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Eric Fletcher & Heather Prince

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# Steering a course towards eudaimonia: the effects of sail training on well-being and character

Eric Fletcher<sup>a</sup> and Heather Prince<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Education, Communications and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK;

<sup>b</sup>Department of Science, Natural Resources and Outdoor Studies, Ambleside Campus, University of Cumbria, Ambleside, UK

## ABSTRACT

Sail training voyages have been shown to enhance self-constructs and inter-personal and intra-personal skills. It is suggested through this case-study approach with twelve 14 year-old crew participants that such an experience contributes towards well-being and character development in emerging adulthood. An audit of voyage-based experiences generated an inventory of 58 authentic activities and participants completed questionnaires immediately post-voyage (T<sup>1</sup>) and six months later (T<sup>2</sup>) to rate the significance of each activity. The highest rated activities reflected Maslow's lower order of needs with a two-thirds correspondence at T<sup>1</sup> and T<sup>2</sup>. Helming (or steering the vessel) was ranked as the most significant activity by participants in both time periods, although participants had questioned their ability to do this before the voyage. Helming is suggested to activate cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains in an authentic adventure education experience that contributes to hedonic well-being and may provide a course towards eudaimonia.

## KEYWORDS

Sail training; well-being; character; adventure education; youth transition

## Introduction

A case study of a five-day sail training voyage involving twelve 14-year-old crew participants aboard the sail training vessel *James Cook*<sup>1</sup> is presented. The purpose of the study was to investigate the subjective significance<sup>2</sup> of voyage-based activities, to consider how these activities may contribute to the developmental outcomes identified in previous sail training studies and to inform future operating practices aboard this vessel.

Sail training is a type of adventurous outdoor activity in which, in addition to technical sailing skills, participants normally experience beneficial outcomes, such as an increase in self-concept, self-esteem, social confidence and inter-personal and intra-personal skills (see, e.g., Gordon, Harcourt-Smith, Hay, Priest, 1996; McCulloch, McLaughlin, Allison, Edwards, & Tett, 2010; Rogers, 2004). It 'is a modern phenomenon with deep historical roots' (McCulloch, 2015, p. 236). We propose that these types of outcome contribute towards participants' well-being which may be indicative of character formation and development.

In their global study aboard a range of vessel types, McCulloch et al. (2010) found that such beneficial outcomes were sustainable beyond the voyage experience. Recent studies have demonstrated the utility of sail training outcomes; for example, a study of five sail training participants during and after an 11-day sail training voyage found that networking and relationship outcomes contributed to participant engagement (or re-engagement) with learning and education (Henstock, Barker, & Knijnik, 2013). A study of a 10-day voyage found that participants enhanced their

resilience, 'the ability to react to adversity and challenge in an adaptive and productive way, ... considered crucial to healthy development' (Hayhurst, Hunter, Kafka, & Boyes, 2015, p. 40), and that this enhanced post-voyage resilience was maintained for five months.

In reviewing the literature to inform the conceptual framework for this study, there are recurring themes in the demands and challenges for children's and young people's personal and social development; in particular, the descriptions of John Dewey (1859–1952) and Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934). These themes resonate today in the debate about how contemporary educational policy prepares (or fails to prepare) individuals for the transition from childhood to adulthood. The context for this study considers these older texts, current propositions for well-being and character education, the present-day demands and challenges facing children and young people and how participation in a sail training voyage may contribute to the formation and development of well-being and character.

## Context

This article relies upon the 'waypoints' to be found in the literature to develop an emergent interpretive narrative.

The physiological changes experienced by today's adolescents are probably very similar to those of the past; however, contemporary society presents these demands and challenges in a more complex setting. Society has, over the last 80 years or so, tended to respond to these changing demands and challenges through educational doctrine intended to meet broader societal needs (Pring, 2004); however, some areas of cognitive and human development (such as personal and social development, and literacy and numeracy) remain difficult issues for policy-makers and educators, implying that the evolution of educational policy may not have been entirely successful in meeting the 'broader societal needs'.

In 1930s America, amidst the transition from a community-based economy and lifestyle to urban industrialised occupations, Dewey cautioned educational policy-makers against the 'tendency to emphasize technical details and [losing] sight of the broader societal function of education' (Quay & Seaman, 2013, p. 2). In the 1930s post-revolutionary Soviet Union, Vygotsky's research on human cognition and development was conducted 'within a society that [had] high hopes for the ability of science to solve the pressing economic and social problems of the Soviet people' and 'the elimination of illiteracy and the founding of educational programs to maximise the potential of individual children' (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 9). That the personal and social development of children and young people remains a contemporary issue suggests we still have a lot to learn.

In Great Britain, the post-1945 educational policy was complemented by a 'vigorous social movement ... developed on the margins of youth work, outdoor recreation, further education and industrial training' (Roberts, White, & Parker, 1974, p. 11). Roberts et al. describe this movement as 'character-training' but they fall short of providing a detailed definition of character, only acknowledging that 'each youngster will carry [their] own personal likes, dislikes, attitudes and beliefs through a course and into [their] subsequent life' (1974, p. 11) and that '[following] their training most young people feel "different", more mature, self-confident, and better capable of handling relationships with others' (1974, p. 148). This character-training was provided by a number of independent organisations, such as The Outward Bound Trust (established in 1941), Brathay Trust (established in 1946) and the Sail Training Association (established in 1966); delivering a variety of residential courses for young people often involving adventurous outdoor pursuits. 'In Britain by 1969 as many as 25 per cent of young people in the 14–20 age range had attended a residential non-vocational course, in most cases based upon outdoor pursuits' (1974, p. 15), with many participants being sponsored by their employers to develop them as employees. This suggests that compulsory education had prepared young people for entry into employment but that these 'new employees' required further investment, by their employers, in their character.

More recently British educational policy is seeing a re-emergence of character education to develop character before entry into employment (Arthur, 2005). However, Ryan (in Arthur, Harrison, Kristjánsson, & Davison, 2014, p. 4) suggests that the 'educational failure to teach about and promote good character has left democratic societies increasingly vulnerable in terms of lacking the social glue necessary to flourish and promote the common good'. The current situation is far from clear.

Mortlock (1984/1994) argues that 'adventure' should be a core component of the British curriculum towards the formation and development of 'an awareness of, respect for, and love of self, ... others, [and] the environment' (1984/1994, p. 18); an argument that is being made today. Mortlock's description of 'adventure' has much in common with Roberts et al.'s (1974) character-training.

Academic research reaching across many aspects of adventure-based activity and the personal and social development of children and young people has delivered greater clarity about the nature and extent of outcomes. Adventure education remains largely outside of compulsory education, increasingly coming within the domain of youth work. Some secondary research has synthesised studies into adventure-based outcomes to further Mortlock's argument for the inclusion of adventure as part of the curriculum; see, for example, Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richards (1997). Rickinson et al. (2004) and Fiennes et al. (2015).

Over the years, labels and descriptions of specific adventure-based outcomes have emerged and academic research has been able (or has claimed to have been able) to differentiate between the multi-layered dimensions of personal and social developmental outcomes.

Sail training has been the subject of such focused investigations; for example, Capurso and Borsci's (2013) quantitative, quasi-experimental voyage-based study measured self-concept using only the Social and Competence sub-scales (from the six sub-scales available) of Bracken's (1992) Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale.<sup>3</sup> However, many studies fail to explore how these very specific components are consciously or unconsciously<sup>4</sup> used by individual participants in their trajectory towards well-being and forming and developing character.

Many of these outcome distillates have now been consolidated and re-branded within the definitions of well-being; however, it is unclear how these multi-dimensional components are, or may be, laminated to create and strengthen well-being and character. This, we would argue, is critical to personal and social development.

Well-being contributes to 'how young people feel about their lives as a whole, ... their relationships, the amount of choice that they have in their lives, and their future' (The Children's Society, 2015, p. 3), resonating with Roberts et al.'s (1974) description of the purpose of character-training, but the relationship between the two concepts is unclear. The Children's Society sets out a framework for the connected concepts of well-being (subjective or hedonic and psychological or eudaimonic) that contribute to self-reported well-being (2015, p. 9).

Hedonia and eudaimonia have both been interpreted to mean 'happiness' (see Waterman, 2008); however, as Diener points out, there has been 'little theoretical progress in understanding happiness [...] in the two millennia since the time of the Greek philosophers' (referring to Wilson, 1967, in Diener, 1984, p. 542). These two constructs for happiness have led to two research traditions and tensions between the language of philosophy and psychology (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009). Hedonic happiness, or hedonia, is defined as 'the belief that one is getting the important things one wants, as well as certain pleasant affects that normally go along with this belief' (Kraut, 1979, cited in Waterman, 2008, p. 235). This type of subjective well-being (see Diener, 1984) may be short-lived or can be associated with a specific event or setting where personal needs are satisfied. Eudaimonia, or eudaimonic happiness, is a complex construct that can be traced back to the writings of Aristotle and the fourth century BC (Waterman, 2008). Eudaimonia is the feeling of 'being where one wants to be, doing what one wants to do' (citing Norton, 1976, p. 216) 'where what is wanted is to be taken as being something worth doing' (1976, p. 236); or 'living life in a full and deeply satisfying way' (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 1). There is a view that eudaimonic living may necessarily

involve ‘[experiencing] hedonic enjoyment; however, not all hedonic enjoyment is derived from eudaimonic living’ (Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008, in Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 3). Diener proposes that ‘eudaemonia (*sic*) is not happiness in the modern senses of the word, but a desirable state judged from a particular framework’ (1984, p. 543). Well-being contributes to preparing children and young people for the rigours of adulthood and making a contribution to society (Aked & Thompson, 2011); other related concepts are citizenship (see Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010) and social capital (see Beames & Atencio, 2008; Finkelstein & Goodwin, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This narrative ‘journey’ seems to have become more of a circumnavigation—bringing us back to the propositions of Dewey and Vygotsky.

Today’s journey towards adulthood, especially for those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, is more difficult – yet:

[their] ‘needs’ will remain very much as they are now but at a later chronological stage in life. ... The need to establish individual identity, self-assurance and skills in inter-relationships will remain central tasks for adolescents and young people—even if deferred by a few years. (Gutfreund, 2000, p. 8)

The Cabinet Office (2014, p. 76) describes this developmental phase as emerging adulthood or ‘a new stage in the life course of many young people, who are experiencing longer, more complex paths to full adulthood and independence’, which has potential to undermine the young person’s well-being.

This review of the literature provides sufficient basis to investigate further the role for adventure education and outdoor learning and, in particular, sail training as they relate to personal and social development and well-being outcomes, and the formation and development of character.

## The study

### *Methodology and research design*

The methodological approach to this study makes the assumption that the operation of the *James Cook* falls within the scope of extant sail training research and that participant crews gain sustainable benefits within the general description of well-being. The purpose of the study was to explore the participants’ experience of a sail training voyage, in particular the subjective significance (see note 2 *ante*) of the activities they experienced; it was construed as a small-scale pilot study to inform a larger research project. The identification of a significant activity (or activities) would enable the development of practice to further improve the quality of the subjective experience and, thereby, the outcomes arising from the voyage experience. This is an approach proposed by Pike and Beames (2013) ‘to learn more of the activities themselves, how they evolved, the various ways in which people experience them, and the underlying factors that control and facilitate them’ (p. 160).

A sail training voyage is the sum of a complex interaction of environmental, people and activity components; however, the causation of beneficial outcomes eludes the existing research. Capurso and Borsci (2013, p. 16) describe this complex interaction as a ‘black box’, in that ‘we know the [inputs] and we know the [outcomes], but the causal processes between the two—the genuine causation—are unexplained’ (Morrison, 2009, p. 123).

In this present study a qualitative approach was taken to observe how these individual (but complex and multi-layered) voyage components are manifested in the overall experience. Denscombe describes this approach as a case study; an approach that ‘works best when the researcher wants to investigate an issue in depth and provide an explanation that can cope with the complexity and subtlety of real life situations’ (2013, p. 55).

The voyage environment is contained within the physical characteristics of the vessel and is very much constant but it is affected by the ever-changing environment outside the vessel, such as the weather and sea state. The people component is complex and is forever changing because each

voyage is made up of combinations of sea staff (both full-time and volunteers) interacting with different crew participants as individuals and collectively as the 'crew'. Individual participants each construct and re-construct their understanding of the voyage experience, their subjective experience; and this understanding is anchored to their own personal foundation of experience (see Boud & Walker, 1990, cited in Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 2010, p. 11).

An audit of voyage-based activities developed an inventory of 58 activities across all aspects of voyage-life. These activities are grouped under seven descriptors: 2.1 Arrival, 2.2 Initial Briefings, 2.3 Safety, 2.4 Seamanship, 2.5 Sail Handling, 2.6 Living Aboard and 2.7 General/Training Workshops. These authentic (as opposed to manufactured or contrived) activities are integral to the day-to-day life on board and the voyage experience, representing the planned structure and the catalysts for the interaction between the people and environmental components.

The environment, people and activity considerations allowed a questionnaire to be developed to explore post-voyage feelings and establish the subjective significance of the voyage-based activities. The study questionnaire comprised three sections; Sections 1 and 3 used open questioning to elicit subjective reaction and feelings about the voyage. The inventory of activities was presented in Section 2; this allowed participants to rate subjectively the significance of each voyage-based activity using a five-point (zero to four) Likert scale (see, e.g., Bryman, 2012, p. 166). The everyday meaning of significance was intended to allow participants to differentiate the subjective effect of voyage activities.

The questionnaire was first completed by participants at the end of the five-day voyage (T<sup>1</sup>), supervised by the researcher whilst the participants were still on board the vessel. Six months later the questionnaire was then completed in the school setting (T<sup>2</sup>), supervised by a teacher acting as 'gatekeeper'. The questionnaires were completed anonymously and there was no analysis of individual T<sup>1</sup> and T<sup>2</sup> responses.

## The participants

The twelve 14-year-old participants for this study, comprising nine girls and three boys, were drawn from a pre-existing voyage booking with a local secondary school.<sup>5</sup> The selection of participants was completed outside of the control or influence of the study; each participant had won their berth for the voyage through an in-school competition. This competition was designed by the school and involved aspiring crew to write a case for why they should be allowed to sail; entries were then considered by a panel of teachers and berths awarded on merit. The competition had been finalised before the approach to participate in this study was made to the school. Although participants were from the same year group, only three had a pre-existing friendship (this study did not investigate the pre-voyage and post-voyage situation of participants, such as friendship groups, engagement in learning or academic achievement).

The ethical approach to this study considered 'whether there is *harm to participants*; whether there is a *lack of informed consent*; whether there is an *invasion of privacy*; whether *deception* is involved' (Diener & Crandall, 1978, cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 135; original emphases). Participants, their parents or guardians, the school and the operating charity were provided with information about the study; written consent was obtained and it was made clear that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. It was agreed that participants and their school would remain anonymous; however, the charity gave consent for their details to be included in any reporting of this study. This approach was approved by the Ethics Panel at the University of Cumbria.

## The voyage

The voyage took place between noon Monday and noon Friday aboard the sail training vessel *James Cook*, a 70-foot steel-built ketch, and covered a total distance of 125 nautical miles in the North Sea. The sea staff for this voyage comprised a professional sea-faring Skipper with a vast

experience in sail training; the First Mate, who was a professional commercial sea-farer acting as a sail training volunteer; a full-time volunteer Bosun; two volunteer Watch Leaders (including the researcher as a participant-observer); and a teacher from the school as the participants' group leader.

Each voyage aboard *James Cook* begins with the routine practices that are founded in the culture and traditions of the vessel, comprising the introduction of the sea staff, familiarising participants with the boat and safety briefings. The day-to-day operation of the *James Cook* engages both sea staff and crew in the domestic arrangements of living within the physical confines of the vessel, preparing the vessel for sea and all sailing activities.

## Analysis

An interpretivist approach was taken to the analysis of collected data, both within and as a comparison between the T<sup>1</sup> and T<sup>2</sup> responses, in a process described by Rogers (2004, p. 16) as evaluation research. In adopting this approach it is important to recognise that the researcher's interpretation of responses may not necessarily reflect the respondents' original meaning; the analysis reflects the researcher's own attitudes, values and beliefs in providing this interpretive narrative (see Denscombe, 2013, p. 237).

The response to the inventory of activities (Section 2) was the main focus for the analysis. The free text responses (Sections 1 and 2) were then examined for context and any explanation for the significance of the six highest rated significant activities from the responses. A detailed discussion is provided for the most significant activity—helming; and a commentary is provided for the remaining highest ranked significant activities. It is recognised that the responses comprise a small dataset and that any inferences drawn might have limited extrapolation and scope; but they may inform operational practices aboard this vessel.

The questionnaire invited participants to rate the significance of each activity from the inventory of activities using a five-point Likert scale (zero to four). For T<sup>1</sup> responses some participants did not rate all of the activities they had experienced, and some T<sup>2</sup> respondents rated activities that they had not experienced.<sup>6</sup> To allow for a direct comparison between activities, a significance rating for each activity was calculated using the following equation:

$$\frac{\text{Sum of participant ratings}}{\text{Highest possible sum of participant rating}} = \text{Significance rating} \quad (1)$$

An activity that was not conducted during the voyage should rate as 'zero'. The lowest possible significance rating for an activity that was conducted—that is, all participants rating an activity as one—was 0.25; the highest possible significance rating—that is, all participants rating an activity as four—was 1.00. The calculation of the significance rating allowed for the inventory of activities to be ranked in order of significance; this then allowed for the comparison of T<sup>1</sup> and T<sup>2</sup> rankings.

The six most significant T<sup>1</sup> activities are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Activities with the highest T<sup>1</sup> 'significance' ratings.

Activity	Significance rating	Ranking
2.1d Initial familiarisation of <i>James Cook</i>	0.97	=1
2.3c Man Over Board (MOB)	0.97	=1
2.4k Helming—steering the <i>James Cook</i>	0.97	=1
2.2b Introductions for crew and sea staff	0.95	=2
2.2i Using the pin rail; using OXO (pin rail and cleats) and round turn and two half hitches (fenders)	0.95	=2
2.6b Meals—eating together around the table	0.95	=2

'Initial familiarisation of *James Cook*', 'Man Over Board (MOB)', 'Introductions for crew and sea staff' and 'Using the pin rail; using OXO (pin rail and cleats) and round turn and two half hitches (fenders)' are four activities found in the routine practice of the first hours aboard the *James Cook*. These activities contribute to alleviating pre-voyage anxieties, and prime and motivate participants for their experience in this novel environment, creating the milieu for the voyage. They correlate to the lower order needs (i.e. physiological, safety and belonging) of Abraham Maslow's (1970) *Hierarchy of Human Needs* (see, e.g., Reece & Walker, 2000, p. 100). Maslow proposed the importance of satisfying these lower order needs to allow the individual to move towards, what he described as, 'self-actualisation', creating the conditions for optimising individual potential within the experience (Mortlock, 1984/1994, p. 115).

It has been the researcher's experience that many crew participants appear anxious at the prospect of 'Helming—steering the *James Cook*'; for a young person, steering and taking control of this 70-foot yacht, albeit always under the supervision of the sea staff, makes for a challenging but empowering activity. The characteristics of this activity are discussed in greater detail later.

'Meals—eating together around the table' takes place around the saloon table (a fold-out table large enough to accommodate all 18 crew and sea staff), and is the focus for much of the non-sailing social interaction. The simple label used to describe this activity fails to acknowledge the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of this social interaction and its potential affect (and it does not consider the nutritional value of the meals). Zaborsky (2011, p. 9) proposes that this type of social activity is absent in many young peoples' lives, quoting a teenage sail training participant: 'It was nice to eat the food at the table like we did. I've never done that'. Sommer, Sturmer, Schmullerovich, Martin-Loeches, and Schacht propose that sharing 'a pleasant meal seems to elicit or modify emotional, cognitive, and social processes' (2013, p. 1).

Analysis of the T<sup>2</sup> responses found only small variances in the significance rating for each activity, leading to some movement in the overall ranking of the activities; four activities remained in the top six (Table 2).

'Helming—steering the *James Cook*' maintained its top ranking in both T<sup>1</sup> and T<sup>2</sup> responses as a significant activity; We propose an explanation of this activity's significance later. 'Night sailing—sailing during the hours of darkness' and 'On watch—keeping lookout for hazards, i.e. navigational marks, other vessels, lobster pot/fishing net markers' improved their respective T<sup>1</sup> to T<sup>2</sup> ranking, and are both activities that are closely associated to helming.

'Initial familiarisation of *James Cook*', 'Introductions for crew and sea staff' and 'Meals—eating together around the table' retained their subjective significance six months after the voyage experience. These lower order Maslow activities are very much social-oriented activities; they are part of the introductory ritual at the beginning of the voyage experience and, we would argue, have an important role in establishing and developing voyage-based relationships.

The subsequent analysis of the free text responses focuses upon the significance of 'Helming—steering the *James Cook*'. Helming as a theme in these free text responses was cited as being one activity the participants thought they would not be able to do (T<sup>1</sup>,  $n = 5$ ; T<sup>2</sup>,  $n = 3$ ) and an example

**Table 2.** Activities with the highest T<sup>2</sup> 'significance' ratings.

Activity	Significance rating	Ranking
2.4k Helming—steering the <i>James Cook</i>	0.90	1 (=1)
2.4l Night sailing—sailing during the hours of darkness	0.88	=2 (=3)
2.6b Meals—eating together around the table	0.88	=2 (=2)
2.4j On watch—keeping lookout for hazards, i.e. navigational marks, other vessels, lobster pot/fishing net markers	0.86	3 (=4)
2.1d Initial familiarisation of <i>James Cook</i>	0.85	=4 (=1)
2.2b Introductions for crew and sea staff	0.85	=4 (=2)

Note: Value in parentheses is the T<sup>1</sup> ranking.



of an activity that had made them 'feel good' ( $T^1$ ,  $n = 7$ ;  $T^2$ ,  $n = 5$ ). Cooking and eating together was another activity that made participants 'feel good' ( $T^1$ ,  $n = 5$ ;  $T^2$ ,  $n = 7$ ).

Although this study did not measure voyage outcomes there were some responses that are worthy of mention to demonstrate a recognition, by some participants, of future application of their experience:

*T<sup>1</sup> responses*

I have learned that it (*sic*) better to take risks & try out new things than not to do anything at all.  
I CAN do challenges. I don't have to be afraid of what lies after that challenge. (Original emphasis)  
I am able to do anything if I set my mind to it.

*T<sup>2</sup> responses*

That I am only one person. I can't be what everyone wants.  
I have more enthusiasm and stride to complete everything.  
That if I have more confidence in myself I will most likely be able to do the things I want to do.

### What is it about helming that makes it significant?

Helming describes the act of steering of the vessel, and helmsman is the non-gender specific term for the person steering a vessel. Within the hierarchy of a vessel, the captain (or skipper), the helmsman and pilot are key roles that ensure a voyage between port A and port B is conducted safely and efficiently. To be 'at the helm' has found its way in to non-seafaring contexts and is now used to describe corporate leaders or captains of industry; it is suggestive of a 'holder of power'. On board the *James Cook* any close-quarters helming, such as leaving or arriving at a mooring or anchorage, is only undertaken by the Skipper (or other senior qualified members of sea staff) which reinforces the suggestion of 'power'.

Whilst crew participants may be familiar with shore-based activities that have been adapted and transferred to the on-board setting, such as cooking and eating a meal or sleeping in a bunk, the nature of helming situates it solely within this setting, with its characteristics founded in the working practices aboard sailing ships through the ages. Helming presents the helmsman, as a 'newcomer', with the opportunity to self-evaluate their 'value of participation' in the on-board community towards becoming a helmsman and an active participant of that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 111). Helming a vessel towards a waypoint or destination may be considered by the 'newcomer' as a form of work; Dewey drew a distinction between play and work, in that work 'is enriched by the sense that it leads somewhere, that it amounts to something' (1910, p. 164).

The *James Cook* is very much founded in the 'recreational or yachting' tradition with its 'roots in the kind of leisure sailing that was developed during the late 19th and 20th centuries' (McCulloch, 2004, p. 186); however, it could be argued that the culture and traditions of any type of sailing activity, regardless of technological advancements, may be found in the seafaring culture and traditions of antiquity (see, e.g., Dunsch, 2012).

This study's inventory of activities used the term helming, which is a complex activity that engages a young person in steering the 70-foot steel-built ketch *James Cook*, by way of its one-metre diameter steering wheel, in open water as the vessel is exposed to external variables (such as the wind, sea state and tidal stream). In this instance, the activity began for each crew participant with their watch leader's introduction to the principle of steering the vessel (which may also include an explanation of the scientific principles of how the sailing vessel and its steering work). This is a mediated one-to-one activity comprising an explanation and demonstration leading to hands-on practice 'at the helm'; this process is a form of 'guided participation' (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002).

On taking the helm, the course to steer towards the intended destination (or waypoint) was explained with reference being made to the compass bearing and other visual cues, such as landmarks ashore. The type of vessel and its course, the direction and strength of the wind, the tidal stream and the sea state combine to generate a constantly moving environment on which the

helmsman exercises his or her control. The vessel could be described as being in a state of equilibrium when the sails are set to optimise the effect of these external factors as it is steered towards the desired destination. This equilibrium is only maintained through the constant adjustment of the helm; the helmsman needs to make 'active compensatory movements' of the wheel to remain on course and 'against the boat's movements in order to keep their balance' (Stadler, 1984/1987, p. 69).

For landlubbers it is important to know that these external influences on the vessel are ever changing, the wind may change its direction or increase or decrease in strength, requiring the helmsman to constantly monitor and adjust the 'helm' to stay on course. This activates cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains in this complex activity. The 'newcomer' helmsman often goes quiet as they focus on their task, assimilating the sensations of the activity and apply their understanding of the watch leader's explanation and demonstration. Often, after a relatively short time, the crew often observe the appearance of a broad smile reflective of enjoyment or an indication that the activity is within a participant's comfort zone. In addition to any supervisory feedback from their watch leader as the helmsman gets to grips with the task of steering, subtle changes coming from the vessel provide the helmsman with other types of non-verbal feedback. For instance, as the vessel sails 'off' its course, altering the efficient movement of the vessel through the water, the vessel's attitude to the waves or degree of heel changes; visual cues, such as the bow moving across the horizon or changes in its position relative to landmarks or other vessels; and audible cues as the sails become less efficient and begin to flap. These sensations and cues all provide non-verbal feedback to the helmsman and activate reflection-in-action like 'a hawk in the mind constantly circling, watching and advising on practice' (Bolton, 2012, p. 33) as they 'make active counter movements with the rudder against the yawing of the boat' (Stadler, 1984/1987, p. 70). It is noticeable that when the helmsman, even those who are experienced and accomplished practitioners, loses his or her focus and stops monitoring their performance it is difficult to stay on course.

Sailing has been described as an optimal experience and having the potential for creating flow:

It is what the sailor holding a tight course feels when the wind whips through her hair, when the boat lunges through the waves like a colt—sails, hull, wind, and sea humming a harmony that vibrates in the sailor's veins. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 3)

Sailing also '[constitutes] an expression of eudaimonia. . . . experienced only in connection with a limited set of specific sources, such as activities associated with self-realization and expressions of virtue' (Waterman, 2008, p. 237). This view introduces an emotional dimension, as an example of an aesthetic experience '[that] is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it' (Dewey, 1934, p. 42 cited in Quay & Seaman, 2013, p. 68).

Helming is a mediated 'side-by-side' activity that empowers the helmsman, regardless of their sailing experience, and activates a complex mix of the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains in an authentic work-based experience, contributing to hedonic well-being but, more importantly, possibly providing a course towards eudaimonia.

## Conclusion

The contemporary journey to adulthood for many young people is complex; this, we would propose, requires a greater emphasis on supporting their well-being, and forming and developing character, albeit unobtrusively. If this is lacking in compulsory education or it is not readily available to those entering the workplace, then other opportunities should be exploited that offer scaffolded support to enable young people to realise their potential.

This case study used a simplistic design to investigate the subjective significance of a range of activities encountered by twelve 14-year-old crew participants on a short sail training voyage. The authenticity of the activities experienced in the naturally occurring environment of an 'adventure

under sail' may go some way in explaining this significance, and the socially oriented outcomes. This is a position supported by Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1984) as they propose that the presentation of an activity in a social context will always be a 'social construction' (p. 175) and that it generates a different response when it has arisen from circumstances that have occurred naturally (p. 188).

Although 'significant' (in the non-statistical sense of this term) activities were identified (for this particular crew, on this particular vessel, for this particular voyage), this study was limited by the methods used and sample size; it failed to explore a rationale or secure an explanation for this 'significance' with the crew participants and can be seen as a pilot or reconnaissance study as part of a more extensive research project. The study has, however, informed the practices aboard *James Cook*; it has confirmed the importance of the introductory sessions and safety briefings in establishing the setting for the voyage, and has provided a renewed focus on the role of helming.

Many studies of adventure and outdoor education have focused on the identification, isolation and measurement of outcomes; the operation of many of these specific outcomes and how they may contribute to well-being or the formation and development of character is not well understood and would benefit from further study. Such studies should extend beyond the isolation and measurement of outcomes and must investigate how these outcomes are 'laminated' by individuals to develop their sense of well-being and character. To accomplish this, we would argue that studies should consider 'the social context of individual achievement and to develop methods for studying the real complexity of life rather than trying in vain to isolate human specimens for study' (Rogoff, 1990, p. 4).

## Notes

1. The STV *James Cook* is operated by the Ocean Youth Trust North ([www.oytnorth.org.uk](http://www.oytnorth.org.uk)), a charity providing 'adventure under sail' for 12–25 year olds.
2. The term significance is used here in its literal sense without statistical connotations, inferring a more in-depth exploration of the importance of activities.
3. The Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale is one of a range of valid and reliable tools to measure child and adolescent multidimensional self-concept (Anstey, 1999; Bracken, Bunch, Keith, & Keith, 2000).
4. In this context the word 'unconsciously' is used to describe how an individual may utilise outcomes from their experience instinctively or without thinking about them.
5. The school is described by Ofsted as a 'smaller than average-sized' secondary school with 853 pupils (as at June 2013) aged 11–16 years. In their 2013 *Ofsted Report* the school was graded as 'good in all areas'. This was the school's third annual voyage aboard *James Cook*; this type of residential experience is incorporated into whole-school activities.
6. These anomalies were not investigated within the scope of this study.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Author biographies

**Eric Fletcher** is a mature student. Having completed this independent study with the University of Cumbria, he is now a doctoral candidate at the School of Education, Communication and Language Studies, Newcastle University continuing his research interest in 'adventure under sail'. He is an active volunteer with the Ocean Youth Trust North, which includes supporting voyages as a Watch Leader, and ashore as their Designated Safeguarding Lead.

**Heather Prince** is Associate Professor in Outdoor and Environmental Education at the University of Cumbria. She has research and teaching interests in pedagogic practice in outdoor and adventure education and has a long standing involvement in sailing, including more recently with sail training through the Ocean Youth Trust North. She is a co-editor of the *Routledge International Handbook of Outdoor Studies* and a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

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