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The Academic Senate on 07 October 2008 resolved that Ian Robert Brooke had satisfied the requirements for admission to the degree of Master of Education.

This thesis represents a major part of the prescribed program of study.

# **Social Competence: A Study of Adolescents in an Outdoor Setting.**

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**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Education.**

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## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to my father, Malcolm Brooker,  
who gave me a love of the outdoors.*

# **Abstract**

## **Social Competence: A Study of Adolescents in an Outdoor Setting.**

This study investigates the effects of a week long challenge program on adolescents' social skills and in particular social competence. Current research has shown that there can be positive outcomes for participants attending outdoor education programs, however little is known about the nature and causes of such effects for short term programs.

Thirty six students attending schools in the Sutherland Shire, south of Sydney were nominated by teachers to attend the week long program and subsequent follow-up sessions. The Life Effectiveness Questionnaire H-I (Neill, Marsh & Richards, 2003) was completed pre and post program and again six months later. This was used to quantify any change that occurred in the eight constructs measured by the questionnaire deemed to constitute 'life effectiveness' in the post program period.

A cohort of students (n=10) was interviewed immediately after the program and six months later. The questioning sought to determine if participants observed changes in their own social skills and those of others. Interviewees were also asked to identify specific activities that they felt were of general benefit and assisted in the development of personal social skills. The instructor and supervising teacher who attended the same program were asked to identify changes in participants and significant events that may have contributed to participants' reported changes.

Results from the questionnaire showed significant gains in the constructs of Social Competence and Time Management. These however declined over the sixth month period after the program. It appears that the effect of short term outdoor education programs on Life Effectiveness is short lived. In contrast, the qualitative data collected from interviews showed that participants had observed changes in their social skills and attributed these to the challenge and group activities within the program. Participants reported that these benefits were long lasting.

The findings of this study demonstrate the positive benefits of short term outdoor education programs and the need to further investigate the post program experience.

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