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The Influences of Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education on

Personal and Spiritual Growth

By

Phil Robson

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2020

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The Influences of Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education on

Personal and Spiritual Growth

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Canadian outdoor adventure education (Canadian OAE) is a unique teaching method that can create affordances for beneficial outcomes for its participants. In Ontario high schools, Canadian OAE is typically found in Integrated Curriculum Programs with an environmental focus. While there are over 100 of these programs in Ontario school-based opportunities for Canadian OAE have been rare in Windsor-Essex over the last 25 years. However, a Windsor-Essex Christian private high school now offers experiences in Canadian OAE.

The purpose of this case study is to describe the influence of a Grade 11 program on its students. Using an online questionnaire and photo elicitation, data was collected from four participants who had previously (within 3-5 years) participated in an eight-day canoe trip in Algonquin Provincial Park as part of the program. A narrative of the course and wilderness canoe trip was constructed, and five themes emerged: comfort zone, challenge, spiritual learning, spiritual experiences, and outcomes/learning. While some wilderness spiritual experiences followed the Spiritual Experience Process Funnel, others occurred because of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and physical challenge. For outcomes and affordances, most reported outcomes aligned with the existing outdoor adventure education categories of interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes. However, a third Spiritual Learning category was added for learning about a higher power through the experiences of the trip. Directions for further research include conducting a longitudinal study on the changes of perceptions of the trip over time and further study on the impacts of Canadian OAE on environmental and spiritual behaviors and attitudes.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife and best friend, Heather Robson, whose patient love, support, and listening ear have kept me going around every twist and bend in the road that has led us here. Thank you.

And to my boys, Will, Owen, and Cole. Thank you for your patience and kindness to me and Mom through the many evening classes and days of writing. I love you, sons.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This process has certainly been an adventure and arriving at the finish line of this project was often uncertain and would have not been possible without the help and encouragement I've received along the way.

To Dr. Beckford, my advisor, thank you for your time, patient guidance, and practical wisdom as you have led me through to completion.

To Dr. Zhou, my committee member and Research Design professor, thank you for cheering me on during class and providing your time and thoughtful comments to this project.

To Vic, my external reader and Outdoor Recreation professor, your course was the spark needed to get the fire going and your help and encouragement was the fuel I needed to keep the dream alive.

Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY .... **iii**

ABSTRACT .... **iv**

DEDICATION .... **v**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .... **vi**

COVID-19 STATEMENT .... **x**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION **1**

Introduction to the Research **2**

Canadian OAE Defined ***3***

Outcomes of OAE ***4***

Current Research in Canadian OAE ***5***

Canadian OAE and Spiritual Growth ***5***

Purpose of the Study **6**

Research Questions **6**

Significance of the Study **7**

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE **8**

A Brief History of Outdoor Education **8**

ICPs and Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education ***10***

Outdoor Experiential Education **13**

Experiential Education ***13***

Outdoor Education ***14***

Environmental Education ***14***

Adventure Education ***16***

Canadian OAE ***23***

Spirituality in Canadian OAE **28**

Current Research in Canadian OAE **32**

Outcomes of OEE ***32***

Outcomes of OAE ***33***

Outcomes in Canadian OAE ***34***

Deficiencies in the Literature **37**

Expected Outcomes **38**

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN **39**

Methodology **39**
Methods **40**
Data Collection Procedures **41**
Sampling ***41***
Instrumentation ***42***
Role of the Researcher **43**
Data Analysis Procedures **44**
Strategies for Validating Findings **45**
Anticipated Ethical Issues **45**
Ethical Considerations for the Teacher as Researcher ***46***
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS **47**
Data Analysis **47**
The Eremos Project Program **48**
Campus Days ***48***
Backcountry Canoe Trip ***52***
Analysis of Themes **65**
Comfort Zone ***66***
Challenge ***67***
Spiritual Learning ***68***
Spiritual Experiences ***69***
Outcomes ***70***
Chapter Summary **71**
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS **73**
Limitations **74**
Spirituality and Challenge in COAE **75**
Outcomes and Affordances **77**
Chapter Summary **78**
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION **79**
Suggestions for Further Research **79**
Recommendations for Canadian OAE Programs **80**
Final Thoughts **81**
REFERENCES **83**

APPENDICES 89
Appendix A 89
Appendix B 90
VITA AUCTORIS 93

COVID-19 STATEMENT

The proposal for this study was originally approved by my Thesis Committee and the Research Ethics Board of the University of Windsor. However, due to the novel coronavirus, significant adjustments needed to be made in order to be able to complete the study and still fulfill the requirements of a thesis for Master of Education. The adjustments to the study were approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Windsor. The following is the adjusted study and its findings.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Canadian outdoor adventure education (OAE) has been referred to as a pinnacle of curriculum education (Potter & Henderson, 2004, p. 77), and the proliferation of programs with Canadian OAE components (called Integrated Curriculum Programs (ICP)), in Ontario high schools was deemed a phenomenon in the early 1990s. Despite this, a survey of these programs during that time found that no such programs were offered in the Windsor-Essex region of Ontario (Henderson, Mehta, & Arnott, 1996, p. 2). However, this had not always been the case. In the 1970s and 1980s at least four secondary school programs in Windsor-Essex had integrated curriculum-based learning in geography, science, history, or physical education with outdoor adventure experiences such as winter camping and canoe trips (McWha, personal communication, 2015). Unfortunately, the Windsor-Essex programs failed to have lasting power, and by 1992 a catalogue of outdoor education opportunities in Ontario (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), 1992) showed that there were no outdoor experiences advertised for secondary school students in Windsor-Essex. Indeed, I grew up in the Windsor-Essex region and did not have a single school-based participation opportunity in Canadian OAE until a nine-day canoe trip during my university undergraduate program. Literature summarized by Ewert and Sibthorp (2014, pp. 130-134) indicate that OAE has a variety of interpersonal and intrapersonal development outcomes, including changes in values (such as spiritual development) and changes in perspective (especially perspective of nature when immersed in a natural environment). While the number of school-based programs that offer Canadian OAE experiences have recently increased in Ontario (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008, p. 15), students in Windsor-Essex are still missing out on participation opportunities, and the possible benefits associated with these programs..

Introduction to the Research

Outdoor education has a broad and storied past and is classically defined by Donaldson and Donaldson (1958) as education "in, about, and for outdoors" (p. 17). While poetic, this definition has been criticized as being too limiting (Priest, 1986, p. 13). For example, outdoor education can be about the social environment as well as the outdoor environment, and it can take place indoors as well as outdoors. Priest (1999) put forth that,

> outdoor education is an experiential method of learning with the use of all the senses. It takes place primarily, but not exclusively, through exposure to the natural environment. In outdoor education the emphasis for the subject of learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources. (1999, p.111)

It is in this context that we can define outdoor adventure education (OAE) as a component of outdoor education. Priest depicted OAE as being one of the two strong branches of the outdoor education tree, the other branch being environmental education (Priest, 1999d, p. 111). In his discussion of the semantics of adventure programming, Priest put forward that, like outdoor education, "adventure education is also concerned with two relationships, but different ones: interpersonal and intrapersonal" (Priest, 1999d, p. 111). Chisnell (1990, p. 15) placed adventure education on a continuum between sports and recreation and environmental education (see Figure 1). He argued that OAE had both an environmental focus and, to a slightly greater degree, a focus on people. Chisnell's definition demonstrates an overlap between the two teaching methodologies.

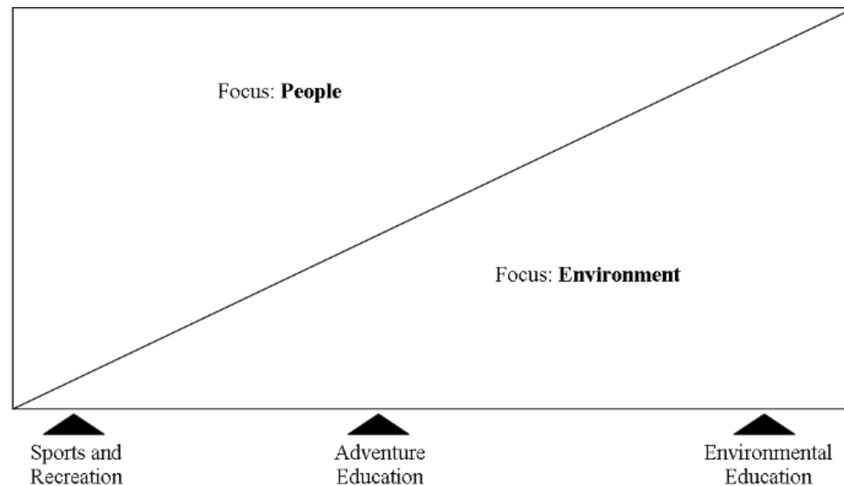

Figure 1 (Chisnell, 1990, p. 15)

Canadian OAE Defined

In 2015, James Borland built on the work of Ford (1986) and Priest (1999a, p. 111) by defining adventure education as "a teaching methodology where educators intentionally use risky and perceived-risky outdoor pursuits (non-motorized forms of wilderness travel) or artificial climbing environments to promote positive interpersonal and intrapersonal social development" (p. 72). In 2001, Henderson and Potter's essay highlighted a distinctly Canadian brand of OAE. In addition to Borland's definition, the Canadian brand of OAE is wilderness based, curriculum connected and is rich in 'green' learning. 'Green' learning includes place-based environmental and heritage awareness, which can also be described as a 'land-fullness' (Henderson & Potter, 2001, p. 227; Breunig & O'Connell, 2008; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011).

To summarize, Canadian outdoor adventure education is rich in environmental education, is curriculum connected, and culminates in a risky or perceived risky outdoor pursuit (self-propelled wilderness travel) that connects participants to place-based heritage and promotes positive interpersonal and intrapersonal development.

Outcomes of OAE

While participants in OAE programs often learn unintended lessons and develop in unexpected ways (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 137), and the purpose, contexts, and designs of OAE programs vary significantly (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 135), there are some common, overlapping, positive outcomes that have been identified in the growing body of knowledge surrounding OAE (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126). These can be grouped as cognitive, skill-based, and affective outcomes. Opportunities for outcome producing moments are labelled as *affordances* and "through OAE programs, participants often become aware of more opportunities [to grow] than they previously perceived" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 137). It is important to note that:

> OAE does not *create* outcomes for participants but rather presents opportunities to achieve outcomes such as personal growth and development. What participants take away from a program depends not only on what the program provides but also on what the participant chooses, either consciously or subconsciously, to process and learn from (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126).

Interpersonal development outcomes include leadership, social competence, and mutual commitment (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 131). Intrapersonal outcomes include increases in: self-constructs, including a sense of self and self-awareness; skill-building, including problem solving, self-regulation, and coping skills for tolerance or adversity; values, such as spiritual development and a change in perspective on the natural world; and attainment of better mental states, such as restoration of cognitive fatigue (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, pp. 133-134).

Current Research in Canadian OAE

In Ontario, Canadian OAE is often found in Integrated Curriculum Programs (ICPs). In an ICP, secondary school students take a package of two to five high school credits with one or two teachers over the span of a semester. During this semester, the curriculum objectives of the different courses are woven together, or integrated. Having only one group of students, allows the teacher to take extended, multi-day field trips with their students, and these trips are rooted in Canadian OAE (Horwood, 1995). Participants in ICPs often speak favourably of their Canadian OAE experiences within their programs (Valkova, 2017). Case studies of Ontario ICPs have documented outcomes of the student experience of ICPs in the following themes: a sense of community (Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015; Henderson, Mehta, & Arnott, 1996); unique experiences (Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015); personal growth (Valkova, 2017); a shifting concept of teacher (Valkova, 2017); and emerging environmental consciousness (Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015; Valkova, 2017). Research on ICPs has provided insight into Canadian OAE, however these programs work with a group of students who may be together for 16 to 20 weeks at a time. More research is needed to determine if single credit programs that endeavor to undertake a Canadian OAE experience have similar outcomes.

Canadian OAE and Spiritual Growth

Spirituality is defined as:

> A way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be Ultimate. (Heintzman, 2009, p. 73)

Henderson suggests that remembering our connection to nature, or developing a deep ecopsychology, is needed to connect us to our sense of place, to ourselves, and to others (1999,

p. 440). Indeed, that "our psychic relationship with the earth is innate, part of essential humanness, a yearning", that it is our lost religious impulse (Henderson, 1999, p. 440). In their textbook, *Outdoor Adventure Education*, Ewert & Sibthorp (2014) suggested that examining the spiritual value of these programs is a key research need (p. 161). While some studies on backcountry adventure experiences and spirituality have been completed (Heintzman, 2009; Daniel, 2007; Ritchie, et al., 2015, Foster, 2012, Marsh, 2008), there have been calls for more studies to include rich descriptions of the types of natural settings and activities that produce spiritual growth (Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2009; Daniel, 2007). Therefore, the study of spiritual growth within the curriculum connected context of Canadian OAE remains an area warranting further study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to describe the influence of a Canadian outdoor adventure education program on students at a private Christian school in Windsor-Essex. At this stage in the research, Canadian outdoor adventure education will be generally defined as a teaching methodology that is rich in environmental education, is curriculum connected, and culminates in a risky or perceived risky outdoor pursuit (self-propelled wilderness travel) that connects participants to place-based heritage and promotes positive interpersonal and intrapersonal development.

Research Questions

The purpose and questions for this study are adapted from Valkova's (2017) study on the long-term impacts of OAE in ICPs. The questions have been adapted to fit Breunig's (2015) case study model of collecting in-field observations and interviews of students as they are completing the program.

The central question that this study will aim to address is:

- How do students in a private Christian school describe their experiences in a curriculum-based Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education program?

Creswell (2013, p. 140) suggests following a central question with sub-questions that further specify the areas of inquiry. Possible sub-questions to consider will be:

1. How are changes in character and behaviour made evident from an online interview?
2. To what course elements do participants attribute personal growth?
3. How do program participants describe and write about their spiritual experiences while participating in a Canadian OAE program?

Significance of the Study

Few or no secondary school backcountry travel programs have existed in Windsor-Essex schools since the early 1990s. A deeper understanding of the workings of this type of program, and of the impact this program has on students and leaders in Windsor-Essex, will help provide policy makers with a greater understanding of these programs and potentially influence how priorities are set and funds are allocated. As well, current and future teachers will have a greater awareness and understanding of these programs, and the researcher as a teacher will be able to further inform his practice. Student participants will have potentially benefitted from their past participation in this type of program, as well as any hard skills they may have gained that would be useful for future participation in outdoor backcountry activities.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The history of Outdoor Education has been traced back to John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) who advocated sensory learning and exploring an object before reading about it (Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999, p. 45). Staying true to Canadian OAE methods, the review of the literature will begin with an understanding of where we have been in order to help guide future directions. The story will remain local, or place-based, in nature and thus will focus on Windsor-Essex's unique natural history that has shaped the outdoor programs and "wild" areas immediately available to schools and students. Following a discussion of the history of local OAE, Outdoor and Experiential Education and its components – environmental education and adventure education – will be discussed. Within adventure education, perceived risk and competence and their relationship to peak experiences and flow will be examined. This will lead to a discussion of the uniqueness of Canadian OAE programs, which will include defining wilderness, curriculum connection and land-fullness. Next, the connection of Canadian OAE to spiritual wilderness experiences will be discussed. Finally, a summary of the current research of Canadian OAE on outcomes in high school aged youth is presented.

A Brief History of Outdoor Education

The natural landscape of the Windsor-Essex region once evoked a sense of wonder in passing European explorers. In the early 1700s, with its towering forests and large marshes, the Detroit river corridor was described as heaven on earth (Pegg, 1985). However, once landed, the forest became a symbol of isolation to the early pioneers, and the marshes seemed a wasteland and a breeding ground for insects. Altogether it was "a hostile landscape to be tamed" (Pegg, 1985, p. 15), and over the next 150 years, in an effort to increase useable farmland, efficient European settlement logged, burned, and drained the region of its natural beauty, leaving only

10% of the natural area intact by the year 1900 (Waldron, 2007). In 1983, Windsor-Essex had "one of the lowest percentages of natural cover of any region in Ontario" (ERCA, 2013).

With increasing settlement and agriculture came the beginning of formal schooling in the region. Educators in this region and across North America were working to engage the agriculture-dependent population, and out of this need grew formal agriculture education which was the some of the first curriculum-based outdoor education in North America (Borland, 2015, p. 23).

In the early 1820s, wealthy North Americans sent their children to private boarding schools. These schools felt the need to develop character in their youth by returning them to the basics of living. To meet this perceived need, the first educational camping experiences were born (Borland, 2015). At first these programs were tied to the school curriculum, but soon they became focused on character development as summer camps developed and adopted the camping-based programs. Adventurous camping programs continued to be prominent with the help of charitable organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the Scouts, who provided participation opportunities for less privileged youth (Passmore, 1972). In the early 1920s, renowned Ontario camps such as the Taylor Statten Camps, Ahmek and Wapomeo, were spearheading canoe trips and camping expeditions (Taylor Statten Camps, retrieved 2015). The programs were eventually noticed in 1947 by the Chief Director of Education in Ontario, J.G. Althouse. Althouse praised summer camps as places where children could learn self-sufficiency without the distractions and complications of modern life (Borland, 2015, p. 29). The 1950s curriculum reflected Althouse's praise of the residential camping movement, and through the study of natural science, the curriculum encouraged teachers to use "hands-on instruction and displays, including the

observation of these phenomena in their natural environments" (Borland, 2015, p. 230) wherever possible.

Kurt Hahn, of Outward Bound fame, in these same post-World War II years, began disseminating his ideas on the declines of modern youth and the power of using "adventure as a tool to arm young people against the allure of fascism and war" (Hunt Jr., 1999). Like the character-development focus of YMCA camps, adventure education was being used as a "*means* to the *end* of virtues" (Hunt Jr., 1999, p. 118). The four solutions or antidotes to the declines of society were "(a) fitness training, (b) expeditions, (c) projects that focus on craftsmanship, and (d) Samaritan (rescue) service" (Valkova, 2017, p. 7; Richards, 1999).

ICPs and Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education

Soon, with the help of newly created government owned camps such as the Ontario Athletic Leadership Camp, outdoor adventure experiences were becoming integrated into the public-school system. By 1976, Paul Tamblyn of Acton High School created what is seen as the first integrated program. This new program model combined canoe building, historical re-enactment, and a multi-day canoe expedition within a package of four secondary school credits (Henderson et al., 1996). For his work in teaching, Paul Tamblyn eventually received the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence (GOC, 1993). Tamblyn's program was followed in 1981 by John McKillop and the Bronte Creek Project at Lord Elgin School, and in 1986 by Bruce Nickel and the Minn-a-kee Outdoor Education Program at Collingwood Collegiate Institute (Henderson et al., 1996). In 1989, the Limestone District School board began using integrated course packages under the name of Focus Programs, which were "created out of necessity" (Sewell, personal communication, Fall 2011) to engage disenchanted students. Some of these programs employed OAE as a teaching methodology. A report by King, Warren, King,

Brook, and Kocher (2009) eventually showed that these programs were effective at engaging students at risk of not graduating. Momentum for integrated programs and OAE was building and, in 1994, a group of like-minded educators met at Bark Lake Outdoor Center to discuss integrated curriculum packages that had an OAE component (Horwood, 1994). However, the 1996 inventory of these integrated programs showed that none existed in the Windsor-Essex region (Henderson et al., 1996).

Despite this, the Windsor-Essex region was not without innovation in outdoor education at the secondary level. According to David McWha, a teacher from W.D. Lowe High School in Windsor, there were at least four locally-developed, single course, OAE programs in the Windsor-Essex region funded by public boards in the 1970s and early 1980s (personal communication, 2015). Some of these courses, like McWha's, featured integrated curriculum from the geography, physical education, history, and science disciplines within the scope of an outdoor education course. This course was paired with outdoor adventure experiences such as winter camping and canoe trips (McWha, personal communication, 2015). Unfortunately, the Windsor-Essex programs failed to have lasting power, and by 1992 a catalogue of outdoor education opportunities in Ontario (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), 1992) showed that there were no outdoor experiences advertised for secondary school students in Windsor-Essex. It is of note, however, that the Windsor Board of Education was running a multi-day camping program for elementary students at Camp Henry in Point Pelee National Park that featured outdoor adventure education activities (COEO, 1992, p. 19).

Despite the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s, by the early 1990s Outdoor Education was experiencing a recession right along with the rest of the province. During this time, many outdoor education field centers were deemed ancillary by local trustees who did not want to raise

taxes to keep schools open. As a result, field centers were closed outright, or full-time teachers were replaced with contract staff (Borland, 2015). It was also during this time that the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario began to ask its members to be prepared to prove their programs' worth to avoid additional closures. Unfortunately, COEO faced an uphill battle against the imminent "Common Sense Revolution" of Mike Harris' 1995 Progressive Conservatives.

In the Common Sense Revolution document, the Progressive Conservatives had predicted $6 billion in funding cuts, specifically $400 million from education (Gidney, 1999). Once in power, the Tories found a greater deficit than expected and education cuts totaled upward of $1 billion, or a 22.7% decrease in the annual provincial operating grant to school boards (Gidney, 1999). The Finance Minister, Ernie Eves, emphasized that Boards should absorb the reductions without increasing the taxes for local ratepayers. Eves declared "that boards must 'take every reasonable step to cut costs outside the classroom, which now account for at least 30 cents of every education dollar'" (Gidney, 1999, p. 242). School boards responded by cutting programs such as outdoor education and laying off a large number of mostly young teachers. However, despite funding cutbacks, by the year 2001, over 40 integrated programs featuring OAE remained in existence in Ontario (Henderson & Potter, 2001).

After the Liberal government was elected in 2003 there was a shift in the outlook of outdoor educators around the province. Perhaps both administration and educators were more willing to take risks and make investments. Bruenig et al. (2015) estimate that the number of ICPs has risen from 30 in 2000 (Russell, & Burton, 2000) to about 100 outdoor focused ICPs in 2015.

In addition, the environment as an important focus was coming into the public eye again, and the Ontario Ministry of Education's Working Group on Environmental Education released a

report in 2007 which would eventually transform into *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* (2009), the policy framework for environmental education in Ontario schools that mandates the inclusion of environmental topics within all subjects. Along with this environmental shift came a general acceptance from the public of Outdoor Education as a valuable teaching methodology in the context of science, geography, and environmental studies.

Outdoor Experiential Education

"That which ought and can best be taught inside the schoolrooms should there be taught, and that which can best be learned through experience dealing directly with native materials and life situations outside the school should there be learned" (Sharp, 1943)

In *Adventure Programming*, Priest states that "a coherent philosophy establishes a foundation upon which to build theory and action" (1999, p. 109). I will here endeavor to define and delineate outdoor and experiential education (OEE), and its two historically identified branches: outdoor adventure education and environmental education. Let's first begin with a discussion of the foundational taproot, experiential education.

Experiential Education

As mentioned in the quote above, experiential education is an education through doing. However, it is a not a haphazard doing, but rather a teaching and learning approach that "emphasizes direct experience as a resource that can increase the quality of learning through combining direct experience that is meaningful to the learner with guided reflection and analysis" (Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999, p. 49). It is both a philosophy and methodology that involves purposeful facilitation of direct engagement experiences for the learner, as well as focused reflection that increases knowledge, develops skills, and clarifies values (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008, p. 11). The learning becomes evident when there is "a change in the individual caused by

experience" (Kraft, 1999, p. 181). Experiential education "allows numerous opportunities for the learner to connect cognitive (head), kinesthetic (body), and affective (spirit or emotional) aspects" (Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999, p. 49). Experiential education is a broad field that encompasses numerous subfields, including: "outdoor education; environmental education; place-based education; adventure education; and service learning, among others" (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008, p. 11). Therefore, experiential education is a teaching method that relies on purposeful doing, involves guided reflection, and is broad in scope in both the subfields it encompasses and the types of learning afforded to the learner.

Outdoor Education

Outdoor education has been defined as "education *in*, *about*, and *through* the outdoors" (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958, p. 17). In 1986, Ford agreed with this definition as it describes the "place, topic, and purpose of outdoor education" (p. 3). However, definitions of outdoor education have continued to be put forward and not one is settled on by the field. In 1999, Priest described outdoor education as an experiential method of learning with the use of all the senses. It takes place primarily, but not exclusively, through exposure to the natural environment. In outdoor education the emphasis for the subject of learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources. (Priest, 1999d, p. 111)

While not as poetic, Priest's definition provides a more complete view of outdoor education, highlighting the use of all of the senses and the aspect of relationships among people and natural resources.

Environmental Education

Environmental education is viewed as one of two strong branches of outdoor and experiential education. Environmental education was originally defined as a discipline "aimed at

producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to help solve the problems, and motivated to work toward their solution" (Stapp, 1969, p. 34, as cited in Inwood & Jagger, 2014). This original definition depicted a field separate from OEE but one in which OEE would be an effective teaching method. Priest (1999), however, described environmental education as an overlapping teaching methodology with outdoor education and as being "concerned with two relationships: ecosystems and ekistic" (p. 111). More recently, environmental education has been defined by Ontario's Ministry of Education (2009) in *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, as

> education about the environment, for the environment, and in the environment that promotes an understanding of, rich and active experience in, and an appreciation for the dynamic interactions of:
>
> - The Earth's physical and biological systems;
> - The dependency of our social and economic systems on these natural systems;
> - The scientific and human dimensions of environmental issues;
> - The positive and negative consequences, both intended and unintended, of the interactions between human-created and natural systems. (p. 4)

The overlap between this definition and Donaldson and Donaldson's 1958 definition of outdoor education as "education *in*, *about*, and *through* the outdoors" (p. 17) is apparent. In some ways, this has constrained the perception of outdoor education for Ontario teachers as a discipline that exists solely within the realm of environmental education. Despite the similarities of the two definitions, it is important to note that not all environmental education is outdoor education and not all outdoor education is environmental education. However, by focusing on dynamic interactions within their definitions the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) supports

Priest's view that, like outdoor education, environmental education is also concerned with relationships (1999d, p. 111).

Adventure Education

"Finally, there is a kind of joy, a simple pleasure, or just plain fun when school is an adventure." (Horwood, p. 12)

Before we explore Canadian outdoor adventure education and its intersection with environmental education, we need to first understand the other strong branch of outdoor education; adventure education (Priest, 1999d, p. 111). Adventure education had been identified as a form of experiential education (Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999, p. 47). This section will endeavor to explore the current understanding of adventure education, including adventure as a teaching method, the balance of perceived risk and competence, peak experiences, and the components of an OAE program. Then, with a thorough understanding of environmental education and adventure education, we will be well positioned to fully understand Canadian OAE.

Adventure in adventure education. Adventure has been described as "leisure with uncertainty" (Priest, 1999c, p. 160) and Horwood (1999) argues that schooling is best done as an adventure (p. 12). When employed in schooling and organized programs adventure is often programmed for specific reasons or outcomes (such as personal growth in students). In this way, adventure is used as a means to an end. For an experience to be an adventure, it must be entered into voluntarily, be intrinsically motivating, but must also have an uncertain outcome (Priest, 1999d, p. 112). Horwood (1999) also provides five characteristics to determine if an activity is adventurous: uncertain outcome, risk, inescapable consequences, energetic action, and willing participation (p. 9). The risk Horwood (1999) mentions in adventure can be real or perceived and

may vary from person to person based on their past experience and competence in the given tasks. Risk can be social, psychological, or spiritual.

Risk and competence in adventure education.

"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for." – John A. Shedd, 1928

Risk is the potential to lose something of value and is created in the presence of dangers (Priest, 1999d). Risk can be either real or perceived. Real risk is the "true potential for loss: that which actually occurs on an adventure" (Priest, 1999d, p. 113). Perceived risk is the best estimation an individual can make of the real risk (Priest, 1999d, p. 113). Typically, novices overperceive risk, however those with minimal skill and knowledge may sometimes underperceive the risk and encounter sources of serious danger (for example, consider a novice skier unknowingly entering an avalanche zone). Dangers can be classified as "perils (the source of the loss) or hazards (conditions which influence the probability or likelihood of a loss actually occurring), human dangers (subjective, in control of the leader), and environmental dangers (objective)" (Priest, 1999d, p. 113). Despite the consequences associated with these risks, participants "paradoxically find it [adventure] exiting and fun, even if they find it threatening and uncomfortable" (Horwood, 1999, p.10). When the unpleasant consequences associated with these risks disappear, so does the adventure.

> One of the great advantages of the outdoors as the site for adventure education is that the consequences of decisions cannot be evaded. Nature is implacable and quite indifferent to the human condition… Yet, the more easily that students can miss deadlines, choose safer paths, and evade responsibility, the less schooling can achieve adventure status (Horwood, 1999, p. 12).

Competence is the ability of a leader or participant to successfully perform a certain task. Like risk, competence can be real and perceived (Priest, 1999, p. 113). Again, novices typically misperceive their competence. In a facilitated adventure education program, perceived values of risk and competence are manipulated. Through maintaining acceptable levels of real risk and structuring an experience to meet the participants' real competence level, "misperceiving individuals slowly come to better recognize real risk and real competence", thus becoming astute adventurers (Priest, 1999, p. 114). As participants gain competence, decisions are to be shifted from the teacher to student, thus making the activity continually more adventurous (Horwood, 1999, p. 12).

Peak experience and flow. When competence levels and perceived risk intersect, the opportunity for a peak experience emerges. Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi (1999) describe this optimal experience as flow or "a state of experience that is engrossing, intrinsically rewarding, and outside the parameters of worry and boredom" (p. 153). Participants enter into this state when they meet challenges with appropriate skills and have the opportunity to "test the limits of their being and extend their former concepts of self" (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 154). According to the *Flow Model* (Figure 2, Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), when competence is high and challenge is low boredom can result, leading to experienced guides being tempted to push the trip beyond their group's capabilities. Conversely, when the challenge or risk is high and competence is low anxiety can result, leading to the inability to perform or engage in the activity.

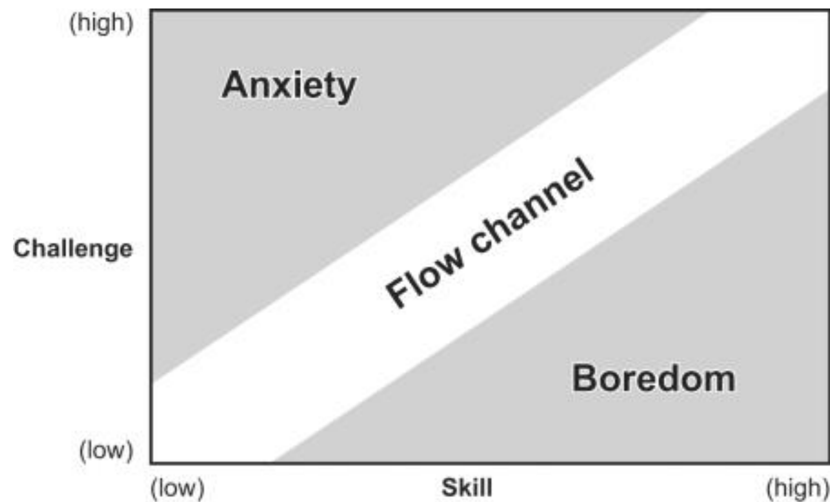

Figure 2: The Flow Model (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999)

Finding the state of flow for a peak experience is a challenge and instructors can use these six characteristics when planning and facilitating a program in order to bring their participants closer to that peak experience. The participant can enter a state of flow when they:

1. Know what must be done and get quick feedback about how well he or she is doing.
2. Have all attention concentrated on the relevant stimuli. This involves the merging of action and awareness.
3. Center their attention on a limited stimulus field.
4. Experience a 'loss of ego' and 'self-forgetfulness'.
5. Feel potentially in control of their actions and the environment and cease to worry about potentially losing control.
6. Feel as though the activity has become intrinsically rewarding (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 156).

In summary, adventure must be entered into voluntarily, include an element of real or perceived risk, and be intrinsically motivating. Adventure disappears when unpleasant consequences disappear and for this reason, the outdoors is an excellent place for adventure as

nature is merciless and objective in delivering its consequences. Facilitated adventures aim to manipulate the variables of competence and risk in order to create astute adventurers with better perceptions of their own abilities (real competence) and of the risks associated with the activity. Peak experiences occur when competence meets risk and is an experience of "self-forgetfulness" that can be described as flow.

Defining Outdoor Adventure Education. Since before the days of Kurt Hahn and his wish to use adventure to combat the declines of modern youth, outdoor adventure education (OAE) has been seen as a means to an end. It has been viewed as "the deliberate use of adventurous experiences to create learning in individuals or groups, that results in change for societies and communities" (Priest, 1999a, p. xiii). Priest continues that "change for society and communities is the altruistic end point sought by adventure programs. While the immediate goals and primary focus for learning may well be to change people, the ultimate impact is to make the world a better place to live in some small way" (Priest, 1999a, p. xiii) or, as Horwood put it, outdoor adventure education is the quest to "do our utmost with our hands, heads and hearts" (p. 12).

Priest described outdoor education as being concerned with the relationships between people and natural resources, and describes the overlapping field of environmental education as being concerned with ecological and ekistic relationships (Priest, 1999d, p. 111). The author continues that "adventure education is also concerned with two relationships, but different ones: interpersonal and intrapersonal" (Priest, 1999d, p. 111). Through direct and purposeful exposure to challenge, high adventure, and new growth experiences *change* may take place in groups and individuals (Priest, 1999d, p. 111). Similar to adventure, there are common points that can typically be found throughout OAE programs: "a small group setting; interaction with the

outdoors or natural setting, a purpose-driven dynamic for achieving specific goals; an uncertainty of outcome; and a sense of achievement on completion of the experience" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 3).

A number of definitions have been put forward of Outdoor Adventure Education (see Table 1 for definitions and key words). In their book, *Outdoor Adventure Education*, Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) summarize the different definitions of OAE in their own definition. OAE is:

> A variety of teaching and learning activities and experiences usually involving a close interaction with an outdoor natural setting and containing elements of real or perceived danger or risk in which the outcome, although uncertain, can be influenced by the actions of the participants and circumstances (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 5).

Definition	Key Words			
	Who	**What**	**Where**	**Outcomes**
"Direct, active, and engaging learning experiences that involve the whole person and have real consequences" (Prouty, 2007)	Whole person	Direct, active, engaging learning		Real Consequences
"…education that focuses on the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships while participating in outdoor activities that include attributes of risk and challenge" (Wagstaff & Attarian, 2009, p. 15)		Outdoor activities that include risk and challenge		Interpersonal Relationships Intrapersonal relationships
"Adventure education involves a particular set of activities, often set in the outdoors. It uses kinesthetic learning through active physical experience. It involves structured learning experiences that create the opportunity for increased human performance and capacity. There is a conscious reflection on the experience, and application that carries beyond the present moment." (Bailey, 1999, p. 39)		Kinesthetic learning Structured learning experiences Conscious reflection	Often outdoors	Increased human performance and capacity Application beyond the present moment
"…education that is conducted in a wilderness-like setting or through nature and physical skills development to promote interpersonal growth or enhance physical skills in outdoor pursuits" (Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin & Ewert, 2006, p. 8)		Through nature Through Physical Skills	Wilderness -like setting	Interpersonal growth Enhanced physical skills in outdoor pursuits

Table 1: Definitions of Outdoor Adventure Education

Further to defining OAE, Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) point out that OAE programs construct experiences based on the following five key principles:

1. Experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis, and the transfer of things learned to other aspects of an individual's life;
2. Learning is personal and provides a foundation for developing meaning and relevance;
3. Participants are encouraged to examine their own values and behaviours during and from the OAE experience;
4. Participants are engaged at the physical, emotional, cognitive, and intellectual levels;
5. Outdoor adventure educators are active learners and engage in a process that parallels that of the participants (p. 37).

These principles, while theoretically great for program design and participant experience, make studying OAE programs in a systematic fashion difficult and messy as participants begin a program with their own way of being and view the program through that past experience. Ultimately, "adventure is leisure with uncertainty" (Priest, 1999c, p. 160) and participants come away with their own perspectives and experiences, and this makes the learning of the purpose driven programs difficult to generalize and predict.

Canadian OAE

"The spirit of adventure lives within teachers." (Horwood, 1999)

In 2001, Henderson and Potter pointed out that Canadians have a distinctive brand of Outdoor Adventure Education (p. 226). They argued that while Canadians do practice OAE as defined in the previous section, a "pinnacle of curriculum education" (Potter & Henderson,

2004) has unique characteristics that can be found across Canada in outdoor education programs. These characteristics can be found in other countries, but Canada's heritage, culture, and geography have come together to create this phenomenon in Canadian schools and OEE programs. Canadian outdoor adventure education is a teaching methodology that is rich in environmental education, is curriculum connected, and culminates in a risky or perceived risky outdoor pursuit (self-propelled wilderness travel) that connects participants to place-based heritage and promotes positive interpersonal and intrapersonal development. The differences between this definition and that of the larger field of OAE is that Canadian OAE must include a wilderness travel component, be curriculum-connected, and promote a land-fulness. We will endeavor here to discuss these key differences as well as summarize some of the outcomes of Canadian OAE currently found in the literature.

Wilderness.

"An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (The Wilderness Act of 1964 as cited in Miles, 1999)

Canada lends itself well to wilderness travel; 83% of the Canadian population lives within a 3 hour drive of our Southern Border with the U.S. (Henderson & Potter, 2001, p. 228) leaving large swaths of northern "wilderness" for eager modern-day adventurers to explore. As a commodity that is viewed as more and more difficult to find in the modern world (Miles, 1999, p. 323), Henderson and Potter (2001) have put forward that many Canadians relate to the wild as compensation for their everyday, metropolitan identity. In Canada, wilderness travel relates participants to the early inhabitants of the country, to the Voyageurs, and to First Nations cultural and spiritual practices (Henderson & Potter, 2001).

Wilderness has certain characteristics. It has been discussed as both a physical and conceptual place of solitude and physical and emotional challenge (Miles, 1999). Through a First Responder's perspective wilderness is delayed access (2+hrs) to definitive medical care, however wilderness can be relatively defined. If we think of the differing perceived risk and competences of varying participants and leaders, what is wilderness to one may be a walk in the park to another. Wilderness can be an idea or a state of mind (Miles, 1999, p. 321). As relative as "wilderness" is, its setting is credited with making certain types of learning much more possible (Miles, 1999, p. 322).

Canadian outdoor adventure education is experientially tied to travel in the Canadian landscape and is particular about its form of wilderness travel. The activity must be some form of *Outdoor Pursuit*, with those pursuits being "self-propelled activities performed in an outdoor setting with a low-impact environmental philosophy" (Priest, 1999d, p. 112). Examples in Canadian programs may include backpacking, whitewater paddling on remote and rivers, dogsledding, horse-packing and canoeing (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008, p. 13).

Curriculum connection.

Truly functional outdoor education incorporates aspects of both [environmental and adventure education] approaches" (Priest, 1999d, p. 111)

A common thread throughout Canadian OAE is the program's connection to curriculum. That is, the adventures are not adventures for themselves, or for a recreational purpose, instead, the trips and activities "represent a planned curriculum towards a set of learning objectives" (Henderson & Potter, p. 231). As mentioned earlier of historical OAE programs, Canadian OAE is a means to an educational end. However, Canadian programs differ from their U.S. counterparts in the content and delivery of this curriculum. A typical OAE program may take

place "in" the outdoors, which may include city parks, playgrounds, climbing walls, public beaches, etc., while Canadian OAE uses a wilderness trip as the climactic experience. Because "the land is such a visceral reality-based arena for our students" (Henderson & Potter, p. 232), a wilderness location situates instructors to teach through experiences that are "for" and "about" the outdoors as well as "in" the outdoors. By teaching "for" and "about" the outdoors instructors and students can engage in a purposeful intertwining of the two branches of outdoor and experiential education: the environment (ecological and ekistic relationships), and adventure (intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships).

> This integration or curriculum enrichment quality adds interdisciplinary teaching strategies to the physical and intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of conventional outdoor adventure education. Integration of environmental education/field interpretation subject matter (biology, geography, astronomy) as well as the special opportunities for Canadian heritage skill development (history, geography, literature, anthropology, native studies) is common in the Canadian context. This is due to the emphasis of the group travel experience on the land in a setting (Henderson & Potter, p.232)

In Ontario high schools, wilderness trips are often woven together with school curriculum through packages of 3-5 high school credits offered simultaneously by one or two teachers in one ICP with an environmental focus. It is the aim of these programs to not just be out on the land but to develop a connection to and with the land through the use of ecological literacy programming (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008, p. 13).

A land-fullness.

"If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography." Canadian Prime Minister, W.L. Mackenzie King, 1936, as cited in Henderson & Potter, 2001

A program that inspires land-fullness must be rich in "green" learning, "a 'green' learning in environmental and heritage awareness" (Henderson & Potter, 2001, p. 227; Breunig & O'Connell, 2008; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). By the use of environmental and heritage curriculum before, during and after Canadian OAE programs, educators inspire within their students a connectedness to the land and its heritage. "Through adventuring, an individual, while engaging in the activity, can *feel* the emotions, excitement, and concerns of those who have gone before" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 26). This connection is more than the typical interpersonal, intrapersonal relationships built in adventure programming. It is a connection of "self to place as well as self to other" (Henderson, 1999, p. 440).

While travelling the same trails and land can build an awareness of heritage through "direct interpretation" (Henderson, 1999, p. 143), educators use different methods to build these connections. Storytelling around the fire or on the trail keeps heritage alive and in the minds of the students (Henderson, 1999, p. 142). Using maps, both historical and recent, can help "define the context" where the learning is taking place (Henderson, 1999, p. 142). Pre-trip readings and presentations followed by peppering the experience with appropriate "stories, reading, quotes, items and technology" (Henderson, 1999, p. 143) all help keep the participants' attention active to the place of travel and to the heritage and ecological context.

> In this way, the so called 'hard' technical skills—often travel and camping skills—and the 'soft'—group skills and personal growth qualities—are blended with, one might say, the 'green' and 'warm' skills of a complementary eco-adventure focus. (Henderson & Potter, 2001, p. 227)

Educators who invite students to become a part of history by opening the doorways of their imaginations to the stories of and land within which they are travelling invite students to:

remember their connection to the land (Henderson, 1999, p. 440); use the hope and faith offered by the place to define who they are (Henderson, 1999, p. 144); experience their psychic relationship with the earth – our lost religious impulse (Henderson, 1999, p. 440); and experience "an ever-widening "wide eye" view as [they] gaze at the vast, overwhelming space of Canada" (Henderson and Potter, p. 229). Ultimately, land-fullness is a grounding experience, one of finding your place and your home.

Spirituality in Canadian OAE

Paul Heintzman (2009) quotes Elkins et al. (1998) as he broadly defines spirituality as "a way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be Ultimate" (p. 73). Spiritual experiences are associated with "moments of transcendence and spiritual enchantment" (Fox, 1999, p. 455) and are "triggered through events which are enhanced by nature, self-awareness and group interaction" (Fox, 1999, p. 455). Spiritual experiences are complex but are strongly associated with wilderness exposure and solitude (Fox, 1999, p. 459). Through these experiences, participants can grow and ultimately change behaviours. Spiritual growth is "defined as delayed awareness arising from spiritual experience" (Fox, 1999) and this awareness leads to a changed perspective. Spiritual growth is rarely planned or calculated.

Fox (1999) outlined the following qualities of spirituality:

1. Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of human nature
2. Spirituality is a sense of mystery
3. Spirituality is the sense of awe or wonderment

4. Spirituality is the belief in the connectedness or sense of oneness toward people, self, and all things
5. Spirituality is aesthetic beauty
6. Spirituality is transcendent
7. Spirituality is a peak experience
8. Spirituality is creating a sense of inner peace, oneness and strength
9. Wilderness is a spiritual attraction (p. 457)

Heintzman's (2003) overview of the research on wilderness and spirituality suggests that not everyone seeks spiritual benefits from the wilderness, but a majority of wilderness users do (p. 28). Heintzman further explains that according to Fox's 1999 *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel* model, this wilderness experience can lead to attitude change and new behaviours. However, participants must be relaxed and in control during a leisure wilderness experience before they can be open to a spiritual experience (2003, p. 29; 2009, p. 75; Henderson, 1999). The *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel* could be a useful framework for interpreting the process of spiritual experiences (Fox, 1999, p. 460). In the model, people first carry "baggage" into the wilderness; this may influence perceptions and even generate fears about nature. As participants become familiar with nature, they accept their fear (or rationalize it), they feel more in control, and this control leads to relaxation. This relaxation and familiarity with nature reduces the stress and anxiety that came with the initial experience. Then, when people are relaxed and feel in control, they become more open to spiritual experiences. These spiritual experiences encompass "intense emotions… which contribute toward feelings of connectedness to nature, to spirits, to the inner self, to life perspectives, to one's sexuality, and toward a connection with other people" (Fox, 1999, p. 459). Marsh (2008) highlights the need to gain competence in the

wilderness setting to allow for the necessary focus and relaxation for a spiritual experience in this quote:

> Appreciation of nature and unspoiled areas are basic to the spiritual meaning. Development of self-confidence and competence for engaging in adventure allows for focus and reflection during experiences. Physical and mental exercise and the resulting well-being are linked to spiritual meaning. Finally, there is a dynamic of tension between interaction and solitude: Both enable a spiritual meaning. Thus, development of interpersonal skills is of value (p. 292).

Finally, "spiritual experiences enhance positive transference and spiritual growth into participants' lives. Outcomes contribute toward significant changes in attitude and adoption of new behaviors" (Fox, 1999, p. 459). These new behaviours could be a link to the environmental behaviour changes Breunig, Murtell, and Russell (2015) are studying in their multi-site case study.

OAE is especially well-suited to foster resilience and spirituality (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 128), and Kellert (1998) in *A National Study of Wilderness Experience*, listed spiritual connection with nature as one of the more common outcomes. Daniel (2007) found in a longitudinal study that 90% of respondents believed that a 20-day wilderness, Christian based, Outward Bound-type program had made a difference in their lives (p. 387). Participants listed the solo experience as the most significant trip component (Griffin & LeDuc, 2009, p. 210; Daniel, 2007) and that they experienced "a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of all things in the natural world" (Daniel, 2007, p. 388). When expeditions draw attention to spiritual matters, the participants are more likely to have spiritual experiences (Heintzman, 2003) and the 20 day expedition "encouraged spiritual growth by drawing parallels between the informants'

wilderness experiences, their life journeys, and the wilderness experiences portrayed in the Bible" (Daniel, 2007, p. 388).

Unlike Daniel's (2007) overwhelmingly positive response to a trip being 'life-changing", an expedition ethnographic study of 43 indigenous youth from one First Nation community and 17 staff leaders found that the leaders of that community saw the trip as a small-step and not a life-changing event, in the lives of the youth (Ritchie, et al., 2015, p. 363). However, a longitudinal survey with the participants might show different results. On this 10 day trip, the authors found in their group a theme of first connecting with creation through sensory experiences and then, once enough experiences had been amassed, a theme of connecting with self through reflective experiences (Ritchie, et al., 2015, p. 364). This supports the *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel* where the participants must first become familiar with nature, relaxed and in control, before spiritual experiences are likely to occur. For Ritchie's group, this process was described as an "awakening" (2015, p. 365). Foster's (2012) wilderness canoe tripping and spirituality phenomenology study of 32 adult participants echoed Ritchie's (2015) themes. Ritchie's (2015) themes of connecting with creation was echoed in Foster's "solidifying connections" (p. 249), and self-reflective experiences was echoed in Foster's "finding quiet" (p. 249) and "finding a better you" (p. 249). Foster also echoed Daniel's emphasis on solo experiences with the theme of "finding quiet" (p. 249). Ultimately, it is the wilderness experiences and the relationships built with instructors and other participants that contribute the most to spiritual growth (Griffin & LeDuc, 2009, p. 212).

There have been three overarching components of a spiritual natural experience: antecedent conditions (ex. 'baggage', motivation and attitude, spiritual tradition, etc.), the setting components (ex. backcountry hiking, being away from home, etc.), and the types of recreation

activity (ex. solitude experiences, free-time, group experience, and facilitation) (Heintzman, 2009). Calls for more studies on characteristics of nature settings and the types of activities where spiritual experiences occur warrant a rich description of the program's setting and activities. There have also been calls for measuring the effects of short-term relative to long-term Christian adventure-based programs (Griffin & LeDuc, 2009, p. 213).

Current Research in Canadian OAE

This section will endeavor to discuss the current research surrounding Canadian OAE. In selecting articles, the present study focused on the target location (Ontario) and population (high school aged youth) of this study as much as possible. A general discussion of the benefits of Outdoor Environmental Education (OEE) and Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) will lay the foundation for additional topics to be covered. Upon conclusion of this discussion, the current understanding of Canadian OAE outcomes will be presented. These outcomes will be designated as within-program, short-term, and long-term outcomes (see Table 2 for a summary).

Outcomes of OEE

The beneficial outcomes of the wider umbrella of outdoor and experiential education (OEE) are numerous and a body of research is being amassed to support this educational method (Foster & Linney, 2007). Breunig and O'Connell (2008) put forward that "OEE programs in school settings enhances students' curricular learning through direct experience (Horwood, 2002); helps students improve their interpersonal skills (e.g. engaging in group work) (Russell & Burton, 2000); provides opportunities for kinesthetic, affective, and sensory learning (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998); and provides a venue for students' moral and spiritual exploration and growth (Haluza-Delay, 1999; Russell & Burton, 2000)" (p. 11).

Outcomes of OAE

When discussing the outcomes of OAE programs, it is important to understand that "OAE does not *create* outcomes for participants but rather presents opportunities to achieve such outcomes as personal growth and development" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126). These opportunities are known as affordances. Affordances can be defined as possibilities for action within an environment. These can be perceived or hidden, and can be dependent on participants' skills and interests; "through OAE programs, participants often become aware of more opportunities than they previously perceived" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 137). What participants eventually take away from a program not only depends upon how the program was designed, but also upon what the "participant chooses… to process and learn from" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126). Due to "baggage", outcomes are not always predictable, but "the overlap of outcomes targeted and learning during OAE programs is a strength of the industry" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126).

In general, OAE outcomes can be categorized as interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal outcomes include group outcomes and group dependent outcomes. Group outcomes are that which affect the entire group, including group cohesion, a sense of community, mutual commitment, and collective efficacy (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 130). Group dependent outcomes are tied to an individual and require a group to perform including leadership and social competence. Intrapersonal outcomes reported by Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) include: increases in self-constructs and self-awareness (p.133); skill building including problem solving, self-regulation and coping skills for tolerance or adversity (p.133); values including spiritual development and changes in perspective (p.134); and changes in mental states such as a restoration of cognitive fatigues (p.134). From an environmental education focus, the

change in values or changes in “enduring beliefs about what is desirable and what is not” (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 134) is particularly important (Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015). These changes in perspective seem to be tied to peak experiences in nature and immersion in the natural environment.

Outcomes in Canadian OAE

For this review, studies that specifically looked at the Canadian OAE experience with adolescents were included. The studies are qualitative in nature and care was taken to ensure that the setting, participants, and methodology employed would have some crossover implications for this study. The majority of these studies focus on student experiences in ICPs with an Environmental Focus (Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015; Bruenig, Murtell, Russell, & Howard, 2013; Valkova, 2017). These programs “ground learning in authentic, real world experiences” (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008, p. 14). For other, non-school based OAE programs, I examined the program structure to find the necessary components of wilderness, curriculum connection, and land-fullness. An example of such a program was described by D’Amato and Kresny (2011); wilderness trips were “16-78 days with most trips about 28 days, ages 15-24 years, course material mostly pertained to personal development and outdoor skills but included nature instruction related to outdoor travel (e.g. ocean tides, weather), local flora and fauna, stars, and other aspects of nature as driven by participant interest” (p. 240).

It is useful to break down observed impacts listed in these studies into three categories; within-program impacts, short-term impacts, and long-term impacts. When summarizing these impacts, I searched for areas of personal growth, which refers to “healthy developmental outcomes as a result of environmental education and related outdoor experiences.” (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 238). The areas of outcome were divided into six themes based on the

longitudinal qualitative studies by Bruenig et al. (2013, 2015) and Valkova (2017); learning, personal challenges and growth, community, environmental attitude and behaviour implications, connection to the program, and the educator. Table 2, *Program Impacts of Canadian OAE*, summarizes the impacts found in these studies.

Within Program Impacts	Short-term Impacts	Long-term Impacts
Learning		
• Sensory experiences awakening a connection to creation[5]	• Learning is relevant and has 'real world' applications[1] • Experiential learning is memorable[1] • Freedom to choose[2] • Negative perceptions of ICPs from others incited critical thinking in students[1]	• Authentic learning[4] • Applying program learning to new Contexts[3] • Experiential learning approach[4]
Personal Challenges and Growth		
• Reflective experiences developing an 'awakening' of connection to self[5] • Connection to the Good Life (a cultural and spiritual process rooted in historical context) [5]	• Program challenges for students[1] • The on-going enjoyment of overcoming challenges[2] • Building confidence and mental strength[2] • Relationship dialogue and challenges[1]	• Personal Growth[3] • Formulating self-identity[4] • Intrapersonal growth[4] • Thriving[3] • An awareness of something greater than the informants (i.e. a greater faith and trust in God, natural world, self) (Daniel, 2007, p. 388) • Psychological Well being (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 233) • Awe and Inspiration (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 244) • Experiencing a different lifestyle (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 245) • Empowerment through challenge and engagement through challenge (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 247)
Community		
	• Sense of community[1] • Safe spaces for open dialogue[1]	• Sense of Community[3] • Interpersonal growth[4] • Being a part of the community (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 246)
Environmental Attitude and Behavior Implications		
	• Impact of program experience on environmental learning and behaviour[1] • Environmental attitude and behavior change[1]	• Stronger environmental awareness • Stronger connection to the natural world[4] • Enacting environmental consciousness[3] • Greater awareness of the interconnectedness of all things in the natural world (Daniel, 2007, p. 388) • Connection to nature (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 244)
Connection to the Program		
	• Some participants returned as leaders [5]	• Lifelong Connection to the Program[3] • Life-influencing, influences other experiences that stemmed from the program[4] • Personal correlation between program and post-secondary selection[4] • Personal correlation between program and current career[4]
The Educator		
		• Teacher's role[3] • The educator[4]
[5](Ritchie, et al., 2015)	[1] (Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015) [2] (Davidson, 2001)	[3] (Valkova, 2017) [4] (Caspell, 2007)

Table 2: Program Impacts of Canadian OAE

Deficiencies in the Literature

The Windsor-Essex Canadian OAE program has set itself apart from others as a geographical anomaly. In itself, it is inherently valuable for study. However, deficiencies in the literature do exist, especially as it relates to geography and the inclusion of adolescents in the context of wilderness as a place of spiritual growth.

Marsh (2008), in his study of backcountry travelers and backcountry adventure as spiritual development, called for similar research in different regions (p. 292). While we will not be replicating his study, Marsh also put forward that a research method that captured more of the richness of the experiences might serve to enrich the field (specifically the content categories he identified in his study (2008, p. 292). Heintzman (2009) echoed this call for richer description of the experiences and settings that lead to spiritual growth in the wilderness. In his study of spirituality and canoe tripping in the Boundary Waters Wilderness, Foster (2012) stated that "more energy could be focused on how foundational religious beliefs affect spiritual experiences" (p. 257). Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) in their textbook *Outdoor Adventure Education* have also identified understanding which programs afford spiritual value as a key research need (p. 161)

Richmond (2016), in his study of OAE on developing noncognitive factors through OAE in college access programs, put forward that OAE as a complement to classroom learning has not yet been fully explored (p. 17). Breunig and her colleagues (2013, p. 12; 2015, p. 14) use a multiple case study method to study ICPs with Canadian OAE as a teaching method in Ontario. These programs are similar to the one outlined in this study and work with a similar population. The authors have suggested that as the field seeks to clarify the outcomes of these programs "further research should explore those aspects of program content and delivery (e.g. teacher

beliefs and epistemology, field trips, course assignments, and student emotions and beliefs alongside environmental knowledge content) that most impact domestic and emancipatory behaviors as well as more individualistic and systemic ones" (Bruenig, Murtell, Russel, & Howard, 2013. p. 12). Bruenig et al.'s studies (2013, 2015) report a wide range of outcomes but are viewed from developing a pro-environmental behaviors lens. This study will be holistic in nature, and the author admittedly tends towards focusing on personal growth and spirituality.

Expected Outcomes

Based on previous research, it is expected that participants will express: a connection to creation (Ritchie, et al., 2015); a connection to a higher power (Marsh, 2008; Fox, 1999; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2003); a connection to place – a land-fullness (Henderson & Potter, 2001; Ritchie, et al., 2015); a connection to others – a sense of community (Valkova, 2017; Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015); and a greater understanding of self (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Richmond, 2016). It is possible some participants will express experiences related to peak experiences and flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi (1999). Finally, it is possible the participants will discuss the value of Canadian OAE as an authentic teaching method.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

"Research literally means to look (or search) and look again (re-search) for understanding and knowledge. It is the systematic inquiry or investigation of a topic in search of knowledge or understanding and it is a repetitive quest for truth which follows a scientific process aimed at answering specific questions" (Priest, 1999b, p. 314)

Methodology

In *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (2013), Creswell puts forward his definition of qualitative research:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a nature setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2013, p. 44).

In this definition, Creswell asserts that researchers take on different approaches, theoretical frameworks, and/or paradigms as they interpret meaning from their data. In his discussion of research in adventure programming, Priest (1999b) defines a paradigm as "a representative model of how one perceives reality, how one interprets the complexity of knowledge, and how this collection of philosophical assumptions about reality in turn influence how one seeks to acquire knowledge" (p. 309).

In OAE, participants often "learn unintended lessons and develop in unexpected ways" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 137), and "OAE programs involve a wide range of purposes, contexts, and designs, and thus the outcomes they target, populations they attract, and experiences they provide vary significantly" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 135). In order to be open to the full range of outcomes participants may experience, it was necessary to learn our lessons from the participants' perspective. To do this, we engaged in a qualitative interpretivist approach, "which suggest[s] that program impacts are constructed from the meaning that participants make of their experiences" (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011, p. 241). To accomplish this, themes were discovered within the data collected, and then an analysis of themes was put forward to aid in developing a deeper understanding of the case.

Methods

The case study approach was selected for this research study. In case study research, the researcher explores an issue or problem and gains a detailed understanding by examining a case or multiple cases (Creswell, 2013, p. 124). Case studies are situated "within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97) and enable a researcher to answer how and why type questions, "while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556). It was appropriate for the researchers to select a single case (within-site) for the present study due to the unique geographic location of this case and the educational focus on Christian education. The case study is bound by the 2014-2017 school years (a specific time frame), by the students who had previously participated in the Canadian OAE experience (a collection of participants), and by the location of the school and wilderness trip (Windsor-Essex and Algonquin Provincial Park respectively).

The present study followed the lead of Breunig, Murtell, and Russell (2015, p. 3) in using a case to focus on an issue, which is Canadian OAE in Southwestern Ontario. Creswell (2013, p. 98) describes this type of case study as an instrumental case. An instrumental case is:

> …used to accomplish something other than understanding a particular situation. It provides insight into an issue or helps to explain a theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. (Stake, 1995 as quoted in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 549)

Data Collection Procedures

The central experience that data collection revolved around was a three-week Grade 11 Environmental Science summer course with an eight-day canoe trip in Algonquin Park called The Eremos Project. This course ran for four summers from 2014-2017. This program included one week of pre-trip preparation and coursework, a backcountry canoe trip, and four days of course work after the trip. The Eremos Project will be described in detail in the following chapter.

Sampling

This study followed a purposive sampling approach as outlined by Creswell (2013, p. 158). The case selected is unusual in its unique geographic location and apparent isolation relative to other high school Canadian OAE programs. It is also unique in that the participants were students from a private Christian school. The researcher sampled participants at the site level (all participants were required to have attended the same course in Windsor-Essex) and at the event level (all participants were required to have enrolled in the course offering the

Canadian OAE experience). In some ways, this case represents a critical case in that it provided specific information about the phenomenon in Windsor-Essex. The case was also one of convenience, as the researcher was, and is currently, employed as a teacher at the school being studied. The maximum sample size for this study was 27 past students. These students were contacted by an email asking for their participation in the study. Four past students chose to participate in the study. This sample size will "provide ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases…" (Creswell, 2013, p. 157).

Instrumentation

Case study data collection requires a "wide range of procedures as the researcher builds an in-depth picture of the case" (Creswell, 2013, p. 162), and using multiple data sources enhances validity and credibility (Creswell, 2013; Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). However, due to the global pandemic through which this study was conducted, multiple sources of data were unable to be gathered, As such, all data was obtained from a 20-question online form (see Appendix A for the Online Form). The form was based on Creswell's (2013) Sample Interview Protocol (p. 166) and questions from D'Amato and Krasny's (2011) Interview Guide and Foster's (2012) Interview Guide (p. 69, Table 1.0). There are limitations when collecting data through this method and these will be discussed after the findings have been presented.

To overcome the length of time that had elapsed since the students had participated in the program, a photo elicitation technique was employed (Creswell, 2013, p. 161). The technique used 22 photos from The Eremos Project trips in an online album that the participants viewed before completing the online survey. The photos were chosen to represent a wide range of experiences while on the trip. Before viewing the album, participants were prompted to think about relating the provided photos to their personal experiences on their trip with the following

text, “Please take a moment to go through these pictures. They are here to serve as a way to remind you of experiences you may have had while on the trip. As you view these photos, think back to your own related stories and experiences with The Eremos Project.” In order to access the survey questions the participants had to first click and scroll through the album. The 20-question survey was estimated to take 30 to 60 minutes to complete.

Role of the Researcher

As an outdoor educator who has grown up in Windsor-Essex, I have both life experience and professional experience that relates to this field study. In my childhood, I was not afforded the opportunities for wilderness trips through the school system that were offered in other areas of the province. It was not until undergraduate studies at the University of Windsor when I experienced my first wilderness canoe trip: a 9-day canoe trip in Algonquin Park. Through my experience on this trip, I found wilderness tripping to be a perfect melding of my interests in youth physical activity and character development. After this, I actively pursued education and certification in this field, becoming a professional outdoor educator and wilderness guide. I have now run a high school based environmental science Canadian OAE program for four years and continue to believe in the benefits of this form of education.

The Eremos Project was a summer course I designed in 2012-2013 using the principles from ICPs. I acted as the lead teacher for each year The Eremos Project was run and acted as trip leader with the help of adults from the school community and, in later years, previous Eremos Project students. We had a leadership team of 3 to 4 individuals on each trip. As a leader on these trips, I was afforded insight into how the groups developed and trips progressed. However, this relationship between myself as teacher and researcher and the participants had potential to create a power imbalance and this will be discussed further under Ethical Considerations.

Data Analysis Procedures

For a case study, “analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting” (Creswell, 2013, p. 199). Upon collection of the data, a direct interpretation was undertaken, which is a “process of pulling the data apart and putting it back together in more meaningful ways” (Creswell, 2013, p. 199). In this process, the researcher looks for patterns and themes as the data is coded. Because of the bounded case design of this study, and to meet the calls of previous researchers, it was important for the researcher to include a rich description of the case, its activities, and its setting in the final report (Creswell, 2013, p. 97; Heintzman, 2003).

Computer programs can be useful aids in storing and organizing data, finding material easily, taking a deeper look into the data, creating concept maps, and creating and retrieving memos, themes, and documents (Creswell, 2013, p. 202). Care must be taken when using computer programs to not lose contact with the data and to learn the computer program so as to not be constrained by pre-defined categories (Creswell, 2013, p. 202). D’Amato and Kresny (2011) and Richmond (2016) used the program HyperRESEARCH with success. HyperRESEARCH has advanced multimedia capabilities and “allows the researcher to work with text graphics, audio, and video sources” (Creswell, 2013, p. 204). As such, HyperRESEARCH was used in the present study to code and identify common themes within the data.

Finally, a danger in case study analysis is to treat data independently and report the findings without converging themes or developing an understanding of the overall case (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 555). Therefore, the intent of the data analysis was to provide a holistic picture and understanding of the themes related to the participants’ experiences with Canadian OAE. In certain cases, unusual experiences were highlighted in order to contrast the experiences of the

individuals to that of the rest of the group. Thus, the intent of this report is to converge the data to understand the overall case.

Strategies for Validating Findings

A qualitative researcher can include a number of measures to help validate their findings. In this study, we used two validation tools: "rich, thick descriptions" (Priest, 1999b, p. 311; Creswell, 2013, p. 251), and a clarification of researcher bias. Typically, case studies provide information and themes that relate to their specific case, however, "rich, thick description" (Priest, 1999b, p. 311; Creswell, 2013, p. 251) of the research setting and processes can allow readers to make their own decisions regarding transferability of the study. Also, it is important to bracket myself as researcher out of the study. That is, I must "comment on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach of the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). This has been achieved through the Role of the Researcher section in the Data Collection Procedures section. Creswell (2013, p. 252) recommends using at least two validation measures – a recommendation that is fulfilled by the present study.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

In this study, participants were asked to share their experiences in a Canadian OAE program. Due to the nature of the trip and research it was important to obtain the informed consent of the participants involved, and a copy of the Letter of Information was attached to the recruitment email as well as provided at the beginning of the online survey. To protect the anonymity of each participant, aliases were assigned to the individual participants and a composite picture of experiences was developed rather than an individual picture (Creswell, 2013, p. 174).

Ethical Considerations for the Teacher as Researcher

As a teacher and researcher, I had to be aware of the power structure in place between myself and the participants. I had to ensure that the participants had a clear understanding of the study and of their right to withdraw. While the study was designed to be mutually beneficial between the participants and researcher, I needed to first act with the participants' well-being in mind. Participants benefitted from participating in this study by having the opportunity to reflect on a Canadian OAE experience and through to opportunity to win a $100.00 gift card.

Access to the participants was controlled by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board and the Board of the school at which the course took place. Approval from both Boards was received before the study began.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This analysis will take the form of reconstructing the four participants' experiences in The Eremos Project by creating a narrative that both describes the course and includes insight from the participants. It is hoped that through this analysis, the antecedent conditions, the setting, and the activities leading to spiritual experiences will be clearly described. Then, after a detailed understanding of the Canadian OAE experience through The Eremos Project has been reached, five themes that have emerged from the data will be presented.

Data Analysis

Four participants completed the online survey. Their answers were compiled into one source file and colour coded. The colour coding was done by participant in order to keep the unique perspectives and experience of each individual intact. The participants will be referred to by their colours - Red, Green, Purple, and Black during the study. HyperRESEARCH 4.5.0 was then used to code the document.

Responses were first examined and coded on a per individual basis. Thirty-eight codes were created in this way. Through this process, an understanding of how each participant uniquely remembered their individual experience with The Eremos Project was obtained. Then, through examining the responses on a per question and per code basis, a collective picture of the Canadian OAE experience with The Eremos Project began to emerge. This collective experience is described in the next section of this chapter.

Codes were then grouped into similar categories, and from these categories, themes emerged. These five themes - comfort zone, challenge, spiritual learning, spiritual experiences, and outcomes - will be discussed in the analysis of themes later in this chapter.

The Eremos Project Program

The Eremos Project was a three-week summer high school course that ran for four summers between 2014 and 2017 through a private Christian high school. The course was curriculum based and offered the Ontario Ministry of Education's Grade 11 Environmental Science credit using hands-on teaching methods. From its inception, The Eremos Project's goal was both academic and spiritual in nature. The program aimed to "connect students to God and His Creation through an Environmental Science credit and an 8-day canoe trip in Algonquin Park" (Eremos Project, facebook.com/eremosproject). The course consisted of nine campus days and eight days of canoe tripping in the backcountry of Algonquin Park. Developing an understanding of both of these settings (campus and canoe trip) will be necessary in order to understand the Canadian OAE experience offered by The Eremos Project.

Campus Days

The canoe trip was preceded by one week of campus days, during which the students met at the school for regular school-day hours (9:00 am to 4:00 pm). An understanding of these campus days facilitates a more complete comprehension of the participants' subsequent canoe trip experiences. As such, an overview of the activities of these campus days is presented here. These days consisted of both field trips and days at the school. On days when the students were at the school, they were preparing for upcoming projects, discussions, and presentations, as well as preparing equipment for the canoe trip, and writing in their journals. A schedule from the 2016 course is presented in Table 3.

The field trips included:

- Bike rides to a demonstration farm run by the Conservation Authority,
- Windfarm tours and discussions with industry personnel,

- Tours of green buildings,
- Mapping invasive species on a local island via Montreal canoe,
- Water quality and benthic macroinvertebrate studies at a local marsh,
- Planting native gardens in the community

The first days included team-building exercises, such as icebreaker challenges and learning camp chores like tent making and tarp setup. Short debriefs followed each activity, allowing each voice in the group to be heard.

The Éremos Project – Summer 2016 Schedule

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
WEEK 1 **(July 3rd-9th)**	*@ Maranatha* **First Day of Class** **(Monday, July 4th, 9:00 AM)** • Group Activities • Course Outlines • Topics chosen for Presentations • Journal Assignment Begins • Student's Choose PAR **PM:** Leave at 11:00 am for Swimming Evaluation and training at the **Windsor International Aquatic Center** Arrive back at MCA at 1:00	*@ Maranatha* **ALL DAY:** Meet at MCA at 9:00 AM Water Quality Study and Benthic Macroinvertebrate Lab at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area **PM:** Back at MCA for 3:30 pm	*@ Maranatha* **AM:** Meet at MCA at 9:00 AM Drive to Holiday Beach Conservation Area for start of **ORCKA Basic Tandem Canoe Course** and map and compass workshops Finish the day at the Demonstration Farm, discuss LOD responsibilities, group travel, and wind energy along the way, pack a lunch and water **PM:** Shuttle back to MCA for 4:00 pm	**AM:** Meet at ***Lakeview Park Marina*** @ 9:00 for a day in the Montreal Canoe – Head to Peche Island to study and map the invasive species, Phragmites, practice knot-tying and tarping, journals and mini- solo time, pack a lunch and water **PM:** Arrive back at MCA for 4:00	*@Maranatha* **AM:**LOD Prep Time, Teacher-student interviews about Algonquin Presentations **MID**: Prep for camp – practice setting up group equipment **PM:** Prep for camp – checking and packing all personal equipment in canoe packs *1st Journal Evaluation* ***BRING EVERYTHING YOU PLAN ON BRINGING ON THE TRIP TODAY!***	*No Class*
WEEK 2 **(July 10th-16th)** *No Class*	*@ Algonquin* **AM:** Leave early for Algonquin Park **(6:00 am departure)** from MCA Arrive and stay at **Magnetawan Lake** (Access Point #3) Continue **ORCKA Basic Tandem Canoe Course**	*@ Algonquin* Finish **ORCKA Basic Tandem Canoe Course** Day trip and Benthic Macroinvertebrate study Stay at **Magnetawan Lake**	*@ Algonquin* Leaders of the Day begins. LODs will be responsible for: • Individual LEC Presentations • Environmental Theme and Interpretation for the day • Navigation Travel to **Daisy Lake**	*@ Algonquin* Travel to **Misty Lake** **PM:** Marsh Monitoring Amphibian Surveys	*@ Algonquin* **AM:** Solo Time **PM:** Brook Trout Citizen Science Fishing Project Stay on **Misty Lake** *2nd Journal Evaluation*	*@ Algonquin* Travel to the **Pine River Depot Farm,** survey forest and map area, travel back, stay on **Misty Lake**
WEEK 3 **(July 17th-23rd)** *@ Algonquin* Travel to **Ralph Bice Lake**	*@ Algonquin* **AM**: Pack-up camp and head home **PM:** Arrive back at MCA at **9:00 PM**	*@ Maranatha* **AM/MID:** Journal and Course Reflection Paper **MID/PM:** Clean and Organize Gear	*@ Maranatha* **AM:** Work on and hand-in Benthic Macroinvertebrate Study and work-on Final Research Product and Presentations **PM:** Catch-up time	*@ Maranatha* *Course Final Reflection Paper Due* **AM:** Meet at MCA at 9:00 AM Ride bikes to Turkey Creek Native Plant Garden to meet ERCA employees and help with the garden **PM:** Ride bikes to St. Clair College for tour focusing on Green programs Return to MCA by 3:30 PM.	*@ Maranatha* **AM:** *Present Final Research Product and Presentations* **PM:** Final PAR Reports and hand in PAR Legacy Binder Course Evaluations and Farewells *Journals due at the end of day*	

Table 3: The Eremos Project - Summer 2016 Schedule

Outdoor Pursuits Before the Trip. One to two self-propelled day-trip adventures were scheduled in the first week before the canoe trip. Two examples of this are discussed: the bike ride, and the Montreal Canoe outing.

Full-day biking excursions were planned in the first years of the trip. These excursions took groups up to 46 kilometers across the county via a railway trail. Stops along the way included conservation areas, wind farms, and demonstration farms. These trips were designed to afford students the opportunity to come across two barriers; their own physical limitations, and/or the limitations of their peers. The reality of traveling at a pace that is slower than your own or continuing when the journey is difficult was one the students would face in Algonquin Park.

In the Montreal Canoe (a very large canoe which seats up to 18 people), the group travelled to a naturalized island in the Detroit River with a rich history of settlement and failed enterprises, called Peche Island. On these trips, the students practiced identifying and mapping the spread of invasive species, such as phragmites. While the crossing to the island is achievable for experienced paddlers in a tandem canoe, the river's current requires constant power in order to navigate to the shelter of the inlets on the island. Through paddling the Montreal canoe, the group had the opportunity to learn about reliance on each other and a responsibility to one another. No one person could paddle the Montreal Canoe, and everyone needed to keep the same stroke cadence, or the blades of their paddles will strike the paddlers in front or behind them. These lessons in group travel were used to set the stage for the Algonquin Provincial Park canoe tripping experience the following week.

Learning to Journal. Throughout these activities, students were taught how to reflect on their experiences using a variety of journaling techniques. *Journeys Into Journaling* by Zabe

MacEachren (2009) was helpful in encouraging students to expand their journaling to include pictures, fonts, cartoons, art, doodles, and poetry. The journal was a mandatory part of The Eremos Project, and students were given time each day to add their thoughts into their journals. Also, as a Christian course, devotionals from the book *Earthwise* (Dewitt, 2011) that helped connect the wonder of creation to topics in Environmental Science, were provided for each day of the canoe trip. These handouts, along with handouts from peer presentations, were glued into their journals. By the end of the course, some students came away with a detailed textbook of the topics we had covered while others expressed their thoughts and learning as a journaled art portfolio. Not all students fully engaged in the journaling, but the time set aside for journaling provided a consistent quiet time for personal reflection none-the-less.

Backcountry Canoe Trip

A wilderness canoe trip route can have a significant impact on the experience of the participants on the trip. The route chosen for the 8-day canoe trip was purposefully designed to allow for a gradual progression of skill acquisition in order to ensure that even participants very new to canoeing and camping could have a positive experience. This section will discuss the following: background and motivation of the canoe trip participants (the ‘antecedent conditions'); the canoe route; considerations related to technology, time, and pacing; and the students’ responsibilities while on the trip.

Background and Motivation. The previous experiences and held beliefs of participants can shape both the affordances for outcomes that are created on the trip as well as the spiritual experiences a participant can have in the wilderness (Heintzman, 2009). The previous experiences and held beliefs are known as antecedent conditions. Discussed below are the

participants' motivations for taking The Eremos Project course, their background as it relates to their comfort with the outdoors, and their previously held spiritual beliefs.

Motivation for taking The Eremos Project. The participants in this study wrote about a variety of motivations for taking The Eremos Project. Red wrote about wanting a Science credit, and the opportunity to pick up basic survival skills/experience. Purple wrote about wanting to gain an extra Grade 11 credit. Green wrote about good testimonies from previous students, and Black was looking for a new experience.

Experience and Comfort with the Outdoors. While each participant in this study reported some camping experience in their background before the canoe trip, none of the participants reported having been on a canoe trip before. This is illustrated in Black's quote: "*I had done some recreational canoeing and camping at campgrounds, but nothing like camping out in Algonquin*". One student, Red, reported that life on a farm was a significant part of her outdoors experience before the trip:

> *I had been to a few campgrounds here and there, but basically all of my outdoor experience as well as my adventurous spirit came from my life on the farm. We would spend the whole day everyday outside, making up stories and games along the way. I loved climbing trees and trekking through the forests and fields.*

Purple also described comfort with the outdoors, "*I have always loved the outdoors, so with the trip being outdoors, it made it very much more enjoyable.*" As will be discussed later, the comfort with the outdoors that the participants began the trip with played a part in shaping how they approached the first days of the canoe trip.

Previously held Spiritual Beliefs. The participants all expressed current personal belief in the God of the Christian Bible. However, not all participants expressed a strong spiritual life at

the time of the trip. Green wrote: "*When I went on the trip, I don't think I had much of a personal spiritual life. It has definitely improved a ton since then, but also from other factors and experiences that I've had.*" Purple commented that her spiritual beliefs at the time of the trip were shaped by her family when she wrote, "*I went to church every week, and I tried to pray daily. I grew up in a Christian home, so those habits were taught to me at a very young age.*" The Christian worldview and habits that these participants held created expectations of spiritual experiences from the wilderness trip. Red wrote of her expectations: "*I guess I expected a fun and easy-going camping trip, less to do with school/education and more about getting in-tune with God's creation.*" Purple's expectations also mentioned God, "*My expectations for the trip were for me to learn more about the outdoors and God. [A]nd to have a closer relationship with those around me, and with God.*"

These preexisting spiritual beliefs, specifically related to the God of the Christian Bible, shaped the way that the participants experienced, reflected on, and discussed spirituality in the wilderness. Because of this, spiritual experiences in this study are discussed less as an opportunity for intrapersonal growth and more as building a relationship with a separate, personal, and present higher power.

The Route. While the canoe trip route varied slightly from year to year, the general location and progression in difficulty remained the same and a summary of the trip can be found in Table 4. To travel to Algonquin Provincial Park from Windsor required a minimum seven hour driving commitment. The unique trip experience started on the drive, as no phones were allowed on the trip, even in the car ride. As such, singing, games, and even challenging debates often occurred on route.

The first two nights of the trip were spent at campsites on Magnetawan Lake, accessed from Algonquin Provincial Park's west side. These campsites were less than a thirty-minute paddle from the parking lot (the parking lot and dock were not in sight from our campsites) and provided the students with their first taste of backcountry camping. During the first two days, the group completed the ORCKA Basic Levels 1-3 canoe course, which included canoe-over-canoe rescues and paddling skills, became familiar with the necessary camp chores and the new camp routine, and completed the benthic macroinvertebrate study during a day trip to a nearby lake and marsh. It was on this day trip that students first practiced how to portage.

Over the next two days, the group moved from Magnetawan Lake to Daisy Lake, and then onto Misty Lake. During these travel days, the students began to take turns being the Leader of the Day, an additional responsibility that includes navigation that will be fully described later. The group would then spend a few nights on Misty Lake, a beautiful, large lake in the Wilderness Zone in Algonquin Park. During the time on Mistry Lake, a Marsh Monitoring Study was completed as well as a day trip. Next, the group would undertake the biggest travel day of the trip, finishing at Ralph Bice Lake. This day had a series of challenging portages and required a full-day's journey. On the last morning, the group would travel back out to the vehicles over two, well-traveled, highway-like portages before beginning the long drive home around lunchtime.

A Typical 8-Day Canoe Trip for The Eremos Project

Day 1

- Leave school at 6:00 am
- 3 :00 pm - Arrive at Algonquin Park, Magnetawan Lake Access #3
- Canoe to campsites on Magnetawan Lake, begin teaching and learning camp chores, stay on Magnetawan for the night

Day 2

- ORCKA Basic Level 3 course and continue camp training on Magnetawan Lake
- Day trip to Little Eagle Lake, one portage (340m)
- Complete the Benthic Macroinvertebrate Study
- Stay on Magnetawan Lake

Day 3

- Begin assigning Leaders of the Day for each day
- Canoe to island sites on Daisy Lake, including three portages (135m, 55m, 420m)

Day 4

- Canoe to sites on Misty Lake via Petawawa River, three portages (135m, 450m, 935m)
- Possible Marsh Monitoring in the evening

Day 5

- 4-hour solo experiences in the morning on Misty Lake
- Marsh Monitoring in the evening
- Stay on Misty Lake

Day 6

- Day trip - Leave camp set-up on Misty Lake and head to Tim River (Pine River Farm) for a day trip, three portages on way (705m, 335m, 1125m)
- Lunch at Pine River Farm and complete a site survey
- Return in afternoon
- Stay on Misty Lake

Day 7

- Canoe to east end of Ralph Bice Lake, four portages (935m, 2435m, 175m, 435m)

Day 8

- Canoe to Magnetawan Access Point #3, 2 portages (295m, 135m)
- Arrive at school at 9:00 pm

Table 4: The 8 Day Canoe Trip Schedule

Technology, Time, and Pacing. Students on the trip were not allowed to bring a watch or cell phone with them to Algonquin Park. The only exception to the 'no technology' rule was a purpose-built camera, which students seldom brought.

The trip leaders purposefully did not refer to time during the trip, saying instead, "we are on Algonquin time now." Sometimes, students would come up with creative ways to measure the passing of time, for example: referring to how long it took to pump fresh water into a 1-liter

water bottle. The group would wake up with the sun and go to bed whenever it felt appropriate. Though it was possible that students could have been apprehensive about not having a time-telling device, Red wrote that "*I was pleasantly surprised by the lack of need to tell time. It was great to go as we pleased without the constant stress or distraction*", and "*Yes, I loved getting away from time, media/technology, parents, jobs, the city and Windsor!"*

These time-related practices allowed for a natural passing of the day and the chance to practice pacing. Pacing is a purposeful slowing down; it is taking the time to focus on and do what each task requires, without rush. Pacing recognizes that sometimes having a conversation, or watching a loon make its way silently across a still evening lake, is more important than getting immediately over the next portage or finishing the next camp chore. Pacing does not mean forgetting tasks and shying away from responsibility. Not completing tasks on canoe trips elicits inescapable consequences: no tarp setup can mean belongings get rained on, or lack of firewood can result in a half-cooked meal. Pacing was discussed with students from the beginning of the course and they were reminded of it throughout their Algonquin trip experience. The participants equated this practice of pacing to getting away from busy-ness, and Purple wrote, "*I was glad to get away from the business of life by going on the trip. The trip was a nice reminder to sit back and breathe every once in a while.*" Green echoed Purple's comments, and Red, when asked about things she missed, said, "*Honestly, nothing! I thoroughly enjoyed the experience to its fullest by being completely present and involved.*" This transition was not easy for all participants, and Black associated it with being pushed further outside of his comfort zone while offering a new perspective:

> *For me it pushed me even farther out of my comfort zone and brought me into circumstances that I haven't been but into before. It offered new perspective to look at*

things as well as escaping the busyness of modern life and just allow you to think in a peaceful and amazing environment.

Ultimately, this change in pace put students into unfamiliar territory, but also provided Black with a chance to reflect on his own routine: "*I was glad to get away the routine that I had gotten into at home. The trip gave me a break where I was able to evaluate that routine and see what needed to change.*"

Student Responsibilities. On The Eremos Project trip, students gradually became fully responsible for the chores around camp. Beyond camp chores, students also had a variety of responsibilities related to the course curriculum. The students took turns being Leader of the Day (LOD), presented research, reflected on daily devotions related to environmental issues, and participated in environmental science studies.

Camp Chores and working together. While it is was never expected that students would come on the trip already knowing how to light a campfire, set up a tent, or rope up a food-hang, it was expected that students would take responsibility for learning these skills during the trip. The leadership team was directed to teach individual students camp skills in the first days of the trip. These students were then directed to teach others, who were then directed to teach others, and so on. In this way, each student would have experienced each camp chore within the first three to four days of the trip. It was during this time that the difficulties of camp life became evident to the participants, and each participant in this study identified some appreciation for the luxuries of modern life when they returned home. Purple described this appreciation as follows:

It was nice to have running water when I came back home, but it took a while to get used to how fast food was able to be prepared when you have an oven, microwave and fridge.

I was used to all the meals taking a while to prep because we only had a fire to heat things up, so having all the appliances again back home took some getting used to.

Naturally, students gravitated to certain chores or skills they preferred or found themselves good at, and some effort was made to encourage students to diversify camp roles as the trip progressed. After the initial learning period, the leaders on the trip purposefully and gradually stepped back from being hands-on leaders, to aids or helpers, and eventually to by-standers – with the goal of not being needed at all. While Green wrote positively of this experience, "*I loved times when I was used to help others when needed*", tension within the group typically rose as they tried to learn to delegate tasks, fulfill their own responsibilities, and work together. This often meant that the group had dinner in the dark one or two nights of the trip as the students worked on completing their new responsibilities together. Reliance on others was discussed by the participants as a significant source of interpersonal and intrapersonal challenge and growth. Red reflected on the experience by writing, "*I think that being outdoors for a long period of time gets everyone out of their comfort zone, which is a great place to be. It also requires more work - teamwork!*" Green echoed Red's comments on teamwork and also described learning how to take a leadership role. About the challenge and affordances offered by being in group for extended periods, Green wrote:

It was challenging in the moment. It got frustrating being around people 24/7 and being out of my comfort zone. But I had a really good time overall and thoroughly enjoyed it. I was personally challenged and learned more about myself, others, and the world around me.

Green also shared some outcomes that she believed stemmed from working with others in the group: "*I think I developed patience and I also learned the importance of keeping a positive*

attitude and helping out even when you don't feel like it. It is more important to put your own feelings away to make the experience better for others." Interestingly, despite the challenges, Green also equated being with people as a special time: "*I think the most special experiences were just times spent with the group and getting through it together.*" As a leader, it was always a special moment seeing a group proficiently set-up camp and prepare a meal together while being completely un-needed.

***The Leader of the Day*.** The responsibility of Leader of the Day was completed by two students working in partnership. The leaders changed daily, with a nighttime group campfire ceremony used to designate the next day's leaders. These students decided when the group would wake up, chose the route to the next campsite, used a map and compass to navigate, ensured their peers stayed on task, delegated tasks when needed, and led the group in one or two team-building games during the day. The teambuilding games have been as simple as a circle game around the campfire, to as complicated as setting up footprints shaped like Bigfoot the night before and leading the group on a Bigfoot hunt that spanned the duration of the day.

The LODs were also responsible for presenting a pre-planned and researched 20 to 30-minute workshop on a relevant environmental issue. These issues were chosen beforehand from a list of issues specifically selected for relevance to Algonquin Park. These presentations have been done around a campfire, under a tarp during a rainstorm, during lunch at the end of a portage, or even from a canoe. Each presentation needed to include a historical component, a hands-on component, and be relevant to Algonquin Provincial Park.

Journaling. Each day students were given at least thirty minutes to journal by themselves. Some days, there was both a morning quiet time and an evening quiet time. Students were directed to find a quiet spot away from others and read the devotional for the day

and then write their own thoughts or reflections. A Christian devotional is typically a short piece of writing that draws attention to a Biblical story or passage. Each student was given a devotional each day from the book *Earthwise* (Dewitt, 2011). These devotionals connected scriptural teaching to a concept called Creation Care (a creationist term for caring for the environment) by examining current issues in light of scripture from the Bible.

Black identified the independent reflection time as "*the time where my way of thinking of the trip shifted*" and wrote the following:

> *One of the most important lessons I learned from the trip was to find joy where you are. For the first couple days I was not excited to be there, until we had we break away time where all the students were separated and had time to themselves to think and learn what God was trying to show them. This is where it really hit me that complaining about being in Algonquin was not going to help me get out of Algonquin or make the trip any better, I just had to focus on the beauty of God's creation and look at what He is trying to teach me throughout the week.*

Processing the trip through journaling made other moments "*more special*" as Green wrote, "*the most memorable experiences were with groups, but they were made even more special when I reflected on my own*." For Green, despite enjoying her time with groups, the daily thirty-minute journaling time was not long enough, remarking that "*I missed alone time; just some time to recoup on my own.*"

Environmental Field Studies. The students also engaged in a number of environmental science field studies. The first study was a benthic macroinvertebrate study. In this study, students examined and identified a sample of insects and other macroinvertebrates that live in sediment in order to gain an understanding of the health of the creek or marsh under study. This

technique was practiced at a local conservation area before heading on the trip. The second study was following the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Amphibian Protocol. To prepare for this study, students were required to memorize 11 frog calls. On a still night, the group would paddle to a marsh on Misty Lake just before sunset. After sunset and in complete darkness, the group would listen for the required three minutes and identify the species of frogs that were calling from that marsh. This experience was often surreal as the calls of owls joined in the calls of frogs as participants listened. The marsh monitoring was then followed by a paddle back to our campsite in silence letting our keener than normal senses do the talking.

Campfires. A typical finish to a day was a campfire. Around the campfire, a group debrief would take place: this could be a 'talking stick' in which each person took turns sharing their thoughts from the day, or a guided conversation starter, such as "identify two roses and a thorn you experienced today." Often students would use the opportunity to make a 'shout out' to one of their peers for some good work they had done. These group debrief sessions provided an opportunity for each student to have a voice when on the trip and had the potential to help students to understand each other better. As Green wrote, "*I understood my friends that I went on the trip with better so I could approach them in a more advanced way*," and Purple wrote as an outcome of the trip, "*to have a closer relationship with those around me, and with God. Due to the trip, I got to do all of those things.*"

Occasionally, the leaders and students would create music around the campfire. These songs would typically be Christian songs. These are songs that may have been sung at a church youth group or heard on a Christian radio station. The subject matter of the songs related to the God of the Bible and certain songs reflected on God's Creation. This musical experience was somewhat spontaneous in nature and did not happen on every trip, however Red wrote at length

about these moments as being particularly memorable and meaningful, and as bringing unity to the group:

> *There were many memorable moments but the ones that stand out the clearest were the times worshiping through song around the campfire. There's just something powerful about God's people being together, lifting praises off of ourselves and up to the only one who deserves it - Christ our King…This time around the campfire also brought us closer together as a group, because people felt more comfortable to share and be themselves.*

Red recalled feeling "*joy (not the fleeting kind but rather the one that makes you fall even more in love with your creator), peace and assurance, and unity with the group*" as being the emotion associated with this musical experience.

Solo Time. During the four-hour solo time, students were dropped off along the shore of Misty Lake in such a way so that they could no longer see one another or the campsite. The students were instructed to hang their lifejackets close to shore and to generally stay in the same spot. Through discussions before leaving the campsite and during the previous night's campfire, students were made aware that this was not a time to explore the forest or to build shelters or fires. Solo time was not intended as a survival situation that the students were being dropped into, but as a relaxed time of solitude and, if the student chose, reflection and introspection. Green wrote about solo time: *"…as a time to pray and reflect on the trip*". Armed with whistles and a day pack, which included their journal and a lunch, they were left along the shore to experience being alone in the wilderness. Possibly because students were limited in what they could do during this time, they reported becoming very aware of their immediate surroundings. Bees became friends to talk to. A rock became "their rock" or a tree "their tree" as they found the

most comfortable spot to sit in the forest. The detail with which students on the trip spoke of their solo time during campfire debriefs was often poetic.

Red and Green identified the solo time as particularly enjoyable and treasured experiences. Green, Purple, and Black specifically wrote about the solo time as being spiritual experiences. Purple wrote "*One spiritual experience that stands out to me is when we had our 'quiet time' and spent hours alone in a designated spot. I felt the presence of God and I felt very peaceful. It made me draw closer to God.*" Black wrote about a feeling of calmness and a positive shift in mood arising from the solo time.

Portages. A portage is a trail that joins one navigable body of water with another over which one must carry their packs and canoe. For The Eremos Project, two carries were required to complete each portage, meaning that the group would walk the trail three times, two of those times carrying heavy packs or canoes. The portages represented a significant physical and mental challenge for some students, and the trip was designed with shorter portage lengths at the beginning of the trip and longer lengths at the end (see the Table 4 for each day's portage lengths). While this allowed students to gradually build their comfort level with portages, it also created a sense of apprehension in some students as they looked ahead to the longest portage (2.4 km) which occurred on the second last day of the trip. Carrying packs and a canoe can be an uncomfortable experience, and this portage represented a significant physical, mental, and even spiritual challenge for some students. Red mentions all three challenges as she describes her experience:

> *Any time I looked to God for strength rather than myself could definitely be described as spiritual. And I found myself crying out to Him a lot on that trip, as my mental and emotional levels were completely maxed out. Thankfully, He came through each and*

every time…. During our longest portage, over 2 km, I pushed myself to solo carry our canoe the entire way without stopping. The forest was heavily infested with mosquitoes, and the air was hot and heavy with humidity. I ignored the pain in my body as well as the constant droning of a voice telling me to quit. Instead, I prayed the whole way, completely depending on God's strength to get me to the end. And to my surprise, I made it! This was the perfect opportunity to brag about my own strength/determination, but all I could think about in that moment was how good God is and what more could He possibly do through me?

While Black and Green also described portaging as a challenge to overcome, Purple uniquely described portaging as an interpersonal bonding experience:

After the trip, my friends and I often would look back on funny memories and experiences throughout the trip that let us bond even further. When we had kilometers of walking to do, we could talk about so many different topics, and we learnt a great deal more about each other.

Analysis of Themes

Five themes surfaced as the data was coded and formed into a single narrative. These themes were Comfort Zone, Challenge, Spiritual Learning, Spiritual Experiences and Outcomes. These themes have been written in bold text in Figure 3: The Eremos Project Story. This figure is not being put forth as a model, but as a visual summary of the participants' Canadian OAE story. The next section will discuss each theme's place in the story as key quotes from participants are highlighted.

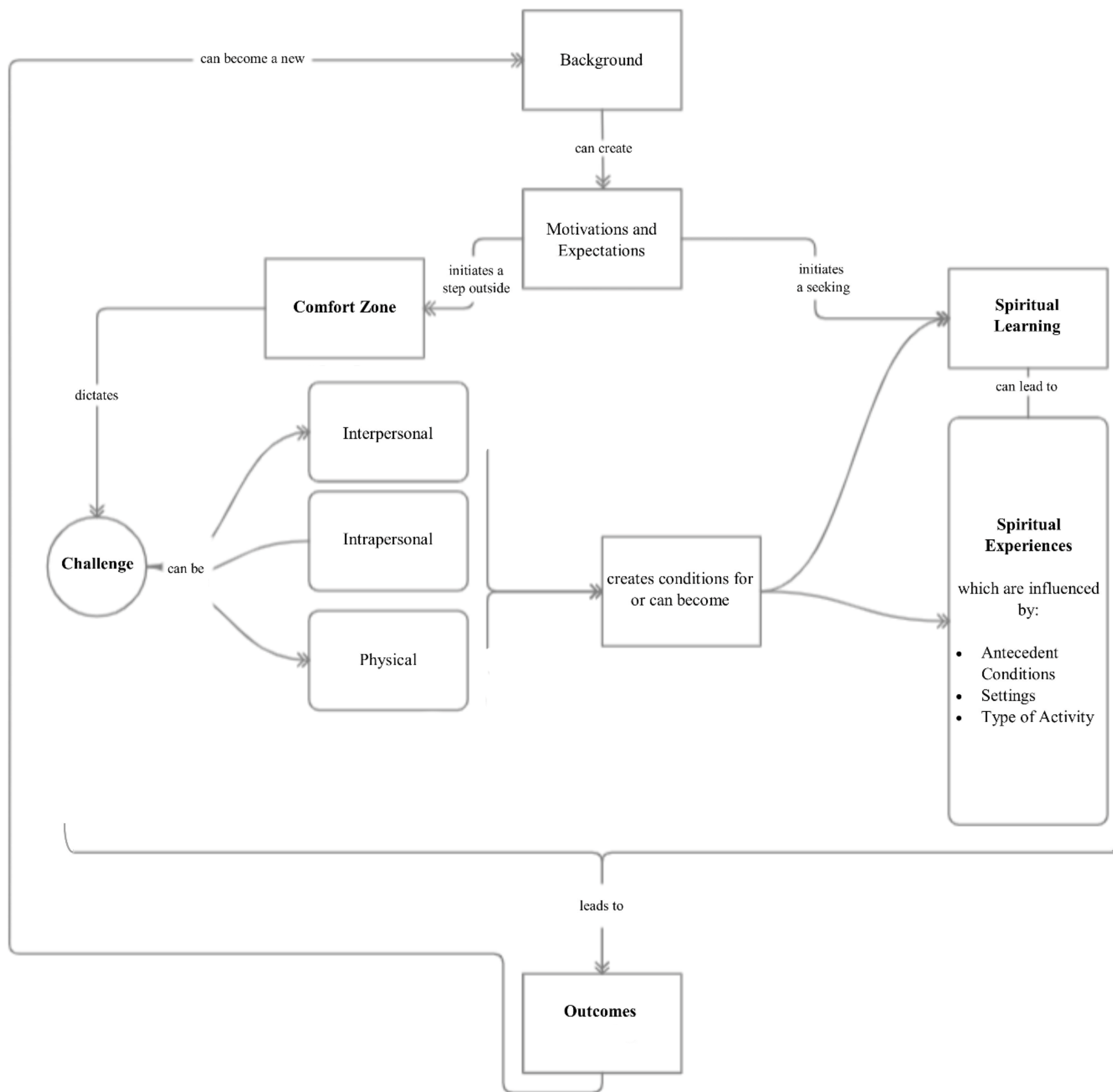

Figure 3: The Eremos Project Story

Comfort Zone

The concept of having, and then leaving a comfort zone was evident throughout the participants' responses. Leaving a comfort zone means accepting new challenges and risks, whether real or perceived, into one's life. Three of the four participants mentioned comfort zone explicitly in their writings. Different factors were credited with pushing participants beyond their comfort zone. Doing daily life tasks like going to the washroom on a 'thunder box' (an outdoor

toilet in the woods away from the campsite) was mentioned by Red: "*I had no idea what a 'thunder box' was and that there would be absolutely no privacy in regards to, using the bathroom. I think I held it for the first day/night out of pure fear and embarrassment HA*!" Green discussed the frustrations of "*being around people 24/7*" and being out of her comfort zone. Black wrote, "*For me [being outdoors] pushed me even farther out of my comfort zone and brought me into circumstances that I haven't been put into before.*" Interestingly, each time comfort zone was discussed, it was followed by a discussion of challenge or of change. This is demonstrated by Red's words:

> *[The canoe trip] definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone in more ways than one. I was challenged physically as well as emotionally in terms of mental strength and endurance. I learned to become more flexible in terms of personal privacy and sanitation. But the best part was being out on the water - just you, the canoe and God!*

Challenge

The theme of Challenge was evident throughout the participants' discussion of the trip. The challenges that the participants faced could be broken down into three categories: interpersonal challenges, intrapersonal challenges, and physical challenges. Interpersonal challenges were identified as difficult moments that participants had with the group or other students. Intrapersonal challenges included handling feelings of homesickness, learning more about oneself, or growing in personal attributes such as patience and leadership. Physical challenges were those that were physical in nature such as paddling 8 km to reach the next campsite or carrying a canoe solo (by yourself) for the entirety of a 2.4 km portage.

Interpersonal challenges and intrapersonal challenges were commonly coupled together. This coupling is illustrated in these quotes from Green:

> *It was challenging in the moment. It got frustrating being around people 24/7 and being out of my comfort zone. But I had a really good time overall and thoroughly enjoyed it. I was personally challenged and learned more about myself, others, and the world around me… I think I developed patience and I also learned the importance of keeping a positive attitude and helping out even when you don't feel like it. It is more important to put your own feelings away to make the experience better for others.*

Through Green's writings we see a reflection on a challenging experience with others and how it afforded for her an opportunity for personal growth. An example of an intrapersonal challenge was described by Black when he was journaling in the first days of the trip. Black found joy where he was despite not being excited to be there by shifting his perspective and focus for the trip.

The physical challenge of portaging has been discussed in the previous section but, it is interesting to note that all four of the participants were "*surprised*" by their physical successes in the face of physical challenges. Black's quote provides an example of this: "*I think I was surprised by what I could actually do. For example, some of the portages I thought would be absolutely impossible to do, but with a little bit of problem solving and hard work, we were able to overcome.*"

Spiritual Learning

These three types of challenges often led participants to an opportunity to learn to spiritually engage with a higher power in the midst of new and difficult situations. Prayer, journaling, and reflection were cited as tools used when perspective, joy, patience, peace or strength was sought from a higher power. There was a distinct theme of participants learning to seek a relationship to a higher power before Spiritual Experiences, which will be discussed next.

Purple describe her learning as follows, “*I also learned to always see God everywhere I go, and to search for a deeper relationship with him.*” Red described learning about taking time to meditate on God, “*I learned the importance of taking an intentional 'solo' day or Sabbath for yourself each week, as well as the power of meditating on the Lord.*” Black learned about “*finding joy in where you are.*” Joy in the Christian context refers to a spiritual joy that can be found through a relationship with God. Black also learned “*to focus on the beauty of God's creation and look at what He is trying to teach me throughout the week.*” Spiritual Learning often afforded participants greater opportunity to have Spiritual Experiences.

Spiritual Experiences

Participants detailed a variety of spiritual experiences while on the trip. As a course based on Christian religious values, The Eremos Project’s objective was to “connect students to God and His Creation” (The Eremos Project, facebook.com/eremosproject). Activities were designed specifically for the course to promote this connection. Journal devotions and solo time were two of these activities mentioned by participants as spiritual experiences. Green and Purple wrote about the solo time, with Green writing, “*I also particularly enjoyed solo time as a time to pray and reflect on the trip*,” and Purple writing, “*One spiritual experience that stands out to me is when we had our ‘quiet time’ and spent hours alone in a designated spot. I felt the presence of God and I felt very peaceful. It made me draw closer to God.*” Black specifically mentioned the journal devotions in his writing.

However, there were also unstructured wilderness moments that became spiritual experiences for the participants and each participant mentioned the wilderness as a place to experience God. Red wrote:

But the absolute best place to experience Christ and meditate on His marvelous works is [of] course, out in nature. Nothing more clearly proves God the creator and His endless love for us better than His own creation. The feeling you get while worshiping on top of a mountain or under the stars...well there's nothing like it!

Others contrasted the wilderness spiritual experience with the spiritual experiences in everyday life. To this end Purple wrote:

I think being in the wilderness, I was in a constant awe of God's ingenuity; creativity; and nature. Whereas in normal life I don't notice it as clearly" and "I had similar spiritual experiences [as home] in the wilderness, but in the wilderness, I had more experiences where I truly felt the hand of God and his presence helping me.

Other unstructured moments that became spiritual experiences included the spiritual songs that were occasionally sung around the campfire, simply being out on the water canoeing, and the physical challenges faced on the longest portage. Green wrote this about that portage:

On the longest portage we took, I felt I had no strength to do it. I had to rely on God's strength, and He pulled me through. And then I was even able to help other classmates afterwards. It just revealed God's goodness to me.

Finally, even in the midst of a storm, Purple describes a spiritual experience, "*There was a night that it was storming in the wilderness and it was very cold, and I could just feel God's presence around me reminding me that everything is going to be okay and to trust in him*."

Outcomes

Outcomes were discovered in the data by looking for evidence of change or areas where learning occurred. The outcomes discussed by the participants were wide-ranging and have been sorted below in Table 5: Reported Impacts of the Eremos Project. An increased openness with

friends and the group that attended the trip was mentioned by two participants and constitutes the only references to outcomes for general life in high school. While participants mentioned gaining hard skills, such as camping and canoeing, as an expectation for the trip, only one participant mentioned, "*also j-stroke and c-stroke*," two paddling strokes, as hard skills that were learned. Intrapersonal outcomes and spiritual outcomes were mentioned most often in the data. Also, Interpersonal outcomes were mentioned by participants as a challenge to overcome. The following table (Table 5) summarizes the key outcomes listed by the four participants in three categories; interpersonal outcomes, intrapersonal outcomes, and spiritual outcomes. These three categories will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section of this paper.

Spiritual Outcomes	Interpersonal Outcomes	Intrapersonal Outcomes
• Taking an intentional 'solo' day for yourself each week • "Seeing God everywhere I go" • Searching and working for a deeper relationship • Finding joy where you are [even in difficult circumstances] • Learning more about God's creativity and nature • Listening to God • The power of meditation	• How to take leadership • Working in a team • Learning to be with people 24/7 • Helping out, even when you don't feel like it • A sense of unity	• Resiliency • The strength of your mind • An understanding of how they deal with difficult situations • Being more open and vulnerable with others • Patience • A positive attitude • A willingness to experience new things • An increased love for outdoors and nature • Appreciating the little things in life

Table 5: Reported Impacts of the Eremos Project

Chapter Summary

This chapter first endeavored to create a complete picture of the participants' experiences with Canadian OAE through a narrative that detailed a typical Eremos Project course and backcountry canoe trip. Significant discussions were the routes chosen, the technology (or lack

thereof) on the trip, a gradual shift in responsibilities from leaders to students, campfires, solo time, and portages. Next, a summary graphic of the experience was presented along with a discussion of the five identified themes; Comfort Zone, Challenge, Spiritual Learning, Spiritual Experiences, and Outcomes.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

When undertaking this project, it was expected that participants would express: a connection to creation (Ritchie, et al., 2015); a connection to a higher power (Marsh, 2008; Fox, 1999; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2003); a connection to place – a land-fullness (Henderson & Potter, 2001; Ritchie, et al., 2015); a connection to others – a sense of community (Valkova, 2017; Breunig, Murtell, & Russell, 2015); and a greater understanding of self (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Richmond, 2016). While each of these connections did not fully materialize (a connection to place did not emerge from the data), a story of three relationships, and therefore three connections, did emerge from the narrative. Participants experienced a connection with others; a sense of community as together they learned to overcome challenges and rise to their new responsibilities as a group. Participants also discussed a greater understanding of self, one that they thought would aid them in future life situations. These examples can be described as intrapersonal growth. Finally, participants also discussed a connection to a higher power, but in a way that was not anticipated from the literature review. After a discussion of the limitations of the study, the following will discuss how the data adhered to, and diverged from, Fox's *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel* and previous research on spiritual experiences in outdoor adventure education. Spiritual experiences were not the only outcome discussed by the participants. The other reported outcomes very closely follow the structure of interpersonal and intrapersonal categories as put forward by Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) with one exception, spiritual learning. The discussion of findings will then conclude with relating the reported categories to the current literature.

Limitations

This bounded case study was limited by: the sample selection process where it is possible that those who viewed their experiences with The Eremos Project favourably would be more likely to respond and complete the study; the small number of participants (four students); and the site of the study (a private Christian school in Windsor-Essex). The study will give researchers a better understanding of Canadian OAE within the context of being connected to a one credit summer program but will not provide sufficient evidence to generalize ideas to other contexts. Specifically, The Eremos Project is a 3-week summer course for 1 credit, and it does not merge credits like other semester-based Canadian OAE experiences in Ontario. Time constraints of the study limited longitudinal research, and the study will be bounded by the perceptions of the participants during the time of the survey. It is possible that the participants have had life experiences in the 3-5 years since taking The Eremos Project that have shifted their view of the experience. Finally, the Canadian OAE program under study has an 8-day trip and some authors report that longer expeditions produce more noticeable outcomes (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014).

Due to changes in the methods of the study and practical time-constraints due to COVID-19, this study does suffer from threats to its validity. Only one source of information, the 20-questions online survey was used to code for themes. This survey was supported by the photo-elicitation technique and hopefully yielded a greater depth of data because of this technique. However, ideally multiple sources would have been available to allow for triangulation of the data. Additionally, member-checking was not possible due to practical time-constraints. Having the participants re-read their narrative for accuracy could have enriched the study and ensured validity. Finally, an attempt at thick, rich descriptions of the setting and events was given to

allow readers to make their own decisions regarding transferability of the study but caution should be exercised when transferring findings to a new case.

Spirituality and Challenge in COAE

The *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel* can be a useful framework for interpreting the process of wilderness spiritual experiences (Fox, 1999, p. 460). In the model, people first carry "baggage" into the wilderness, such as previously held beliefs and attitudes or fears about being outdoors; this may influence perceptions and even generate fears about nature. As participants become familiar with nature, they accept their fear (or rationalize it), they feel more in control, and this control leads to relaxation. This relaxation and familiarity with nature reduces the stress and anxiety that came with the initial experience. Then, according to the model, when people are relaxed and feel in control, they become more open to spiritual experiences. This suggestion that relaxation and control predicates spiritual experiences was supported in the data pertaining to the participants' reflections on their solo time activity. The solo time occurred over halfway through the trip, at which point each participant would have been adequately adjusted to and trained in relation to their surroundings to feel relaxed and in control. Subsequently, as predicted in the model, participants described the solo time as a time of reflection and prayer. These solo time spiritual experiences and 'finding quiet' have been discussed previously in the literature (Daniel 2007; Foster, 2012). Interestingly, though Fox (1999) identified the sense of awe or wonderment as a part of spirituality, these themes did not emerge from the data collected in this study.

In contrast to the model, one participant, who was "not excited to be there" for the first few days of the trip, did discuss finding "joy where you are" in a journal devotional time near the beginning of the trip. For this student, it was not skills gained or comfort that then enabled him to have a spiritual experience in the wilderness, rather it was the spiritual experience that enabled

him to continue on in the trip with a new perspective and then gain the skills and experience needed to feel comfortable.

Griffin and LeDuc (2009, p. 212) put forward that the wilderness experiences and the relationships built with instructors and other participants contribute most significantly to spiritual growth. In the present study, the theme of interpersonal growth did have significant spiritual impact on participants. The community debrief and campfire worship sessions were identified as spiritual experiences. As well, the challenges associated with doing camp chores as a team when the responsibility shifted from leader to students created enough tension to have some of the study's participants seek a higher power for strength. The physical challenge associated with canoe tripping was also discussed by participants as a being spiritual experience, often with specific reference to the long 2.4km portage on the second last day of the trip. When discussing this experience, participants described God's strength and goodness. Green wrote, "*On the longest portage we took, I felt I had no strength to do it. I had to rely on God's strength, and He pulled me through.*" For these participants, challenge, whether physical or interpersonal, became a spiritual experience.

In 2003, Heintzman put forward that when expeditions draw attention to spiritual matters, the participants are more likely to have spiritual experiences. As a Christian Environmental Science course, The Eremos Project was both academic and spiritual in its nature and delivery. It is possible that the attention the course paid to spiritual matters aided the participants in seeking higher powers in circumstances other than those suggested by the model. Heintzman (2009) also put forward that there are three overarching components of a spiritual experience in nature: antecedent conditions (ex. 'baggage', motivation and attitude, spiritual tradition, etc.), the setting components (ex. backcountry hiking, being away from home, etc.), and the types of recreation

activity (ex. solitude experiences, free-time, group experience, and facilitation). Therefore, another possibility is that the participants' antecedent conditions, specifically their Christian faith, enabled the students to have spiritual experiences in challenging situations. Although not every participant identified themselves as having a strong faith at the time of the course, each participant came with a foundational Christian worldview that would have shaped how they viewed and interacted with the natural world and the challenges they faced. This may have led to more reported spiritual experiences in the wilderness than groups with differing antecedent conditions.

Outcomes and Affordances

Outdoor Adventure Education provides opportunities to achieve personal growth and development known as affordances (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126). OAE does not create outcomes; the outcomes depend on the participant and what they choose to process and learn from. The literature categorizes OAE outcomes into interpersonal and intrapersonal and this study identified both of those categories as significant areas of reported growth and challenge. A third, distinct category of identified outcomes in this study was spiritual outcomes. While Ewert & Sibthorp (2014, p. 134) identified spiritual growth as a subset of intrapersonal growth, in order to better reflect the narrative provided by the participants, the decision was made to keep spiritual outcomes as a separate category. In a quote from Red, you can see each of these three categories of growth present:

> *The trip changed me in the way that I was able to be more open and vulnerable with others, especially in regards, to my relationship with God the Creator. My love for the outdoors and nature only increased and the way I saw myself drastically improved.*

The Spiritual Outcomes category shares outcomes that could be considered intrapersonal growth, such as “*finding joy where you are*” and “*taking an intentional ‘solo’ day for yourself each week.*” However, the participants distinctly identified outcomes that were focused on learning about a higher power, and not on personal growth. These outcomes were learning about the characteristics of a higher power (God’s creativity, God’s nature, and “*seeing God everywhere*”) and growth in their relationship with that higher power (listening to God, meditation on the Lord, seeking and working for a deeper relationship).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter we discussed how both the reported spiritual experiences and outcomes of the participants aligned and diverged with the current literature. The solo time spiritual experiences concurred with the *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel* model, as the participants had adequate training and skills to be relaxed and in control of their situation when they were given time in the wilderness to reflect. However, one participant had a spiritual experience while he was not comfortable, trained, or relaxed, which allowed him to have joy in a difficult circumstance. Physical and interpersonal challenges were also described as spiritual experiences by the participants. It is possible the religious background of the participants or the spiritual nature of the course itself encouraged participants to describe these challenges as spiritual experiences. While a connection to creation was mentioned, wonder did not emerge as a theme in the data. Finally, the majority of reported outcomes aligned with the existing categories of interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes. However, a third Spiritual Outcomes category was made distinct from intrapersonal for describing learning about and growing in relationship with a higher power through the experiences of the wilderness trip.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The present study endeavored to describe the influence of Canadian OAE on students in a private Christian school in Windsor-Essex. Four participants completed a reflective online questionnaire and five themes emerged from the data; Comfort Zone, Challenge, Spiritual Learning, Spiritual Experiences, and Outcomes. This case study uncovered additional questions to explore as well as provided insight for practitioners in the field of Canadian OAE. In this final chapter, suggestions for further research will be offered as well as recommendations for Canadian OAE instructors.

Suggestions for Further Research

Evidence of current behaviour change from the participants' experience with Canadian OAE and The Eremos Project was not made evident from the data collected. Virtual meetings, face-to-face, or phone interviews would have allowed for reflexive questioning which may have yielded further data in this area. Future studies may choose to examine the question: Are wilderness spiritual experiences like the ones described in this study linked to spiritual attitude and behavior change beyond the wilderness experience?

What the participant takes away from a program not only depends on how a program is designed, but what the "participant chooses… to process and learn from" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 126). The participants in this study were reflecting on experiences they had 3-5 years ago. These participants may have had certain life experiences since the course that shape their current perspective on the significance of the wilderness trip. Future studies should aim to contrast this longer-term perspective with one from immediately after a trip in a longitudinal study.

Finally, the The Eremos Project was a Grade 11 Environmental Science credit course, yet the participants did not explicitly mention the coursework, outside of the journal, as a meaningful part of their experience. Further study could develop an understanding of the relationship between the curriculum taught and the outcomes that result from a Canadian OAE experience.

Recommendations for Canadian OAE Programs

The participants' responses uncovered four points that Canadian OAE practitioners can learn from when planning their own wilderness programs:

1. Consider how these programs are memorable;
2. Extend program planning to include fostering connections;
3. Plan to take the time for reflection; and
4. See challenge as more than physical.

The first point should encourage Canadian OAE educators. These adventurous programs are difficult to run, however, in this study the participants each described the program as a memorable experience that for some, has shaped how they view and connect with the world around them (see Table 5 for reported Spiritual, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal Outcomes). Next, educators should consider what will be memorable about their programs. In this study, the participants did not mention the curriculum connected activities as memorable. Instead, challenges (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and physical) and spiritual experiences were named as some of the most memorable, and growing, experiences. Instructors should extend program planning beyond the curriculum connections and the nuts and bolts of the wilderness excursion to also facilitate connections: to creation; to a higher power; to place – a land-fullness; to others – a sense of community; and to oneself. Participants in this study found the solo time, journaling times, and group debriefs to be helpful in this regard. To do this requires a time commitment,

one that is often difficult to carve out while on a trip. Plan these moments into the schedule ahead of time to ensure that there will be time to take these quiet moments while on the trip. A final recommendation involves challenge; the participants in this study described growing interpersonally, personally, and spiritually from the challenges they encountered while on the trip. Canadian OAE instructors are experts at facilitating appropriate challenges for their groups. Often these challenges are physical in nature, however the present study can act as a reminder and encouragement to instructors to see challenges (such as an arduous portage) and the affordances provided by these challenges as more than physical and to plan, debrief, and reflect on them as such.

Final Thoughts

The purpose of this case study was to describe the influence of a Canadian OAE program on students at a private Christian school in Windsor-Essex. This case was chosen in an attempt to focus on a program that is unique in its school's focus on Christian education and in its geography in Ontario. What emerged was a reflective narrative and discussion of the experiences that these students had in a Grade 11 Environmental Science summer credit, The Eremos Project. By providing thick, rich descriptions of the antecedent conditions, the setting, and the activities surrounding these spiritual experiences it is hoped that this study contributed to filling an identified research need in the leisure and spirituality literature (Marsh, 2008; Heintzman, 2009; Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 140).

The five themes that emerged from the study's narrative were Comfort Zone, Challenge, Spiritual Learning, Spiritual Experiences, and Outcomes. The discussion of outcomes further supported previous research (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014) that categorized the types of outcomes that can be expected from Outdoor Adventure Education into interpersonal and intrapersonal.

However, spiritual learning, which is the learning about the nature of a higher power, was added as a distinct third category of outcomes. Finally, future directions for research include a longitudinal study that monitors the changes in participants' perceptions of the significance of a Canadian OAE experience over time. Additionally, the insight provided by this case study could be used to give further understanding of and direction to Canadian OAE as a unique teaching method. It is hoped that the story of these students stepping out of their comfort zone and embracing challenge will inspire other local teachers and practitioners to begin their own forays in Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Online Interview Protocol

1. How did you come to decide to do the trip?
2. How would you describe your expectations for the trip?
3. What kind of outdoor experiences did you have before the trip?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your experience on this trip?
5. Was there anything that surprised you about the trip?
6. What did you miss, if anything, while you were on the trip?
7. Were there things you were glad to get away from by going on this trip?
8. What lessons did you learn from your trip?
9. How do you think it shaped your experience that your trip was outdoors?
10. Did your trip change you in any way? If so, how?
11. How did you respond to coming back home and school after your trip?
12. Was your school life different after the trip? If it was, how?
13. What does the word spirituality mean to you?
14. Some people believe in ‘God’ or something greater. Do you, and if so, how do you define that?
    a. Do you ever feel a 'closeness' to that which you described?
    b. Can you tell me about these moments, such as when and where?
15. What was meaningful to you about your trip? Was there any part that was particularly meaningful or memorable?
    a. Can you tell me more about what made that experience meaningful or memorable?
    b. When/where did you have that experience? Where you alone or with groups?
    c. Can you recall any particular feelings that stand out in your mind from the above experience?
16. Would you describe any experiences had on the trip as spiritual?
    a. Can you tell me more about those experiences? (setting, company, mindset, activity, thoughts, emotions, and memories?)
    b. Consider when you returned home from the trip. Did you feel different than before your trip? or did you feel experiencing the wilderness change you in any way?
17. I’m interested in learning a little more about your spiritual life outside of wilderness. Can you tell me a little bit about that?
    a. How would you describe your spiritual experiences outside of the wilderness?
18. "b. Are the spiritual experiences you had in the wilderness different than those you spoke of?"
19. Can you tell me about a specific experience you have had that encapsulates some of the things you wrote about today?
20. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix B

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Title of Study: The Influences of Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education on Personal and Spiritual Growth.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mr. Phil Robson, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The results of this study will contribute to Mr. Phil Robson's Master's Thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Dr. Clinton Beckford, Faculty Supervisor, at clinton@uwindsor.ca , or 519-253-3000 ext. 3810.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this case study is to describe the within program and short-term influence of a Canadian outdoor adventure education program for students and trip leaders at a private Christian school in Southwestern Ontario.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete an online survey 30-60 minutes in length

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You will be asked to share your personal experience as it relates to spirituality and personal growth. Data will remain anonymous.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Few or no secondary school backcountry travel programs have existed in Windsor-Essex schools since the early 1990s. A deeper understanding of the workings of this type of program, and of the impact this program has on students and leaders in Windsor-Essex, will help provide policy makers with a greater understanding of these programs and potentially influence how priorities are set and funds are allocated. As well, current and future teachers will have a greater awareness and understanding of these programs, and the researcher as a teacher will be able to further inform his practice.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants completing this study will be entered to win a $100 Amazon gift card.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data collected through the online form will be anonymous and will not be linked to you.

The researcher will further ensure anonymity by reporting on the group experience by creating a composite picture of the experience rather than an individual picture.

All data collected will be kept in a secure location (encrypted files, or locked cabinet for hardcopies) for 5 years after the study is completed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participants may withdraw their consent to participate in the study by informing the researcher. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants will be actively involved in understanding the data through member-checking. At the completion of the study participants will be able to access a completed version of the study through the following website:

Web address: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/
Date when results are available: November 1st, 2020

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study The Influences of Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education on Personal and Spiritual Growth as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____
Name of Participant

______________________________________ ___________________
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_______________________________________ ______________________

Signature of Investigator Date

VITA AUCTORIS

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