Coastal and Marine
Experiential Education

Does Sail Training have the potential to change a young person's life or behaviour in life?

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Abstract
It can be suggested that the Sail Training experience is the flagship model for Marine Experiential Education; particularly in relation to Youth Development. For some time it has been suggested by many Sail Training operators that "Sail Training is a life changing experience" [1 - 8]. However; other providers suggest that the experience can change attitudes and provide essential life skills which enable a young person to change their own life [9 - 11]. It cannot be denied that Sail Training as an experiential education tool has the potential to have a profound effect on a young person, particularly those who originate from a disadvantaged background. However, does the experience in itself change a young person's life or could it be part of a much larger systematic change; which can in turn alter a young person's lifestyle and/or direction in life. In essence – is it more accurate to ask: Can a marine experiential education experience change a young person's behaviour?

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1.   What is Marine Experiential Education?

The philosophy behind the concept of Marine Experiential Education is a marriage between Experiential Education and Marine Geography. It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach within the marine environment. In essence it could be suggested that Marine Experiential Education is the underlying ethos of the Sail Training experience. To understand why each of the two disciplines are identified.

The Royal Geographical Society identifies that "*Human geography concerns the understanding of the dynamics of cultures, societies and economies, and physical geography concerns the understanding of the dynamics of physical landscapes and the environment.*" [12] Marine Geography takes this generic description into another level; Dr Chris Wooldridge of Cardiff University states that *"Marine Geography is the study of the social and economic relationships between people and the physical environment of the sea"* [13].

Petty [14] identifies that Experiential Education was initially suggested by Dewey and then developed by Kolb. The experiential learning cycle has four stages which can be seen in Figure 1.

Through promoting active experiential education practices, The Learning and Skills Improvement Service [15] identify that *"Active and experiential learning is central to citizenship**. *It requires that learners become involved in real projects and take action themselves, which builds their confidence and self-esteem. Young people identify issues of concern to them and work together to research these issues. The staff encourage them to take ownership of their projects."*

Marine Experiential Education focuses upon the culture, society; environment, experiences, personal evolution [living philosophy] and physical seascapes that individuals are exposed to and may adopt within a marine focused setting. This is similar to the ethos of the Sail Training experience. However, the Sail Training experience not only focuses upon a marine setting – it is immersed within a marine *residential* setting because the voyage crew are at sea for the duration of the voyage.

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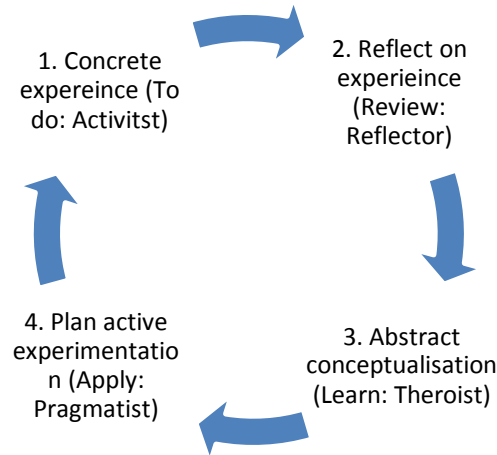
1. Experience maybe realistic (or a real life simulation). Used to test out ideas, methods and plans (instead of repeating well known procedures mindlessly). Ideally; it should be fed by sessions of planning active experimentation (stage 4).
2. Involves a systematic and objective evaluation of stage 1. Possibly including an examination of the participants' feelings. Methods for reflection include self-assessment; peer assessment; diaries and journals. There is a high level trust required between the facilitator and the participant in this stage to promote honesty from the participant.
3. Relating the concrete experience in stage 1 to theory. It is the How? Why? What? Where? When? evaluation. This is where changes in how participants think about their learning processes may occur or confirmation of their initial ideas about theory.
4. Analysis of 'lessons learnt' – future improvement through evaluation and planning. The results are then tested by returning to stage 1 and so the cycle continues and the results evolve.

Figure 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle [14]

2. What makes Sail Training such a successful tool for Marine Experiential Education?

In Lyth's 2012 report [16]; the key ideology behind Sail Training is identified as *"less training for the sea than through the sea"* [17 - 20]. McCulloch [20] explains that this is achieved through *"taking young people to sea as a means to social and educational objectives"* whereby *"the core purpose is not to teach seamanship but to use seafaring as a context for education. Sail Training might be said to provide a context for learning, but to form only a modest and perhaps not ultimately very significant part of the content of that learning"* [16].

Wright [1] suggests that sail training is not just the process of learning to sail and is a much bigger experience as through adventure at sea it offers personal development. He also suggests that there are fundamental differences between shore based Experiential Education settings and the Sail Training environment:
"Being at sea is a challenging experience for anyone, living for days at a time in a confined space, with people who were strangers just 24 hours before and limited access to home comforts and familiar routines. Unlike residential settings ashore, once you are at sea you are unable to escape or give up when things get tough. The voyage goes on around you, and more importantly people are depending on you to do your part. All while things refuse to remain horizontal. "

This is supported by the Association of Sail Training Organisations [5] who identifies that Sail Training develops self-confidence and changes lives in a fun and challenging way; within an environment that has a clear common purpose, defined boundaries, is intense and has a structured environment; in particular, when used for personal development with young people (12-25 years old). McCarthy [18] promotes this further by highlighting that outdoor adventure activities [Sail Training], *"have a long and successful history in delivering beneficial personal and social change".* It can be further supported by Sail Training operators such as UKSA and CatZero (see page 2)

The perceived benefits of any experiential education have been documented by various authors, youth development organisations (both land based and Sail Training), and a number of studies, notably regarding inclusion of social capital† and citizenship skills. These benefits include [22 - 27]:

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- Increased Self confidence
- Increased Self esteem
- Increased Motivation
- More tolerance
- The opportunity to display talents
- Enhanced teamwork skills
- Enhanced communication skills
- Encourages learning overall
- Creates a positive environment
- Identifies previously unknown career opportunities
- Staying out of trouble (regarding youth offending)
- Promotes a healthier, more active lifestyle
- Gaining respect for others (and oneself)
- Improved life skills overall
- Manage diversity and homogeneity on a daily basis,
  Recognise the value of instrumental interpersonal relationships.
- Develop new friendships
- Gain appreciation of the social value of rules, regulations and authority
- Develops a greater awareness of the civic society at large.

It could be suggested that it this a result of providing experiential education in a setting where there are no contrived situations, resulting in a dependence on teamwork to achieve a successful outcome; the exhilaration of harnessing the elements engenders enthusiasm and a feeling of achievement[5] as well as achieving to provide a suitable environment to deliver the inclusion of social capital and *(Marine‡)* citizenship skills into the on board training syllabus that is the recipe of Sail Training's success.

3. Sail Training as a 'life changing experience'.

There appears to be a widespread assumption supported by anecdotal evidence that the Sail Training experience is life changing. For example; some Sail Training operators have quoted previous clients in response to the effects of Sail Training experience. These comments have come from both voyage participants and sponsoring organisations. For example; in a BBC Radio 4 presentation regarding the effects of the Hull, East Yorkshire, UK based charity Cat Zero; the parent of a young Sail Training participant commented: *"Cat Zero hasn't just changed his life, it's changed our lives and his son's life. He left here a boy and he came back a man. He totally changed and he's stayed that way."* [28]. Toby Russell commented to the Herald Express [29] that Sail Training *"is a true adventure and the experience can inspire young people, whatever their background, broadening their horizons and motivating them towards new goals. For some it is genuinely life-changing".*

To support the claim that 'Sail Training is a life changing experience'; the definition of a life changing experience is: altering a person's life or circumstances in a substantial way [30]. It could be suggested that with such an extensive list of advantages as listed in section 2, there is a claim to reason with this suggestion. In addition, some Sail Training operators have conducted studies to gather data and information in relation to the effects of Sail Training. Some of these operators include Cat Zero (with the NHS), Wheatsheaf Trust, Motiv8 (in partnership with the Hampshire Police); University of Edinburgh and the University of Sydney to name a few.

However, many of the young people who participate in a Sail Training programme encounter complex issues that may require long term intervention and support; something which a stand - alone Sail Training voyage cannot deliver. These issues can include Bullying; Criminal activity; Deprivation, Disabilities; Not in Employment, Education or Training; Safeguarding issues; Social Care assistance etc. In other words there may be an imbalance in their human rights within society (if society has failed to assist appropriately). Would it be more accurate to suggest that the cognitive and behavioural skills acquired and developed during a Sail Training voyage empower a young person to redress the imbalance; and as such increasing their autonomy level so they in turn gain a higher level of control and independence in their life? Would it be more suitable to suggest that it has the potential to change a person's personality?

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Sail Training Operator profile: UKSA

UKSA is a youth development charity that aims to provide life transforming opportunities – both at sea and onshore. It could be suggested that UKSA ought to be categorised as a Sea School as they provide both professional yachting and water sport career course and youth development programmes. The emphasis on all the youth development programmes is on personal growth and the creation of an inclusive environment for all. The youth development programmes that UKSA currently offer include are:

Change Direction (Aweigh Ahead) [56]**:** Change Direction is a six-week part-residential programme for young people living on benefits. UKSA created this ground-breaking programme, which is supported by JobCentre Plus, to steer young people off benefits through maritime experiences. Still in its early days, the programme has already enjoyed huge success with 85% of participants moving off the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) register. The programme gives participants a whole range of on-water experiences, establishes a healthy routine, offers them work experience with local maritime businesses and raises their aspirations and self-belief. Participants also gain different maritime qualifications, complete a CV and often overcome some of the barriers preventing them from gaining employment. Mentoring, one-to-one help and careers guidance from our in-house industry experts all add value to the experience.

Unlocking Potential [56]**:** Participants use on-the-water activities as the catalyst for positive change, giving them the chance to get their lives back on track.

This four-week course is suitable for those excluded or at risk of exclusion from schools, young offenders and those at risk of offending and gang members or those at risk of gang involvement. The course has also been undertaken by individuals from within the local community who were identified as requiring additional support. It is a four week programme whereby participants complete a:

- A residential module working as an individual and as part of a team through challenges and activities such as dinghy sailing and keel boating. Focus on motivation, aspirations, commitment, and establishing a healthy routine within a structured yet dynamic environment.
- Sail Training module working/ staying on a yacht, learning how to become an effective crew member. Taking on clear roles and responsibilities, focusing on coping strategies, resilience, teamwork, communication, independence and self-belief.
- An Ownership module giving participants the opportunity to work together to improve a community facility. Focus on ownership and responsibility, leadership, understanding and coping.
- A module offering work experience and focusing on the outcomes and destinations after the programme. Experience maritime activities and learn about potential employment opportunities within the industry – something they probably haven't considered before.

It has been reported that the programme has a 91% success rate regarding those who have served their sentence and not re-offended; and 50% of programme participants have found employment after release.

Sail Training Operator Profile: CatZero [56]

CatZero is a unique, not-for-profit organisation specifically designed to meet the holistic needs of young people and their families. It was inspired by the positive impact of the participation of 10 young people in the 2007/8 Clipper round the world yacht race on board the Hull and Humber vessel. Each of these young people lived in Hull and were not in employment, education or training (NEETs). CatZero continues to work with the most hard to reach young people through the delivery of innovative youth development training programmes that allow participants to self-assess their needs and set their own targets in order to improve their lives.

The programmes CatZero offer are a balance between challenge and support. CatZero challenges people through personal action plans, challenging activities and personal goal setting which enables them to understand where they currently are, plan where they would like to be and then support them, through a process of positive activities and training, to put steps in place to achieve their own goals and improve their lives.

The Humber area has up to two times the national average of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). After the decision was taken to form CatZero, NHS funding was secured for the 72 foot Challenge Racing Yacht "CatZero". The project was then successfully awarded WNF money by the Local Strategic Partnership 'OneHull' to work with some of Hull's most difficult to reach young people aged 16-18 who were classified as NEET.

Statistically at risk from significant health and social problems, NEET classified young people can be in a potentially vulnerable position, being up to 70% more likely to experiment with drugs and up to 3 times more likely to offend.

Following the success of the initial Hull project, CatZero developed a partnership with JobCentre Plus and expanded into other areas in the region and are now running a range of programmes for young people up to the age of 28 across the whole Humber region. As well as the basic core programme, CatZero work intensively with young people wanting to start their own business and have also expanded to work with schools, academies and colleges to help with the transition from primary to secondary school, exam years and transition from secondary school into further education or employment.

4. Sail Training as a behavioural changing experience.

To challenge the anecdotal evidence suggested in the previous section; scientific and theoretical evidence suggests that it is the personality that changes due to experience (which in turn can inspire a person to alter their lifestyle). Two of the components thought to affect personality change are Beliefs and Feelings.

4.1. Beliefs

During the 1960's; personality was defined in terms of 'consistent patterns of experience and action that are evident across multiple situations or life contexts'; suggesting that beliefs were at the epicentre of personality [31]. Since then, further research suggests that people can be categorised into one of two theories – Fixed or Malleable. Fixed theory individuals belief that their personal intrinsic worth is based on fixed traits. Malleable theorists however, believe that their most basic intrinsic worth can be enhanced through their own personal endeavour and education. It has also been identified that malleable theorists "are more open to learning, willing to confront challenges, able to stick to difficult tasks, and capable of bouncing back from failures and these virtues promote improved accomplishments during challenging situations" [32]. Although beliefs tend to be developed during infancy, focusing upon their mental representations of the nature and workings of the self, their relationships and their surrounding world; it has been acknowledged that these beliefs form an essential element of personality [33]. This is supported by Rothbart & Ahadi [34] arguing that "personality contains much more than temperament and patterns of habitual behaviour; importantly, it also includes the way one perceives self, others, and events". Block [35] also reinforces this by stating that these representations of self develop ''organizing, motivating, and life-defining contexts within which the individual acts''.

Studies suggest that a person is not predetermined to be either a fixed or malleable theorist. Malleable theory can be trained. This is supported by Aronson, Fried, and Good [36] who identify that the "brain is capable of making new connections throughout life and how it grows in response to intellectual challenge; emphasizing that the brain is malleable and that intelligence expands with hard work"; and Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck [37] who highlight that "the brain is like a muscle that gets stronger with use and that the brain forms new connections every time learning occurs".

4.2. Feelings

During significant personality changes, "intense, emotional, inwardly felt events are usually observed...... an individual directly feels an inward reworking. Their concepts and constructs become partly unstructured and is felt experiencing at times exceeds their intellectual grasp" [38].

Fisher [40] identifies this connection between feeling and personality change with the 'Process of Transition' (see Figure 2). This process was based upon the bereavement process developed by Kübler-Ross [39], along with anecdotal evidence and 'participant observation'.

Fisher [41] explains that an individual's understanding of the impact the [personality] change will have on their own personal construct systems (how they view the world and what meaning they attribute to things so that they can communicate and connect with other individuals effectively [42]); as well as their ability to work through the implications for their self perception. Fisher continues to state that regardless of the size of the change; there is potential to impact the individual, including the risk of self conflict in relation to their existing values/ beliefs and anticipated altered ones. Also, the majority of the Process of Transition is conducted subconsciously and as a result the changes may not be noticed initially. The change process may only become evident to the individual with reflection of the experience/ situation. In addition, the speed of transition is also variable depending upon the individual's "self perception, locus of control, and other past experiences, and how these all combine to create their anticipation of future events". The more positive you see the outcome, the more control you have (or believe you have) over both the process and the final result the less difficult and negative a journey you have" [41].

4.3. Beliefs and Feelings in relation to the Sail Training experience.

It could be suggested that the Sail Training environment cultivates malleable theorist. This is because evidence suggests that 'Sail Training is effective in the development of a wide range of social skills and attributes' [2]; many of which are identified in Section 2. As stated in Section 4.1.; Malleable theorists enhance their intrinsic worth through personal enterprise and education. Although some young people may join a Sail Training voyage as a Fixed theorist; the transition that a young person encounters throughout a Sail Training voyage (which it could be suggested in many ways replicates Fisher's Process of Transition in Figure 2§); they may begin to become

more receptive to learning in an experiential education environment. This new founded interest in personal develop and a wiliness to embrace challenging situations are all factors which lead to an increase in the social/ citizenship skills previously identified in Section 2; which in turn can grow malleable theorists. Several Experiential Education theorists suggest that 'successful experiential learning is described as an approach to training and development utilising activities involving some form of perceived physical or emotional risk to bring about positive changes in individuals. Here learning is based in real world situations with both a social element and immediate consequences that in turn allows for future learning to occur' [3-4]; thus supporting the suggestion at Sail Training cultivates Malleable Theorists.
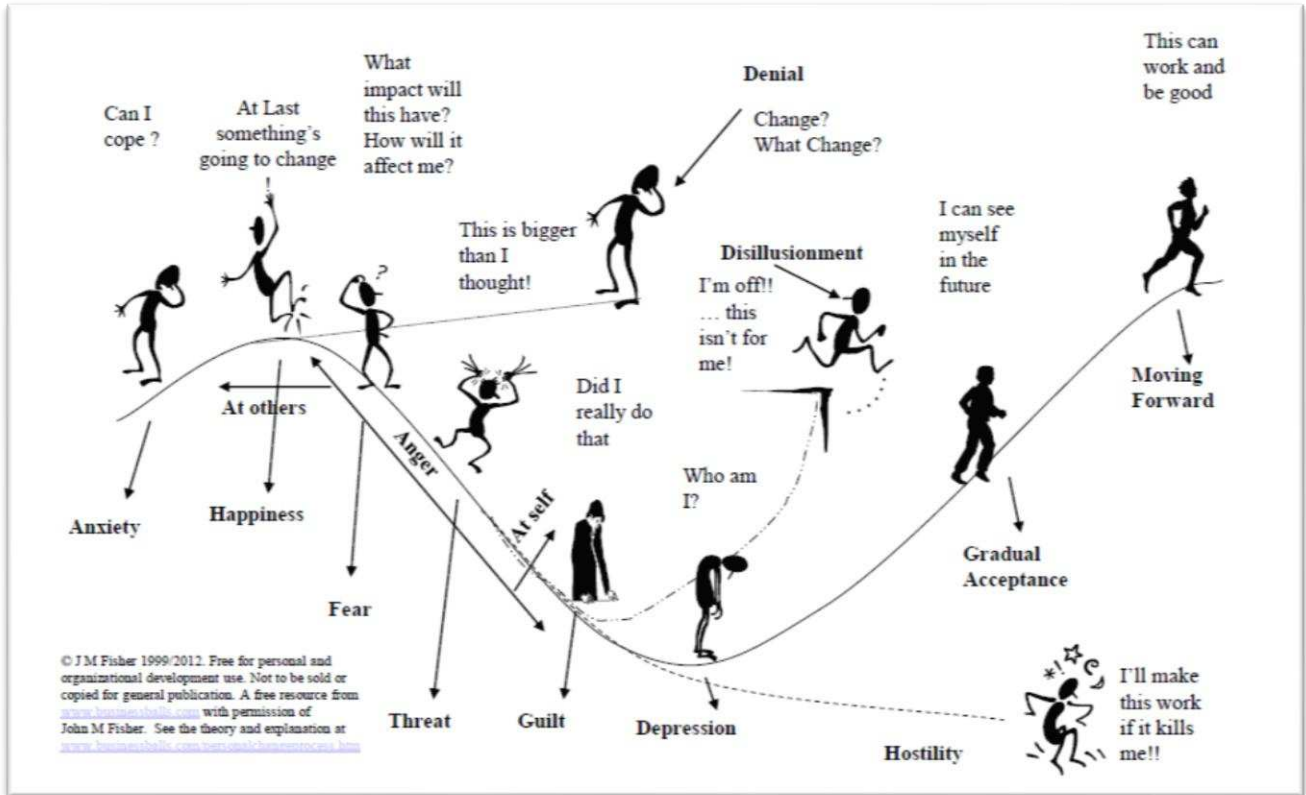

Figure 2: Fisher's Process of Transition [40]

5. Conclusion

The intention of this research has been to identify that the results of a Marine Experiential Educational encounter, whilst participating on a Sail Training voyage, are more complex than the anecdotal and statistical evidence suggests; to which it could be suggested it has achieved.

Section four identifies that beliefs and feelings have an impact on personality change. Both beliefs and feelings matter, both are variable and when change occurs, an individual's personality does too.

Could the scientific and academic evidence, coupled with the possible disadvantaged backgrounds that many young people encounter in the modern world; suggest that the notion of a 'life changing experience' could be a rather simplistic interpretation of the post voyage analysis? By making such claims could it be a counterproductive statement? Whereby in one hand experiential education creates positive change; but then in the other it takes away a level of ownership from the young person. After all, it is the young person who decides to embark on altering their post voyage lifestyle; developing the self determination to make a conscious long term change in their attitude; behaviour and perceptions in order to make these changes possible.

Jollimore (2005) [43] claims that an individual *"only has reason to accept beliefs that follow from what they already believe; and thus that scientific evidence in itself never provides reasons for belief"* which he refers to as Deductive Foundationalism. He continues with suggesting that this implies that scientific evidence should give way to an individual's beliefs in conflict situations. This is because *"one will necessarily have*

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reason to accept what follows form one's beliefs, but will not necessarily have reason to accept what is supported by scientific evidence" and as a result *"the argument for scepticism about science is formally analogous to its practical counterpart".*

This could suggest that there are similarities to the 'is experiential education life changing or personality changing?' argument and the debate regarding 'is the world flat or is the world round?' The world is round debate was initiated as early as the eighth century BCE in the ancient Hindu Scripts Shatapatha Brahmana [44]; and it continued throughout Greek Philosophy by Pythagoras and Anaxagoras during the sixth century BC. However it wasn't confirmed and accepted until the third century BC by Aristotle due to Hellenistic Astronomy [45].

However to counter argue this notion, Jollimore (2005) continues by suggesting that there are flaws in the Deductive Foundationalism debate. This is as a result of what he refers to as the "Inferential Principle of Theoretical Reason"** and that an individual conducting themselves by this principle is reasonable in doing so. This principle may only be counterproductive if an individual was in a satiation whereby they are aware that they need to avoid danger but cannot identify where the danger manifests. However, in the debate regarding effects of experiential education there appears to be no danger apparent. It can be suggested that the practitioners' reputation would not be affected negatively, nor the overall results of the voyage experience because the end result is still the same and can be nethertheless positively profound – may they be described as 'life changing' or 'personality changing'.

To resolve the initial argument; it could be suggested that the result is in itself complex. To understand its complexity, several questions need to be considered including:

- Could the situation be that the terminology used to describe the results of Marine Experiential Education are a more 'socially acceptable' way of categorisation than the complex terminology required to be scientifically and academically correct?
- Could it be suggested that both terms could be acceptable? Whereby 'life changing experience' is more suitable for the layperson (general society) and 'personality changing' is more suitable for the academic/ scientist?
- Is it accurate to suggest that the choice of terminology used to describe the results of Marine Experiential Education *(which could also be applied to land based Experiential Educational experiences)* could be based on an individual's own knowledge of subjects such as Behavioural Psychology?

Could it be that the answers to questions previously mentioned are indeed based on the experiences and perceptions of the individual; which in turn leaves the initial question "Marine Experiential Education: Does have the potential to change a young person's life or personality?" open to a never ending philosophical debate? Could be that the answer is indeed based on Rational Choice by the beholder...... *Maybe*.

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* The Citizenship Foundation identify that citizenship education is about enabling people to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for their own lives and their communities. It also prepares young people for our shared democratic life by providing an understanding of the political, legal and economic functions of adult society, and with the social and moral awareness to thrive in it [47]. Citizenship promotes social cohesion; community involvement; inclusion; a sense of social responsibility [48].

† Social Capital is the patterns of interaction and access to, or potential for, gains that reside within specific social arrangements. It is about networks and connections that enable personal and collective gains. The focus is on community values and civic participation [27].

‡ The concept of marine citizenship is where individuals take an increased personal responsibility for the seas and oceans and its environment; whereby a 'marine citizen' displays an awareness and concern for the marine environment. It is argued that a marine citizen also requires an understanding of how their behaviour [and the behaviour of human beings overall] impacts on the marine environment; requiring a superior "awareness of marine environmental issues, an understanding of the role of personal behaviour in creating and resolving marine environmental issues", as well as a shift in values and motivation to promote pro-environmental lifestyle choices [16, 46].

§ This assumption is based on personal anecdotal evidence witnessed by the author during their 10 years experience of Sail Training. It is the opinion of the author that more research into this area ought to be beneficial.

** The Inferential Principle of Theoretical Reason suggests that an individual has (at least some) reason to accept those claims that follow logically from beliefs he accepts [43].

About the Author:

Ellen Greenaway-Bowen Graduated in 2006 from the University of Hull, UK with BA(Hons) Business Management and Sustainable Business; and in 2012 from the University of Portsmouth, UK with MSc Coastal and Marine Resource Management. Her MSc dissertation was titled: A critical evaluation of marine citizenship within the international sail training industry. Recommendations for the development of a voluntary marine environmental education programme for young people on board sail training vessels. She is also the Creative Owner and Education Practitioner of Coastal and Marine Experiential Education. Ellen has approx 10 years experience (2014) in the Sail Training Industry; volunteering/ working on Australian, Dutch and UK vessels. This experience includes

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participating in six Sail Training International Tall Ship Festivals. Most of her experience on board specialises with young people who are Not in Education. Employment and Training and Young Offenders. In addition to her on board experience; Ellen has also:

- Been a member of the Man Masting team at the 2012 official reopening of the Cutty Sark, London, UK for HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.
- Participated in an education outreach programme on board the ONE AND ALL, the South Australian State Sail Training vessel. This was in partnership with the South Australian Maritime Museum as part of the Maritime Trades festival, Port Adelaide, August 2013
- Been co-ordinator in developing a research steering group, which is now hosted by Sail Training International, est. At the Sail Training International conference 2013. Members include the University of Edinburgh, Association of Sail Training Organisations, Australian Sail Training Association and leading Industry experts.
- Conducted guest speaker sessions during the Ship's Liaison Officer Training for the Royal Borough of Greenwich Tall Ships Festival 2014.

When not Sail Training; Ellen has been a UK and Australian Civil Servant since 2007; working for the Royal Navy, The National Health Service, Thee Ministry of Justice and the Government of Western Australia: Department of Education Services. She has also been a Civilian Instructor with the UK Cadet Forces (Air and Sea) since 2004; as well as participating in short term tenures with the Princes Trust and Camp America.