**SAMPLE ANSWERS TO ETHICS APPLICATION: INTERVENTIONS WITH ADOLESCENTS**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

**Application forms for research students at CDU**

For projects that include human participants or animals, CDU research students will need to submit an ethics application. This application is designed to assess the extent to which the benefits of your research outweigh the risks.

* For projects that include human participants, visit www.cdu.edu.au/research/ori/human-ethics and read *submission of new proposals*
* For projects that include animals, visit www.cdu.edu.au/research/ori/animal-ethics and read *all forms and documents*

**Application forms for research students at Menzies**

For projects that include human participants or animals, Menzies research students complete a slightly different ethics application. For more information, visit

* www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Ethics\_approval/

**Sample answers**

The CDU ethics application includes 14 main sections. This document illustrates some typical answers whenever the research entails evaluating interventions applied to adolescents. These answers could help you formulate your own responses to the various questions. Nevertheless, you still need to think carefully about your answers, because every project raises distinct ethical challenges.

The Menzies ethics application is slightly different. Nevertheless, many of the answers in this document are relevant to research students at Menzies as well.

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| **Preliminary questions and Question 1** |

**Question 1d. Approval of project.** Include a sentence that is something like one of the following bullet points.

* This project was presented at a College seminar. A panel was organized after the seminar to discuss potential amendments and improvements
* This project was approved during confirmation of candidature
* The project was reviewed and commended by the panel of reviewers who evaluate ARC grants.

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| **Question 2: Research categories** |

For many surveys, tick

* 2a School children; Employees or Officers of a specific company or organisation
* 2b Young people 14 to 17
* 2c Anonymous questionnaires or surveys; interviews

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| **Question 4: Description of the project** |

This study explores the prospect that exposure to nature can facilitate learning and wellbeing in schools. In particular, high school students, aged between 14 and 18, will attend six hours of classes outside school time on how to improve memory and resilience. Half these students will be randomly allocated to classrooms comprising large windows, surrounded by nature. The other students will be randomly allocated to classrooms that are not surrounded by nature.

Before and after these classes, students will complete a survey. The survey includes various measures and determinants of wellbeing and engagement, including burnout, absorption, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, students will be invited to participate in interviews, lasting between 30 and 120 minutes. During the interviews, students will be granted opportunities to discuss their attitudes towards this program and potential improvements. Several teachers will be asked to participate in similar interviews. Alternatively, students can attend one of one to three focus groups that explore similar questions. The quantitative data will be subjected to mixed model ANOVAS. The qualitative data will be subjected to thematic analysis.

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| **Question 5: Aims and significance of the project** |

**Limitations of past research**

Many studies have shown that exposure to nature can enhance the wellbeing and concentration of individuals. For example, according to the attention restoration hypothesis, exposure to nature restores attention and thus facilitates concentration and diminishes the likelihood of burnout.

Unfortunately, several limitations of past research limit the utility of these findings. First, past research has not explored whether such exposure to nature is beneficial to this generation of teenagers. This age group is especially relevant, because the capacity of these individuals to resist temptations is limited relative to adults. Yet, this generation of teenagers may not have developed the same association with nature because they often play games indoors. Second, past research has not explored which characteristics of individuals affect the benefits of nature.

**Aims and hypotheses**

The aim of this study is to explore whether exposure to nature does enhance wellbeing and engagement in teenage students. Furthermore, this study explores the possibility that teenagers who are not as certain of their future might be especially likely to benefit from nature, because they tend to be more distractible.

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| **Question 6: Locations** |

The program will be delivered, the interviews will be conducted, and the surveys will be administered at a participating school.

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| **Question 7: Research methods** |

Students will be randomly allocated to one of two conditions. Students allocated to the intervention will complete some of their studies in classrooms, with large windows, that are surrounded by nature. Students allocated to the control condition will complete the same studies in classrooms that are not surrounded by nature. This program will be delivered 1.5 hours a week over 4 weeks during the school semester. All students will receive the same material on memory and resilience.

Before and after the program, the students will participate in interviews and complete surveys, designed to gauge their attitudes towards this program, possible improvements to the program, the wellbeing of these individuals, and key determinants of wellbeing. Furthermore, before and after the program, teachers will be interviewed to measure their attitudes towards this program as well.

For the survey, participants will receive approximately 50 statements on a paper questionnaire, delivered by the investigator before and after the program. The participants then indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with these statements on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

**Question 7b: Indicative questions**

The survey will comprise several validated measures including

* subjective wellbeing (e.g., “I feel satisfied with my life”) and burnout (e.g., “I sometimes feel mentally drained at school”)
* engagement (e.g., “I feel absorbed in the lessons”)
* agreeableness (e.g., “I tend to sympathize with the feelings of other people”)
* a growth mindset—or the belief that people can change fundamentally (e.g., “With effort, you can change who you are”)
* future clarity—or the belief their future seems vivid and certain (e.g., “My future seems vague and uncertain to me”)

The interview with students will be semi-structured and, therefore, include some prompts and probes. Some of the likely questions will include

* What did you most and least enjoy about this program
* How do you feel the program could be improved?
* How did your feelings towards this program change over time?
* What do you feel were the effects of this program on you or other students?

The interviews with teachers will follow a similar format. Some of the likely questions will include

* What do you feel might be the benefits of this program?
* What do you feel might be the complications of this program?
* How do you feel other people, like parents, regulators, and the public, might evaluate this program?
* What were some of the challenges you experienced as a consequence of this program?
* How do you feel the program could be improved?

Attachment B presents all the questions.

**Question 7c: Qualifications of individual members**

Dr Adam Adams, the primary investigator, has accrued many years of experience in this discipline: sociology. He has worked in academia for 5 years, and has worked in a range of organizations, including Red Cross. He has implemented similar programs in the past.

Dr Betty Betts, one of the associate investigators, has utilized similar methods in other research projects, such as constructing and administering surveys as well as conducting interviews and analysing qualitative data.

**Question 7d. External service providers**

No external service providers will assist in the recruitment, collection, and analysis of data.

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| **Question 8: Research methods** |

**8a. Describe the potential participants**

The students will include approximately 100 pupils from several high schools in Darwin or surrounds, ranging in age from 14 to 18. Half the participants will be allocated to the intervention condition in which their classroom is surrounded by nature. The other participants will be allocated to the control condition.

A priori power analyses indicated this sample size is sufficient provided the effect size is moderate or large. Approximately 8 teachers of these students will be interviewed as well. All these teachers will be granted opportunities to observe and participate in the program.

**8a.1. Rationale for the selection of participants**

This study was designed to examine whether exposure to nature facilitates learning in teenagers. This age group is especially relevant, because teenagers, unlike adults, have not always developed the capacity to resist temptations. Consequently, programs that facilitate this resistance—such as exposure to nature—are especially germane to teenagers.

**8a.2. Recruitment**

The researchers have already sought interest from relevant high schools. Once the ethics application is approved

* the investigators will email invitations to principals that highlight the potential benefits of this program—the classes in memory and resilience
* the principals will receive a template they can send pupils and their caregivers to ascertain who might be interested in attending this program
* this template will indicate that pupils must be aged 14 to 18 and able to attend a six hour program outside school hours
* students who are interested will be encouraged to attend a session, together with their caregivers, in which one investigator describes the program and the study
* at the end of this session, the investigator will seek the consent of students and the consent of caregivers to participate
* the students who plan to attend will be randomly allocated to one of two classrooms: a classroom surrounded by nature and a classroom that is not surrounded by nature

**8b**

See 8a.2

**8c.**

None of the participants are likely to experience impairments that could limit their capacity to participate in this program and study.

**8d.**

All participants will be students of a high school in which English is the main language of communication. Hence, the program will be delivered in English

**8e, 8f, 8g, and 8h.** NA

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| **Question 9: Benefits and potential risks** |

**9a. Anticipated benefits of the research**

If exposure to nature does indeed improve mood and engagement, this study will thus uncover a simple means to improve the wellbeing and learning of students in the future. Furthermore, in both conditions, students will be exposed to principles that research has shown enhancs memory, resilience, and mood.

**9b. To whom will the benefits flow**

The participants will benefit from the program. Future students and teachers will benefit if exposure to nature is shown to be effective.

**9c. 9d. Explain the potential risks**

* Because the pupils merely participate in a typical classroom—and then complete surveys or interviews—this study entails no physical risks.
* During the program, participants will be exposed to memory and resilience techniques that attempt alone. Because they attempt these exercises alone, this project does not entail obvious social risks.
* Because the survey does not include questions that revolve around crime, misconduct, or malfeasance, the study entails no legal risks

However, psychological risks are possible, because some of the questions revolve around personal matters, such as mood and wellbeing. Individuals who feel depressed, helpless, or resigned might become attuned to their despair while answering these questions. Nevertheless, these questions typically normalize feelings of futility or despair, and this normalization tends to temper, rather than amplify, unpleasant emotions. Furthermore, none of these risks apply to the teachers.

**9e. To whom do the risks apply**

The risks apply to all participants, especially peers who experience mental health issues.

**9f. Strategies to negate risks**

If participants experience any distress, the plain language statement will encourage these students to withdraw from the study and discontinue the survey or interview. We will also arrange a school counsellor or psychologist to be accessible and contactable during the program. If students exhibit any signs of distress—an unlikely event—this school counsellor or psychologist will be contacted.

**9d. Do the benefits outweigh the risks**

The risks are negligible: The students are unlikely to experience levels of distress that exceed the levels they would endure most days. The benefits, however, are potentially pronounced: the study could enhance the learning and wellbeing of students.

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| **Questions 10 to 12: Informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, data storage** |

**10a.** Affirm opting in by return of questionnaire

**10b, 10c.** No

**10d, 10e.** NA.

**11a.** No

**11b.** Identifiable information

**11c.** Re-identifiable information

**11d.** Non-identifiable information

**11e. Procedures to ensure confidentiality**

Typically, the investigators will record the audio of each interview and focus group. Participants of interviews can indicate whether and how they want the sessions to be recorded. If participants do not want the sessions to be recorded, the investigator will write field notes during the sessions.

Participants will be asked to provide a pseudonym, and this pseudonym can be used in all data records and publications. Participants of focus groups must sign confidentiality statements before the session begins—a form that is connected to the consent form.

The recordings will be transcribed and both the recordings and transcripts will be stored on hard drives that are protected by passwords. Any identifiable information in the transcripts will be removed. The recordings and transcripts will be assigned pseudonyms the participants can assign.

Occasionally, the investigators may construct written field notes or journals. This information will be stored in a locked cabinet at university.

A separate file will match the pseudonyms to the name and contact details of participants. This approach enables the researchers to contact the participants to check the transcripts or fieldnotes and the findings to ensure that their experiences, interpretations, and interactions have been represented accurately. This approach also enables the researchers to present the findings of this study to the participants. Only the investigators will be able to access these recordings, transcripts, and files with pseudonyms.

Whenever the findings are reported, the publications will not refer to particular individuals or to the specific associations or communities in which individuals belong, unless approval is received by the participant. Personal information that could identify the participants will be removed from the transcripts and quotes.

The survey is anonymous. Furthermore, the survey does not include enough demographic questions to be able to conjecture about the identify of individuals from their answers.

**11f. Limited confidentiality in focus groups**

In the invitation to focus groups, as well as at the beginning of focus groups, participants will be informed they will obviously hear the responses of one another. To be able to participate, they will need to sign a confidentiality form—attached to the consent form—and will be instructed not to disseminate the comments of specific individuals. Nevertheless, they will be informed that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In addition, participants will be informed that, after 20 to 30 minutes, a short break will be organized. This break enables individuals to withdraw inconspicuously if they choose. Participants will also be informed they can contact the researcher later if they would like to withdraw specific comments.

**11g. NA**.

**11h**

The participants will be informed that recording the interviews and focus groups will ensure accuracy and completeness of data because the interviewer cannot easily conduct the interview or focus groups and develop rapport while also recording all responses comprehensively. The participants will be informed of the intent to record prior to the interviews. If participants do not want their interview to be recorded, their choice will be respected.

**11i.**

Audio recordings will be retained until the project ends to check responses and interpretations of the data during analysis. Once the project is completed, these recordings will be erased immediately. The recordings will be transcribed and both the recordings and transcripts will be stored on hard drives that are protected by passwords.

The interview recordings and transcripts will be assigned pseudonyms the participants can assign. A separate file will match the pseudonyms to the name and contact details of participants. Only the researchers will be able to access these recordings, transcripts, and files with pseudonyms.

**11j.** NA

**12a.** Yes

**12b. Storage of identifiable information**

The recordings will be transcribed and both the recordings and transcripts will stored on hard drives that are protected by passwords. Any identifiable information in the transcripts will be removed. The interview recordings and transcripts will be assigned pseudonyms the participants can assign. A separate file will match the pseudonyms to the name and contact details of participants.

The responses to surveys will be entered into a Spreadsheet. The surveys will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university. The spreadsheet will be stored on hard drives that are protected by passwords. Only the researchers will be able to access these recordings, transcripts, and files with pseudonyms.

**12c**. **Publication of identifiable information**

Publications will present the analysis of the data and never refer to specific individuals. If direct quotes are used in publications, pseudonyms will be used to attribute the quotes to the participant. The paper will indicate that only pseudonyms will be used

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| **Questions 13: Indigenous research** |

**13a.** No

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| **Questions 14: Other ethical issues** |

**14a. Debriefing**. Yes

The final paragraph of the survey will clarify the purpose of this study. Specifically, this paragraph will read "We are really grateful for your contribution to our study. This study was designed to clarify whether views of nature enhance learning, engagement, and wellbeing at schools. If you would like more information, such as a summary of these results, please contact Adam Adams on [adam.adams@cdu.edu.au](mailto:adam.adams@cdu.edu.au).

**14b Feedback to participants**

All the participating schools will receive an interim report, clarifying the benefits of this program and the experiences of students. A simpler version will be sent to the school and then distributed to the participating students

**14c to 14g**. No