Outdoor Education: Youth’s Perceptions of Experiential-Based Outdoor Education in the Context of Social Inclusion

Aileen P. McKeown (University of British Columbia)

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Abstract

Outdoor education is common, although often small and delimited, program within schools, providing an avenue in which to teach important skills to students, and may be particularly important for students who struggle in a traditional academic setting. Past research indicates that outdoor education has a positive impact on students in gaining academic and social skills. However, little research has been examined on what participants believe they gain from involvement in outdoor education. Overall, this study provides exploratory research about personal perceptions of outdoor education, assessing the value of outdoor education as part of a larger socio-cultural learning arena. This study investigates into whether youth feel outdoor education experiences creates a more socially inclusive environment among peers. This study complements extensive quantitative research suggesting a positive impact of outdoor education on the development of individuals.

I assessed a cohort of students at a private secondary school in Vancouver, Canada. Students participated in qualitative in-depth interviews before and after participation in a school facilitated outdoor education program. I was particularly interested in whether or not students perceived engagement with their classmates differently after the program. Results indicate that students felt more inclusive towards classmates after participation in the program, and had a greater appreciation for team building and communication skills amongst peers. This study suggests areas for further research in student perceptions of outdoor education, which may help advise school board policies surrounding the use of outdoor education programs, as well as advise schools themselves in restructuring their outdoor education programs to better reflect desired learning outcomes.
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Introduction

Outdoor education can be understood as education that is for, in, and about the outdoors (Ford, 1986). This definition clearly identifies the setting in which outdoor education is to take place, namely any outdoor environment; identifies the subject matter that is taught, namely any physical, cultural, or geographical aspects relating to the outdoors; and identifies the purpose of outdoor education, namely developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important in navigating one’s self in the world (Ford, 1986). Outdoor education can take the forms of numerous activities, such as orienteering, hiking, ropes courses, canoeing, avalanche safety and winter skills, or various teambuilding activities. Thus a strong outdoor education experience would incorporate the development of practical, social, and physical skills that while developed through various activities in the outdoors, are transferable beyond the outdoor environment. Reflection on this process of learned transferable skills is critical, and can take a number of different forms including writing as a form of reflection (Taniguchi, 2004). In contrast, a weak outdoor education experience would fail to fully develop such skills, and may fail to provide participants with the understanding and reflection that such skills are transferable into various other environments.

Outdoor education is becoming increasingly common among schools as a means of learning for children and youth; over the past fifty years, numerous outdoor education centers have opened up across North America (Attarian, 2001). Outdoor education is perceived to have a positive impact on individuals in gaining skills such as self-confidence, environmental awareness, and physical fitness (Attarian, 2001; Cason et. al, 1994; Niell, 2008; Sipthorp et. al, 2007; Brown, 2009). This study explores outdoor
education among youth, investigating the perceptions that children have about their personal outdoor education experience. More specifically, I examine whether youth feel outdoor education participation creates a more socially inclusive environment among students.

Sociologically, student perceptions of the value of outdoor education in their own personal lives can reflect the value that current children place on outdoor engagement, outdoor learning, and environmental awareness. Recognition of this value is important in determining how to instill values and priorities of environmental sustainability in children and youth. Given the increasing environmental challenges currently facing the planet, nurturing such values and priorities amongst the younger generation is wise.

This study may help identify whether students themselves perceive outdoor education as a valuable means of education for themselves. While this proposed study is exploratory in nature, this study may suggest areas for further research in the area of student perceptions of outdoor education, which may help advise school board policies surrounding the use of outdoor education programs in schools, as well as advise schools themselves in restructuring their outdoor education programs to better reflect the desired learning outcomes for students.

I have a personal interest in outdoor education among children, having worked in an outdoor education center with children from various elementary schools and high schools from across Canada. Having participated in outdoor education programs myself, I feel as if I have gained many valuable social and personal leadership skills from my experiences. I also think that outdoor education may provide an avenue in which to teach
important social and personal skills to children and youth who might not learn best in a traditional academic setting.

Thus this study aims to look at perceptions that children have about outdoor education. Overall, this study provides exploratory research about personal perceptions of an outdoor education experience, assessing the value of outdoor education as part of a larger socio-cultural community of learning.

This study contributes to the review of educational policies and practices amongst schools and school boards, the sociological understanding of the value children put on outdoor education, as well as to the revision outdoor education programs. Research done on what children and youth themselves think about the benefits of outdoor education is sparse; this exploratory study aims to complement extensive quantitative research that suggests that there is a positive impact of outdoor education on the development of individuals.

**Literature Review**

Attarian (2001) discusses the rise of outdoor education in North America, attributing the start of outdoor education with the founding of Outward Bound in 1962. Following Outward Bound came the founding of the National Outdoor Leadership School, Project Adventure, and the Wilderness Education Association. Most of these organizations are situated in the United States. In 1971, Project Adventure acknowledged a rising trend in using outdoor education as an instrument in fostering personal and professional growth. This acknowledgement started the integration of outdoor education into school’s physical education programs (Attarian, 2001). Currently, a number of organizations run outdoor education programs in numerous countries around the world.
Such organizations include Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS).

There is an emphasis that there is a lack of coherence among the statistical research done on the impacts of outdoor education (Carson & Gillis, 1994; Neill, 2008). Cason & Gillis (1994) emphasize that while there is vast quantitative, statistical research undertaken on the benefits of outdoor education, the results of this research is very disjointed. In particular there is no comprehensive description of these benefits.

Highlighting that a vast majority of outdoor education professionals find the current research difficult to understand, Cason & Gillis (1994) emphasize the essential nature of statistically integrating research findings from many studies to show outdoor education professionals, schools, researchers, and funding sources the overall effectiveness of outdoor adventure education. With an emphasis on American outdoor education, their study uses a meta-analysis approach to create a comprehensive, cohesive understanding of the benefits and effectiveness of outdoor education based on past research findings.

Neill (2008) emphasizes the limited theory and research done on the impacts of outdoor education programs on participants, reiterating Cason & Gillis (1994)’s argument that there is a lack of comprehensive, cohesive research and information done on these impacts. Neill (2008) attempts to synthesize theoretical and empirical knowledge into a longitudinal study of outdoor education and the impacts of these programs on life effectiveness in an Australian context.

There is also an emphasis on how the impacts of outdoor education need to be understood within a larger socio-cultural framework (Neill, 2008; Brown, 2009). Neill (2008) emphasizes that the experience of participants may be understood as arising
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within a complex social and cultural system of learning. Brown (2009) reiterates this emphasis on the context of participant experiences in an Australian context, highlighting that outdoor education must be appreciated outside of the personal cognitive processes specific to an individual's experience. Rather, outdoor education must be seen within a larger socio-cultural framework that perceives the learner as a participant in a highly orchestrated community of learning (Brown, 2009). Thus outdoor education, while a valuable form of education in itself, must be understood within the context of socio-cultural understandings of education as a whole. It is important to recognize how outcomes of outdoor education can benefit and complement current dominant forms of indoor classroom learning.

There is also an emphasis on the lack of qualitative research done on the impacts of outdoor education (Sibthorp et. al, 2007; Sibthorp, 2003; Taniguchi, 2004). Qualitative research can complement extensive quantitative research conducted on outdoor education as qualitative findings can provide a richer sense of participant understanding of the outcomes of outdoor education participation, and provides an opportunity for participants themselves to give a voice to their experience in outdoor education participation. Sibthorp (2003) uses qualitative research to explore what skills adolescents have gained through an intensive, immersive three-week adventure program, finding that these adolescents gained both hard skills specific to wilderness leadership, as well as what the participants described as ‘life skills’, which were perceived by participants as most applicable after the program in the home environment. Sibthorp et. al. (2007) emphasize the lack of qualitative research done on the effectiveness and impacts of outdoor education, highlighting that the majority of research done in this area has been
quantitative and statistical. They explore participant perceptions of personal empowerment related to communication, leadership, judgment in the outdoors, and environmental awareness as a result of participating in outdoor education in an American context, finding that there was an increase in these areas after participating in an outdoor education program. This study emphasizes the perceptions of participants at-large, and does not specifically discuss children and youth perceptions of outdoor education.

Taniguchi (2004) uses a qualitative approach to identify common attributes of a meaningful learning experience among different university students enrolled in the Wilderness Writing Program at a university in Utah, finding that meaningful learning experiences were found from participants that experienced a period of awkwardness, followed by a period of reconstructing one’s personal view of oneself.

There has been an emphasis in research on the effects that participation in residential wilderness programs may have on the self-perception and self-efficiency of participants (Cook, 2008; Cummings, 2009; Fine, 2005). Cummings (2009) attempts to gain a better understanding of the outcomes that individuals experience after participation in wilderness adventure programs and the effects that these outcomes have on the participant’s lives. Cummings (2009) interviewed participants that had completed programs in Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School in the US, finding that participants gained both hard skills applicable to outdoor activities, as well as an increased sense of self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Cook (2008) further examines the impacts of outdoor education on children and youth by examining residential wilderness programs and their influence on the self-perception of male adolescents. Having interviewed male adolescents before entry into these programs, and
four months later after the completion of these programs, Cook (2008) found that self-images of these participants increased as a result of the increased levels of social support provided to these participants through outdoor education.

Fine (2005) conducted a mixed methods approach to investigating the effects of participation in residential outdoor education programs in Ontario Summer Camps, combining both a survey research approach and in-depth interviews to assess the outcomes of participation in such outdoor education programs. Fine (2005) found that participation in residential outdoor education programs in the form of Ontario Summer Camps contributed to increased ability for participants to self-conceptualize and self-regulate themselves, and an increase in self-efficacy, peer teaching, cooperation, teambuilding, appreciation for socio-cultural diversity, and an increased respect for the environment. It is identified that participants reflected on this experiential learning environment with clarity and positive fondness.

Research has found that many observed impacts of participation in outdoor education programs are successfully transferred to later life situations of engagement with the learning activities themselves are encouraged temporally (Fine, 2005; Neill, 2008). Fine (2005) discusses the context of participation in residential outdoor education programs in an Ontario context, finding that participants were much more able to identify and recognize skills they had learned in outdoor education being transferable to later life situations if they had been exposed to residential outdoor education programs over a number of different years. Similarly, Neill (2008) suggests that longitudinal impacts of participation in outdoor education programs in an Australian context are more reflective of transferring teambuilding and leadership skills from outdoor education programs to
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later life situations if participants had been exposed to outdoor education programs on a regular basis. Thus research suggests that a limitation of participation in outdoor education programs is that continual exposure to such programs influences how transferable learned skills are to later life situations.

In summary, most studies have found numerous benefits to participation in outdoor education. The predominant research on the impacts of outdoor education reflects research done in the United States and Australia, with little research specific to a Canadian context. Furthermore, the majority of research conducted has been quantitative research with the aim of establishing a correlation between outdoor education and increased life effectiveness skills. Furthermore, the majority of the research reflects a cross-sectional design. The qualitative research that has been conducted on participant perceptions of outdoor education has predominantly been cross-sectional, with a focus on adolescent and youth perceptions of the value of outdoor education, with a noticeable lack of research surrounding youth’s perceptions of their outdoor education experiences. I suggest that there is a need for more qualitative, longitudinal research on what youth specifically think that they gain out of participation in outdoor education. Qualitative research on youth perceptions of outdoor education will fill in the missing knowledge gap as to what youth may get out of participation in outdoor education. Gaining an understanding of youth perceptions of their outdoor education experience can help increase an understanding of the position of outdoor education in the socio-cultural context of an overall learning system for youth in Canadian society.
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Methods

Research Question

The research objective of this study looks into how youth perceive their individual experience in participating in an outdoor education program. The specific research question of this study investigates how secondary-school children perceive their experience in outdoor education in terms of its effect on the social inclusion of their fellow classmates.

There are several reasons to think that outdoor education programs might facilitate this greater sense of social inclusion. Firstly, I suggest that participation in outdoor education programs transports youth to a very different physical environment than they are comfortable learning in. As most youth are comfortable and familiar with learning in an indoor classroom environment, transporting the arena of learning into an outdoor environment leads youth to participate in different activities in a different physical environment than they are familiar and comfortable with. I suggest that these different activities that youth are expected to participate in, such as hiking, ropes courses, or canoeing, leads youth to develop problem solving skills, teambuilding skills, and leadership development skills. I suggest that by developing these skills in a small social group in a foreign physical environment will allow youth to become more familiar and comfortable with interacting and working with their peers with a specific goal in mind, thus encouraging social inclusion in the form of youth able to work efficiently and effectively together. I suggest that the outdoors is an ideal location for this foreign physical environment as I suggest limited number of youth that live in an urban area
spend less time engaging in the outdoors, and thus the outdoors is a foreign environment to a greater number of youth.

Secondly, I suggest that the outdoors as an arena for learning presents a very specific sense of necessity that tasks need to be completed. For example, a group of youth need to be able to work together to complete the task of setting up a tent if they wish to sleep in the tent at night. Similarly, the outdoor environment is, to some extent, uncontrollable; outdoor educators cannot control the weather or the presence of wildlife in a particular area. I suggest that this environmental uncertainty will further promote the development of problem solving skills amongst participants.

Thirdly, I suggest engagement with the outdoors encourages disengagement with various forms of entertainment that youth commonly use to entertain themselves now such as watching television, playing video games, or surfing the Web. By spending extended amounts of time in the outdoors, I suggest youth are encouraged to spend free time talking with their peers, and this fosters a social environment that encourages social inclusion in the context of youth who are given the opportunity to get to know their peers better.

**Timeline of the Research Project**

In June 2013, I was able to submit my research proposal to the UBC Behavioral Ethics Board for approval. The study was approved by the Behavioral Ethics Board in August 2013. In August 2013, I contacted the Head of School at the secondary school where I was interested in conducting research. Throughout September 2013 I was in contact with the Director of Outdoor Education at the school, and was able to contact and collect Letters of Consent and Letters of Assent from participants and their parents/
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guardians. The first round of interviews with participants took place in the first two weeks of October 2013. The students participated in a week-long school facilitated outdoor education program during October. At this particular outdoor education program, students were expected to sleep in tents they had set up on their own, were engaged in a number of different discussions surrounding environmental conservation, particularly in the context surrounding food security and minimizing food waste, and were encouraged to participate in a number of outdoor activities such as hiking and canoeing. The second round of interviews with participants took place in the last week of October 2013 and the first week of November 2013.

Recruitment Strategy

I contacted the Head of School at a private secondary school in Vancouver. I outlined my academic background, my research interests, and what participation in my study would entail to the Head to School. Please see attached Appendix A for the Letter of Contact for the school. After gaining the approval of the Head of School, I was put in contact with the Director of Outdoor Education at the school. In collaboration with the Director, I was able to gain access to a group of students in a grade that would soon participate in a week-long outdoor education program. I was able to provide these students with letters of consent for their parents or guardians, which outlined my academic background, what my research was interested in, and what participation in my study would mean for their children. I also assured parents and guardians of confidentiality within the study, assuring that all information provided to me by participants would be kept strictly confidential, with pseudonyms used when writing up the results, and with all audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews kept locked up.
and on a password protected computer. Please see attached Appendix B for the Letter of Consent to Parents/ Guardians.

I was also able to provide Letters of Assent for the youth themselves. As minors, these youth were unable to legally sign consent forms given to them, however I was able to provide them Letters of Assent to inform them about my academic background, what my research was interested in, and what participation in my study would mean for them. I also assured students that all information given to me in the study would be kept strictly confidential, and that pseudonyms would be used when writing up the results of my research. These Letters of Assent were important in giving participants agency over their personal decision to participate in the study or not. Please see Appendix C for the Letters of Assent provided to participants.

My decision to contact the grade of students that I did reflected the timeline of the outdoor education program that these students participated in. At the particular school that I conducted research at, outdoor education programs were structured around all of the students in a particular grade. The students I contacted were most appropriate for my study as they were scheduled to participate in an intensive, week-long overnight outdoor education program with their classmates and teachers in the fall. As these students had participated in an outdoor education program with their classmates and teachers, I was able to discuss with participants how their views surrounding their classmates may have differed after participating in the outdoor education program together.

All of the participants in the study were female. Participants were in Grade 9, and thus were between thirteen and fourteen years of age. Participants were from a middle and upper class. There was a varied ethnicity amongst the participants.
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Data Generation

To gather information surrounding the perceptions of secondary school students on personal outdoor education experiences and the social inclusion of their fellow classmates, I conducted in-depth interviews with students. I found interviews as the best source of gathering this information; with interviews, I was able to follow up on comments made by youth during the interview. The participants were more willing to talk more extensively about their experience to an actual person than in writing, encouraging the inclusion of youth into the study that may not feel comfortable or confident expressing their thoughts in a written format. I conducted qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants both before participation in a school-facilitated outdoor education program and after participation in such a program. I interviewed five students prior to participation in their outdoor education program, and six students after participation in their school-facilitated outdoor education program. I chose to interview students both before their participation in an outdoor education program and after participation in an outdoor education program in order to directly compare participant’s perceptions of outdoor education and of interactions with their peers from before and after participation in the outdoor education program. This comparison provided guidance into what specific insights changed after an engagement with outdoor education.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured. I did ask each participant a standard set of questions for both the first interview prior to participation in the outdoor education program and for the second interview after participation in the program. However, I was able to follow up with specific comments made by participants throughout the interview, which made each interview a dynamic and unique process.
The questions asked in the first interview started with inquiring what the participant thought outdoor education was and what one can gain from participating in outdoor education. Questions then were asked surrounding friend groups that the participant currently had at school, what sports and extracurricular programs they participated in both through their school and in their community, and any excitement or apprehensions surrounding the participant’s upcoming outdoor education trip.

Questions in the second interview started with asking the participant again what they thought outdoor education was, what skills they think they learned from participating in an outdoor education program, and how they thought these skills would be transferable to environments beyond outdoor education. Participants where then asked with whom did they hang out during the length of the outdoor education program, and whether they feel as if they know their close friends and their classmate better after participating in the program. Lastly, participants were asked if they would participate in another outdoor education program, and if they would recommend participating in an outdoor education program to a friend.

Please see Appendix D for a full and detailed list of questions asked in both the first and second interviews.

Ethical Issues and Limitations due to Study Design

In this study, the potential benefits from this study outweigh the potential risks associated with participation in this study. This project is a relatively low risk study. However, there are several possible risks that are associated with this study. When working with children, youth, or any other vulnerable population, it is important to be sensitive to the issue that the participants are minors and cannot legally make decisions
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without the permission of a parent or guardian. As such, it is important to ensure that
parents or guardians are fully aware of what participation in the study entails for their
child, as well as ensuring that the children themselves are aware of what is required for
participation in the study. As stated above, I have thus provided a letter of consent for the
parents of the potential participants, as well as a letter of assent to the potential
participants themselves to ensure that they are both fully aware of the purpose of this
study, and what participation in this study entails. I have also explicitly told participants
and their parents/guardians of my agreement of confidentiality, agreeing to use
pseudonyms in the actual report of my research, and locking up recordings of the focus
group discussions in a safe.

Participation in this study may have a damaging impact on a participant if they
had a particularly negative experience with outdoor education. Being sensitive to this
possible experience for a participant is important in being aware of the potentially
negative impacts of this study. Given my personal positive experiences working in
various capacities in outdoor education, I needed to be particularly alert to the possibility
that participants may have had negative experiences that may completely contradict my
personal experiences.

Being a young undergraduate student, I feel as if the youth participants in the
study may have perceived me as more approachable. This may be beneficial to the study
as it may have helped to balance the unequal power dynamics between an adult
researcher and a youth participant. However, it is important for me, as the researcher, to
be sensitive to the inherent power dynamics that are going to be present between an adult
researcher and a youth participant. As much as I may attempt to discuss the topic at the
level of the participants, such as using language appropriate to the age group of the youth participants, acting in a very friendly and welcoming manner, and dressing in casual clothes, I may still have been perceived as a powerful adult and that may have influenced how the youth participants discussed their experiences of outdoor education with me. They may have felt as if they had to shape their answers to what they perceived as my expected response.

There are other limitations of the study in terms of the structure itself. The scope of the study is quite small. This study aims to be an exploratory study with the purpose of suggesting potential trends in regards to youth perceptions of their outdoor education experience in the context of social inclusion amongst their classmates. The breadth of the study is very limited and a larger, more extensive and comprehensive study will be further needed to assess whether potential trends that may be suggested from this study are prevalent across a broad range of children and youth that participate in outdoor education programs in Canada. Similarly, there are a large variety of outdoor education programs across Canada that youth participate in, and further research needs to assess the value of these various forms of outdoor education programs offered across the country.

Future studies would need to investigate children and youth from different age groups, different schools such as public or private schools, or different geographical locations. This study also only looks at children and youth that participate in outdoor education programs. It may be important to conduct further research on what students who do have the opportunity to attend outdoor education programs through their school, and then looking at the perceptions of the benefits of outdoor education by children and youth that have not participated in outdoor education programs. The perceptions of these
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children who have not participated in outdoor education programs are important in situating the value and benefits of outdoor education in the larger socio-cultural context of Canada.

Another limitation of the study may reflect my personal experience and interest working in outdoor education. Acknowledging that participants themselves are the experts in their personal experience in outdoor education, I must be sensitive to the fact that, based on my personal experience, I may have preconceived notions of what I may find in my data. I thus consciously made an effort to view my findings as impartially as possible, without looking for certain findings that I may have expected to find.

Results

Pre-Trip Interview Results

All students interviewed in the pre-trip interviews had only participated in outdoor education trips facilitated through their school, and had not had previous outdoor experience external to programs facilitated by their school. Students identified traditional outdoor activities as what they were most excited for, namely canoeing, hiking, and exploring the outdoors.

When asked what they thought outdoor education is, students were good at identifying the location of this form of education. Several students identified the outdoors as a ‘different learning environment’. Lauren¹ noted that the foreign location of outdoor education was important: “Um I think it’s when students are able to go outside [pause] so that they are in a different environment, different skills um [pause] and learn these skills”.

¹ Pseudonyms used for all participants to protect the confidentiality of participants of the study.
Similarly, Sitka identifies the different environment of the outdoors as a means to learn different things: “Well [pause] I think it’s like another classroom um where it’s um, thousands of things like the environment. [pause] and it allows us to [pause] well because it’s a different environment it allows us to learn different things.”

It is important to note that both Lauren and Sitka highlighted that the different learning environment of the outdoors allows them to learn different skills that they may have not been exposed to by simply learning in an indoor educational environment. It is notable that the ‘different skills’ that students identified as having learned were predominantly practical skills, such as setting up a tent and learning how to canoe.

Rilla said that the location of this form of education was a place where students were less familiar and less comfortable: “Um, I guess outdoor education [pause] tries to take us, and learning outside a classroom [pause] into another place where we don’t feel comfortable, and where we don’t [pause] well some of us don’t know a lot about”.

Thus in conclusion about pre-trip thoughts on what outdoor education was, students were able to identify that learning outdoors was a different arena of learning that pushed them outside of their comfort zones, allowing them to learn new practical skills.

When asked what skills they thought they would obtain from participation in the outdoor education program, students were readily able to identify practical skills they would learn on the trip. Lauren identified that she would learn skills such as using camp stoves and setting up tents. Similarly, Sitka identifies cooking food and setting up a tent as practical skills that would be learned in an outdoor environment. The ability and skill of being self-reliant was also an outcome that students discussed; this skill was most commonly discussed in the context of being able to cook by oneself, as mentioned by
Rilla, Sitka, Robyn, and Claire. Rilla highlighted that “it’s like learning to be more self-sustaining [pause] and um how to take care of yourself a bit more, cooking, making your own decisions, that kind of thing”.

Robyn explicitly stated that an increase in physical fitness was also recognized as a perceived outcome of participation in outdoor education: “it’s like um [pause] increasing physical, getting physically fitter, getting more active and being outdoors, um, yeah”.

Lauren identified the ability to learn and gain friendships as a skill that they might learn while on their outdoor education trip: “I guess then also how to [pause] you learn leadership and [pause] well, I guess you don’t learn it you get it but you get friendships”. However, Lauren did not elaborate on the process of how leadership is developed or how friendships may form as a result of being outdoors.

Sitka discussed that being outdoors may allow peers to bond and thus as a group the students may be able to complete activities more efficiently: “Just [pause] bonding together, mainly. Um, like we are able to do stuff together more effectively.” Rilla identified that being in an outdoor environment was a way in which peers could learn more about the people they were with: “Yeah, um [pause] I guess we are able to learn about the people you are with, maybe about yourself, I dunno”. Thus there was a vague recognition that the outdoor learning environment can be beneficial in developing a social network and social capital, while the process of how such development occurs was not recognized.

Thus in conclusion about the perceived outcomes of participation in outdoor education programs, students emphasized practical outdoor and self-reliance skills as the
predominant perceived benefit of participating in such programs. Skills such as how to cook for oneself, setting up a tent, using a camp stove, and building a fire were emphasized. As mentioned above, there was a vague recognition that participation in outdoor education programs can be beneficial in developing one’s social network and social capital, however students failed to recognize or acknowledge the process of how such development occurs. It is important to acknowledge that all participants in the study had participated in school-facilitated overnight outdoor education programs prior to their participation in my study and prior to their attendance at the outdoor education program in October 2013.

**Post-Trip Interview Results**

When asked generally about the overall experience of their trip, participants mainly identified their experience at the outdoor education center as positive. Most participants stated that they would participate in another outdoor education program, with only one participant stating that they were unsure if they would participate in another outdoor education program. Robyn, Lauren, and Claire explicitly stated that they had enjoyed the trip as they were able to be outdoors and participate in activities that were very different than they normally did.

Overall, the post-trip interview results suggest that students do think that participation in outdoor education programs create a more socially inclusive environment amongst their peers. However, learning to be friends with other students in their grade wasn’t explicitly stated as a learned outcome. Many students discussed learning friendships in the realization that expanding their friendship circle and social network allowed them to work more effectively and efficiently together as a cohesive group. Thus
social inclusion as a result of participation in outdoor education programs can be understood as building and expanding one’s social network to the goal of increasing one’s ability to achieve specific results together, rather than building friendships in the specific contexts of gaining companions.

When asked what outdoor education was after participation in their week-long school facilitated outdoor education trip, students again were able to readily identify the different and foreign learning environment. However, students were more readily able to incorporate perceived social outcomes of participation in outdoor education in their definitions of outdoor education after attendance at their week-long outdoor education program. Daine identified outdoor education as “learning [pause] about the outdoors in that space, um [pause] building leaderships, bonding with classmates, that kind of stuff is what I guess outdoor education is”. Similarly, Robyn was now able to identify outdoor education as an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of her peers while in an unfamiliar environment: “a time to learn in a different place. [Pause] um and I think for our grade, we got a lot closer and learned different things about each other, um so I think it’s a time to break out of your friend groups and [pause] talk to everybody. And do things you aren’t completely comfortable with, but [pause] um you may try anyways”.

Lauren was able to identify that the outdoors was a very different learning environment than an indoor classroom environment: “I think it is a chance to [pause] um for kids, who live in the city who um live a lot in stimulated environments to get out of that, um, and to learn about what exists beyond their environments”. Similarly, Claire identifies the outdoor learning environment as a different learning environment in which different skills can be taught: “It’s, um, a chance for you to be outside. Um and learn.”
And not just to learn and be outside, but to learn about the environment and how to protect it and all that kind of stuff”.

When asked what skills the participants thought they gained by participation in this outdoor education program, three major themes emerged amongst the responses. Firstly, participants discussed friendship as an outcome of outdoor education that can be learned. Participants were explicit in defining friendship within the context of getting along with other people and working together with others as a team. Rilla discusses bonding with her classmates as an outcome of participation, stating that she “learned how to get along with other people, um for a long period of time”. Similarly, Sitka identified being in the outdoors as providing an opportunity to “learn leadership through bonding with classmates, that type of thing”. Claire and Robyn similarly identified that they felt that they were able to work better as a team with their peers after returning from their outdoor education trip. It is thus important to acknowledge that participants identified gained friendships within the context of learning how to work more efficiently and effectively as a team with their peers.

The second theme of skills participants identified as gaining after participation in the outdoor education program was practical outdoor skills. These practical skills that were gained were the predominant focus of what participants perceived as what they had gained after the program. Robyn, Lauren, Sitka, Rilla, and Claire explicitly identified learning to pitch a tent and learning to warmly dress in the outdoors as skills they had learned after they had participated in their outdoor education program. Daine identified learning how to take responsibility for knowing when to brush one’s teeth and what type of clothing to wear for specific outdoor activities as specific skills she had learned. Daine,
Robyn, and Claire identified learning how to canoe and what to bring on a hike as skills they had learned while on their trip. Thus the participants were readily able to identify practical outdoor skills as skills that they had learned as a result of participating in their outdoor education trip.

The third theme of skills participants identified as gaining after participation in the outdoor education program was a rise in the understanding of environmentalism and conservation. Rilla stated that “I was able, um to learn to be acquainted with the outdoors, I guess.” Daine said that she was able to “I guess gain interactions with the environment, learning why it’s special, what is so exciting, um, about it I guess”. Conservation in the context of food security and minimizing food waste was also discussed. Claire stated that, “…they also had these challenges where you try to conserve food, um yeah waste less food and like I think that’s gonna be something that I will take back from it ‘cause like now I don’t try to waste, um well not that I tried to waste food before, but um now I guess um I’m more aware of it”. Sitka identified that her experience at the outdoor education center gave her the opportunity to become more “aware of packing and all of that, you know with your food”. Thus environmentalism and conservation were skills that participants identified as having learned as a result of participation in their outdoor education program, specifically in the context of food security and becoming personally aware of the intrinsic value of the outdoors.

When asked if they thought they would be able to use the skills they had identified as having learned while on their outdoor education trip, participants were able to identify how they thought they would use these skills in their everyday life. Claire
discussed her ability to view her own life in a different perspective after having participated in the outdoor education trip: “I think I learned how to live a little bit more objectively, like um I’ve learned that there’s more beyond um my own little world, that exists beyond my own little world, if that makes sense? [Pause] Like I get a sense of awareness from it... I think this will help me look in a world in a different, um perspective.”

Both Sitka and Rilla identified concepts of sustainability as skills that they would use in their everyday life. Sitka identified her outdoor education experience as “teach[ing] an appreciation of the resources we have, um, and an understanding of where things come from, which is, um, useful because it think we should understand what we use and where it comes from”. Similarly, Rilla stated that “especially the things they taught us um about sustainability, I can think about like, it wasn’t exactly something new, but um it was a good reminder for us to um be more aware of what nature is out there”.

Robyn identified personal responsibility and knowledge of her peers as predominant skills she had learned while on her outdoor education trip, skills that she would be able to transfer back to her everyday life: “I guess, like being more responsible and organized is um good. More independence, [pause] yeah that’s a big one. And I guess this isn’t really a skill, but I learned a lot about of other people, so I I guess I can use that here, working with other people, in school and stuff. Um and I can use all of those skills when I go camping, with my family and stuff”.

While Daine identified learning to be disconnected from technology as a skill that had been learned while on her outdoor education trip, she was reluctant to state that she
would want to transfer this skill back to her everyday life: “I felt, um, learning to
disconnect from the real world [pause]. Like I um get that it’s important to learn to be,
well learn to relax, and that you are going [pause] going outdoors to in a sense be
disconnected. But [pause] it seemed really intense, and I [pause] I’m not sure if I can live
without, like my phone, computer, technology in my everyday life [pause] I guess, um, it’s
just such a habit”.

Thus most participants were able to identify positive skills that they had learned
while on their outdoor education trip that they would be able to transfer back to their
everyday lives, identifying a shift in their perspective of understanding their lives,
attitudes towards sustainable practices, and ability to work as a team with their peers. One
participant identified learning to disconnect from technology as a skill that had been
learned, but not a skill that she would transfer back to her everyday life.

Lastly, when asked if they had hung out with different people while on the
outdoor education trip, most participants identified that they had, on some level,
interacted with different classmates more than they usually do while at school. Robyn
stated that, “you were given lots of opportunities to hang out with different people.
Whereas at school, [pause] you’re in classes, well um [pause] classes with the same
people, and they [pause] automatically become your friends, um you would see them so
often. I would [pause] yeah I would hang out with these new people again [laughs] if I
see them in the halls and stuff”. Similarly, Daine stated that she felt she would hang out
with new people as “the more comfortable we got with the others, we um began to hang
out with them more”.
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Sitka, Lauren, Rilla, and Claire identified that the common experience of participating in the outdoor education program together allowed them to feel as if they would interact more with their peers once they had returned to school. Sitka stated that, “it was a good balance, [pause] because you got to, well learned to work with others, um other students who weren’t necessarily your friends. And being all together, well, that’s something we can all talk about later”. Similarly, Lauren said that the shared experience of being on the outdoor education trip “gave us um, a chance to get to know the others, you know? I guess we all, learned to work together… We will be able to work, um, much better as a team back at school”. Rilla said that “now that we have this, um [pause] shared experience we can all relate to that. Something for us all to laugh about, um [pause] you know, later and stuff”. Claire stated that while she was able to talk with different classmates “a bit more than before”, it was really the “communal activity, I guess that [pause] help us work together now we are at home, you know, [pause] teamwork stuff”.

Thus participants identified that the shared experience of participating in the outdoor education program together may allow them to increase their ability to work well as a team upon their return to school.

Discussion

Overall, when asked what they thought outdoor education was, student responses did not vary significantly from before participation in their outdoor education program and upon their return to school. In both circumstances, all participants were able to readily identify the outdoor environment as a different learning environment than the indoor classroom learning environment that they were more comfortable and familiar
with. In both sets of interviews, several participants were able to explicitly state that learning outdoors allowed them and their peers to learn different skills than if they were learning in an indoor environment. However, in the post-trip interviews, several participants were able to explicitly include in their definition of outdoor education the fact that leadership and teamwork skills were an integral aspect of outdoor education. This can be seen in Daine’s testimony that outdoor education included “building leaderships, bonding with classmates, that kind of stuff”, as well as Robyn’s statement that outdoor education is “a time to learn in a different place... learning different things about each other”. Thus we find that before participation in their outdoor education trip, participants were able to identify that the different outdoor learning environment was a key aspect of outdoor education. It was only after participation in their outdoor education trip that teamwork and learning to work with their peers was explicitly stated as a key aspect of outdoor education.

I suggest that this finding can be explained through the experience that participants had while on their outdoor education trip. Through participating in the activities that had been asked of participants while on their outdoor education trip, students were able to explicitly identify teamwork and learning to work with their peers as significant aspects of outdoor education. Thus participation in an outdoor education program allowed participants to more clearly articulate what their definition of outdoor education was.

Overall, when participants were asked prior to their outdoor education trip what skills they thought they might learn, all of them were able to readily discuss practical skills that might be learned, such as building a tent and learning to canoe. Participants
also discussed self-reliance as a skill learned; self-reliance was discussed in the form of cooking one’s own food, as mentioned by Rilla, Sitka, Robyn and Claire. While there was a vague recognition that outdoor education could be beneficial in fostering a bond amongst peers, as discussed by Sitka and Rilla, or beneficial in learning leadership qualities, as discussed by Lauren, there was no recognition of the process of how these skills may be developed in the outdoors.

In contrast, after the return of their trip, participants were able to broaden their understanding of what types of skills could be learned by participation in outdoor education programs. Participants identified friendship as something to learn, particularly in the context of developing teamwork and working efficiently together. This was explicitly mentioned by four participants. Participants were also able to identify increased understanding of environmental and sustainability factors, discussing the intrinsic value of being outdoors and discussing food security. Lastly, and the most commonly discussed issue by participants, were the practical outdoor skills they had learned. These skills were explicitly mentioned by all participants. These skills were the predominant focus of what skills they had learned.

Thus after returning from their outdoor education trip, participants still predominantly focused on the practical skills they had learned. However, learning environmentalism and sustainability practices had not been discussed in the pre-trip interviews, and were a notable aspect of skills learned identified by four participants. Similarly, while there was a vague notion that teamwork and expanding one’s social network could be developed as a skill by participation in outdoor education in the pre-trip interviews, participants in the post-trip interviews explicitly stated that they felt as if
friendship was something in which they could learn, in the context of developing friendship and working efficiently together. Participants were more readily able to explicitly characterize what they thought ‘bonding with classmates’ meant, namely working together as a team. This suggests that participation in outdoor education further allows students to clearly understand what they have learned. It is interesting to note that the word friendship is used here to describe what has been learned. However, the definition of friendship that is used is more in the context of creating an effective and more cohesive group rather than forming bonds with peers that may result in what can be understood as a more traditional understanding of ‘friendship’, where participants would hang out with their peers outside of the classroom.

When asked if they thought the skills they had learned while on their outdoor education trip were transferable, participants were able to broadly identify how they would use these skills in later life situations. Participants discussed changes of perspective, increasing sustainable habits, increasing one’s personal responsibility and knowledge of peers through the increase of teamwork. All of these skills were positively discussed in the context of transferring these skills back to participant’s typical lives. One participant discussed the skill of learning to disconnect from technology, but stated that she did not want to transfer this skill back to everyday life.

Thus overall, there was an explicit acknowledgement that these skills participants identified as having learned are applicable to future life situations. I believe this is a positive impact of outdoor education that participants can explicitly state what they think they can gain out of outdoor education. However, no participants gave any specific examples of how they would use these skills in everyday life. Thus that while participants
were able to broadly identify skills that would be transferable back to their everyday lives, all participants failed to be able to explicitly identify the process in which such skills would be useful, and were unable to provide specific examples of the transferability of such skills they had learned.

When asked if they thought they would hang out with different peer groups after their participation in the outdoor education trip, participants identified that the shared common experience of participating in the outdoor education program was key in the process of allowing participants to more easily work together as a team. This suggests that a common, shared experience amongst peers is critical in fostering a greater sense of teamwork amongst youth. However, no participants explicitly stated that the outdoor environment was critical in this common shared experience. However, participants had discussed how the outdoor environment was a beneficial learning environment as it was different and foreign to them when discussing definitions of outdoor education. Thus we can conclude that participants were more inclusive as a group after their outdoor education trip as a result of the common experience. However, participants were clear that this shared experience allowed them to work better as a team, and not necessarily gain more friendships. Students identified feeling closer with other students after the trip, thus increasing the social inclusivity of the grade dynamic, and that this communal or shared experience would allow them to work better as a team, but failed to explicitly recognize this as skills that had been learned through participation in outdoor education.

Discussing the temporal nature of the benefits of outdoor education, one participant explicitly recognized that the opportunity to continue activities done while on their outdoor education trip would play a role in her ability to transfer skills learned back
into everyday life. Rilla stated that it would be beneficial to go “into the outdoors more to kind of, well [laughs] it’s relaxing [pause] and to keep learning [already learned skills]”. Thus there is an explicit acknowledgement by a participant that they felt as if they needed to spend more time outdoors to feel as if they would fully benefit from the skills that they had learned while on their outdoor education trip, and that spending more time outdoors would enable them to effectively transfer these learned skills back into everyday life. This suggests that outdoor education as a continual process of learning is most valuable for participants to effectively transfer skills over into everyday life situations.

One participant discussed an activity that all students had participated in while on the outdoor education trip, intending to teach students about the global distribution of wealth more generally and about issues of food security in terms of a nation’s wealth specifically. At one lunch, one table was given a full meal with chicken and juice and dessert, while the rest of the tables were given bread and water. The students knew they were expected to participate in a long hike in the afternoon. Sitka was interested in the concept of the unequal distribution of wealth, but she did not physically want to experience what this concept was like. Sitka identified that the activity was “to teach us about [pause] like how [pause] twenty percent of the world has, um eighty percent of um [pause] the resources, and twenty [pause] eighty percent rather has um twenty”. However, she stated that, “it wasn’t really the most effective way of like teaching the lesson, because um instead of um [pause] focusing on the real world implications of it, um [pause] most people were just upset that they didn’t get any food”.
This comment is very interesting; while it does not relate directly to the social inclusion of classmates per se, I think it clearly expresses how students may have felt as if experiencing desired learned outcomes on a very physical level was undesired (and perhaps very different than a dominant school curriculum where most lessons are taught in a classroom). While the desired outcome of this described exercise is obviously an understanding of the global distribution of wealth, I wonder if the lack of interest of students physically experiencing learning outcomes may be translated into attitudes surrounding other activities. For example, are students more willing to discuss the importance of working together as a team than actually participating in activities that require teamwork? Perhaps the outdoor education environment (in which activities are very hands-on and require a significant amount of physical engagement and physical interaction on the part of the student) forces students to physically engage with learning in a way that is more physically demanding than their physically lazy normative educational environment requires, whether students explicitly acknowledges this or not.

Other participants shared this sentiment of preferring theoretical discussions of topics rather than physically participating in activities as a form of learning. Lauren stated that she “preferred the discussion of [pause] aspects that we learned about”. However, she was quick to acknowledge that this may have been because that was “what we’re most familiar with, even though sitting outdoors was nice”. Sitka was able to identify that if the activity surrounding global food security had been “portrayed in a different way [pause] it could have been a more effective tool, um lots of people started getting angry about this”.
Thus it is noticeable that several participants would have rather discussed the theoretical reasoning behind activities rather than physically engage with the material itself. This may be explained through the fact that theoretical discussions are a more familiar learning environment than physically engaging with activities that teach a similar lesson. However, I suggest that participants’ discomfort with the activity addressed above may have been resulting from both the learning environment in which the lesson was taught and with the lesson itself. Living in Canada and having the financial opportunity to participate in outdoor education programs, I suggest that few participants will have experienced food insecurity in their lives. However, this activity forced participants to physically experience a form of food insecurity for a short period of time. The fact that students had to physically experience what this form of food insecurity was like may have fuelled their discomfort with the activity. I suggest that perhaps this discomfort is an integral learning outcome of the lesson itself, and perhaps participants failed to recognize this specific learning outcome of the lesson. Thus that while students were able to gain skills as a result of learning in a different learning environment, perhaps the explicit learning outcomes of all activities were not met.

**Conclusion**

Outdoor education is increasingly incorporated into the curriculum of numerous elementary and high schools. While a significant amount of quantitative research has been undertaken on the impacts of outdoor adventure education as a whole, there is less qualitative research available on personal perceptions of the impacts of outdoor education on participants, particularly the perceptions of children and youth on outdoor education. The qualitative research undertaken about personal perceptions of outdoor education
focusses on adolescent and youth perceptions, with little research emphasizing the perceptions of children about the impacts of outdoor education.

I conducted an exploratory study in which to fill this knowledge gap, attempting to gain an understanding behind the thought processes of how secondary school aged youth perceive the benefits of outdoor education. More specifically, this study focused on how youth think outdoor education within secondary schools contributes to social inclusion amongst their classmates after participation in outdoor education programs. This study identified potential thought processes amongst secondary school students about how they think participation in school-facilitated outdoor education programs affects social inclusion amongst classmates. This study aims to benefit future researchers by identifying these potential trends or thought processes, as well as informing teachers and outdoor education professionals as to student perceptions of outdoor education programs in a secondary school context.

Several conclusions were found based on the results of this study. Firstly, participation in the outdoor education allowed participants to more clearly articulate what their definition of outdoor education was. Secondly, student’s perception of skills learning in outdoor education was broadened after participation in the program. This can be seen through the inclusion of understandings of environmentalism and sustainability practices as skills developed after participation in the program. Thirdly, outdoor education was found to encourage students to physically engage with activities that may only be theoretically discussed in a traditional classroom learning environment.

The main conclusion reached from this study was that participants were more socially inclusive as a result of the shared experience of participation in the outdoor
education program. However, the term ‘inclusion’ was specific to increased teamwork within the group and the outdoor environment was not explicitly recognized as critical in the process of creating this shared experience.

Based on the findings of this particular study, I would suggest that participants could be provided with further discussions surrounding explicit examples in which they could transfer over skills learning in an outdoor education environment to their everyday lives. I also suggest that participants should be provided with future activities to spend more time outside, and more time engaged within outdoor education activities. This increased engagement with the outdoors would foster the greater development of skills, and an increased ability to transfer skills back to everyday life, as identified by several participants.

While this study has produced several notable conclusions, the exploratory nature of the study leaves avenues for future research to be explored. The sample of the study produced several limitations. Thus I suggest that future research could be conducted to assess whether trends identified in this study are found amongst a greater cohort of secondary students in Vancouver, and amongst secondary school students across Canada. Similarly, future research could be conducted surrounding specific themes found in the results of this study. Future research could further investigate into the thought processes behind students preferring to theoretically discuss concepts over teaching the same lesson in a more physically engaging environment. Future research could also investigate how students define social inclusion as increasing teamwork amongst a group, investigating how this definition is constructed.
Thus as identified through the results of this study, outdoor education is important as it provides a different and unfamiliar learning environment for youth to engage in. Engagement with this different environment has been identified by participants as allowing them to learn new practical skills, such as self-reliance skills of cooking for oneself, learning to pitch a tent, and learning how to participate in new activities such as hiking and canoeing. Such activities are important in developing self-reliance and self-responsibility amongst youth, as well as fostering increased physical fitness, all skills that are integral in developing a balanced and productive lifestyle. Participants were further able to identify that this outdoor environment specifically allowed them to gain an increased appreciation for environmental values and sustainable practices, values which are integral given the current state of environmental degradation worldwide. Lastly, highlighting the predominant focus of this study, participants were able to identify that the shared common experience of participating in an outdoor education program amongst their peers fostered a more socially inclusive environment upon their completion of the program.

Thus the outdoor environment, as a different and unfamiliar learning environment to youth, can foster social inclusion as a result of shared experiences amongst peers. Social inclusion amongst peer groups, as identified by the participants in this study, is critical as it fosters a stronger ability for a group to work together as a team to efficiently and effectively complete tasks. I suggest that the outdoor environment in particular is critical in the development of social inclusion as it is an environment in which youth are less familiar with as a learning environment, and using the outdoor environment as a learning arena can produce other benefits to youth as identified above.
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Thus outdoor education is important as it fosters the development of practical skills such as pitching a tent and how to properly engage in various outdoor activities. These practical skills foster the development of self-reliance and self-responsibility. Outdoor education also fosters a greater sense of environmental values and sustainable practices. Furthermore, outdoor education fosters social inclusion amongst peer groups in the context of creating a development of teamwork and an increased ability to effectively and efficiently complete tasks. All of these skills are critical skills that I suggest are valued in current pedagogical trends that focus on a traditional indoor learning environment. Thus there is an increased applicability to current pedagogical trends. Outdoor education has critical value within the larger socio-cultural arena of learning, as seen through fostering the development of skills as identified above. Such skills are valued in current pedagogical practices predominantly focused on the classroom learning environment. In this larger socio-cultural arena of learning, outdoor education provides a different learning environment in which youth are able to develop critical skills that are valued by current pedagogical practices predominantly focused on the classroom learning environment. A different learning environment to engage and develop valued skills can be critical for youth who struggle to learn effectively in a traditional classroom learning environment.
References


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Appendix A: Letter of Contact to School

Outdoor Education: Children’s Personal Perceptions of Experiential-Based Outdoor Education in the Context of Social Inclusion

Department of Sociology
University of British Columbia
6303 NW Marine Drive
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

Dear [School],

I am a past [School] graduate (‘10) and an undergraduate student from the University of British Columbia, and I am conducting a study surrounding children’s perceptions of participation in school-facilitated outdoor education programs. This study focuses specifically on how children think participation in outdoor education programs affects social inclusion among classmates. I am conducting this study in partial completion of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology.

I am aware that your school has an outdoor education program for students. I am requesting permission to ask parents of children who will engage in your outdoor education program to participate in this study.

My goal is to explore children’s perceptions of the impacts of outdoor education on social inclusion amongst classmates, as well as potential thought processes behind these perceptions. Many, although not all, school children form tight-knit peer groups. Among other things, I am interested in how outdoor education experiences may contribute to strengthening or weakening these social bonds.

The study will involve individual interviews. Each interview will be approximately 20 minutes in length. I aim to interview students twice, both before their participation in a school-facilitated outdoor education program and after their participation in such a program. If all participants and their parents/guardians agree, the interviews will be recorded. Participants can withdraw from the study at any point. Pseudonyms will be used when the data is written up. No details of any interview will be provided to the school. The only exception regarding confidentiality occurs if a student discloses to me information about abuse and I am legally required to report that to the proper authorities. If requested, results and findings of the study may be provided to participants and their parents/guardians.

This study is a low-risk study. Possible risks include: psychological discomfort or anxiety if the participant experienced a negative experience in outdoor education. The benefits of
YOUTH’S PERCEPTIONS OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

This study include suggesting possible avenues for future research to gain more understanding of how children perceive outdoor education.

I would like your permission to work with the lead teacher of the outdoor education program at [School] in order to conduct this study in an efficient and timely manner. I would hope to meet with this teacher to more fully explain the study and seek their permission as well.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Aileen McKeown
Outdoor Education: Children’s Personal
Perceptions of Experiential-Based Outdoor
Education in the Context of Social Inclusion

Department of Sociology
University of British Columbia
6303 NW Marine Drive
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

Dear Parents/Guardians of [School] Students,

I am a past graduate of [School] ('10) and an undergraduate student from the University of British Columbia, conducting a study on children’s perceptions of participation in outdoor education programs. I would like to invite your child to participate in this research study. This study focuses specifically on how children think participation in outdoor education programs effects them and their classmates. I am conducting this study in partial completion of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. I have invited these particular students to participate in this study as they will have, or soon will have, completed a school-facilitated outdoor education program.

This study aims to explore how children make sense of their outdoor education experiences. For example, how do they understand learning out of doors in comparison to learning in a classroom? Do they relate to their peers similarly or differently in both types of settings? Can they identify what they have learned or do they need to be reminded of possible lessons they may have gained from outdoor exploration? This study will try to gain an appreciation of what learning out of doors means to youngsters, what they understand as its aims and objectives, both real and imagined?

The study will take place in the form of two individual interviews. Each respective interview will be approximately twenty to thirty minutes in length. One interview will be conducted before participation in a [School] facilitated outdoor education program, and one interview will be conducted after participation in a [School] facilitated outdoor education program. If participants and their parents/guardians agree, the interviews will be recorded for data analysis purposes. Participants will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any point and this assurance will be repeated prior to the second interview. Interviews will be conducted on school grounds but in a private and secure location. All data will be confidential, with the recording of the interviews stored in a password-protected computer. Pseudonyms will be used when the data is written up so that the identities of all participants will be masked and so no one will be able to identify or attribute any comments or quotes to a specific person.
One exception to confidentiality occurs if a participant in the study discloses information of any form of abuse. By law I am required to report such disclosure to the appropriate authorities.

This study is a low-risk study. We do not think any of the questions are harmful or upsetting but if your child should find a question is difficult or challenging, then it is possible to skip this question. The benefits of this study include suggesting possible ways to enhance outdoor education as a learning activity. The results of the study will be provided in an Honours thesis which will be publicly available at UBC via the library or through my Department. The schools involved will only have access to the summary report that I write on my research. For reasons of confidentiality, they will not have access to the direct information provided by the students I interview.

If you have any concerns about your child’s rights as a research participant and/or your child’s experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research services at 604-822-8598, or in an email RSIL@ors.ubc.ca, or call toll free 1-877-822-8598. Alternatively please feel free to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Neil Guppy (neil.guppy@ubc.ca or 604 – 822 -3670).

Sincerely,

Aileen McKeown
UBC Honours Student

I consent / do not consent (please circle one) to my child’s participation in the study.

Furthermore, I agree to have the interviews recorded.

Yes        No

___________________  Name of Participant

___________________  Signature of Parent/Guardian

Please have your child return this form to the outdoor education teacher at [School].
Dear Student,

My name is Aileen McKeown, and I am a student at the University of British Columbia. I am interested in conducting a study about how children think about outdoor education programs, and how participation in outdoor education programs affects how children feel towards their classmates. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participating in this study will involve talking with me both before your experience in an outdoor education program, and after your experience in an outdoor education program. Each interview should last around 20 minutes. We will discuss topics such as what you think you have learned through outdoor education, and whether you feel closer to your classmates after participating in your outdoor education program. If you want, you are free to leave the study at anytime. Anything discussed in the interviews will be confidential.

If you have any questions about participating in this study, please ask your parents/guardians as they will receive information about participation in the study. You can also ask me any questions you may have.

Thanks,

Aileen McKeown

____________________________  Name of Participant

____________________________ Signature of Participant
Appendix D: Interview Guide

First Interview

1) What do you think outdoor education is?
2) What do you think you can gain from participating in outdoor education programs?
3) Will this be the first time you have participated in an outdoor education program? If no, what other outdoor education programs have you participated in?
4) What are your thoughts surrounding the outdoor education program offered at [School]?
5) What do you think you will learn from this particular outdoor education program?
6) Do you have any close friends in the class? Will they go on the outdoor education trip with you? How often do you spend time at school and outside of school with the other students you will be going on the outdoor education trip with?
7) What are you most looking forward to about the outdoor education program?
8) Do you have any worries about the outdoor education program?
9) Do you participate in any of the sports or recreation programs at [School]? In your community? Which ones?

Second Interview

1) What do you think outdoor education is?
2) What do you think you have gained from participating in the outdoor education program?
3) Was this the first time you have participated in an outdoor education program? If no, what other outdoor education programs have you participated in?
4) What are your thoughts surrounding the outdoor education program offered at [School]?
5) What do you think you have learned from this outdoor education program?
6) How do you think these skills you have learned are applicable outside of outdoor education?
7) How would you use these skills in your classroom? At home? In other extracurricular activities you may participate in?
8) Do you have any close friends in your grade? Did they go to the outdoor education program?
9) Who did you hang out with the most during the time of the program? Would you say that you hung out with your close friends more or other classmates more? Why do you think you hung out with the people that you did?
10) Did you talk to people in your class that you don’t usually hang out with?
11) How well do you feel you know everybody that went on the trip? Why do you feel that way?
12) How do you feel towards your classmates after participation in the program? Why do you think you feel the way you do?
13) Do you talk to people in your grade that you might not have talked to before? Do you think this has made you get to know your classmates better than before the program? Why or why not?

14) Did you learn anything about your friends that you didn’t know about them before? Do you think you would have learned this about them without having participated in outdoor education?

15) Would you recommend participating in an outdoor education program to a friend? Why or why not?

16) If given the opportunity, would you participate in another outdoor education program? Why or why not?