was placed on the importance of a brief and debrief, along with having established relationships with the participants and

clear intentions for the solo itself (Knapp, 2005a, p. 20). Smith (2005) expresses that whether the solo is done for a longer period of time or just an hour in a special place, it is important to consider the 'pre-solo mindset' (Smith, 2005, p. 4). Hammond (2005) also suggests the importance of documenting the solo as a way of understanding the experience. Similar to PB and EE there is a need for reflecting on the experience and documenting the experience to take in what is occurring. In briefing the solo at an initial meeting (Appendix B) I did not specifically frame what I wanted the participants to learn but expressed that I was interested in their experience. I had asked all participants to document their solo in a way of their choosing. The interview conducted within one week was considered a debrief and reflection upon their experiences, in the hopes that this would deepen the meaning of it (Knapp, 2005a).

## **2.7 Previous Work**

Subjects, which address ideas associated with the urban solo, are those discussed above, OEE, PB, EE and the concept of solos. Other programmes that address similar ideas are those of the Natural Change Project (NCP), which addresses "the importance of [developing] a community of interest, providing support for personal journeys and critical reflection on sustainability" (WWF, 2009, p. 6). The NCP aims to bring about environmental awareness and utilizes a range of approaches, occurring in a variety of natural settings and a blog is used to as a form of reflection when participants return to home. The NCP suggests, "As the mix of venues implies, value-based work does not have to be exclusively carried out in remote settings, and the personal and group-based elements could arguably be transferred to an urban context" (p.29). Within PB, there are numerous approaches encouraged by Sobel 1998; Sobel, 2008; Smith & Sobel, 2010 that encourage the uncovering of local information and engaging with it as guides for educators. Sobel (1993) looks at special spots children naturally create.

Within the realm of architecture there is a focus on how the structural space can encourage a particular social space (Gaffkin, Mceldowney & Sterret, 2010). Nemeth and Schmidt (2010) address the role and importance of public space to the community. Gaffkin et al. (2010) addresses what creates barriers and what promotes positive community space. This could potentially result in a healthier environment

linking to the premise of OEE as healthy communities and healthy environment, but on a structural level.

Out of my personal experience within the Outdoor Environmental and Sustainability Education programme at the University of Edinburgh, I have experienced something along the lines of what I would consider an urban solo. During an 'Interpreting the Landscape' course (University of Edinburgh, n.d.), we were all given academic writing associated with perspectives on the landscape for example, the 'soundscape', the built environment or the history of the landscape. Each person had a different perspective and was asked to read through and find a place outside and consider this perspective. The activity lasted for under one hour and all students were asked to document their experience. Afterwards we displayed the documents and had an opportunity to share if we had wanted. This idea along with Smith's (2005) notion that a solo can be an hour long or multiple days influenced my choice on making the initial urban solo one hour long. It was also a matter of feasibility for participants.

## **2.8 Literature Review Summary**

In reviewing the literature, a basic premise of OEE is that community and the environment are interlinked. This premise is being enacted upon through models of PB and EE as they offer an approach where individuals can engage in their local community through direct experience and critically reflect upon these experiences. Being critically reflective can potentially lead to moving beyond historical roots of inequality and the confines associated with formal education. A solo is another approach for individuals to be reflective of themselves, their environment and community. So in the call for experimentation within these disciplines and a need for a diversity of approaches, I suggest that an urban solo could be a way of critically reflecting on one's environment.

## Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

### 3.1 Research Question

Discussed within the literature review was the consideration of the use of an urban solo as a method of reflective practice, in particular for individuals who reside within urban settings. So I ask the question: could the urban solo be incorporated within the practice of outdoor environmental education?

### 3.2 Research Design:

The ‘Heron Project’ uses an *interpretive approach* (Thomas, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and draws from the disciplines of ‘*phenomenology*’ (Patton, 2002; Seaman, 2012; Spring, 2000; Thomas, 2009) and ‘*evaluation research*’ (Clarke, 1992; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2009) to address whether the experience of an urban solo could be utilized within the domain of OEE. The project was considered a *collective case study* that used ‘*purposive sampling*’ (Descombe, 1998; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2009) to generate a group of eight individuals who would each embark on an urban solo. ‘*Semi structured interviews*’ (Clarke, 1992; Descombe, 1998; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2009) were then used within one week of the solo, for data collection. Each participant was considered an individual case and coded independently. A cross-case analysis was done to determine whether common themes or prominent concepts occurred. The results were compared and analyzed against the literature of OEE to assess whether or not an urban solo could fit within its realm, and if so where.

#### 3.2.1 Interpretive Paradigm

My worldview approach to this research is via the interpretive paradigm to investigate the experiences of the urban solo through the participants’ perspective as each participant is considered unique and will construct their experiences differently (Thomas, 2009). The interpretive paradigm tends to “emphasize the complexity of human life” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 35). As opposed to a positivist approach I am concerned with how the individuals are feeling, what they are thinking and how this may inform their constructions of the experience (Silverman, 2005; Thomas, 2009).

This perspective will inform my approach to this research as to what is appropriate methodology to understand the perspectives of the participants but it also informs my professional position. Working in the outdoors it is important identifying

whether you engage in a place as a “result from layers of cultural ideas, beliefs and histories, or as a site of intrinsic meaning” (Brown & Wattchow, 2011, p.56). Brown and Wattchow explain that it is important to understand how outdoor educators locate themselves when using outdoor spaces.

However, the participants understanding of their experience is then subject to my interpretation within this paper. This is also a phenomenological issue of interpretive appropriateness (Seaman 2012). I must take into consideration the accuracy between the participants use of language to interpret their experience, but also my own (Seaman, 2012).

This application allows for a more naturally emerging research design, which is conducive to inductive reasoning (Gillham, 2000). This allows the research design to flow and adapt to what has been found from the research rather than remaining in a structure that assumes it is appropriate.

### *3.2.2 Phenomenological Influence*

First I will address the influence of phenomenology and secondly evaluative research on this project, and the rationale for drawing on these domains. Before I can presuppose where an urban solo might fit within the realm of OEE, I must first consider the meaning of the experience independently from any domain. This is to encourage inductive reasoning as Gillham (2000) suggests that researchers do not begin with *a priori* of theoretical notions, but rather develop it from the data that is gathered. These theoretical underpinnings call for the researcher to start with a ‘blank canvas’ to investigate the nature of the experience and how the participant engages and understands the environment they are in. A phenomenological approach can highlight this through an interpretation of the behaviour, experiences and meanings participants create (Seaman, 2012). The definition of phenomenology varies from a range of theoretical approaches such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Max Van Mannen. Patton (2002) expresses that what they have in common is “exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Thus one must ask the foundational question of phenomenology of what are the meanings, structure and essence of the lived experience of this particular event for each of the participants (Patton, 2002). I must understand how the participants comprehend the experience and the influence of their histories. It is important to



address the epistemological and ontological aspects of this study. “Ontology is about what you are looking at – the kind of events that exist in the social world. Epistemology is about how you look and find out about these” (Thomas, 2009, p. 87). The Heron Project is about the development and understanding of the epistemological as I am trying to understand how the participants have come to know the place they are in as well as the experience, to be able to evaluate the urban solo’s usefulness. Harrison (2010) has made this point of place-based approaches and similarly addresses the ontology in asking, “what is the nature of the place we are engaging with; a physical location, a way of being somewhere” (Harrison, 2010, p. 5). So to understand this phenomenon I must come to grips with the epistemological and the ontological. The phenomenology discipline allows for such social explanation (Spring, 2000). However one must take into consideration the position of *bracketing* (Dowling, 2005) when looking at any form of phenomenon. This is most often where the researcher acknowledges their own prejudice or bias to be able to interpret the views of the participants (Dowling, 2005, p. 135). This is to avoid what Spring (2000) refers to as *a fortiori* (p. 98), that is the interpretation of the researcher rather than the interpretation of the experience from the participant (Seaman, 2012; Spring, 2000). Thus I must engage reflexivity with my findings, embrace the self-critique and address the ways in which I would influence the research process through each of its stages.

### 3.2.3 *The Influence of Evaluation*

The evaluative aspect of this research is the second component to the methodology. It lies in the question of whether the use of an urban solo could be beneficial within the practice of outdoor environmental education? If so where within OEE would it be applicable? Evaluation research, which is often conducted within education and social sciences, is usually “undertaken to assess how effective a programme of activity has been” (Thomas, 2009, p. 122), or similarly “to study the effectiveness with which existing knowledge is used to inform and guide practical action” (Clarke, 1999, p. 2). While the ‘Heron Project’ is not an existing programme, it is guided by existing knowledge within the discipline of OEE. This is still within the concept of evaluation research and such an investigation can be done in a new programme or initiative (Thomas, 2009). Here the evaluation research has been done based my own initiative. Patton (2002) expresses the use of case studies can be

beneficial in evaluating a programme whilst understanding the individual needs or experiences of participants. It is essential for myself as a researcher to be attentive towards each individual case so that I can capture the individual qualities of the individuals and the programme, along with any variations that may occur in different settings (Patton, 2002, p. 55). In drawing from evaluation and phenomenological domains, I must take into consideration the appropriate methods to be used within this study (Clarke, 1992).

#### *3.2.4 Collective Case Studies:*

Initially within this research there is a particular focus on the individual experiences of the urban solo to understand the phenomenon independently. This is referred to as unique case orientation (Patton, 2002, p. 41). The following epitomizes my rationale for employing a case study methodology:

“This emphasis upon the uniqueness of events or actions, arising from their being shaped by meanings of those who are the participants in the situation, points to the importance of the ‘case study’ – the study of the unique case or the particular instance”

(Spring, 2000, p. 40).

The suggested appropriate sub-methodology for case studies has been via observations, surveys and/or interviews, etc, (Gillham 2000, Patton, 2002; Spring, 2000; Thomas, 2009; Thomas 2011). To understand what an experience means to an individual, Patton (2002) suggests to use participant observation, and in-depth interviewing. While this research is looking at each case uniquely, ultimately the interest of each case is within the context of a phenomenon, the urban solo.

A case study is not necessarily a methodological choice but rather the focus on a phenomenon or an object (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, pp. xiv). Case studies allow for researchers to gain a deeper understanding of a particular instance and may comprise of a person, event or programme (Gillham, 2000; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005; Stake, 1998; Spring 2000), depending on what is being evaluated. This can also be referred to as an interpretive case study (Knutsen & Moses 2007).

For the ‘Heron Project’, each participant will be considered an individual case in the evaluation of the urban solo so it is considered a collective case study (Stake, 1998; Thomas, 2009; Thomas 2012). Patton (2002) expresses that addressing the unique variations between cases can contribute to the evaluation of a programme

(Patton, 2002 p. 55). Similar to interpretive and phenomenological approaches, collective case studies acknowledge that there are different interpretations of reality by different people (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 35). According to Falk (2005) this is because “each person’s neural system is unique and thus responds accordingly. Furthermore, all learning is contextual” (Falk, 2005 p. 268).

Though it addresses a phenomenon in detail and each case is unique, this type of research is not intended for the purpose of generalizations (Silverman, 2005; Spring, 2000; Thomas, 2011). Again, it is important to address your own bias and interest in the topic as “a case study is both the process of learning about the case and a product of our learning” (Stake, 1998, p. 87). This suggests the importance of an emergent research design, as well as acknowledging one’s position within the research.

### **3.3 Methods**

Purposive sampling was used to generate a group of individuals to take part in the Heron Project. Within one week upon completion of participants’ urban solo semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio recorded.

#### *3.3.1 Purposive Sampling*

Eight participants were brought onto the project over the course of June and July through a method of *purposive sampling* also referred to as ‘*non-probabilistic*’ (Thomas, 2009) or *non-probability sampling* (Descombe, 1998). Purposive sampling is used within a subject that the researcher is interested in but the researcher cannot draw generalisations about it (Silverman, 2000; Thomas, 2009). This is conducive to an emergent research design because as the researcher understands more about their topic, in particular within a unique case study, there is “a need to interview those who have particular knowledge or can discuss specific experiences that you want to know about” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 67). It places the importance on an in-depth understanding of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Such a pursuit requires a deeper analysis of what the experience means so that it may, or may not be further developed. Participants or the *key players* (Descombe, 1998) were chosen based on their interest in the project and in consideration of their ability to contribute, provide feedback, and information about the experience (Descombe, 1998 p. 119). Ideally this will lead to the critique, growth and development of such an experience.

There was a pre-established relationship between all eight participants and myself before the project commenced, thus my consideration of their ability to provide feedback about the experience. I have known five out of eight participants through the Outdoor Education or Outdoor Environmental and Sustainability Education programme at Edinburgh University. I have worked with the final three participants in an outdoor retail store. Descombe (1998) asks whether the research can rely on a smaller number of participants? As this is an interpretive collective case study Knutsen & Moses (2007) discuss that these cases are not chosen randomly but rather dependent on what is being studied, and go on to suggest that the researcher should limit the amount of cases involved (Knutsen & Moses, 2007, p. 95). This research is trying to grasp the potential uses of the urban solo rather than generalise what the experience means. I must be aware of the issue of ‘over-determination’ with my findings (Knutsen & Moses, 2007, p. 95) as a smaller number of participants is also not conducive to generalizations. I must also acknowledge the bias this presents, and also that pre-established relationships can lead to participants favouring a particular outcome. However, a small number of participants, who have been chosen for purposive reasons, are more conducive to going deeper into this understanding. I would strongly suggest that as a reader one visit Appendix C to have a brief introduction to the participants as well as review the documentation of their urban solo experience.

### *3.3.2 Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews*

It is suggested that observation and interviews can lead to an in-depth understanding of another’s experience, allowing the researcher to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible (Patton, 2002, p. 106). For my data collection, I have chosen to focus on semi-structured interviews due to the nature of the solo being a solitary experience and observation was not possible. Although secondary analysis could have been done on the participants’ documentation of their solo experience (Appendix C), my interview data was incredibly rich and due to the time and scope of this paper I did not include it. The intention of qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews is to do exactly that, provide rich detail (Gillham, 2000, p. 65) to understand a phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 56). Semi-structured interviews are conducive to both phenomenological and evaluative methods (Patton, 2002) and were used to gain a more in-depth response from the participants who have directly

experienced the phenomenon of interest (Descombe, 1998; Patton, 2002). Within the semi-structured interview I used a ‘generalized guide’ or ‘interview schedule’ (Appendix D) to ensure that I covered topics that I had intended to address (Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2011). However, this can potentially omit certain topics that may have been important to the experience, the wording of the questions can have an affect on the answer, and the answers are less likely to be comparable (Patton, 2002, p. 347). The nature of this research is not to find generalized answers but to understand and evaluate a phenomenon. I understand that “knowledge in qualitative interviewing is situational and conditional” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995 p. 38). Another time, or different time period between interview and experience could potentially result in different answers. I primarily used open-ended questions, which allow the researcher to grasp the perspective without predetermining what is discussed, as the example of a questionnaire (Patton, 2002, p. 21). The aims are in light of discovery rather than fact checking (Descombe, 1998, p. 113). The questions used were informed by the literature but aimed to draw out the interviewee’s perspectives and what they have experienced and observed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The questions were reviewed to find those that were essential to the research topic as well as rehearsed prior to the interview (Gillham, 2000, p. 66). I chose to have the interview conducted on myself by another individual reading the questions, whereby I considered this my ‘practice interview’ (Gillham, 2000, p.67). Since I too had conducted an urban solo, it allowed for me to reflect on what questions felt relevant. An initial trigger question was asked to connect the participant to something concrete (Descombe, 1998, p. 127). This question was asking the participants about how they documented their solo as well asking them to tell me the story of their solo. This story acted in a two-fold manner, firstly it allowed for the participant to re-visit and re-construct their experience through a rich description (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 35). Secondly it provided insight into their experience without the influence of the questions being asked. All interviews were audio recorded and field notes were taken. However, during the interview I wanted to ensure my focus was on the participant and our conversation. All interviews were transcribed independently, which infers that the audio recording was transferred into writing (Thomas, 2009). An example of this transcription can be found in Appendix E. I understand that I can have an interviewer effect on the data whereby it may be affected by my own personal identity (Descombe, 1998, p. 116). However, as a semi-structured interview is more like a conversation (Patton, 2002) I

as an interviewer cannot be neutral as my interest and beliefs are used to understand what is being said (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 38).

### *3.3.3 Ethical Implications*

I completed the University of Edinburgh's 'Research Ethics' form and was classed as a level two in regards to the 4-tier system and my research supervisor reviewed this at the initial phase of research. Throughout the research I addressed ethical implications associated with the urban solo. During the first workshop (Appendix B) safety factors were addressed with regards to the urban solo, such as the weather and appropriate clothing, and having cell phones (though asked to remain off) for safety precautions. Participants were informed to pull out from the research at anytime if they felt unsafe, physically or psychologically. Intent and consent forms were presented to the participants, (Appendix F) providing purpose of the research, the background and discusses confidentiality (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 95). There was also a consent form regarding the audio recording, the confidentiality of the recording, and the length of time they would be retained. All participants will be kept anonymous; their names have been changed within this paper (Thomas, 2009). When conducting qualitative research involving interviews whether or not they are recorded, is an ethical implication and interviews will affect participants (Patton, 2002, p. 405). When you encourage individuals to be open in discussion can be an ethical implication (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 93). The interview is a method of data collection but can also be considered a debrief or reflective experience (Patton, 2002). This is associated with solos, experiential education and place-based education (Boyde and Fales, 1983; Harrison, 2010; Higgins, 2007; Holland, 2006; Knapp, 1992; Chapman, et. al., 1995). However I must consider the emotional implications of a structured reflective experience as it "affects the persons being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves they didn't know—or least were not fully aware of—before the interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 405). I informed the participants during the interview that they did not have to answer questions they did not feel pertained to them. Open-ended interview questions allow for the participant to take the conversation in a way of their choosing, which would possibly limit going deeper into questions that they may have been uncomfortable about.

## **Chapter Four: Analysis**

### **4.1 Contextual Overview:**

The ‘Heron Project’ brought together eight individuals who were interested and prepared to give feedback upon their experiences of the urban solo. The project had been discussed with the individuals and a form of intent and consent had been sent out prior to the first group meeting in August. A group meeting was held, in the spot where I had conducted my urban solo, to provide the participants with guidelines for the urban solo (Appendix B). This was also done as a safety brief to explain to the participants that I was interested in their experiences of the urban solo and I didn’t want to impose my expectations on the participants and so refrained from answering particular questions that could frame the experience, but focused on questions of concern. All participants were asked to document their solo in a manner of their choosing. All participants but one were able to attend, and a meeting with the one individual was conducted within two days of the original meeting. All participants, but one, had conducted their solo within one week of the group meeting. Gleoc’s interview could have been considered an outlier as she had conducted her solo earlier than the initial meeting. While I could have not included this interview, I felt that her insight was incredibly valuable and a lot of the common themes derived from other participants still coincided with her prominent themes as discussed in the next chapter. The interviews with the participants occurred within one week of the participants’ solo, aside from Gleoc’s. The same interview guide was used for all participants and each interview lasted between thirty minutes to an hour and a half. All interviews were then coded independently and data analysis incurred.

### **4.2 Analysis**

The analysis occurred in two storylines. First, the interviews were coded as a whole and secondly, the participants answers to the questions were reviewed and generalised. The primary analysis revolved around the coding of the interview text as a whole to address common themes that occur throughout. While these references are subtler than the answers to the question, they are the unique qualities of the participants’ experience (Patton, 2002). These references are the stories that lead the participant to answer the question. The experience is like a pool in which the participant draws from to answer the question. This is to avoid the commodification

of the experience but to move towards a more emergent experience (Loynes, 2002) of place. Analysis of the text as a whole highlighted by the general answers provides a greater platform in understanding the essence of the experience in order to move towards a goal-free evaluation (Patton, 2002) on whether an urban solo is a beneficial experience to the realm of OEE.

#### *4.2.1 Coding:*

The method of coding categorizes the responses from each participant and brings together similar concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 238). The themes were derived through a method of *open coding*, the “unrestricted coding of data (Strauss, 1987 p. 28) whereby the researcher critically reviews their notes or interviews. I understand the implications of coding can often reflect the interests of the research or the intended audience (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I have chosen to code the interview as a whole rather than based on the questions asked, to limit this bias as best possible. The aim of this is to come up with provisional themes, concepts and dimensions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995 p. 238; Strauss, 1987 p. 28). I experienced the challenge of the data becoming fractured from the context as whole (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Straus, 1987). I also faced the issue of over coding (Strauss, 1987) whereby, I derived thirty provisional themes. Some of these themes were case specific, while other common themes were unveiled through the method of cross case analysis. These themes form the following integrated explanation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995 p. 251). This is done through what Rubin and Rubin (1995) refer to as a two-step process where initially you look at the material within each category and secondly you address themes that cut across the categories, otherwise known as a cross-case analysis.

#### *4.2.2 Cross-Case Analysis*

A cross-case analysis, as used in this research, is a method of comparing the individual coded themes of each case in order to evaluate whether common themes occurred across the cases (Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2012). At this point the focus turns from the uniqueness of each case and onto the comparison of these themes in understanding the phenomenon of interest (Thomas, 2009, p. 41), the urban solo. The common themes derived all appeared to be affected by, or a result of, the participants’ experience in the place and the themes presented more like a network analysis (Thomas, 2009). A network analysis demonstrates the way themes are connected and

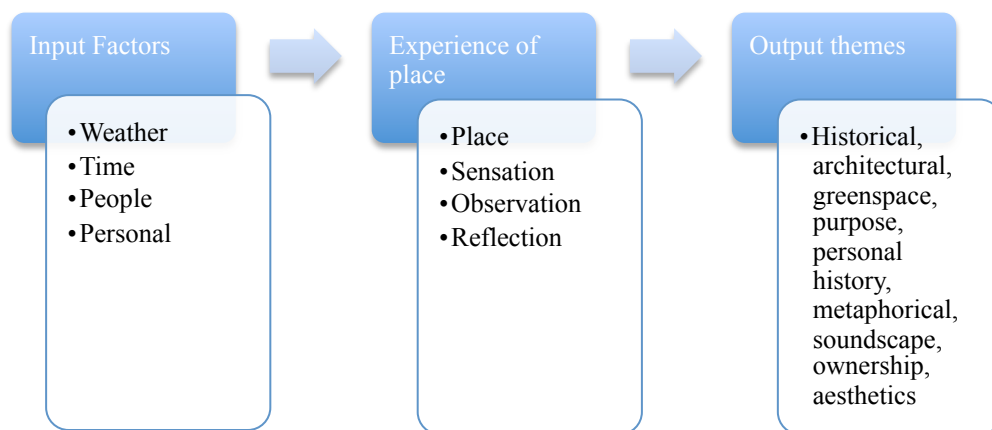


stem from each other (Thomas, 2009, p. 198). With a cross case analysis I am seeking to emerge with a system of integrated themes or concepts that can be interpreted (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 227). This analysis resulted in an input-output model demonstrating what affected the experience of place, the processing of experience of place and the results of experience of place. The following section will address this model, the data associated with it and where it fits in with OEE.

## Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

The themes collected from the data have arrived at an integrated model of experience (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I will refer to this as the ‘Experience of Place’ model. The discussion will initially address the compilation of the model and then the factors involved: input factors (factors affecting experience of place), experience of place (ways the participants’ engage with the experience) and the output themes (the perceptions of the experience) as demonstrated in Figure 3. Addressing this model coincides with the nature of the interpretive approach drawing from a phenomenological design as it is trying to understand the participant’s perspective and how this experience was shaped. I will then move onto evaluate the results to address whether the urban solo experience could be used within the realm of OEE.

Figure 3: Model for Experience of Place

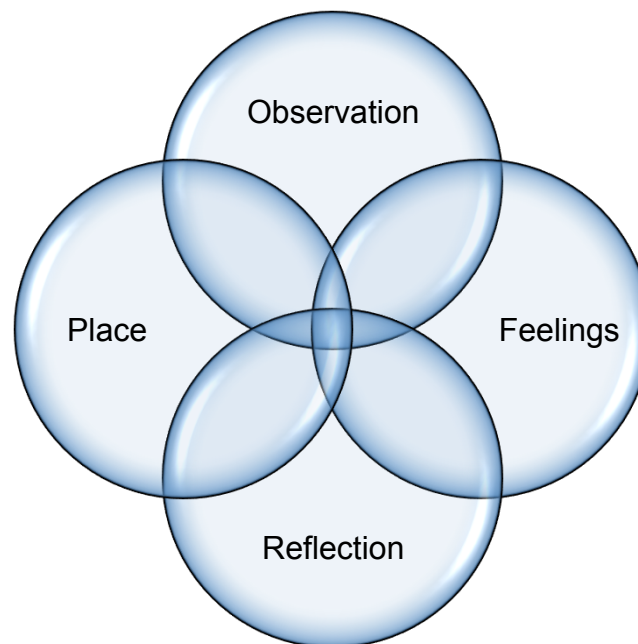


### 5.1 The Experience of Place Model:

The first concept I will address from the model above is ‘experience of place’ (EP). Themes derived from the data appeared to be a factor of place. The literature review demonstrates however that place can be a result of human values and intentions (Relph, 1976), is a product of culture (Brown & Wattchow, 2011), and is intertwined with those who experience it and dwell in it (Relph, 1976, Tuan 1977). The themes derived therefore may not be a direct result of place, but rather the unique experience of place; thus the concept EP. The data demonstrated that there are four

factors comprising the EP: the ‘place’, ‘sensations’ (emotional/physical), ‘observations’, and ‘reflections’. The overlapping and interacting of these themes are represented in Figure 4. EP reflects Tuan’s (1977) model of experience, as addressed in the literature review, yet he has not included place as he is discussing the general concept of experience independently. Whereas, the urban solo experience utilizes a particular place as stimulus.

Figure 4: Experience of Place



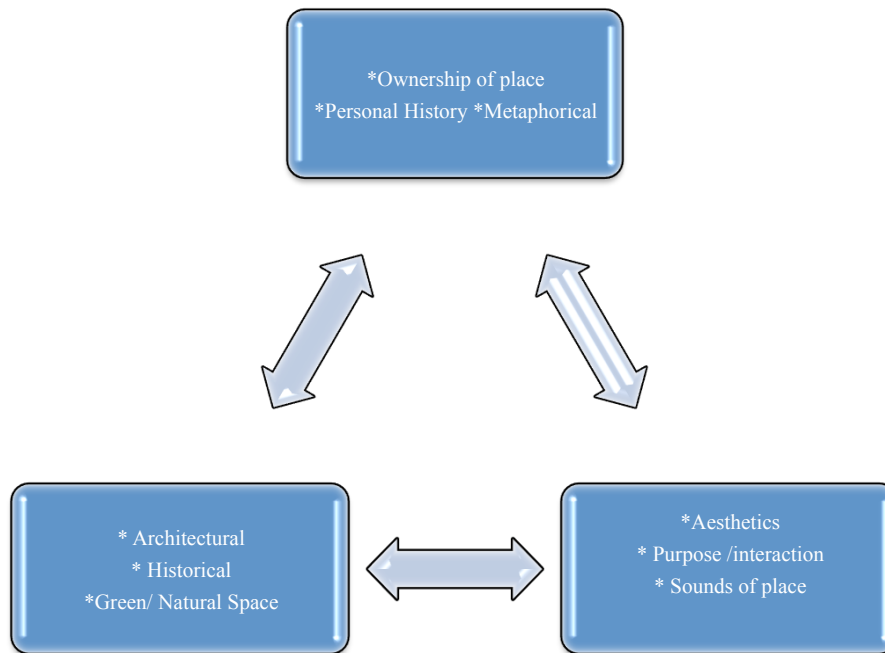
Input factors (IP), as demonstrated in Figure 5, are themes identified by the participants as affecting, changing or imposing upon their EP, but were not the result of EP. These factors included time, weather, people, and personal. The knowing and experience of a place will change based on different conditions. These factors are also important in understanding how participants constructed their experiences and what led to their stories.

Figure 5: Input Factors Affecting Experience of Place



Participants' perceptions, thoughts, questions, understanding, feeling, and knowing of their urban solo place, could be considered a result of their experience of place. There were nine themes that seemed to result from EP that will be referred to as 'output themes' (OP). I would like to suggest that while each of them may have been named, the output themes appear to be in constant engagement with each other; in other words, when coding I rarely found one output theme in a statement without another present and is shown in Figure 6. The themes are as followed: architectural, historical, green/natural space, sounds of place, aesthetics, purpose/interactions, metaphorical place, ownership and personal history with place.

Figure 6: Output themes



The presence of this model is similar to certain models of experience and experiential learning (Beard, 2010; Higgins & Nicol, 2002, Kolb, 1976; Tuan, 1977). This would imply that some form of experiential learning has occurred, the results of this learning are discussed in the following sections. According to Higgins & Nicol (2002) if the facilitator does not shape or influence the experience this is learning through direct experience, which can result in physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual notions (Higgins & Nicol, 2002 p. 10). These factors are discussed in section 5.4. As a facilitator I did not act as an intermediary prior to the urban solo, so I ran the risk of whether the participant will interpret or engage in the situation or not bother (Higgins & Nicol 2002, p. 10). However, the participants engaged with the activity by having to observe and document their solo. Secondly, the interview was then a post-intermediary activity, which has resulted in data collection and outcome of the EP model. While the EP model enacts a method of EE there is a particular focus on place and so this model reflects the approach and outcomes of place-based education as discussed in the literature review. This also demonstrates similarities to the interdisciplinary nature of OEE. What I will address in the following sections is the relationship between the participant and their experience of the urban solo.

## **5.2 Factors Affecting the Experience (Input Factors):**

The input factors (IP), while not a result of the EP are critical aspects to consider with regards to the urban solo. For some these factors will act as a barrier and/or can shape how individuals come to know a place, whether it is the time spent, the way other people make participants feel, a personal factor or the weather. I will address the findings within these themes and then move to a discussion of understanding their importance.

### *5.2.1 Time*

Time was a predominant theme that affected the participants' EP. Time can also act as a barrier. Feelings of awkwardness coupled with a feeling of wasting time can cause hesitation in engaging in an urban solo. Cuan, Oilthigh, Slighe worried that one-hour of time doing 'nothing' would drag, but were surprised that it had gone quickly. The concept of taking the time arose with most participants while initially being an issue came to be a concept of solace. Cuan, Oilthigh, Slighe, Pàirce expressed they felt relaxed because they had nothing to do, no set tasks or expectations. Uisge articulated, that it allowed for him to slow down. For Pàirce, taking the time early in the morning to draw and think about things was "just another step in making it into my home". Slighe expressed, she would never think to take the time just for herself, as there are always other tasks to do. Slighe and Oilthigh referred to the concept of guilt. Slighe enjoyed that she did not feel guilty. Oilthigh was initially worried because she had other things to do expressing:

"Although I have got this dissertation to write and I have got lots of things to do today, I hadn't been thinking about that. It's almost as if I used that time to be mindful and to be present and to think about things, quietly and calmly. Because there was no expectation of me, I had to do this hour" (Oilthigh).

Many participants wanted to do the solo for longer, whether it was because they were feeling a sense of ownership (Eachdraidh), it wasn't long enough to warrant accomplishment (Trian), they wanted to see it at other times of the year (Pàirce), they didn't want to go back to work (Slighe) or that they would like to try it again (Gleoc).

### 5.2.2 *Weather*

Weather can change the experience of place, through its character, affecting one's sensations and/or impacting reflections. Slighe explains such an effect: "the sun came out briefly, after that and it was lovely and warm and the whole atmosphere changes when the sun comes out. I don't know it just makes it a very different place". Gleoc states the character of her clock, her main focus, changed when the rain came on. "The clock became much darker, and uh you know, not like a grumpy clock but you know...she is like a character changing moods as the weather changes". Metaphors or analogies were created based on the weather, the feel of the city, the mood of an inanimate object or of the participants emotions. The weather combined with sensations affected people's experience of place; with different weather the experience would be different. When asked if there was one thing about this experience that without it, the experience would be different, Cuan expressed "the wind being one... a different wind."

### 5.2.3 *People*

Other people who engaged or walked through the place affected the participants EP. Cuan and Oilthigh specifically stated in the final question in the interview (Appendix D), without the people, the experience would not have been the same. Oilthigh expressed "if the square was empty then there would have been very little life and it would have just been the architecture". The people shaped the participants' perception of who used the place and the purpose of it. For some it generated an impersonal feeling or particular societal norms (Cuan). It was noticeable in what direction people are supposed to walk (Oilthigh, Cuan, Uisge, Slighe), how long you spend in a spot (Slighe, Oilthigh,) and where you should sit (Cuan, Trian, Eachdraidh). People and relationships triggered ideas and questions (Uisge, Pàirce) and the consideration of how people were and who they were (Oilthigh). Participants addressed other people who remained in the space, (Cuan, Slighe,), what the other people thought of them (Slighe, Uisge) and how long they had been there (Slighe, Oilthigh). Yet feelings of awkwardness could be put at ease with a simple smile from another (Uisge). Gleoc noticed a range of ages and types of people that shaped her ideas around the concept of time stating, "I was thinking that is like the clock of life.

You know, it's like sixty minutes, it's like how life, a picture of a lifetime but with the lives of many different people”.

#### *5.2.4 Personal*

The ‘personal’ factor influences the EP, and is different from the OP as it arrives at the venue with the participant. It can be the prior assumptions or histories associated with that place or even the motivation for choosing that particular place. Though, it should be considered that the OP from the urban solo experience can contribute to the ‘personal’ factor after the experience. For this experience the ‘personal’ comes with the participant and imposes upon the urban solo experience. The majority of participants had an established history with their place, whereas Cuan had only been to the place once before and Gleoc had chosen a place that would challenge her. The personal can be associations with weather for example Oilthigh felt comforted and at home with the cold brisk weather that occurred that morning, and Pàirce loves the sun but can become unnerved by the wind. The majority of participants felt awkward at one point, yet Trian has a personal history with meditation and sitting in spots within the city for periods of time, so she perhaps did not have the same uncomfortable feeling. Thus there are personal factors that arrive at the experience and can be drawn from by the participant.

#### *5.2.5 Discussion on Input Factors*

Input factors are important to consider for a few reasons, one being that they can affect the epistemological and ontological. It can shape how individuals come to know a place but it can also change the perception of the physical place demonstrating the link between the two. The IP reinforces the idea that place is a stimulus but also an interpretation for individuals, and therefore a unique experience. For example, one individual may feel uncomfortable with a cold wind while another feels at home with it. These factors had the power to shape participants’ experiences and while elements of literature pay tribute to these factors, they are not often addressed in full. More depth of research could be done within this area.

Participants took into consideration social interaction (Relph, 1976), the social ecological context (Fettes & Judson, 2011) and the culture (Brown & Wattchow, 2011) in the way they described how people shaped and interacted with the place creating a purpose. Participants described the character of the place Appendix G.



These layers of social relationships are essential to how individuals form their identity (Claytons & Opotow, 2004, p. 5). For some participants the character was based on the purpose other people had for it (Eachdraidh & Usige) and for other participants (Oilthigh) it was reflected from her personal history. It is also demonstrated how the weather can change the character of the place and its attitudes (Kudryatevse et al. 2011), as in the example of Gleoc's clock. As the IP factors are subject to change this demonstrates the EP can change alongside it. It also draws out from individuals a level of symbolism addressed by Tuan (1977). Different people, different times and under different weather conditions, it can be said to be a different place. The people's senses create an embodied form of learning from an experience, and this is underutilized within outdoor educational practices (Brown and Wattachow 2011, p. 72). However, the sensing body is essential for connecting people's being with their locale (Canatella, 2007 p. 627).

The IP emphasizes the importance of visiting a place more than once, as the second time around it may seem unfamiliar. Within place-based and experiential educational approaches it has been acknowledged that time and effort are needed (Harris, 2010; Kudryatsev, et al. 2011). Participant suggestions for longer and multiple visits reflect general place-based educational practices (Harrison, 2010), and thus should be taken into consideration for future implementation. All participants have lived in Edinburgh (Appendix B) affecting their attachment and understanding of the place (Relph, 1976). This experience could act as an aid in the transition from acquaintance to a more intimate knowing of the place (Harris, 2010).

Time affected the place through human value and intention (Relph, 1976), as the way in which people viewed taking the time, and the value felt afterwards. Relph (1976) explains people's experiences of a place are intertwined in time and "places themselves are the present expressions of past experiences and events and hopes for the future" (Relph, 1976, p. 33). Gleoc used this concept of time through the ages and the character of the clock as her inspiration for her art piece (Appendix B).

### **5.3 Participant's Construction of Experience (Experience of Place):**

The experience of place can be considered the epistemological element of the experience. The combination of these themes demonstrates how individuals are taking in the experience as suggested by Thomas (2009) and Harrison, (2010). The themes

that comprise the experience of place are place, sensations, observations and reflection.

### *5.3.1 Place*

Place, as a part of the participant's EP is both a stimulus and a creation. As it is discussed in the literature review, place is a combination of a number of factors. The physical place will change your view; affect where you want to sit, and how others interact with it. For example, as Cuan sits on bench behind a concrete wall peering onto the beach, he describes the areas as "boxed into compartments... compartmentalized". Cuan feels had he sat on the beach this perception would have changed. Eachdraidh describes electrical wiring running over the old chossy brick of the archway, implying to him "that this place has been used and re-used and changed and adapted by generations for hundreds of years and therefore it doesn't have an owner to it anyways". With Gleoc's place, a large clock was located between the cross roads in front of her. This physical element contributed to her overall experience and focus on time as expressed in the interview. The perception of place and the feeling it gives will ultimately shape the participant's observations and reflections. Oilthigh did not feel a part of her place the way she might in a more natural setting and yet Eachdraidh who was in a built environment felt a part of it because it appeared to have no owner. Each individual generates their own sense of place when they are engaging in it. The participants addressed aspects of that place, which held resonance to them. Place as a concept is relative to each individual as is its stimulus for observation and reflection, which are essential part to the EP

### *5.3.2 Sensations (psychological, physical)*

The weather (section 5.2.2) affected participants' comfort and their senses, inviting particular feelings and shaping thoughts and experiences. While the sun and the wind were most often referred to, the participants also referred to annual and daily weather changes and were addressed as changing the experience or character of the place. Cuan, Pairce, Oilthigh, Slighe, Trian, Eachdraidh and Gleoc discuss the ways the weather physically affected their senses, whether they felt happy about the sunshine (Trian, Pairce, Slighe, Cuan), positioned their body in the sun because it felt more natural (Eachdraidh), wanted there to be less wind (Cuan), felt unsettled by the wind (Pairce) or decided to embrace the rain after a fleeting moment of questioning; should I leave (Gleoc). Oilthigh expressed that while the cold windy morning left her

fingers feeling cold, these weather conditions entertain feelings of transition and yet the “cold and brisk is familiar and homely” (Oilthigh). The transition felt is between the festival and university beginning. It is also a period of time for Oilthigh where she is possibly going to be transitioning out of Edinburgh and so this is applied to her urban solo experience.

However, there were particular feelings that affected the experience of place. Some of these feelings were a result of conducting a solo (IP factor) and questioning if they were doing it right. Cuan, Slighe, Uisge, Gleoc, Trian, Eachdaidh, Oilthigh all felt ‘awkward’ at some point, however these feelings appeared to ease into comfort as time passed, this is also referred to in section 5.2. Both Slighe and Uisge described a transition from being self-conscious to feeling more settled down.

### *5.3.3 Observations*

When documenting the solo, the majority of participants chose to write, one wrote single words, two included photos with their writing, and one took only photos. The transition from observation to reflection or ‘thinking’ for Trian began when she started writing down what she was thinking about. Cuan described the transition between present place observation and other reflections as ‘there and elsewhere’. Expressing that he could deliberately think about what is in front of him, but that he didn’t want to. He describes letting his thoughts freely flow and he finds that they drift to his home, study, friends, family and daily occupations. Oilthigh expressed that the reflection of place “seems to swap between memories of the place and then just being in the place”. Uisge who was surprised by the thoughts turning inwards expresses: “I don’t know how that process works, so seeing things going and thoughts coming in and just relaxing in one place. I don’t suppose if you were in your own house sitting down... you would have thoughts, but they wouldn’t be the same thoughts perhaps”. This demonstrates a shift in perceptual thoughts from what is being observed within the place to a contemplative and reflective engagement in thoughts other than the physical place (the stimulus). These reflective thoughts are discussed below.

### *5.3.4 Reflection*

The reflective process is fundamental to EP as a process of understanding and making sense of the experience. Within the urban solo experience, participants

explicitly engaged in three forms of reflection; a process that transitioned from observation to reflection, the documentation of their experience and the interview itself. When asked about an important factor of the experience (Appendices H) Trian expressed that “having the pre and post follow up, the framing a little bit of it, and just in terms of drawing as much from the experience”. Cuan had stated this explicitly that questions brought up in the interview were not necessarily thoughts he would have had about the experience independently from the interview. Thus, we can see both the impact and perhaps importance of having a reflective experience. Before asking specific questions about the solo, I first asked the participants to share the story of their solo to provide the opportunity for the participants to speak about what was important to them. All participants referred to their documentation when telling the story. While I was able to be a part of the interview process and visually see their documentation, reflection that occurred on the solo could not be observed. This was investigated and interpreted through the interview data.

Oilthigh and Trian expressed that they were practicing mindfulness, meditation and being in the moment. Oilthigh expressed, “if I am writing, it really helps keep me in that moment and what I am doing”. Trian discussed past experience with meditative practices, and addresses the challenge of stillness in an urban setting. Trian questions:

“Is it possible to be in complete stillness and if so does it have to be both psychologically and physical or is just a way in which we have defined ourselves as human beings? If... if that’s possible, are solos within a city a good way to practice? Because it’s such stimulating environment”.

While Slighe does not use the word mindfulness, she does elude to it. Slighe states “I have enjoyed that bit of time where you can just sit, take in your surroundings without any, you know thinking of anything else but other than what you are observing”.

### *5.3.5 Experience of Place Discussion*

The factors involved with experience of place, touch on the complexity of the process involved with experiential and place-based learning in an outdoor environment. Participants engaged with place through the means of observation, reflection, sensations (physical and psychological) and place itself. With Beard’s (2010) model there is a particular focus on the inner world and outer world being brought together through sensory interface, which emerges ideas from ego to

consciousness. This transition between states (if you like) could have occurred as participants shifted from observing the place to more internal thoughts. The opportunity for reflection is an important part of outdoor learning (Higgins, 2007), experiential learning (Chapman, et. al., 1995), place-based education (Gruenwald, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Holland, 2006), for the solo (Campbell, 2010) and it is suggested that it can contribute to one's community (Bobilya, 2005). This process can be necessary in order for transformative change to occur as it grapples with our own personal and social constructs (Higgins & Nicol, 2002). Higgins and Nicol (2002) express that to gain new understanding individuals should question these constructs (Higgins & Nicol, 2002, p.2). The interview was considered a debrief for the solo and a semi structured reflective process to transfer what was experienced on participants' solos to another setting (Hammond, 2005a, p. 22) and reinforce this experience (Hammond, 2005, p. 53). This combination of lived experience and personal reflection is in many senses the essence of experiential learning (Smith & Knapp, 2009, p. 7). Mindfulness was referred to by participants and currently is recognized as promoting health in a variety of settings (Holland, 2006, p. 1842). According to Beard (2010), meditation "is an experience that can lead to the understanding of the inner self: it is not concerned with the norm of material things" (Beard, 2010, p. 9).

Documentation as a factor of reflection and observation demonstrates that the participants are processing particular parts of the experience. Holland (2006) refers to the role of journaling as a way for participants to take in what they are experiencing and what it means to them. Harrison (2010) expresses the need for a journal or way or recording the experience as essential to a place-based approach. The recording of the experience can be considered one form of observation, and was explicitly labeled by participants as being a beneficial way of taking in their surroundings. An example of this was Oilthigh expressing that writing things down allows her to take more in.

The senses and the mind have an interesting and interconnected relationship. While Canatella (2007) addresses the way our senses affect how we exist in a place, both Canatella (2007) and Tuan (1976) point out that thought can also affect sensation. As touched on in section 5.2 participants addressed both emotional feelings and physical sensations that affected their experience and at times challenged the participants in being out of their comfort zone. Feeling outside one's comfort zone, according to Chapman, et. al. (1995), is another essential part of experiential learning, along with the role of reflection and lack of teacher/facilitator judgment. The concept

of place also was an essential aspect of EP, as it was the stimulus for engaging in reflection and observation. As reviewed in the literature, place is an individual understanding and relationship to an environment and “involves multiple layers, all interacting in differing ways and intensities with the learner” (Chapman, et. al., 1995, p. 242). Place is not an independent experience but connected to the landscapes, purpose and interaction of other people and one’s own influence (Relph, 1976, p. 29). Relph (1976) also explains that place is about the concern for the place one dwells.

The themes of ‘experience of place’ demonstrate the importance of being exposed to complex experiences, which is discussed in the next section. It also emphasizes the role of an outdoor learning environment as an engaging setting for all aspects of experience of place.

#### **5.4 The perceptions of EP (output themes):**

The following output themes are to demonstrate results of urban solo EP. These results are similar to the aims of a place-based approach and the ways in which an individual can come to intimately know their place.

##### *5.4.1 Architecture and History*

Eachdraidh, Oilthigh, Trian addressed aspects of architecture that surrounded them. Cuan referred features of the space, how they shaped his view and the way people interacted with it. Oilthigh noticed Victorian statues, ornate green and gold lanterns and the concentric rings of McEwen Square. Oilthigh expresses “I really think the architecture of that square is really beautiful. I love that it has stood for a couple hundred years and will continue to stand after I am gone”. Trian notes the intricacies of the railings and the abundance of flags, which she had not noticed upon her arrival. The architectural and historical themes seemed to interweave themselves together. These themes occurred predominantly with Eachdraidh, Oilthigh and Gleoc, who were in built-up environments with little or no access, visually or physically, to green space. Both Eachdraidh and Oilthigh created interpretive stories based both on the history and architecture of their place. Eachdraidh and Trian considered the interaction of natural and human history within their place.

#### *5.4.2 Personal Histories with Place*

Personal histories or connections with the place played an important role in the EP for seven out of eight participants. Oilthigh suggests the choice of spots for a solo often reflects a space that means something to someone. Individual reasons for choosing the place were: it was the first place they remember (Oilthigh), the first place they had a reason to go (Eachdraidh), the first place they arrived to (Trian), they had spent a lot of time there earlier in the year (Pairce), it was a place they had a history with and felt it would be busy (Slighe), or because they had a particular connection with canals and water and would soon be living on one (Uisge). For Cuan, this place peaked his curiosity and had been there once before. Gleoc did not have a history with the spot but had wanted to go to a place that was challenging.

Personal history of place created what Oilthigh referred to as the ghosts of who she once was. This is the reflecting of one's past self within the place and this occurred with Trian, Pàirce, Slighe, and Oilthigh. Oilthigh acknowledges this is a place she has merely passed through but has never sat in. Looking at her past self she develops a sense of mourning of not really knowing who those girls were. Trian looks upon the place she first arrived to in Edinburgh, expressing "I kind of felt a part of me had been sitting there throughout this entire year, so kind of I felt it had been a long time, but at the same time looking back at that particular platform that I got off at with all my stuff". Slighe describes her spot as 'her patch if you like', reflecting on changes that have occurred through time. "It just takes you back and makes you look and compare to how it was in your day to how it is now" (Slighe). Slighe suggests that perhaps it is she that has changed and not the place. Perhaps it is both. Pàirce's place represented a period of time where she was figuring herself out, as she sits on her bench looking onto her normal spot. Gleoc, did not have an established history with the place, yet she developed a history as a result of this experience, which has also led to a feeling of ownership.

### *5.4.3 Ownership and Attachment*

“Now I feel that, that spot is my place... (laughs). Uh when I was over there that was mine, that was mine. I’m sure that nobody ever stopped there to do what I was doing. So that spot belongs to me, and when I go back there I always think about it. I look at the crossroads and I look at the traffic lights... and that’s my spot you know”.

This statement was Gleoc’s response and feelings of attachment to her spot. Feelings of ownership and attachment to place seemed to coincide. Eachdraidh, at the end of the hour, had expressed he felt he had earned the right to be there and with more time that this feeling would have grown. Eachdraidh alternatively expresses this place does not have an ownership to a period of time as it has constantly been used through the ages. Trian expresses momentary feelings of asserting her space but not feeling a sense of ownership. This concept of ownership is quite ambiguous and is a point where more in-depth investigation would be needed.

### *5.4.4 Metaphorical Meaning*

Some participants developed metaphors and analogies. For Trian the train station was the heart of the city ‘characterized by circulation and movement’, which was reinforced by the sun and wind. For Trian this heart of the city represented Edinburgh as a whole. Uisge describes the canal as an artery as that flows through the city, cleanses and energizes and provides roots - roots for wildlife. Gleoc refers to the clock at her crossroads as the observant whose moods changed based on the weather. Oilthigh refers to the light, weather, and time of year as a ‘quiet grey hinge’ symbolizing a feeling of caught between moments. The university is also a symbol for Oilthigh’s undergraduate self but the city is more of her postgraduate self.

### *5.4.5 Green Space*

Green spaces and natural features were addressed by Uisge, Slighe, Trian, Pàirce, and Cuan, all of whom had access, whether visually or physically to a form of green or natural space. Uisge, Slighe, Trian and Pàirce all commented on the value of the green space in some way. Pàirce, Slighe and Uisge referred to the green space as free from traffic and a nicer to travel through. Pàirce talks about the value of a large



green space and expresses that it encourages community. Slighe alluded to the value of green space for people in built up areas. Uisge feels with regards to this environment, “you’ve got to respect it, it’s so important. It provides energy, re-charging. Perhaps, more importantly going forward that we have these spaces to do this in”. Slighe suggests these spaces are important to care for, as her view looks onto a park, which she feels has not been maintained. Eachdraidh was in a built up environment but looks out at a more natural historical point and notes that the Craggs no longer have trees on them, which is unnatural.

#### *5.4.6 Sounds of Place*

Pàirce, Trian, Cuan, Uisge, Oilthigh and Slighe refer to the sounds of the place. There were noises that disrupted the experience: a background car noise that was annoying (Uisge), the beep, beep, beep of pedestrian lights (Slighe), an annoying motorcycle alarm (Eachdraidh) and the crashing of construction (Pàirce). Oilthigh considers whether such noise would detract away from solitude. Cuan, had expected to smell and hear the sea but “I didn’t hear them, I heard the street, the busy street behind me”. Pàirce was able to hear the wind in the trees alongside these disruptive sounds. Uisge expresses “the wind was very soothing actually, the sort... the strength of wind that wasn’t too harsh and kind of soothing background noise. Going through the rushes and that was quite nice”. For Trian, “I heard a little bit of bagpipes blowing over towards me which was nice. Which made it quite distinctive in terms of being in a Scottish place. It helped to define the space for me”. Oilthigh questions whether people even take in the soundscape of their everyday lives.

#### *5.4.7 Aesthetics*

Aesthetics were addressed by all participants, whether directly using the term or commenting on the qualities of them. Cuan explains that the aesthetics of place provide enjoyment. Trian described the purpose of the Princes gardens as per their aesthetics. For Oilthigh, the aesthetics of her urban solo place are important; yet depending on the basis of the solo she expresses that they may not be that crucial. Other participants referred to the beauty of the place. For Pàirce this beauty was based on natural factors such as trees and the sky, whereas Eachdraidh explains his place may not be a conventionally beautiful place, but that the brickwork was beautiful.

#### *5.4.8 Purpose and interaction*

Oilthigh, Uisge, Gleoc and Cuan commented on the directions people were walking. Eachdraidh noticed how closely people would walk by him trying to stay on the pavement. Oilthigh, Gleoc and Cuan addressed people who seemed to stick out from those patterns. For Gleoc it was an older couple that had asked her what she was doing and wanted to be a part of the project. For Oilthigh it was a few children who had stopped to engage with the square and for Cuan it was the children who wanted to play, walk, climb on the concrete wall, and the one man who did. Cuan and Oilthigh commented on the people who used the place and their purpose. Uisge, Cuan and Pàirce all described a part of their place as being for leisure. Pàirce expresses “I think the space is really valuable for exercise, in that sense, I think people will exercise in any weather in The Meadows, around it, through it”. For Trian, Slighe, Gleoc Cuan, Uisge, Pàirce and Eachdraidh it was considered a place of transit, a means to get somewhere else. Eachdraidh comments that within the city it seems people don’t really want to know whom you are. Oilthigh refers to co-existence in the city as blind, and that people aren’t really taking in their surroundings. Gleoc similarly expresses “it’s a place where people don’t really stop but to cross the road and go somewhere. You don’t expect to see anything interesting going on at that spot. Because it’s just a view of a passage and that’s it. There’s nothing really to have a seat around”.

#### *5.4.9 Output themes discussion*

The variety of OP could be considered the ontological aspects of what participants were looking at, events of the social world, the nature of the place and its physical location (Harrison, 2010; Thomas, 2009). The ontological perspectives of the participants were diverse which coincides with the interdisciplinary nature of OEE. The OP demonstrate similarities to models of facilitation presented by Higgins and Nicol (2002) whereby the facilitator does not act as the prism for experience thus shaping the experience but leaves the participants open to direct experience and interpretation. While the interview was a form of reflection and shaped the experience after, the participants had documented their solo and so had already taken in the experience in their own right.

The themes demonstrated the variety of ways that individuals can come to know and engage with a place. Participants demonstrated reflection on the ecology, history, stories of place, the people place as well as the social interactions and

implications which were addressed by Harrison (2010). The participants engaged on the level of the social, cultural, political and natural as indicated by Smith (2002). These are components of developing a sense of place (Harrison, 2010), and perhaps deepening their intimate knowledge with a specific place, generating thoughts about its rhythms, natural processes, community, inhabitants and history (Fettes & Judson, 2011; Sanger, 1997). All participants referred to some form of attachment or feeling of ownership to their solo spot (Appendices H), which can be considered developing a sense of place (Brown & Wattchow, 2011; Kudryatsev et al., 2011). Will this attachment and ownership one-day result in responsibility? It has been stated that by establishing a relationship with this place (Higgins, 2007; Krudyatsev, et al, 2011), one could then develop a love for place (Higgins, 1997; Sobel, 1998), a place in which they inhabit (Fettes & Judson, 2011). It is proposed that this love can lead to the greater ecological understanding Higgins (1997) was referring to. This however, could not be concluded from this research alone as it looks at a single event on small time scale and the urban solo was conducted independently of any OEE framework or longer-term programme. The concept of establishing responsibility could not be assessed or concluded.

The reflection of personal histories tie together the concepts of place and identity as discussed by Relph (1976) and this experience potentially added to a personal connection to this land as discussed but Knapp (2005b). Having personal histories and perhaps a greater sense of history ultimately makes the experience more relevant to the participant and allows for them to locate themselves within a bigger time scale of history (Sanger, 1997). Sanger (1997) explains that identifying with your past and present can lead to valuing one's role in the future.

Importance placed on the historical and architectural and the creation of stories can be found in various place-based approaches (Harrison, 2010; Sobel, 2008). This is also one indicator of how place can be found within the imagination (Brown & Wattchow, 2011). Place and conditions provoked a sense of character, in the example of Gleoc's perception of the clock and changing weather conditions. This formation of analogies or metaphorical figures according to Relph (1976) this could be a result of the dominant attributes of place, the landscape, whether it be hills or buildings (Relph, 1976, p. 30). Tuan (1977) discusses how humans have an exceptional capacity for symbolism. Tiesdell and Varna (2010) in discussing the values of public space address symbolism as one of these values stating, "public space is symbolic and

representative of the collective and sociability (rather than individuality and privacy)” (Tiesdell & Varna, 2010, p. 579). The metaphorical thoughts from Uisge and Trian were in regard to an aspect of public space, the train station or the canal and their metaphors reflected what these added to the community.

Sounds have the potential to disrupt our experience and reflective process; they bring us back to the locale or encourage a drifting of thoughts. Grant and Korte (1980) discuss the impact of noise and its effects on pedestrians, suggesting that when noise increases, particularly in places of high traffic, it can decrease an individual’s awareness of their surroundings.

Participants demonstrated an understanding of purpose of place, which could be a product of culture (Brown & Wattchow, 2011) or a result of people’s values and intentions with the space (Relph, 1976), and I would suggest that identifying such purposes contributes to the understanding of place. Participants demonstrated concern for place through valuing of green space. Three of the participants had discussed its value and the necessity for preservation; part of its value is leisure and another is that it is a nicer place to be, a haven in the city. Higgins (2007) discusses the diversity of benefits from green spaces, including ones associated with physical activity and those independent of physical activity but rather associated with health and well-being. Nemeth and Schmidt (2010) also address how the economic shifts have changed the way these public spaces have been taken care of, which is noted by Slighe in identifying changes past and present conditions of the place and the current lack of care for the green space she is looking at.

Consideration for the lack of green space and environmental impacts reflects the intentions of Palmer’s (1998) model of environmental education. While these may have been personal feelings, which arrived at the place with the participant, I may suggest that this experience potentially reinforced or built upon these ideas.

The importance of taking these into consideration is to allow one to evaluate the variety of ways these participants can interpret and experience place. The OPs also reflect the intentions of a place-based approach and what can occur with minimal framing input and naturally accrue thoughts of an interdisciplinary nature that is relevant to OEE.

## Chapter Six: Summary

The coding and data analysis had resulted in the EP model. This model reflects past models of experiential learning and indicates that experiential learning occurred about a place, therefore place-based learning could be said to have occurred. This arose with a minimal amount of framing or facilitator input as to how to conduct the solo or what participants should get out of it. Approaching the urban solo with no particular aims attached to the experience, coincides with a naturally occurring experiential approach suggesting it is moving away from the ‘defined set tasks’ approach and moving into more exploratory territory.

Identifying input factors was an important part of this model because it reinforces the notion that place is both a stimulus and individual interpretation and the same physical space could be a different place for different people. The IP demonstrate that a place can change for individuals and is impacted by internal and external factors. This reinforces the place-based approach that, to gain a sense of place, there must be multiple visits. This is an important consideration for future applications.

The components of the experience of place indicate the importance of the experiential process as well as the role of place. Place, sensing, observing and reflecting was the way individuals engaged with the place. The variety of output themes indicates that this was a complex learning experience. This emphasises the role of outdoor learning in providing such experience, even when sitting still. The individual’s minds are engaged even if their bodies are not. Arguably, their bodies are engaged as per the sensations they experienced.

The output themes were rich and perhaps, without specific aims to obtain from the experience, contributed to this. The themes are comparable to the aims of place-based education in developing a sense of place and place attachment. They demonstrated a diversity of ways that participants of the urban solo can experience a place. The themes reflected historical, architectural, geological and aesthetics influences. Yet the participants also demonstrated concern about places and an awareness of particular social implications.

The layers of the urban solo experience demonstrate that it can be incorporated within outdoor environmental education practice through the place-based and experiential learning approaches in developing a greater sense of place. The Heron Project's approach to the urban solo should not be considered the sole way of applying the experience rather I feel it would be beneficial if incorporated alongside other OEE programmes, activities and approaches. The urban solo experience would possibly be more effective as well if there were multiple visits to the same place as to know this place in many shades. I would also suggest that future research could be done on each of the themes presented during this experience, as the scope of this paper did not allow for the presentation of the rich data that was collected. I believe however, that practices within outdoor environmental education could benefit from the reflective experience of an urban solo in a variety of contexts and should be considered for future research as well as practice.

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