

Seasonal Nature Discovery Field Trips: A Platform for Social Learning between a
Non-Profit Organisation and Local Primary Schools

by

JESSICA ADAMS

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Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: DR. PETA WHITE
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 JESSICA ADAMS, 2017

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Jessica Adams' Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled Seasonal Nature Discovery Field Trips: A Platform for Social Learning between a Non-Profit Organisation and Local Primary Schools and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication:

DR. PETA WHITE [signature on file]

DR. LYNN THOMAS [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

DR. PETA WHITE [signature on file]

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Abstract

Employing a social learning framework in a phenomenological inquiry, this study investigated the potential for environmental education (EE) in primary schools through a field trip-based program. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with school principals, teachers, and parents so as to understand field trip participation using the following guiding questions: *what do field trips mean to study participants; what is taken into consideration when deciding to participate in a field trip; and what factors are key to long-term participation in a field trip-based program?* Findings revealed participants agree that field trips are valuable learning opportunities for students and that typical challenges such as educators' lack of time or experience were not an issue in the program in question. These findings suggested potential for long-term collaboration, however, changeover in schools and within the field trip organisation were identified as important unknowns. These factors were considered together to provide recommendations on how the program may move forward.

Keywords: field trips, environmental education, social learning, phenomenology

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research project was designed to investigate the potential for environmental education through a field trip-based program offered to primary schools in the Brome-Missisquoi region of Québec. The non-profit organisation spearheading the program launched the program in fall 2015 and since then has sought to understand how they may encourage continued participation on the parts of the schools. This chapter will begin by presenting background information on the organisations involved as well as the key features of the program. The chapter will culminate in a discussion of the opportunities as well as the questions guiding the research and will conclude with an outline of the project's significance as well as important delimitations to be acknowledged.

Background

In 2014, a Québec organisation known as the Réserve naturelle des Montagnes-Vertes (RNMV) published a five-year plan (Poisson & Gratton, 2014) identifying its primary mission as conservation and its secondary missions as research, discovery, and regional influence. Under the discovery mission it specified the goal of creating a nature discovery and education program relative to RNMV for the local and regional schools. This project was undertaken by the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS), a partner organisation operating adjacent to the RNMV in the area of Sutton, located in the Eastern Townships of Québec.

Following its commitment to fulfill the mandate set by RNMV, PENS piloted the Youth-Nature Program for the 2015-2016 academic year and I was appointed program coordinator and guide. The Youth-Nature Program is offered to primary schools in the Brome-Missisquoi region of Québec. The program invites school groups to visit the PENS for an educational hike once per

season for a total of three hikes throughout the school year. The program's main objective is to provide students with an opportunity to discover and learn about their local natural heritage, but it also offers the benefits of encouraging students to challenge themselves physically and to work with their classmates (P. Lefèvre, personal communication, September 9, 2016). The pilot was deemed a success due to the enthusiastic participation and positive feedback from the schools and as such, the PENS elected to continue the program for the 2016-2017 academic year (P. Lefèvre, personal communication, September 9, 2016).

While the success of the pilot year aided in setting a foundation for the Youth-Nature Program, the PENS is interested in the long-term, aspiring to a program that schools will participate in annually. The PENS operates primarily during the summer season and as such, its educational program was previously focused on offering summer activities such as nature day camps for children. Due to the intimate nature of the summer camps, there are typically a small number of children participating. The Youth-Nature Program presents an opportunity to expand the PENS' educational program, reaching a larger number of local children. The Youth-Nature Program constitutes an educational endeavour on a much larger scale in terms of number of participants, time, and human resources involved. In order to ensure this undertaking is coordinated in such a way as to meet the needs and respect the limitations of all involved, careful consideration of all parties' interests and priorities is essential.

The Organisations Behind the Program

The Réserve naturelle des Montagnes-Vertes (RNMV), spanning roughly 68km² of land in the Southern Québec portion of the Appalachian Mountains (Poisson & Gratton, 2014), is the largest span of privately owned protected land in the province of Québec (*Historique*, translation:

History, n.d., para. 1). Originally established to protect the region's natural heritage and to preserve a cross-border corridor, the RNMV territory is privately owned by Nature Conservancy Canada and protected in perpetuity (Poisson & Gratton, 2014). The vast area covered by the RNMV touches four municipalities (Poisson & Gratton, 2014) and is home to 20 species that are designated by the Québec or Canadian government as either vulnerable or threatened (*La réserve en chiffres*, translation: The Reserve in Numbers, n.d., para. 5). The main leisure activities promoted within the boundaries of the RNMV are hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing (Poisson & Gratton, 2014). While the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS) is not completely within the RNMV boundaries, the reserve overlaps portions of the PENS network of hiking trails (Poisson & Gratton, 2014).

The Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS) manages a network of 52kms of hiking trails in the Sutton region of Québec. The PENS is a non-profit organisation that promotes responsible enjoyment of nature via recreational hiking and rustic camping. Since its inception in 1979, the PENS has had education at the heart of its mission, however it is only since 2011 that this mission has truly emerged in the form of outdoor and nature education activities and programs, particularly for children (P. Lefèvre, personal communication, September 9, 2016). The PENS' location and access to amenities (parking, bathrooms, indoor spaces) makes it the ideal entry point to the RNMV for the Youth-Nature Program (P. Lefèvre, personal communication, September 9, 2016).

I have worked with the PENS educational program since summer of 2013 and have been closely involved with the Youth-Nature Program since its creation. From the earlier discussions concerning how to design the pilot project to the coordination of this year's field trips, I have

been an active participant in the development of the program. In addition to my responsibilities as program coordinator, I was charged with guiding the field trips during the pilot year. I continued guiding the hikes for fall of 2016 and thereafter served primarily as program coordinator.

Figure 1. The PENS Hiking Trail Network

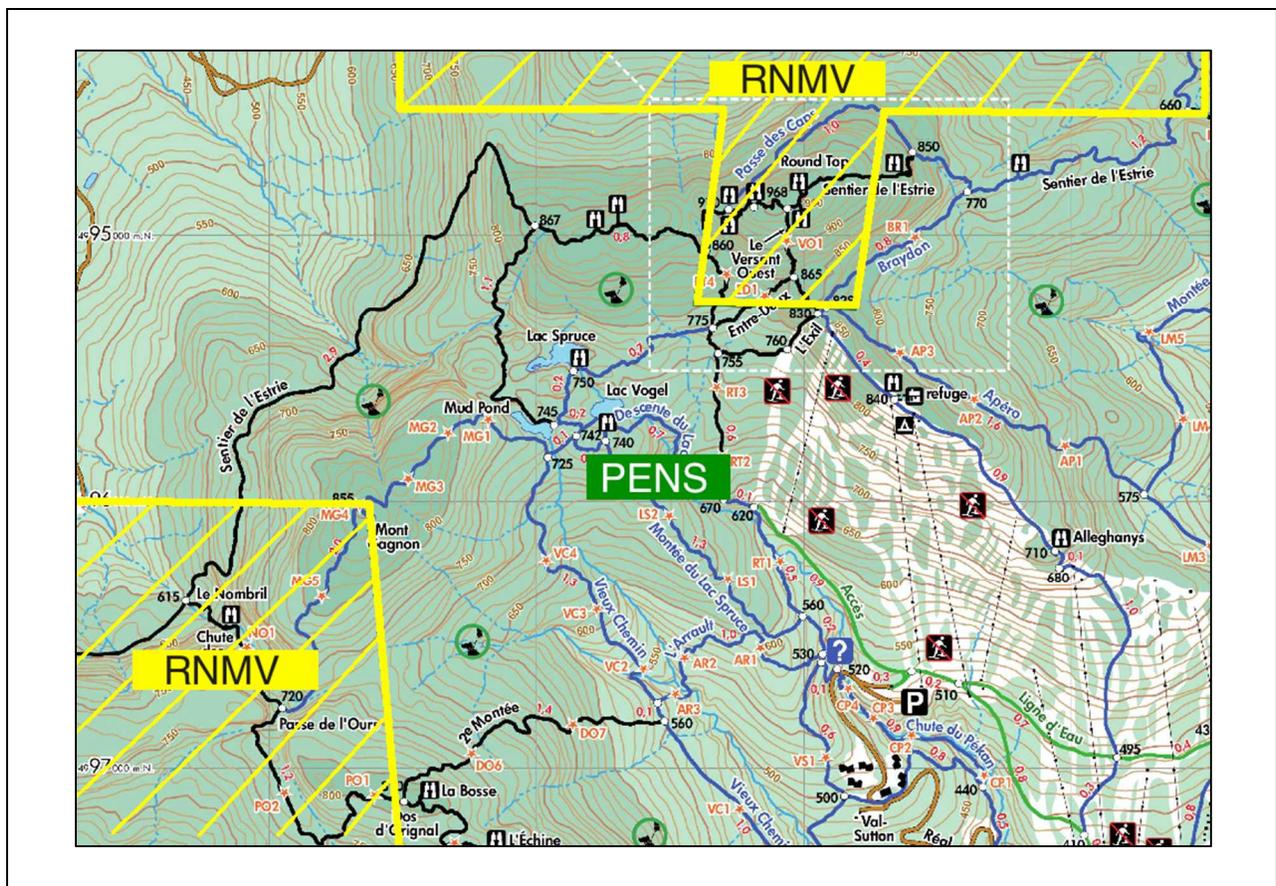


Figure 1. Map showing a section of the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS) trail network. The portions of the park that overlap with the Réserve naturelle des Montagnes-Vertes (RNMV) indicated in yellow.

The Youth-Nature Program

The Youth-Nature Program is offered to 24 primary schools: 22 schools located within the Brome-Missisquoi area as well as to two additional schools located outside of the area, but within close proximity to a sector of the Réserve naturelle des Montagnes-Vertes (RNMV). Every spring, the PENS send the 24 schools a description of the Youth-Nature Program complete with an invitation to participate in the program the following academic year (see Appendix A). Following reception of the invitation, the schools are asked to reserve a place in the program if they are interested. For the 2016-2017 program, the first 10 schools to express interest were selected to participate and registration for field trip dates occurred immediately prior to the start of the school year. In registering for the program, each school committed to three full-day hiking field trips throughout the course of the school year, one day hike per season (fall, winter, and spring). Upon official registration, teachers were sent an information letter concerning the fall field trip, as well as some materials they may use in the classroom as a means of preparing for and following up on the hike.

The 2016-2017 edition of the Youth-Nature Program was slightly different from the pilot for certain reasons. First, the number of schools participating rose from 7 to 11. Due to special circumstances, the PENS decided to make an exception and allow 11 schools to participate in the program (as opposed to the maximum of 10 mentioned above). Second, certain changes were made to the program in response to observations made throughout the pilot year. For instance, the aforementioned preparatory and follow-up material provided to teachers was incorporated after some teachers expressed interest in connecting the hikes to classroom lessons. On the more logistical side of things, changes were made to improve the field trip experience. For example, it

proved more difficult to orchestrate outings with larger groups (i.e. 40 or more) because there was less room for students to gather in the narrow trails and getting the students' attention was often challenging. In addition, accompanying adults (teachers and parents) at times seemed unclear as to what was expected of them during the outing, creating confusion and possibly interrupting the flow of the activity. Key logistical changes to the 2016-2017 program therefore included: limiting the number of students per school group, recruiting volunteers from the community to accompany groups, and providing an opportunity for teachers and parents to visit the park prior to each field trip as an orientation to the trails and activity.

In an attempt to encourage participation, the PENS aim to provide schools with as much support as possible in the form of organisational and financial assistance. The program is designed in such a way that the PENS assume responsibility for planning the itinerary and activity, for providing a guide and, when possible, additional adult supervision in the form of volunteers, and for reserving transportation (if required). Everything except for transportation is offered completely free of charge. For schools requesting bus transportation, the PENS subsidise half the transportation fees for one bus. The rationale for providing this assistance is that this relieves educators of key responsibilities that are often seen as burdens or barriers to participation in outings (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Scarce, 1997) either because of lack of time or lack of experience (Tal & Morag, 2009). In turn, teachers are responsible for completing their group's registration and for arranging for an appropriate amount of parent volunteers to accompany the group.

The Youth-Nature Field Trips

Certain factors such as group size and composition as well as weather conditions, can

affect how the actual outing unfolds, however, all field trips follow the same basic formula. Students arrive at the park by car or by bus and gather around the guide while she introduces the park and the program. The guide proceeds to engage in a discussion with the students on the season at hand. For example, in fall, she will ask, “What do you think of when you think of the fall?” and “What changes do you notice around you when fall comes?” Students are encouraged to contribute to the discussion. During a bathroom break for the students, teachers and parents are typically assembled to briefly discuss roles and responsibilities as well as key safety considerations. The students then reassemble to receive instructions on the activity to complete during the hike (described below). Right before departing for the hike, the guide consults a map of the trails with the students and also goes over, with the students’ help, the guidelines to follow during the hike.

The program’s field trip activities are semi-structured and designed around a theme relevant to the current season. Activities are semi-structured in that the guide leads a portion of the activity, but leaves ample space for students to interact with their classmates and devote more time and attention to elements they find most intriguing. For example, the fall 2016 theme was photosynthesis and tree diversity. The goal was to use the context of the season change to have students learn about the important biological process of photosynthesis and through this to learn about recognising key differences between tree species. Students were asked to work in small teams and each team was given an activity sheet to complete together. The questions on the activity sheet corresponded to stations placed along the trail in the forest. Each station had a certain number of questions associated with it and students were required to follow the questions and provide answers based on their observations and reasoning. It was made clear prior to the

start of the hike that the activity's emphasis was on careful observation and teamwork and not on getting the 'right' answers. The guide leads the students down trails and to the stations, stopping sporadically to take advantage of unplanned learning opportunities inspired by the students' questions and/or anything happening in the forest at a given moment (e.g. a cluster of mushrooms growing next to the trail).

The Research Opportunity

Between the pilot year and the start of the 2016-2017 edition, the PENS built a certain momentum with the Youth-Nature Program. The PENS wished to use this momentum to establish long-term collaborations with the local schools via the program. The value of field trips as learning experiences is typically not contested (Kisiel, 2006), however this value can be negatively affected by lack of a follow-up on the experience (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Kisiel, 2006). Follow-up provides students with an opportunity to consolidate learning of new concepts by making connections (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). While some literature refers to follow-up as being performed in the interest of making connections to what is happening in the classroom (Kisiel, 2006), I posit this follow-up can also come in the form of repeated experiences in the field trip setting, particularly if the primary learning goal is for students to gain an awareness and appreciation of their natural heritage. On this premise, the PENS aimed to have each school commit to this program annually, making it a regular part of its routine thereby offering ongoing, contextualised outdoor learning experiences for the students.

While it is not disputed that field trips have the potential to be valuable educational experiences (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996; Kisiel, 2006) they are often regarded by educators as extracurricular commitments (Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996). As

such, one might suppose educators take into consideration the implications of undertaking these extra commitments before doing so. This logic underscored the importance of understanding the participant perspective seeing as the ultimate goal was to encourage educator interest in long-term participation.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the dimensions of school participation in field trips and to use this understanding to determine how the PENS can develop the Youth-Nature Program into a long-term program with continued school participation. The dimensions of school participation in field trips were explored more broadly with regards to participants' previous experiences of field trips. They were also explored more specifically within the frame of the PENS Youth-Nature Program example. The investigation was approached by delving into the perspectives of the adult members of the school community (principals, teachers, and parents) involved, unpacking their values, priorities, and concerns when deciding to engage in this type of program. The adult members of the school community were the focus of this research due to the fact they are typically the ones in charge of making decisions as to how students and children spend their time.

The Research Question

The inquiry was guided by the following questions regarding what it means for a school to agree to participate and continue to participate in field trips. First, *what do field trips mean to principals, teachers, and parents and what is taken into consideration when deciding whether to offer their students/children the opportunity to participate in a particular field trip experience?* Second, *do certain factors have a stronger influence on long-term participation in field trip experiences?* These questions were explored in a broader sense, with regards to the schools'

participation in various types of field trips and programs, and then more specifically as they applied to the Youth-Nature Program. The insight garnered from these questions helped in the discussion of the final question to be addressed within the scope of this study: *How can the PENS use this information to establish a long-term collaboration with the local primary schools via the Youth-Nature Program?*

Significance of the Research

Having been closely involved in the development of the PENS' educational program since the summer of 2013 I have had the privilege of experiencing the successes and challenges this organisation has encountered in its educational endeavours. Foremost, many of the activities offered have been developed largely by trial and error with insufficient time or resources to properly assess their success and identify areas for improvement. The Youth-Nature Program has the potential to represent an important pillar of the PENS' educational mandate and this study provided the opportunity for careful consideration of the program and its overall impact. An essential aspect of this involved going beyond the perspective of the PENS employees to include input from participants. The insight gained from interviewing the adult members of the school community served as the basis for recommendations on how to move forward with the Youth-Nature Program. Ideally, the results of this investigation will contribute to the establishment of a program that is relevant and meaningful to all involved.

This study has the potential to benefit both the schools participating in and the organisations behind the Youth-Nature Program. As a community organisation, the PENS may serve as a valuable pedagogical asset to the local schools and this study created an interface for regular interaction between the schools and the PENS. Institutions working closely with the

PENS stand to gain access to long-term enriched learning experiences for their students. Study participants had an opportunity to learn more about the Youth-Nature Program and about the organisation offering it, which is a notable feature of their community. The research also contributed to the fortification of PENS' and RNMV's conservation mandates. The primary goal of the Youth-Nature Program is to enable students to discover their natural heritage. Conducting a thorough investigation into how to offer a program that will be deemed important and interesting by the target participants increases the likelihood that the program perseveres. Should the program continue into the future, more youth will have the opportunity to participate increasing the number of people discovering and gaining an awareness of their natural heritage.

Study Delimitations

The focus of this study is on the Brome-Missisquoi region of Québec and in particular on primary school participation in the Youth-Nature Program. As such, the study required certain delimitations be set. Participants were selected from the 11 primary schools that were involved in the Youth-Nature Program up until and including the 2016-2017 offering because experience of the program was an integral part of the investigation. In the interest of keeping the data manageable, no more than four interviews or focus groups per participant category (principal, teacher, parent) were required and focus groups were not larger than three participants per group. Finally, children were not interviewed as a part of this study because the goal was to understand the perspectives of those who are perceived as having the most influence on the decisions on whether to participate in field trips or not.

This chapter has outlined the basis for this study by introducing key stakeholders in and features of the program as well as presenting the problem to be addressed and the significance of

investigating this problem. In the following chapter, this basis will be put into greater context through an exploration of the literature related to environmental education, field trips, and social learning.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review begins with a discussion of environmental education and the important roles childhood experiences in and affective ties to nature play in the development of a sense of place and positive attitudes towards the environment. Due to certain barriers present in the home (*e.g.* lack of comfort, time, or access), schools are discussed as a possible alternative context within which to encourage childhood experiences in nature. As such, outdoor school field trips are proposed as a suitable mechanism by which more children may have the opportunity to experience nature and the outdoors. Due to multiple complicating factors, not least of which are teacher time and experience, school field trips and particularly outdoor field trips, can be seen by teachers as daunting undertakings. This may suggest a need for considering alternative formulae to the typical school field trip, particularly when it comes to the stakeholders involved.

Environmental Education, Sense of Place and Critical Pedagogy of Place

While environmental education can be interpreted and applied in various ways (Hart, 2003, 2010; Tidball & Krasny, 2011), the field's origins can be traced back to elements of either the Belgrade Charter (Srinivas, 1975, <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/ee/belgrade.html>) or the Tbilisi Declaration ("Tbilisi Declaration (1977)," 1977, <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/ee/tbilisi.html>). Since then, the field has evolved and expanded to include a multitude of concepts and perspectives. While some bodies of literature tend to underscore the goal of encouraging a change in behaviour (Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Knapp, 2000), others focus more on the importance of getting to know and develop ties to one's own milieu (Sobel, 1996, 2004). The rationale for the latter is based on the idea that knowledge without emotion is insufficient when it comes to

addressing environmental matters. Steven J. Gould (1991) writes, as humans we are “unlikely to protect what [we] do not love, and (...) we cannot love what we do not know” (as quoted in Smith & Williams, 1999, p. 7). Works that speak to this dimension of environmental education tend to highlight the importance of place (Gruenewald, 2008), affect (Cheng & Monroe, 2010), and significant experiences in nature, particularly during childhood (Chawla, 1998, 2007).

According to Ardoin (2006) the idea of place-based education emerged through the belief in the importance of encouraging development of affective ties to places via direct experiences in a local context. Many argue for the formation of these ties at a young age (Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards, Moore, & Boyd, 2014; Kellert, 2002), however some stress that this be approached with care. Pioneers in the realm of place-based education such as Sobel (1996), caution against presenting children with complex and urgent environmental matters as this may have the opposite of the desired effect, potentially instilling a sense of fear and powerlessness as opposed to passion and conviction. Instead, Sobel (1996) suggests, encouraging children’s pre-existing inclination to bond with the natural world is likely a more productive place to start: “What’s important is that children have an opportunity to bond with the natural world, to learn to love it and feel comfortable in it, before being asked to heal its wounds” (Sobel, 1996, p. 10). Moreover, while it is not uncommon to come across exotic ecosystems in the primary school curriculum, Sobel (1996) also argues for focusing on the here and now, suggesting distant matters be left for later, after children have become acquainted with their local surroundings.

While much of the place-based education literature emphasises appreciation of the natural world, some authors suggest that one of the main purposes of place-based education is to nurture a sense of place (Semken, Freeman, Watts, Neakrase, Dial, & Baker, 2009). According

to Ardoin (2006), sense of place refers to the “complex cognitive, affective, and evaluative relationships people develop with social and ecological communities through a variety of mechanisms” (p. 118). Furthermore, instilling a sense of place in a child can be seen as laying the foundation for the child’s sphere of concern to include his or her surroundings and take an interest in its protection (Olwig, 1982). Kudryavtsev, Stedman, and Krasny (2012) discuss what factors can contribute to sense of place, stating that direct and indirect experiences can have an important influence. Length and frequency of direct experiences as well as the social contexts within which they happen appear to be important predictors, with longer-term and frequent experiences of a positive nature having the greatest influence overall (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012). In terms of indirect experiences, the social component factors in more, with Kudryavtsev et al. (2012) suggesting discussion between educators and “participants of environmental education” (p. 240) and social construction of place meanings prior to engaging with a place can also have an influence on the development of a sense of place.

Authors like Gruenewald (2008) argue for an approach based on direct experience with even greater focus on the social, an approach he describes as a critical pedagogy of place. This approach is presented as a combination of two concepts: place-based education and critical pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2008). Gruenewald (2008) suggests that the success of place-based education may suffer without reform of the greater social and cultural context within which this education is occurring. That is to say, attempting to effect change within an overarching system that remains rigidly unchanged may prove futile. It is suggested that critical pedagogy of place can be used to steer towards such reform of the overarching system through its aim of evaluating the nature of our relationships with one another and with our socio-ecological places

(Gruenewald, 2008). In order for such reform to take place, however, a foundation of empathy and understanding is required, particularly for young people. As previously mentioned, confronting children with large-scale environmental problems without first encouraging an emotional understanding of their immediate surroundings may be fruitless (Sobel, 1996). Similarly, Gruenewald (2008) states that critical pedagogy's goal of transforming rigid societal conditions requires the formation of affective connections to other human and non-human beings.

Within the context of this study, environmental education will be defined as a multi-layered practice attempting to foster emotional and cognitive ties between people and places with the ultimate aim of creating an important shift in individual awareness and overall societal conventions related to the environment. More specifically, the goal would be to usher individuals' sense of self towards inclusion of the greater environment and within the greater population, to challenge the social conditions that have previously been responsible for individual attitudes and practices. The design of the PENS' Youth-Nature Program is guided by key concepts previously discussed, such as the importance of direct experiences in nature as well as the interdependence of knowledge and emotion when it comes to the formation of one's environmental ethic. Equally central to the previous discussion and to the PENS' program is the focus on children. It is throughout the younger years that we tend to form our ideas as to how the world works (Hutchison, 1998) suggesting these field trips have the potential to be formative experiences from an environmental education perspective and perhaps beyond.

The Importance of the Child-Nature Connection

The relationship between children and nature has been characterised as important by

virtue of the positive impact it can have on both the child and the environment (Chawla, 1998, 2007; Driessnack, 2009; Keniger, Gaston, Irvine, & Fuller, 2013; Louv, 2007). Children who have access to nature may experience various cognitive, affective, and physical benefits including an improvement in concentration and academic performance and a decrease in stress and risk of obesity (Kellert, 2005; Louv, 2007; Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Wells & Evans, 2003). A strong relationship with the natural world may also benefit the environment. As previously mentioned, direct experience in nature may encourage the formation of a sense of place. Chawla (1998, 2007) discusses the particular link between time spent in nature as a child and the development of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours as an adult. Various sources outline the presence of adult role models during these childhood nature experiences as an important factor (Chawla, 1998, 1999; Chawla & Cushing, 2007). Wells and Lekies (2006) further specify that children who have significant experiences in nature before age 11 may have an increased propensity to develop positive attitudes about the environment in adulthood.

Despite the many arguments supporting the importance of the child-nature connection, emphasis on this relationship in the general population seems to be lacking. In general, young people are spending less time outdoors in natural settings (Carr & Luken, 2014; Louv, 2005), a trend that can have important implications. Children may be particularly susceptible to the consequences of less contact with nature (Kellert, 2005) yet studies continue to show they are spending shorter and shorter amounts of time outdoors in the natural world (Charles & Wheeler, 2012; Strife & Downey, 2009). Not only does this deprive children of the possible benefits of interacting with their natural environment, but also this lack of direct experience in nature may be detrimental to encouraging young people's development of affective and cognitive ties to

their environment. For example, the study conducted by Balmford, Clegg, Coulson, and Taylor (2002) showed that eight-year-old children were more proficient at identifying popular Pokémon characters than they were at recognising common local flora or fauna. This aligns with more general observations that natural history knowledge is lacking in Western societies (King & Achiam, 2017). This waning connection threatens to negatively impact young people and their environment by depriving both of the numerous benefits outlined above. In order to understand how to approach and potentially rectify the situation, however, a clear understanding of the factors contributing to the phenomenon is required (Strife & Downey, 2009).

According to the literature, several factors are at play in limiting children's experiences of the natural world including access to natural spaces, lack of time or interest, and fear. Various researchers share the concern that children's access to nature is becoming more restricted not only due to the diminishing amount of natural spaces, but also because access to these natural spaces may be more intermittent (Taylor & Kuo, 2006). Strife and Downey (2009) propose race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status may also influence youth experiences and access to nature, citing studies suggesting low-income and minority families have "relatively limited access to greenways... and trails" (Strife & Downey, 2009, p. 11). On the individual level, schedules overfilled by structured activities (Rosenfeld & Wise, 2010) and liberal amounts of screen-time (Louv, 2005; Taylor & Kuo, 2006) seem to have a marked impact. Parental concerns compound the problem as adults become increasingly concerned by crime and their children's safety, allowing this concern to influence their decisions to not let their children play and explore in nature unsupervised (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). While the interrelationships are complex (Strife & Downey, 2009), together these factors begin to shed light on why children spend less

time in nature within the context of their home lives.

When focusing on the home lives of children, it is essential to acknowledge the vital role adults, particularly parents and guardians, play in the child-nature equation. It is a role of particular interest as adults seem to have a powerful influence on the facilitation of formative experiences outdoors in natural environments, but may also have an equally powerful effect on limiting experiences. For instance, Chawla (2007) contends that when nature is accessible to children and they have no reason to fear it, they will have a natural tendency to want to spend time in it. In terms of how children actually access natural spaces, however, she says, “it is their caretakers who decide whether they are allowed to use these places freely and whether this interest should be encouraged” (Chawla, 2007, p. 248). As such, different concerns and priorities may make it so parents or guardians prefer their children spend time playing a team sport instead of exploring the patch of woods next door, for instance, or that they let their child play video games instead of going for a walk in the park. Chawla’s work (1998, 2007) highlights the importance of family role models in nurturing pro-environmental attitudes into adulthood. She also mentions the notion of unspoken ‘permission’ granted by parents and how communicating to children that spending time outside is acceptable and encouraged contributes to the formation of children’s positive attitudes towards the environment (Chawla, 2007). Taking this into consideration, one may suppose that while it is desirable to have adult role models encourage children to spend more time outdoors in nature, this may not necessarily be easily put into practice depending on the home situation. It may therefore be appropriate to seek an additional context within which to promote this increased contact with nature, a context that can afford the same accessibility to children from various backgrounds. Perhaps this alternative context can be

found within the school environment where, regardless of their home life, children can engage in the same experiences offered via the institution, with teachers acting as adult role models in addition to or, in some cases, in the place of parents or guardians.

Environmental Education and the Child-Nature Connection in Schools

Schools might be a suitable venue for implementing EE and encouraging greater numbers of children to interact more with nature via organised visits to natural spaces. Bixler, Carlisle, Hammitt, and Floyd (1994) highlight that regular park interpretation programs may be limited in their impact due to the fact that recreational park visitors typically already have an interest in and level of affinity for natural spaces. While the study was published some time ago, I contend this remains relevant in highlighting a need for determining how to reach a demographic that does not necessarily have such a pre-existing interest and affinity. Nagra (2010) proposed that the school system presents the largest organised venue for environmental education and Bixler et al. (1994) contend “effective outdoor school programming may be the single best tool for stimulating appreciation of wildland environments in a wide range of individuals” (para. 5).

Despite the arguments for schools presenting a favourable environment to encourage environmental education, there are important barriers to consider. First, some argue there is a fundamental disjointedness between the goals of EE and the goals of traditional school systems due primarily to the fact that schools typically seek to reproduce and maintain norms and values responsible for current decision making while EE would serve to alter or challenge the status quo (Stevenson, 2007). On a more practical note, incorporating EE into the school routine may depend on the educators involved. That is, in some cases, teacher experience and comfort may be lacking and in other cases, EE may simply not align with educators’ interests (Hart, 2003).

Certain authors suggest educators are not sufficiently prepared to teach EE as part of the curriculum (Hart, 2010; Torquati, Cutler, Gilkerson, & Sarver, 2013) and others (Hart, 2003) have argued that the lack of motivation to incorporate EE stems from a lack of interest in and passion for the subject matter. There is also need for consideration of the context within which EE would occur in the school environment. That is, if one is to focus on EE by means of direct experiences in nature for children, at least a portion of this must be accomplished in nature (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012). Taking this into consideration, perhaps field trips can present a viable option to promoting EE outdoors in nature for schoolchildren (Falk, 1983; Farmer, Knapp, & Benton, 2007).

School Field Trips for Environmental Education

Krepel and DuVall (1981) define a field trip as a school-related outing with educational intent during which students have the opportunity to interact with the setting and experience connections to concepts. By their very nature, these experiences expose students to a situation for learning that cannot be reproduced in the classroom (Eshach, 2007), providing “authentic learning opportunities” (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014, p. 236). These opportunities can be used to put school material into context (Scarce, 1997) thereby increasing understanding of concepts and enhancing student learning (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012). Not only can field trips contribute to substantial cognitive learning and long-term information retention (Falk, 1983), but they can also provide a platform for challenging students’ ideas and prejudices on certain topics (Scarce, 1997) and can stimulate student interest and engagement (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Scarce, 1997). The increase in knowledge and interest generated by field trips justify their use in learning (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012) and may also bolster the case for their use in environmental

education.

Field trips come in a variety of forms with different venues, learning goals, and pedagogical approaches (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012). Visits to outdoor sites for environmental education constitute one such form (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012). Hoisington, Sableski, and DeCosta (2010) claim outdoor field trips can allow students to develop their vocabulary and interest in the outdoors. Furthermore, the variability of an outdoor setting expands the range of learning opportunities available to the students participating (Orion & Hofstein, 1994). In addition to the valuable impact on students, teachers may experience benefits. For instance, it may add to their relationships with their students and may also help develop their mode of teaching (Dillon, Morris, O'Donnell, Reid, Rickinson, & Scott, 2005). While field trips may prove useful instruments in environmental education, outdoor field trips specifically provide opportunities for direct contact with nature, which is seen as positively influencing the formation of ties to places (Ardoin, 2006; Kudryavtsev et al., 2012).

Important considerations for field trips.

Evidence suggests that field trips and outdoor field trips in particular can be valuable learning experiences (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Morag & Tal, 2012), however Behrendt and Franklin (2014) caution they do not unconditionally yield benefits. It is therefore crucial to consider the factors that can influence the outcomes of a field trip. Research on field trips conducted by Falk (1983) suggests that repeated experiences at a given venue and providing pre-visit orientation materials can contribute significantly to the learning experience. Kisiel (2006) emphasises the importance of building around the experience, particularly with regards to how knowledge from the experience is consolidated and related to classroom curriculum. He claims,

“Making the most of a field trip, then, must include some sort of follow-up activity. The more connections teachers make, the greater the opportunity for supporting student understanding” (Kisiel, 2006, p. 7). It would appear that repeated experiences and experiences in context are key components of a successful school field trip, further outlining important factors when considering their use in environmental education.

Potential barriers to field trips.

While there is ample evidence supporting the potential value of field trips as learning experiences, these experiences involve a substantial amount of planning and Alon and Tal (2017) propose their successful implementation is dependent on the teachers involved. Teachers must be committed and prepared when deciding to take students to natural areas for EE (Simmons, 1998). Field trips are typically organised by the school (Dillon et al., 2005), can be difficult to orchestrate, and usually come at a financial cost (Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996). More specifically, when taking on a field trip, teachers must organise for logistics like transportation (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Simmons, 1998) and may find themselves preoccupied by choosing the right trails, possible physical challenges, weather conditions, and their own lack of scientific knowledge (Dillon, Rickinson, Teamey, Morris, Choi, Sanders, & Benefield, 2006). Additionally, they must make arrangements for students who do not attend the field trip, an added responsibility to a schedule that is busy to begin with (Scarce, 1997). These responsibilities may be reasonable were it not for the fact that most teachers have minimal training and experience in field trip organisation (Michie, 1998; Tal & Morag, 2009) and typically lack the time necessary to take on these responsibilities (Michie, 1998). The combination of responsibilities and lack of educator experience may pose a considerable barrier,

potentially dissuading teachers from organising nature experiences for their students (Simmons, 1998).

The importance of educator commitment and involvement to a field trip extends beyond the planning and into the actual proceedings of the field trip itself. The teacher involved must also be at ease leading the field trip if it is taking place in a more informal, outdoor environment. As previously mentioned, some teachers are uncomfortable teaching EE due to lack of training. The discomfort is unlikely to be improved within the context of a field trip, much less an outdoors field trip. Few teachers feel sufficiently confident to lead outdoor experiences (Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996; Simmons, 1998), a reality Hofstein and Rosenfeld (1996) and Tal and Morag (2009) attribute to lack of training. It appears despite the fact teachers recognise the value of natural settings for pedagogical purposes, they are unclear as to how best to incorporate them into their teaching (Simmons, 1998). Torquati et al. (2013) suggest that one way to address this uncertainty is to “draw upon models of professional development in other curricular domains [...] to design effective professional development in nature, science, and environmental education” (p. 738). Taken together with the abovementioned responsibilities associated with field trip planning, however, the collective endeavour may discourage teachers from committing to outdoor field trips, possibly perceiving them as “disruptions to the normal school program” (Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996, p. 95). This perception could prove detrimental when attempting to encourage environmental education via school field trips, making it important to truly understand the perspectives of the individuals involved and the role EE field trips in nature may fulfill.

A Social Learning Framework for EE Field Trips

The barriers present to integrating EE in the classroom as well as the barriers present to

teachers' partaking in field trips appear to be closely linked to educator interest, experience and comfort, and lack of time. It is therefore important to consider how these barriers may be addressed. Some have suggested pre-service teacher education as a viable means of reconciling educators' lack of comfort with EE (Davis, 1998; Hart, 2003). While this may eventually prove useful in generating a more widespread shift in educators' familiarity with EE, this represents a complex, long-term undertaking. It may therefore be necessary to explore a more immediate, concrete solution that aims at providing in-service teachers with support in teaching EE and, more specifically, in orchestrating outdoor field trips.

Hungerford and Volk (1990) propose it "may be that it will take a concerted, cooperative effort among educational institutions to meet the challenge of changing learner behaviour. Certainly, ... the cooperation of nonformal educational agencies as well as local and regional educational resources would maximise the opportunity for success" (p. 263). While this approach focuses more on changing learner behaviour, I propose this observation may apply to a learning system founded more on a critical pedagogy of place framework. Tal and Morag (2009) conducted a study showing that with the right amount of support, teachers are capable of confidently conducting outdoor learning experiences. This would suggest that collaboration or the forming of partnerships may be beneficial for environmental education and field trips in particular. Advantages associated with using partnerships include access to different networks as well as greater operational efficiency and innovation (Tennyson, 2003). Partnerships may also help leverage resources such as staff, equipment, and cost (Tennyson, 2003). Considering school field trips inherently involve an external organisation (the field trip venue), perhaps this is a partnership that can be nurtured in the interest of providing additional support to the schools

involved and creating the grounds for rich and unique learning opportunities for all parties involved.

Interactions between people and groups with varied backgrounds and interests can be important for learning and encouraging social change. From a social constructionist point of view, knowledge is less seen as something that is unilaterally disseminated or acquired, but rather as “something that people do together” (Burr, 2004), a notion that is fundamental to the concept of social learning. According to Wenger (2010), social learning is concerned with the way engagement between different actors in society can lead to understanding, contesting, and influencing the direction of social change. With a main goal of critical pedagogy of place being to influence social change, social learning may prove an appropriate and effective framework to designing an approach to EE.

Social learning platforms facilitate collective learning by encouraging strong interpersonal relationships, identifying common tasks and objectives, and improving and multiplying management options to attain these objectives (Monroe, Andrews, & Biedenweg, 2008). With regards to social learning’s application to environmental and natural resources education, Krasny and Lee (2002) state:

Social learning would suggest that educators work with other professional and volunteer stakeholders to design educational strategies that are suited to the biophysical and social conditions of their particular locality, determine the efficacy of such programs, and share program outcomes and ideas for developing new educational strategies. (p. 102)

The process requires careful attention to the motivations of, as well as benefits accrued by, those involved as well as consideration of the potential challenges (Krasny & Lee, 2002).

They go on to specify the previous statement is particularly true when the focus is resource management and not “teaching ecological concepts” (Krasny & Lee, 2002, p. 102). While ecological concepts are integrated into the Youth-Nature Program, the overarching goal of the program and of this study is to effect social change within schools and their surrounding community with regards to attitudes surrounding environmental education and direct experiences in nature.

In order to determine the potential for field trips to serve as long-term social learning opportunities for environmental education in the Brome-Missisquoi region, the research required an in-depth understanding of the experience of field trips from the points of view of the adults concerned. Social learning theory highlights the importance of understanding the motivations, benefits, and challenges faced by those involved in a particular endeavour (Krasny & Lee, 2002). At the community level, it also highlights the importance of constructing a common vision and identification of priorities (Dyball, Brown, & Keen, 2009). As such, this study sought to gain an appreciation for these essential aspects as they related to the Youth-Nature Program.

Guided by a social learning framework, detailed accounts were needed from a small number of adult individuals from the school community who had some connection to the Youth-Nature experience whether it was from an administrative or participant standpoint or from the point of view of a parent who had a child participating in the Youth-Nature Program. The following chapter goes into detail as to the qualitative method employed in obtaining these detailed accounts as well as any ethical considerations relevant to the study.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted to address the research questions. The research aims to gain an understanding of adult participant experience of a particular program, using phenomenological inquiry, as described by Adams and Van Manen (2008) and Moustakas (1994). This chapter outlines the various elements of the methodology employed in the research. It begins by identifying and explaining the qualitative inquiry used and follows with a description of the participants involved in the study and the data collection methods used with these participants. The subsequent section treats the techniques used for analysis of the data collected and the final section presents an overview of important ethical considerations for the project.

A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Experiences

As a research methodology, phenomenology revolves around understanding the meaning or nature of everyday experiences on a deeper level (Van Manen, 1990). Adams and Van Manen (2008) describe phenomenological research as “the study of lived experiential meaning and attempts to describe and interpret these meanings in the ways that they emerge and are shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and non-cognitive sensibilities, and by our preunderstandings and presuppositions” (para. 2). Phenomenology involves the assembling of perspectives from a number of participants (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). This study considered the experiences of several people (principals, teachers, parents, and a park employee) in an attempt to construct an understanding of the essence of school field trips in general with particular attention to the shared experience of the Youth-Nature Program. In probing into the particular experience, phenomenological inquiry is not so focussed on the

factuality of an account, but more so on how truly an account reflects the meaning of an experience as it was lived by a particular person (Van Manen, 1990). Naturally, this implies that a single experience may prove to have various facets and meanings as reported by the different individuals who have lived the experience. This does not hinder the relevance or applicability of the findings, however, as the goal is not to find consensus on how an experience is perceived, but to find deep, subjective meaning of how an experience is lived and assimilated by a participant.

According to Payne (1997) there are multiple reasons for considering a phenomenological approach to investigating how experiences of environments are constructed via different pedagogical means. One main reason is the central role that experience plays in environmental education (Payne, 2003). For many environmental educators, “experience is at the pedagogical heart and curricula soul of a great deal of learning in environmental education” (Payne, 2003, p. 172). A phenomenological approach would focus on understanding the nature of these experiences so seminal to environmental education.

Two branches of phenomenology can be considered. Van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as accounting more for researcher interpretation whereas Moustakas (1994) describes transcendental phenomenology as putting more emphasis on the researcher approaching the data with as few preconceptions possible (Creswell et al., 2007). For this study, my perspective as researcher was crucial to the investigation due to the fact I was directly involved in the Youth-Nature Program as coordinator and guide. As such, hermeneutics would be the more appropriate branch of phenomenology to follow for this study, as it would allow for the integration of my perspective both as researcher and study participant.

While phenomenology would appear to be the best-suited approach for the investigation

at hand, it is important to recognise its limitations. The detailed understanding afforded by a phenomenological approach, while providing in-depth understanding of a small number of accounts, limits the generalisability of findings using this method (Van Manen, 1990). The aim of this study, however, was not to produce findings that could be applied universally to school field trips, but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation within the Brome-Missisquoi region specifically. Therefore, the limited ability to generalise the findings does not impact the overall intention of the research. Van Manen (1990) also stresses that because phenomenology is focused on uncovering the meaning of experiences, it cannot be relied on to solve problems. Once again, this facet of phenomenology poses less of a barrier in the context of this study, as the goal was to understand an experience as opposed to aiming at rectifying a problem.

Research Design

This study sought to understand the nature of schools' adult participant experiences of field trips more broadly and of the Youth-Nature Program more specifically. As such, only the schools currently involved in the Youth-Nature Program were invited to participate. With one of the main goals being to understand why schools engage in experiences of this type, the inquiry revolved around the perspectives of the decision-makers of the school community, i.e. the adults. In order to provide an account of the experience from the perspective of the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton, I was involved as program coordinator and guide.

Participants and Sites

The Québec school system is divided according to language with children pursuing their studies either in French or in English, depending on certain conditions ("Instruction in English,"

2017, <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/school-boards/special-cases/instruction-in-english/>). The 11 schools actively participating in the Youth-Nature Program are distributed in two separate school boards: an English school board and a French school board. All 11 schools were invited to partake in the study. The original goal was to interview subjects across a minimum of three and a maximum of four different schools, with each school having a principal interview, a teacher interview or small focus group, and a parent interview or small focus group. The hope was to have a mix of participants from both school boards. After invitations were distributed, a total of eight schools expressed interest in participating. When the time came to follow up on the invitation and schedule interviews, representatives from a total of five schools were able to participate.

The final participants were selected according to availability, willingness to contribute to the study, and my preference for representation of both the English and French school boards. From these four schools, participants included three school principals, seven teachers, four parents, and myself (see Table 1 for breakdown of school participants). Principals and teachers had a school group participating in the program at one time or another (pilot year and/or second year). Parents had a child participate in the program at one time or another (it did not matter whether the parent was present for any of the outings). For the purpose of clarity all are referred to as ‘participants’ in the Youth-Nature Program hereafter.

The participants represented both school boards, although there were more participants from the English school board. Of the three principals, two were with the English and one was with the French school board. Of the seven teachers, five were under the English and two under the French. Three out of four parents had children attending English schools and the fourth

parent had a child attending a French school.

Table 1

Breakdown of Interview and Focus Group Participants

School Name	Participants		
	Principals	Teachers	Parents
Sherwood Elementary	Marie	Cordelia and Jeff	John, Harold, and Carol
Green Valley	Rita	Adaline, Oli, and Carrie	-
Saint-Augustine	Annik	David*	Ben
Frère-Jacques	-	Camille*	-

Note. Camille and David were interviewed together. Schools with the French school board are shaded in grey.

Number of years' experience of the Youth-Nature Program varied across the participants. Of the three school principals, two had classes that participated in the pilot (2015-2016) and were participating in the 2016-2017 offering of the Youth-Nature Program and one principal was new to the program in 2016-2017. Of the seven teachers who participated in focus groups, five were new to the program in 2016-2017 and one had only participated in the pilot year. One teacher out of seven participated in the pilot and was participating in 2016-2017 as well. Of the four parents interviewed, three had children who participated in the pilot and continued to participate in 2016-2017 while one had a child who participated in the program for the first time in 2016-2017. All four parents had children who regularly participated in outdoor activities both through school, in the community, and with their families. One parent was a retired teacher, but continued to work in the school milieu in a different capacity.

Data Collection

The data for this study was comprised of interview and focus group transcriptions and field notes. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, and parents involved in the Youth-Nature Program either by focus group or individual interview. Interview data was supplemented by my own field notes, which were recorded after each field trip. Data collection was scheduled during and after the fall field trips (September to November) of the 2016-2017 Youth-Nature Program.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviewing aims to understand the lived experience of others and is a particularly efficient approach to inquiry when the researcher's goal is to understand the meaning of educators' experiences (Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are usually guided by a set of open-ended questions that are decided on prior to the interview (Ayres, 2012). A semi-structured interview affords the researcher more control over the topics than in an unstructured interview, however there is no predetermined range of responses to each question as is typical of a structured interview (Ayres, 2012).

The amount of time for an interview or focus group and the exact questions asked depended on the person or group at hand. Principals participated in individual interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes. Teachers participated in small focus group interviews composed of two to three participants that lasted approximately one hour. The process for parent interviews was similar to that for teachers. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions (see Appendix B for sample of questions asked) meant to induce a narrative. The questions revolved around previous experiences of field trips, the experience of the Youth-Nature Program

specifically, and the possibility of a future collaboration between the school and the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton via the Youth-Nature Program or a similar program. Across the different categories of participants (principal, teacher, parent) the questions remained similar with wording changed slightly to suit the nature of a given participant.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, given a brief outline of how the interview would proceed, and asked to read and sign a copy of the Informed Consent Form. Interviews ended with an open invitation for interviewees to add any other information they deemed relevant or important. Interview and focus group discussions took place in a mutually agreed upon location, most often in a school classroom or office. I voice recorded all sessions using Garage Band and transcribed them myself. All participants were contacted and offered the opportunity to review the completed transcripts however none chose to do so.

Field note recording.

Due to the social learning approach applied to the study of the Youth-Nature Program and school field trips in general, it was important to gain an understanding of the experience of the program from my perspective as program coordinator and hiking guide. As such, during the fall field trips I recorded field notes in a journal. Van Manen (1990) cites close observation as a means of collecting information pertaining to the experiences of others. In this journal, I noted key “perceptions and interpretations of events” (Tuckett & Stewart, 2014, p. 110) taking place before, during, and after a given field trip. Field note taking began after ethics approval and ended at the time of the last field trip. Once hikes began, I devoted approximately 30 minutes following each hiking field trip to taking notes on reflections on the outing using a series of pre-

determined topics: teachers and parents; students; guide; and setting, logistics, and safety. I added any further observations as they arose. Journal entries included any observations made during the Youth-Nature Program as a whole and were not limited to the schools participating in interviews and focus groups. For schools that did not participate in interviews, however, written permission to use the journal entries was requested.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data obtained from interviews and recording field notes was guided by a combination of the “Phases of thematic coding analysis” described in Robson (2011, p. 476) and the iterative process of describing, classifying, and connecting described by Dey (2003). Robson enumerates the phases of thematic coding analysis as beginning with a preliminary familiarisation with the data followed by generating initial codes, identifying themes, constructing thematic networks, and then integrating and interpreting the treated data (2011). These approaches were applied in tandem to make meaning of the data collected.

The initial familiarisation with the data collected for this study took place during transcription of the interviews. Preliminary codes were generated using the interview questions asked (see Appendix B) as well as any themes emerging from the data itself. In a second round of description and classification, preliminary codes were grouped together into the following three broad themes: 1) general opinions and perspectives on field trips; 2) considerations when deciding to participate in field trips; and 3) experiences of field trips. The first two themes were categorised according to the study’s original research questions and aims. The categories of the first theme were classified according to whether they appeared to have a positive, negative, or variable influence on the general opinion of field trips. The second theme’s categories were

classified according to which party has the capacity to influence them and also according to their importance to program participation over different time frames. The third theme was used to illustrate important findings across the first two themes. At each level of description and classification, thematic maps were created to conceptualise the themes and categories, their associated codes, and any important connections. A summary of the categories and questions guiding each of them is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Illustration of Categories and Themes That Emerged During and That Guided Data Analysis

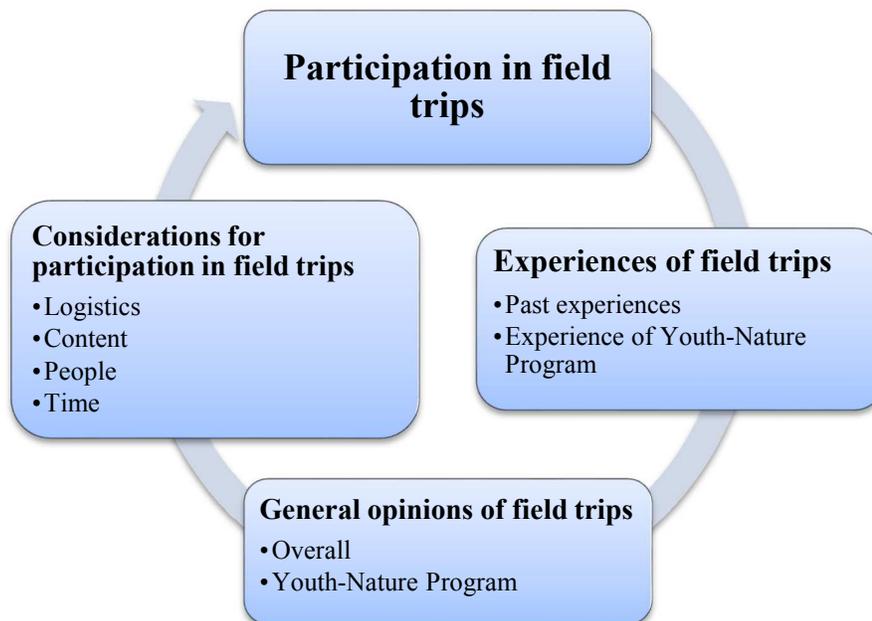


Figure 2. Diagram depicting the different categories and themes that emerged during data analysis with arrow indicating how they are related to each other and to participation in field trips overall.

The relevance and applicability of the themes, categories, and sub-categories were verified according to their recurrence in data from each interview. Excerpts of data that clearly

exemplified the chosen themes and categories were used in presentation of the findings while portions of data that appeared isolated in a small number of transcripts were put into a miscellaneous category and later either subsumed under one of the three broad categories or disregarded as irrelevant to the overall aim of the study.

Presenting data from French interviews and focus groups.

Some interviews and focus groups were conducted in French, which had implications on how the data were presented in the Findings. In order to ensure clarity while staying true to the original data, all quotes from French interviews and focus groups were indicated in the original language in-text with an English translation included as a footnote.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the research conformed to the appropriate ethical standards, a Request for Ethical Review was submitted to the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. As per university requirements, written approval of the Request for Ethical Review was received prior to contacting research participants and collecting data. The ethical considerations were respected (as outlined in the approved request) for the entire duration of the research process.

Basing the study on schools and members of the school community had an impact on this research. First, school boards were contacted so that any particularities regarding research in their schools could be observed and followed. Second, the relationships between principals, teachers, and parents and the implications of their participation in the research needed to be taken into consideration. The decision to conduct interviews with principals separately from teachers was intentional as was the decision to conduct separate teacher and parent focus groups. This was done in an attempt to minimise the influence of power in any of these relationships.

Teachers were able to openly discuss without their principal present and parents were able to discuss their perspectives freely without worrying about the possibility of their responses influencing their children's teachers' opinions.

Confidentiality and anonymity.

Upon invitation to participate in the study, participants were informed that all efforts would be made to keep their participation confidential and anonymous. In the interest of maintaining anonymity, pseudonyms were used and any identifying information was removed in the transcribed interviews. Participants were allowed to indicate the pseudonym of their choice, however most declined the offer and so were assigned one. All data were kept on an external hard drive stored in a locked drawer. All data will be permanently disposed of from every storage location (electronic and paper) five years following the approval of the final paper.

The methodology followed for this study resulted in a rich data set comprised of interviews and focus group discussions revolving around the topic of field trip participation. Using the abovementioned themes and categories (Figure 2) to guide analysis, the findings are arranged according to their relevance to each research question, allowing for comparison and contrasting between study participants' responses.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study seeks to investigate the potential possibilities to support environmental education through school field trips with the ultimate goal of encouraging long-term collaboration between local schools and the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS) via the Youth-Nature field trip program. Through investigation of the lived experiences of principals, teachers, and parents, this study aimed to understand what field trips meant to the adult members of the school community and in particular what factors influenced their decisions to have their students or children participate in field trips. The latter aspect was explored more generally using accounts from past field trip experiences and also more specifically using discussions of experiences from the Youth-Nature Program. Investigation of participants' experiences of the Youth-Nature Program allowed for a deeper understanding of what is important to participants specifically within the context of a local outdoor field trip designed with environmental education objectives in mind. For this portion of the investigation I integrated my perspective as program guide and coordinator by presenting data from my field journal in tandem with the participants' opinions and accounts. The data from participant interviews and my field journal were compiled, compared, and contrasted to create a global portrait of the Youth-Nature Program experience. This portrait will serve as the basis for discussion on the possibilities of collaboration between the PENS and primary schools via this field trip-based program.

Findings are arranged according to the first three research questions guiding this study: what do field trips mean to study participants; what do they take into consideration when deciding to participate in a field trip; and what is most important to long-term participation? In

the first section, the meaning of field trips for principals, teachers, and parents is explored. Overall, participants appear to regard field trips as invaluable opportunities and experiences for students despite the fact that teachers have a tendency to associate field trips with certain challenges. The second section focuses more on what features make a field trip most attractive to participants making them want to have their students or children participate. Participants seemed to prefer field trips that offer students an experience with multiple dimensions ranging from the educational and physical to the social and recreational. This portion of the findings allows for a closer look at participants' perspectives on what constitutes an 'educational' experience and reveals that curriculum-related learning is not the only kind of learning that participants perceive as valuable- as much by parents as by educators. Finally, the closing section of the Findings considers participants' outlooks on the possibility of a long-term collaboration between the PENS and the primary schools via the Youth-Nature Program (or a similar program). Overall, participants appeared to have positive opinions of field trips and the Youth-Nature Program in particular with certain elements highlighted as key to inciting longer-term program participation.

What Field Trips Mean to Participants

Through accounts of their experiences, principals, teachers, and parents outlined both positive and negative dimensions of participating in field trips. All participants highlighted the opportunities field trips can create for students while principals and teachers were the parties most concerned with and affected by the challenges these experiences can create. Regardless of these challenges, however, there was a general sense that field trips are considered valuable as the positive impacts these opportunities can have on students are seen as outweighing the challenges they may present to teachers.

For principals, teachers, and parents, field trips are considered valuable by virtue of the role they can play in broadening students' horizons and in providing alternative contexts for learning to take place. Partaking in field trips via school is viewed as instrumental in exposing students to a greater number of experiences in general and in some instances it provides experiences that might otherwise be unavailable to them. For instance, Annik, principal at Sainte-Augustine, said participating in field trips is "une ouverture sur plein de choses."¹ With regards to the importance of making more opportunities available to students in general, Rita, principal at Green Valley, stated:

I've been a principal for fourteen years and I've always encouraged the teachers to go on field trips with their kids. To go out of the school and to experience as much as they can experience in the outside world. Whether it's nature, whether it's for the arts, whether it's cultural, skiing, hiking, seeing a play, exploring, overnight camping... It's just everything that a child does expands their horizons. So I encourage it always.

This quote suggests that for Rita increasing the number and variety of experiences children have is important and something that she sees schools as capable of encouraging through field trips.

Field trips were viewed as a means of introducing students to experiences they might not have in the home due to possible lack of financial resources, time, or interest. For parents like Sherwood School's John, Harold, and Carol, this underscores the value of school programs that make these experiences accessible to more children. John, a Sherwood parent, used an example involving sports field trips to illustrate this:

What that means is that the *value* of [this kind of program] is *enormous* [spoken emphasis

¹ Translation: "an opening to a variety of things"

indicated with italics]. And it expands the opportunities for these kids to experience things. It's sad that there are kids who live in Sherwood who, were it not for [these field trips], would... never, ever be able to [participate].

This comment illustrates once again that field trips are considered valuable experiences and also alludes to the important role a school can play in facilitating these experiences for children.

All participants agreed upon the potential for field trips to promote valuable learning, whether the learning is school-related or not. With regards to school-related learning, comments were made on the ability of a field experience to reinforce what is learned in class and also on the ability of a field trip to increase student motivation. Sherwood School parents Carol and John referred to Science curricula and how field trips such as visits to a butterfly exhibit or to a local distillery can effectively illustrate class-learned concepts. Marie, principal at Sherwood, highlighted how students who struggle with classroom learning might find an important source of engagement and motivation through field trips.

Field trips were also recognised as opportunities for extracurricular learning. Harold, parent at Sherwood, said, "Any time the school brings them to a place outside of the ordinary it's interesting, it's educational. Even if they're not learning the curriculum." This suggests that a new experience can be considered educational simply by virtue of novelty. This was also discussed as it pertains to the social interactions occurring on field trips. For teachers and principals, social interactions during field trips were deemed important to creating cohesion within the student group and forming stronger bonds between a teacher and his or her students, particularly when the field trip takes place at the beginning of the school year. Parents in particular discussed how the presence of new adults and exposure to different behaviours can

have an impact on children. Overall, it appears participants view field trips as inherently educational due to the novelty factor.

While the advantages of field trips were discussed at length, principals and teachers also outlined important challenges they tend to associate with field trips. These challenges revolved primarily around the added responsibilities they create for the teachers and the financial costs incurred. A principal and teacher from one school brought up the issue of class time lost to field trips. All teachers interviewed discussed the responsibilities associated with field trips and the stress this can cause when added to a schedule they consider to be overloaded already. For example, Cordelia, teacher at Sherwood School said, “The amount of planning you have to put into something weighs on you” while Oli, teacher at Green Valley, stated, “It’s the amount of work on top of everything else.” Adaline, one of Oli’s colleagues at Green Valley, commented on the effect this extra work can have on teachers’ perceptions of field trips perhaps causing teachers to “shy away from them.” Together these comments suggest that any negative associations made with field trips mostly have to do with the added responsibilities for the teachers and this may result in a certain reluctance to participate.

For some teachers, the challenges associated with field trips are compounded by confusion over how field trips fit into their roles as educators. Several alluded to the fact that hours devoted to the organisation of an outing go beyond the hours for which they are compensated under their contracts and furthermore, aspects of field trip planning are not explicitly included in their job description. Cordelia, teacher at Sherwood School alludes to this, saying, “At that point it’s kind of all volunteer work, right? It doesn’t fit into your workload, it doesn’t fit into your pay scale, ... you’re doing it for the kids.” This is a sentiment echoed by

other teachers, suggesting that while these experiences are perceived as valuable, field trips can require teachers to put in hours of work that go beyond what they are compensated for as educators.

All school principals and teachers mentioned the issue of costs associated with field trips. Principals had different attitudes toward the importance of costs associated with field trips. For Marie and Annik, principals at Sherwood and Sainte-Augustine, cost seemed to be of particular importance. For Marie, a high cost may require her to say no to a certain experience and for Annik, “Le pire c’est les frais. C’est toujours la question de frais.”² Rita, principal at Green Valley, had a slightly different take on the role cost plays in field trip participation. For Rita, cost is not necessarily the determining factor when it comes to deciding whether to offer opportunities to children, as demonstrated when she stated, “The money’s always found somewhere”. In addition to the added responsibilities, principals and teachers generally perceive cost as an important challenge associated with field trips, however the extent to which this pressure is seen as a barrier depends on the individual.

For Sherwood School, preserved class time was introduced as a very important issue when considering field trip participation. Marie, principal at Sherwood, feels her school’s openness to new opportunities has put them in a vulnerable position with regards to the amount of time left for learning in class, saying, “At one point we have to make sure we don’t do too many.” Cordelia, teacher at Sherwood, also mentioned the amount of class time preserved as being an important issue in their school. Cordelia, however, commented that the importance of losing class time might depend on the students and on the conditions in a given school year.

² Translation: “The worst part is the cost. It is always a question of cost.”

Contrary to school staff, Sherwood parents did not share the view that there were too many field trips, but rather felt there could be more.

Overall the findings suggest that despite the challenges field trips can impose, participants deem them to be valuable experiences due to the positive impacts these opportunities can have on students. For instance, Cordelia, teacher at Sherwood School, recalled a certain student's experience of the Youth-Nature Program in the fall of last year, saying:

When we went hiking he said, "I can't believe how beautiful it is, I could dance." And then he starts dancing... those moments make all of the work worthwhile. Because that's going to be a memory that that kid has for the rest of his life. And that's the kind of thing that is worth putting in two or three hours of work for. Even if it's just that one kid.

This suggests not only that a positive impact on even one student can make the extra work worthwhile, but also that in the teacher's eyes, this impact has the potential to be far reaching into the student's life.

Important Considerations for Field Trip Participation

Participants were asked to describe what they take into consideration when deciding to participate in a field trip experience and were also asked to describe their experiences of the Youth-Nature Program to date. These questions were designed to gain insight into what is important for these parties when considering whether a field trip is, essentially, worthwhile or not. Responses generally built on the previous discussion of opportunities and challenges, going into more detail as to what opportunities are most desirable for schools participating in a field trip and what pressures are to be minimised or eliminated if possible. Together with my field notes, these categories of discussion are analysed with regards to their interactions and impacts

on the functioning of field trips in general and of the Youth-Nature Program more specifically.

Participants discussed several elements that contributed to making a field trip seem worthwhile, namely the content of the field trip, how well it is organised, and the people participating in the field trip. In terms of the field trip content, participants discussed their preference for experiences that are educational, physical and outdoors, and that occur within the immediate community. Most agreed that overall organisation is key and that minimising the responsibilities required on the part of the school is especially valuable. Finally, some interviewees discussed how the decision to participate can ultimately rest on the how well the activity coincides with the interests of the principals and teachers involved and how well they believe their students will engage in the proposed activity.

Educational component.

As previously discussed, participants perceive field trips as potentially valuable learning opportunities. Naturally, when asked what is taken into consideration when deciding to participate in a field trip, principals, teachers, and parents emphasised the importance of a field trip having some educational value. David and Camille, teachers at Sainte-Augustine and Frère-Jacques, expressed a preference for field trips that relate to what is being taught in class. Both Camille and David incorporated the Youth-Nature fall field trip into their Science classes and my observations of both of their field trips indicated that they were the teachers who appeared to have prepared their students the most for the outing.

While principals and teachers alluded to the fact that participating in a field trip that is related to what is being taught in class is advantageous, none discounted the importance of extracurricular learning. That is, participants discussed the educational value of an experience in

broader terms. There seemed to be a general sense that various types of field trip experiences can be considered educational and are therefore still valuable. For instance, John, a parent at Sherwood, said, “Trips that have an educational component to them are really great. A big educational component. I love museums or farms or facilities where things are made.” This comment suggests John recognises various types of experiences as educational, not just experiences that are directly related to the curriculum. As an additional example, Carrie, a teacher at Green Valley, cited learning a skill as something educational that can result from a field trip. Cordelia, a teacher at Sherwood, and Adaline, a teacher at Green Valley, highlighted the importance they place on learning through experience. For example, Cordelia commented on the Youth-Nature Program’s impact on enhancing the experience of walking through the woods:

It brings it beyond just walking up a mountain and [you learn] to look for things like bear claw marks on the tree. That’s cool. [And] the next time you go hiking and you notice it on your own, it makes you feel good. You’ve got something new in your repertoire of what to look out for and what to talk about with your friends.

This suggests that for Cordelia, learning goes beyond relating the experience to class material. This was a sentiment that seemed to underlie several participants’ accounts, suggesting what participants consider most important is that students grow intellectually through an experience.

These findings tie in with the notion that field trips provide opportunities for students to broaden their horizons, suggesting that principals, teachers, and parents consider new experiences as inherently educational and therefore valuable. This was demonstrated by the clear and concise response Rita, principal of Green Valley, gave when asked what was important to her in a field trip: “Something that’s new to [the students]. Something that will teach them.”

Overall the discussion of the educational value of field trips was relatively open and not restricted to relevance to the curriculum. While some expressed an interest in field trips that can be used to support what is being taught in class, it was not seen as the only way of making a field experience educational.

Physical activity and outdoors components.

In addition to an educational component, nearly all principals, teachers, and parents expressed an interest in activities that are physical and bring students outdoors. John (Sherwood parent) discussed how he sees encouraging physical activity as advantageous, even for students who are already fairly active compared to others. He added that he feels combining physical activity with an educational piece, for example, in a hike at the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton would be the "ultimate combination". Marie, principal at Sherwood, touched on outdoor experiences in general, saying:

I really like the outdoors component whether it be hiking or something else. If they're doing an activity outside it's important. Especially now that kids are more "techy". They don't spend enough time [outdoors] after school so we kind of have to do a minimum as a school.

Marie's comment suggests she believes there is a need for more outdoor experiences and also that she recognises the role a school can play in providing these experiences.

With regards to the outdoors component, some participants specified that contact with nature is favourable. For example, when talking about the Youth-Nature Program, Annik, principal at Sainte-Augustine said, "Je trouve ça super intéressant parce que ça combine l'activité

physique... [avec] tout ce qui est de la nature.”³ She added that her having been a physical education teacher and her being “une sportive dans l’âme”⁴ influenced her interest in this type of activity for her students. Lastly, she commented that she values the seasonal component to the program as it allows the students to observe the diversity between the seasons. This suggests Annik recognises the importance of experiences that promote physical activity and contact with nature, particularly a contact with nature that provides students with an opportunity to observe diversity through the seasons. For these reasons she considers the Youth-Nature Program hikes interesting and worthwhile experiences for her students.

Field trips with physical activity and outdoors components were seen as having the potential to challenge students, an aspect that was seen as advantageous for various reasons. With regards to the Youth-Nature Program, hiking the mountain proved challenging for some students. For instance, Oli, a teacher at Green Valley who participated in the program last year, talked about one student in particular who found the hike to be demanding, but insisted on doing it anyway and was even able to complete the hike to the summit. Oli said, “And she did it! It was hard. She worked very hard. But she did it.” This suggests Oli feels the challenge provided a student with an opportunity to grow and feel pride in her accomplishment. Observations recorded in my field notes on other group’s experiences corroborated the notion that the hiking was physically challenging for some students. Various portions of my notes suggested there was another dimension to the challenge in that students who did not have difficulty hiking had some difficulty stopping to wait for their peers to catch up. I observed this on several occasions,

³ Translation: “I find it super interesting because it combines physical activity with everything that is nature-related.”

⁴ Translation: “an athlete at heart”

however did not see it as problematic as this often provided an opportunity to chat with students informally about nature, as demonstrated by the following excerpt from my notes: *Once again, the more energetic kids were at the front [of the group] which provided a good opportunity to talk casually, more openly about nature and answer their questions or review things we had already seen.* These findings suggest that the challenges inherent in the Youth-Nature hikes experience provided some students moments for growth and learning, moments that were deemed valuable by teachers, myself included.

In sum, the physical activity and outdoors components of a field trip were described as important aspects of field trips due to the benefits they can have on the students. In some instances, these benefits were discussed as they relate to encouraging more time outdoors and in nature and in other instances, they were discussed within the context of the challenges they can present for students.

Community component.

Several participants highlighted the value of field trips that take place within their community. This aspect was seen as important both for the immediate benefits to the students and for the impacts over a longer time frame.

For participants at Sherwood School and Green Valley, partaking in field trips within the community presents an important opportunity and is instrumental in promoting connections to and knowledge of where students live. Marie, principal of Sherwood School, discussed how her school participates in various outings in the immediate community, saying this helps students to “appreciate what they have and... [to] use it.” For Carol, John, and Harold, parents at Sherwood, not only are these opportunities valuable, but they are abundant in the immediate community.

When speaking about the potential of the mountain (where the Youth-Nature Program hikes take place) for learning opportunities, Carol said:

We have to take advantage of the kids growing up right next to the mountain. [Not taking advantage of the mountain] as an educational tool and as [an] experiential tool and as a way of building community and a connection to this place just seems ridiculous.

These findings suggest that participants are aware of the opportunities for educational experiences within their local communities and they feel strongly about capitalising on these opportunities for the benefit of the children.

Other participants highlighted that field trips within the students' community make the experiences more relevant to the students' lives. This relevance was discussed by Adaline and Carrie, teachers at Green Valley, in terms students' abilities to make connections between what they know from their "backyard" and what they are learning on the field trip. They noted how field trips that are farther away can make it more difficult for students to recognise elements they know from home. Adaline said, "[The students] have to feel like it's right in their backyard. ... And then they really do make that connection.... When it's not too far, then [they] can really make that connection to home."

The relevance of a community-based field trip was also discussed with regards to how the experience and any knowledge gained will serve the students beyond the field trip. Several participants remarked how visiting the park through the Youth-Nature Program was perceived as helping students connect with their local natural environment and, because it is taking place close to home, may encourage them to return to visit the Park. For instance, Annik, principal of Sainte-Augustine, believes the students who participated in the Youth-Nature hikes will have

“plus de respect pour la nature”⁵ and because they have discovered the park they will be more likely to return and enjoy it with their parents. This point was also brought up by Carrie, a teacher at Green Valley, who added, “It’s nice to promote local.” Cordelia, a teacher at Sherwood, commented more specifically on the content of the hikes and how learning about one’s local natural environment has the potential to be more relevant to the students of the area. She used the example of students who will likely learn to hunt in the near future and how knowing more about the natural environment may prove significantly more useful to them than some things they learn in school.

From a logistical standpoint, participants also discussed community-based field trips as generally being ‘easier’ and carrying more impact. Some commented on this aspect in terms of proximity and how this makes certain things (like coordinating transportation) less complicated. This was also discussed from a more profound standpoint with regards to working within one’s community and how proximity and community ties can influence the impact of a program. For example Annik, the principal at Sainte-Augustine, said, “[Pour la] collaboration... j’ai toujours travaillé dans mon milieu. Je trouve ça facile.... Le PENS c’est des gens que je connais... donc c’est plus facile.”⁶ She added that she feels offering the Youth-Nature Program to members of the same community likely encourages participation, as individuals tend to be more interested in their own communities and feel a sense of belonging to them. She closed this thought saying, “Sutton.... c’est notre montagne.”⁷ This demonstrates how a field trip that takes place within the

⁵Translation: “more respect for nature”

⁶ Translation: “For collaboration, I have always worked in my area. I find it easy. The PENS, it is people I know so it is easier

⁷ Translation: “Sutton is our mountain.”

community can not only make relationships easier, but can also be more impactful on the participants because, once again, it is closer to home and more relevant to the participants' realities.

Partaking in field trips within the community seemed to appeal to participants a great deal. In some instances this was discussed from a more practical angle as interviewees acknowledged organising transportation and the like are easier when attending a venue close by, but many discussed this aspect of field trips more in terms of the relevance it has to students' lives as well as the sense of belonging it can instill.

Overall field trip organisation.

In addition to the abovementioned components, participants agreed they tend to prioritise field trips that are well organised. The notion of a 'turnkey' experience was alluded to by several participants, referring to a field trip that is 'ready-to-go' with the majority of the planning and preparation taken care of already. This aspect was highlighted as incentivising for teachers who, as previously mentioned, rarely have the time to go through the procedures that are often necessary when organising a field trip. The value of this type of field trip was demonstrated clearly by the comment made by Adaline, a teacher at Green Valley: "[Field trips that are almost entirely organised by someone else are] a bit more attractive because you're not putting so much more extra work on yourself". Participants went into more detail as to what logistical elements are integral to a turnkey field trip, as well as other important considerations for organising a successful field trip experience.

Role definition.

Role definition of the adults involved in the field trips was a topic discussed by interviewees and in my field notes. Clear role definition was seen as instrumental to the smooth operation of a field trip. For teachers, it is important the field trip be animated by someone who has knowledge of and genuine enthusiasm for the material and who also has some pedagogical experience. For some teachers, it is an added stress when they are charged with the responsibility of leading a field trip because this means they must prepare for a role for which they do not feel they have the experience or knowledge. This point was illustrated by Oli, a teacher at Green Valley, when she commented: “I don’t want to be the person who has to study before to explain everything to them after, you know?” David and Camille, teachers at Sainte-Augustine and Frère-Jacques, added that while it is desirable for someone who has knowledge of the material to lead an activity, it is equally important that that person know how to teach and truly engage the students. Cordelia, a teacher at Sherwood School, built on this discussion by bringing up the notion of enthusiasm, in particular my enthusiasm for the subject when guiding the spring hike of last year’s Youth-Nature Program:

So we go on this hike and we’re stopping and we’re listening to birds. And we’re learning about the birds and you’re so excited about them and your enthusiasm is there and it’s catching.

Prior to this Cordelia had mentioned that she is not particularly interested in birds (the theme for the spring hike), yet this quote demonstrates that she was able to engage with the topic regardless because of the interest shown and shared by the person leading the activity, in this case, me.

From my perspective as the researcher and guide for the hikes, clear role definition for

the guide and the adults accompanying the students can make all the difference in the organisation the day of the actual field trip. I made reference to the juggling of roles and responsibilities in my field notes:

With some groups I have the impression that I instinctively enforce discipline.... because I am a substitute teacher...where it is my responsibility to ensure students are well-behaved and respectful. I sense that I am perhaps blurring the lines between these two distinct roles.... Within the context of the field trip, however, [disciplining is] not necessarily my role. And in the future, it might not be a role that is comfortable for another guide. [For this reason] the roles need to be [clarified].... teachers and parents need to be present with the guide, providing support at all times.

This excerpt from my notes reflected observations made on several field trips. Outings that went most smoothly were the ones where teachers assumed a role that revolved around facilitating the activity and ensuring the students were participating. This gave me the space necessary to lead the activity with as few interruptions as possible. Activity facilitation was most important when students seemed confused by the activity or got easily distracted. At times, it required a parent or teacher to read the sheet with the students and help them understand how they might go about answering. Some teachers appeared to have a technique to manage their student group during the outing. Carrie mentioned this during the interview with Green Valley teachers. She said, “I purposefully am the trouble-shooter”. I had noted that David, teacher at Sainte-Augustine, took on a similar role with his class. He did not assign himself a group during the fall field trip, but instead made sure he was able to ‘float’ between groups ensuring everything was going smoothly.

Activity preparation and follow-up.

Some participants displayed a preference for field trips that offered preparation and follow-up thereby putting the experience in context for the students. For Ben, a parent at Sainte-Augustine, seeing his daughter use the provided material to prepare for the Youth-Nature fall field trip reassured him because it showed him there is a certain organisation to the experience. David and Camille, teachers at Sainte-Augustine and Frère-Jacques, indicated they were keen to make use of the materials the PENS provided to prepare the students for the fall Youth-Nature hike. From my perspective as the guide leading the fall hikes at the PENS, it was noticeable when a teacher had prepared his or her students in that the experience went more smoothly and the students appeared more on task when it came to completing the activity. While interviewees' comments focused more on the preparation for the activity my observations considered the importance of a follow-up as well, as demonstrated by the following excerpt from my field notes:

The more I think about the flow of the activity, the more I consider the importance of having a clear introduction and a clear conclusion. Until now, I have kept it loose in an attempt to keep the atmosphere comfortable and fluid for the teachers, parents, and students. I am concerned, however, that this does... diminish the impact of the activity.

After making this observation, I made a more concerted effort to close the activity at least with an informal discussion, as this would make the activity feel more complete.

In summary, my observations as researcher and field trip guide along with the interviewees' comments discussed the above aspects of field trip organisation in terms of how they minimise the pressures on teachers and also how they contribute to the smooth functioning of the actual outing. These were components that were reiterated within and across interviews:

“Different field trips take different amounts of work and so [the Youth-Nature field trip] is really nice because [all we have to do is pick our date and go]. And you do everything for us and we don’t have to plan anything.” (Cordelia, teacher at Sherwood School)

“C’est le fun quand c’est tout prévu comme [le Programme Jeunes-Nature]. Ça nous évite d’être en surcharge, par rapport à tout le reste des affaires.”⁸ (Camille, teacher at Frère-Jacques)

These participants’ comments are examples of teachers highlighting their appreciation for the Youth-Nature Program field trips due to the fact the program offers experiences that are almost entirely organised by an external organisation, minimising the amount of work teachers have to take on themselves in addition to their other responsibilities as educators.

The people participating in the field trip.

Much of the discussion of what makes a field trip worthwhile revolved around the experience itself, its content and how it is organised, however, participants were careful to acknowledge how the deciding factor can sometimes be the participants, both the students and the teachers. For instance, teachers discussed how they consider student behavior when deciding to participate in a field trip and also highlighted that field trips that coincide with their own interests are typically seen as most appealing, thereby encouraging them to participate.

Naturally, several participants mentioned their interest in a given activity as a prerequisite for participation. This applied particularly to principals and teachers. For instance, some

⁸ Translation: “It is fun when everything is organised for us, like in the Youth-Nature Program. It prevents us from feeling overwhelmed what with everything else.”

principals discussed how it was critical that a teacher be personally interested in a given field trip in order for it to work. For Annik, principal at Sainte-Augustine, “Ça prend un [professeur] intéressé.”⁹ For her, entirely voluntary participation means teachers are happy and willing to participate. Annik added that when this genuine interest is present, students can see this and this in turn stimulates their enthusiasm for the experience at hand. Marie, principal at Sherwood School, suggested that this also ensures that the experience has a certain meaning for the teachers: “I find that to get teachers really engaged in various things you have to go with their passions and interests. You don’t want to impose stuff that, to them, doesn’t really have any meaning.”

With regards to the Youth-Nature Program, various participants alluded to a pre-existing interest in nature and the outdoors as motivating them to participate in the program. When talking about Green Valley being invited to participate in the program, principal Rita said:

We have a school here where there’s a lot of people that are very interested and very keen and understand the importance of the outdoors and getting the kids in the outdoors and getting them into hiking... and all the experiences being in nature.

This suggests that agreeing to participate in the program relied to a degree on a pre-existing interest in the underlying nature of the experience. This was also true for David, teacher at Sainte-Augustine, who discussed how his personal background with the outdoors was what led him to teaching. He claimed that the outdoors are therefore “dans [ses] cordes”¹⁰ making a program like the Youth-Nature Program a ‘given’ for him.

⁹ Translation: “It takes a teacher who is interested.”

¹⁰ Translation: “his line of work”

All teachers discussed how they take into account the students that will be participating in a given field trip. Cordelia, teacher at Sherwood, said she considers whether her students can afford to miss the class time without jeopardising their studies. Other teachers discussed how they consider the behaviour of their students while on the actual field trip. Student behaviour proved to be tied to several factors including the level of maturity of the students, the presence of students with special needs, and also with regards to organisational elements of the field trip at hand. While most teachers discussed student behaviour as something that can be difficult to predict, most agreed that organisation can be key in encouraging appropriate behaviour. For instance, I observed that when parents were more engaged in the activity themselves, it helped keep the students on task. With regards to the hike with Sainte-Augustine, I noted: *Parents were central to the activity. They each had a group of four or five students and would stop and look at the activity sheet [with them] to answer questions.* This made it so that during the hike students listened more attentively to instructions and made a more concerted effort to complete the activity sheet. Cordelia, a teacher at Sherwood teacher, also mentioned how student behaviour can be positively affected by instilling a sense of routine about the hike. She mentioned how having three hikes throughout the year in the Youth-Nature Program could help the students get accustomed to how things work and that this could improve student behaviour overall.

In summary, participants take into consideration various factors when deciding to participate in a field trip. Some of these factors have more to do with the nature of the field trip itself (content and logistics) and others revolve around those participating in the field trip. With regards to the nature of the field trip, participants expressed an interest in experiences that are educational, that involve some element of physical activity and are outdoors, and that take place

in the immediate community. Based on the positive comments on the Youth-Nature Program, there was a general sense that field trips that offer a combination of these components are preferred and that overall it is important that the experiences be well organised so as to run smoothly and avoid placing added responsibilities on the teachers. In addition, participants acknowledged that their own personal interest in a given field trip subject and student behaviour were important considerations when deciding to participate or not.

Long-Term Participation in a Field Trip-Based Program

Participants were asked what their outlooks were on the possibility of long-term collaboration between their schools and the PENS via the Youth-Nature Program or a similar field trip-based program. The responses largely built on the previous discussion of what participants take into consideration when deciding to participate in a field trip. The discussions had two overarching themes: consistency and novelty. Participants noted several aspects of the program they felt were essential to conserve in moving forward with the program. Novelty was also important in the sense of ensuring students experience new things every time they visit the park. Finally, some participants presented ideas and suggestions on how the program can be further developed in a way they feel would continue to meet their requirements with regards to field trips and would be interesting and positive for those involved.

Overall, participants appeared to appreciate their experiences of the Youth-Nature Program thus far and commented on particular elements that they feel are important to conserve in the future. Cost was discussed to a degree, but its relative importance varied according to the participant. For instance, Camille, teacher at Frère-Jacques, said, “La gratuité... c’est sûr que

c'est un élément très incitatif parce que sinon il faut faire des choix.”¹¹ Others, like Annik and Rita, principals at Sainte-Augustine and Green Valley, mentioned that while the low cost is an advantage, their interest in this type of program would motivate them to liberate a budget for continued participation. This suggests there is a relationship between cost and the level of interest of those participating when it comes to field trip participation.

As mentioned above, various components of the Youth-Nature Program were deemed valuable such as the educational component, the physical activity and outdoors components, and the community component. Participants generally agreed that preserving the multi-faceted nature of the program is desirable all the while ensuring the program stays organised. John, a parent at Sherwood, stated that he feels it is only a matter of time before the program is well-established, saying, “Once it’s more established, [once] it’s been going on for four years, for five years, I think that it might be more solid just because of the fact that it’s worked for [that amount of time].” Rita, principal at Green Valley, commented that for her, while it is important the educational and the outdoors components be preserved, of utmost importance is that the experience continues to be positive for the students and for the teachers.

An element of the program participants appeared to particularly appreciate was returning to the park once per season for a total of three hikes throughout the year. This was seen as introducing both a sense of novelty and routine for the students. By coming to the park on three separate occasions, teachers viewed this as allowing students to get used to the venue and the way things work which would facilitate the outings over time. In addition, many participants felt

¹¹ Translation: “The fact that it is free really provides incentive because if it were not free, we would have to make choices.”

it was an advantage for students to witness the changes in the park from one season to the next. Not only did this allow them to see the natural diversity, as alluded to by Annik, principal at Sainte-Augustine, and Rita, principal at Green Valley, but it also preserved an element of novelty to the experiences, because no two hikes were the same.

Through discussions of other field trip-based programs, it seems the people involved in a program, both those offering the program and those participating, were equally important factors in long-term participation. Rita, principal at Green Valley, commented on a project that Green Valley has been participating in for over 30 years, saying, “it really is a joint effort” that has required extensive and consistent organisation. When Rita used the phrase “joint effort” she was referring to the collaboration between members of the school community and the organisation where the field trips took place. Marie, principal at Sherwood School, discussed two programs Sherwood had participated in that involved outdoor field trips and that did not continue because the main person in charge of the project was unable to continue working on it. These accounts from Rita and Marie suggest that they see the people involved as an important piece in long-term participation in a program.

When asked to comment on her outlook for the future of the Youth-Nature Program at Sainte-Augustine, Annik, school principal, mentioned that she feels participation depends on the interests of those at the school, particularly the principal. With regards to the Youth-Nature Program Annik said:

“C’est sûr que... tant que c’est moi qui est à la direction de l’école, c’est quelque chose qui pourra se répéter et qui va être toujours valoriser. D’une direction d’école à l’autre ça

pourra changer, par exemple. C'est sûr qu'on n'a pas tous la même vision...."¹²

This suggests that Annik feels it is possible that the Sainte-Augustine withdraws from the program if the administration changes and the new principal does not share her (Annik's) values with regards to this type of program. She goes on to consider, however, that if the program is well established before administration changes, it may very well continue so long as an agreeable collaboration has been founded. Annik added that she feels the collaboration between the PENS and Sainte-Augustine thus far is a positive one and that this is related to the fact that it involves people from the same community working together.

Cordelia, a teacher at Sherwood, also discussed how her own interests could be an important factor in her decision to continue participating in the Youth-Nature Program. She approached this aspect from a slightly different angle, however, saying that it had more to do with her interests as an educator and what she strives to provide her students. As a teacher, Cordelia's priority is exposing her students to the most new experiences possible. She therefore made a point of mentioning that despite the fact she values the Youth-Nature Program, she could not necessarily guarantee long-term participation as she would like to keep her options open in case other field trip opportunities are presented to her and her students.

Finally, some participants shared ideas they felt would add to the program in a way that would encourage long-term participation. Some suggested having a program for younger children and a program for older children, which would allow for the students to see progression in their experiences and abilities over the years. Others suggested integrating more school

¹² Translation: "For sure, as long as I am principal, this is something that can keep going and that will always be valued. From one school administration to another, however, that could change. Of course we do not all have the same vision."

subjects into the program outings, which could help justify missing class time to take part in the field trips. These two suggestions will be taken into consideration and included in a list of recommendations for further development of the program.

In conclusion, participants were able to identify factors that are of particular importance to long-term participation in a program like the Youth-Nature Program, however some factors appear to be easier to account for than others. For example, assuming the conditions remain the same for the PENS, it may be possible to maintain the low-cost, multi-faceted, and organised nature of the program. When one considers the importance of the people involved, both from the schools and from the PENS, however, it may be more difficult to account for the future of the program. School administration and teachers may change and over time those involved in coordinating and guiding the program may also change. These findings will be unpacked further in the discussion, which will serve as the basis for consideration of how the PENS may move forward with this program.

Chapter Five: Discussion & Conclusions

Introduction

The goal of this study was to better understand the nature of adult experiences and views of school field trips in hopes of laying the foundation for establishing a long-term nature education program for primary school children. The insights garnered from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with principals, teachers, and parents were compiled to first portray existing perspectives on field trips, then to look more specifically at what is important to participants when agreeing to participate in a field trip, and finally to gain an understanding of what factors are most important to long-term participation in a field trip-based program. My perspectives as researcher, program coordinator, and guide were also integrated into the latter two portions of the investigation. The findings relative to the aforementioned questions will be amalgamated to discuss how the PENS may use the information to establish the Youth-Nature Program over the long-term.

Discussion

The following discussion first treats the findings as they relate to each of the three research questions and then as they contribute to answering the final question as to how the investigation as a whole can contribute to establishing the program over the long term. First, the meaning of field trips to participants is reviewed in terms of how it relates to existing literature on field trips and also how the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the Youth-Nature Program coincide. A more detailed discussion of what factors influence participation in field trips follows. This discussion examines each factor and its relative importance to the program in question and includes recommendations for how these factors can be considered to

secure participation in the future. The final section presents an integrated examination of the participation in the program from a social learning perspective and concludes with final recommendations for implementation in the program over the long term.

What field trips mean to participants.

When asked to discuss what field trips mean to them, participants' responses outlined opportunities and challenges they tend to associate with field trips. Responses focused primarily on the opportunities field trips can provide students and several participants alluded to the important role a school plays in providing these opportunities to a greater number of children. There was, however, due acknowledgement of the challenges faced in participating in field trips, challenges that typically come in the form of added responsibilities for teachers as well as financial costs incurred. Overall, participants seemed to agree that field trips are valuable experiences for students and are typically worth the challenges they can present to the teachers.

Participants discussed field trips as valuable opportunities for students and schools were recognised as playing an instrumental role in facilitating these experiences. Participants see field trips as opportunities because they expose students to new educational settings and contexts. With regards to teachers' perspectives, these findings align with the findings presented by Michie (1998), stating that teachers see field trips as valuable experiences for their students. Less literature features school administrator and parent perspectives on field trips, though some (Michie, 1998) discussed administrative opposition as a potential barrier to field trips. In the context of this study, it would appear this does not represent a substantial barrier. Moreover, not only do principal and parent perceptions of field trips align, but the latter coincide well with the PENS' motivations in offering the Youth-Nature Program. Viewed through the lens of social

constructivism, which recognises knowledge and understanding as grounded in the historical and cultural contexts within which they are occurring (Burr, 2004), these findings might be seen as stemming naturally from the fact that the community is relatively small. Thus, increasing the likelihood of overlap in community members' perceptions and associations, in this case, pertaining to field trips.

The challenges participants tended to associate with field trips were of less consequence to parents and revolved primarily around organisational concerns affecting teachers. These concerns related to teachers' lack of time, limited experience, and also, to a degree, around the cost associated with field trips. Based on past experiences, principals and teachers noted the work that is involved in planning a field trip and how this can be overwhelming for teachers as they already have numerous responsibilities as educators. This corroborates findings from various other studies such as Tal and Morag (2009) and Behrendt and Franklin (2014) which outline the more negative aspects of participating in field trips, from the teachers' perspective. In more than one account, teachers underscored the fact that these responsibilities are not only overwhelming in terms of volume, but also in terms of a lack of familiarity and background knowledge on a given field trip subject. That is to say, organising a field trip often comes with tasks that teachers are not altogether familiar with, making it even more stressful. Similar findings were reported by Michie (1998) and Tal and Morag (2009). While various authors such as Patrick, Mathews, and Tunnicliffe (2013) suggest teacher education (primarily pre-service) as a possible means of increasing teachers' comfort with field trips, none of this study's participants suggested this as a means of alleviating the pressures they associate with field trips. This may be because pre-service education, while useful in preparing teachers for the task of organising or

leading field trips, ultimately does not help with the time factor. That is, even if they were better prepared to orchestrate field trips, the lack of time in an already busy schedule could still constitute an important barrier.

Important considerations for field trip participation.

When asked what is taken into consideration when deciding to have their students or children participate in a field trip, principals, teachers, and parents elaborated on the earlier discussion of what field trips mean to them, identifying specific components that influence the decision to engage or not. Particular elements of a field trip proved to be of greater importance, most notably an educational component, physical activity and outdoors components, and a community component. The educational component was defined in relatively broad terms, with some participants focusing on curriculum-related learning and others going beyond the curriculum to include the social and experiential dimensions. Participants also highlighted preference for field trips that involve physical activity and take place outdoors as these elements can present feasible challenges to the students, challenges interviewees believe are important for growth. Without being specifically asked to comment on this component, interviewees also identified a preference for field trips that occur within the immediate community. While each component was discussed as incentivising, no participants expressly stated that a field trip necessarily combine all components. They did, however, suggest that a combination of the most elements possible- as is the case with the PENS' Youth-Nature Program- is considered highly desirable.

A broad definition of 'educational'.

Aiming at understanding the meaning of field trips in terms of their educational value

revealed participants' definitions of the term 'educational' varied. Certain individuals, like Camille and David, teachers at Frère-Jacques and Sainte-Augustine, hinted at a preference for field trips that can be integrated into the classroom. Others placed less emphasis on this, with many feeling that a variety of experiences can be considered educational enough to legitimise a field trip. While this may be at odds with a more curriculum-related view of what is considered educational, it is a finding of significance when considering the goals the PENS has in offering these field trips. That is, while the Youth-Nature Program field trips are designed with learning in mind, the environmental education focus (emphasising direct experience in nature in a local context) may have posed a problem if educators and parents insisted on experiences related directly to the curriculum.

It is worth noting that the Youth-Nature Program field trips appeared to accommodate the various perspectives of what is considered 'educational'. That is, those who wished to link the field trip to the classroom did, and those who were less concerned with making the link did not. This suggests the Youth-Nature Program field trips are somewhat adaptable to the purposes and motivations of the teachers involved. This is a feature of field trips that Anderson, Kisiel, and Storksdieck (2006) say is often lacking. For this program, however, participants with slightly different agendas were able to take part in and appreciate the field trips, regardless of whether the goal was to tie the outing to classroom learning. While authors like Millan (1995) emphasise the importance of field trips being directly related to the curriculum, this might not be essential within the context of the Youth-Nature Program and the Brome-Missisquoi community. Perhaps, instead, it would be more appropriate to look to authors like Anderson et al. (2006) who "subscribe to a view that field trips can be educationally legitimate even when their focus does

not lie predominantly on cognitive objectives related to classroom topics, curriculum or standards” (p. 368) or Orion and Hofstein (1994) and DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) who discuss learning from field trips as additions and complements to classroom instruction as opposed to exclusively an extension of what occurs in the classroom.

The apparent disparity between the educational objectives of environmental education and more ‘traditional’ school learning was discussed in the Literature Review as potentially problematic for promoting EE in the school milieu. This study’s findings suggest that the Youth-Nature Program field trips likely provide an important interface for school and EE objectives to converge for the community of Brome-Missisquoi.

The outdoors and physical activity components.

The outdoors component was discussed by participants primarily in terms of the advantages it affords a field trip. This contrasts with existing literature that identifies the outdoors component as somewhat daunting or perplexing to educators (Dillon et al., 2005; Tal & Morag, 2009). This may have to do with the fact that most participants discussed a pre-existing personal interest in outdoor activity. One would therefore expect it to follow naturally that participants are attracted to these types of experiences for their students and children. Indeed, all discussed the outdoor component of the PENS’ program with great enthusiasm. As previously mentioned, this may be due to the fact that many expressed a personal interest in the outdoors and perhaps it is also linked to the fact that the PENS program coordinator and guide organises aspects teachers typically view as confounding within the context of an outdoor field trip (for example, taking the right trails and planning for weather).

While the enthusiasm conveyed for the outdoors and physical activity components bodes

well for the Youth-Nature Program, it highlights an important crux to the participation equation that authors like Hart (2003) have discussed. Participants' pre-existing interest or affinity for the type of activity proposed seems to be essential to inciting participation. In this study, all participants communicated their interest and preference for experiences like the Youth-Nature Program suggesting that, in its current form, the program has solid support. It follows, however, that this support may waver should certain individuals no longer be involved for various reasons. This is an important factor in the consideration of a partnership forming between the schools and the PENS and, ultimately, for the longevity of the program.

The value of field trips within the community.

All participants felt that a field trip occurring within the community enhanced the experience in multiple ways. Firstly, participants believed community activities to be inherently valuable as they provide students the chance to discover what they have available to them in their community, also making it more likely for students to revisit these locations afterwards. They discussed this specifically with regards to the PENS program and how exposing children to the mountain and to hiking will encourage them to go back with their families. Moreover, participants noted that bringing children to a local place for a field trip makes the experience more relevant. They saw the importance of offering children experiences they could relate to everyday life, saying that visiting a place in the community allowed students to make connections to what they knew from home, connections that would serve them well into the future.

While the term itself was not explicitly mentioned, participants' responses had undertones of an appreciation for a place-based approach to education for their students, at least

in the context of a field trip. Participants' discussion of the importance and relevance of field trips in the immediate community suggested they recognise the value of children's getting acquainted to and forming ties to their local environment, elements integral to a place-based approach to environmental education (Sobel, 1996, 2004). This may mean that the Youth-Nature Program has the potential to be viewed as more than just a novelty, one-off experience for the children to take part in, but rather as an integral part to their childhood education. This has important implications for the longevity of the program; as it suggests principals, teachers, and parents are aware of the value of what the Youth-Nature field trip program offers students, which may help secure support for its future.

Field trip organisation and the people involved.

Principals, parents, and teachers commented on the types of experiences they tend to favour when deciding to participate in a field trip, as covered in the above discussion. However they also highlighted organisation as key to inciting participation. The organisation component had mostly to do with facilitating the logistics, ensuring a program is run smoothly, and, ideally, minimising the work for the teachers. More than one interviewee alluded to the idea of a 'turnkey' experience- whereby everything is in place and requires fewest responsibilities possible on the parts of the teachers. All participants reported appreciating the level of organisation involved in the PENS program and also noted that small details such as the PENS reserving the buses made a significant difference. Participants also related organisation to the community-based aspect of the PENS program, saying that organisation is typically easier for field trips within the community. For some this facilitation was simply due to the fact that the venue is closer, making the trip shorter. One participant in particular noted that she feels

collaboration is easier with people from the same community.

Finally, the human component of field trips was discussed from several angles and appeared to constitute an important element to field trip participation. Participants noted the importance of the people in charge of a given field trip or program. Ensuring that the person leading a field trip has the necessary experience to effectively engage the students was considered key. While other portions of the discussion may have hinted that teachers appreciate when they are alleviated of certain responsibilities, these comments suggest teachers do nonetheless have certain expectations of the person who takes on the responsibilities. For example, participants commented on valuing this aspect of the Youth-Nature Program as it was led by someone (myself) who had experience as a teacher and who also readily communicated her enthusiasm, which made the activity more engaging.

This study's findings would suggest that in the eyes of the adults involved, the Youth-Nature Program offers valuable experiences to the primary students of the Brome-Missisquoi area. This appears to be related to the fact that the program, in its current form, builds on aspects deemed important to successful field trips such as opportunities for learning, time spent outdoors, and community-based experiences. Moreover, the program relieves teachers from many of the challenges associated with field trips due to the fact the PENS takes on many of the organisational and logistical responsibilities. Despite the positive evaluation, important variables remain that may be difficult to account for when considering the future of the program and the possibility of a long-term collaboration between the schools and the PENS.

Study implications for the future of the Youth-Nature Program.

As previously mentioned, it may be difficult to account for continued participation in the

Youth-Nature Program moving forward. Participant responses strongly suggested teacher and principal interest in a given activity is first and foremost essential to inciting school participation. With regards to the PENS program, several participants cited personal interest in nature and the outdoors. They made a clear link between these personal interests and their keenness to participate in the Youth-Nature Program. This suggests that personal interest or, at the very least, openness to a certain type of activity is an important source of motivation to participate. This is in line with findings from Hart (2003) in his exploration into why teachers provide outdoor and nature experiences for their students. While it makes sense that a person engages (for the most part) in activities that he or she is most interested in, it does indeed add an element of unpredictability with regards to long-term participation in a program in the event of changes to school administration or teachers.

Interviewees were asked to consider the Youth-Nature or similar (outdoor field trip-based) program and the possibility of a long-term collaboration with the PENS. Naturally, responses focused on preserving the aforementioned positive elements while minimising the negative elements. In fact, most participants commented that the program in its current form is very much appreciated. When asked to elaborate, the notions of consistency and novelty emerged. With regards to consistency, participants noted that it was important for the quality of the program to be conserved in terms of its educational value and organisation and also noted that continuing to provide the program at a low cost would be an advantage. With regards to novelty, nearly all participants emphasised the importance of ensuring the program does not become redundant and that students are continually having new experiences through the field trips.

The program: Consistency, novelty, and the current 'formula'.

The fact the Youth-Nature Program invites the schools to visit the program once per season for a total of three outings in the year is an element of the program that may potentially secure the novelty and consistency components that participants cited as important to continued participation. Not only did a number of participants see it as interesting in terms of observing the diversity from season to season, but as some commented, revisiting the park can instil a sense of routine for the students. Each season they return to the same location with the same rules, decreasing the element of surprise and novelty that can sometimes be responsible for students' unpredictable behaviour (Falk & Balling, 1982). On the other hand, having one visit per season ensures that students are not reliving the same experience because while the venue remains the same, the seasons and trails change, keeping the experience fresh and hopefully maintaining student interest.

This has important implications for the justification of how the program is currently designed. The PENS set up the Youth-Nature Program as a nature discovery experience, which, one might argue, easily justifies the schools' visiting on more than one occasion and in different seasons. However with schools being required to provide a different set of justifications for participating in field trips (and for missing class time), it is important that the three-season nature of the program is not seen as frivolous, but as an integral component to the overall educational agenda of the program. Existing literature on field trips argues that field trips cannot be standalone experiences (Kisiel, 2006) and that reinforcement of what is learned on a field trip is of utmost importance (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). Often the reinforcement is referred to as taking place in the classroom, however, perhaps returning to visit the park two more times after

the initial visit can constitute a suitable means of consolidating learning about the place.

Moreover, it is often considered essential for children to explore and gain familiarity with a venue before being expected to learn (Alon & Tal, 2017) suggesting students taking part in the Youth-Nature Program are being granted this opportunity to familiarise themselves with the PENS during each field trip, positively influencing their ability to learn.

The nature of the program and how it is delivered (for example, how many times each school visits and who takes on what responsibilities) can be seen as relatively easy to plan or control for moving forward with the Youth-Nature Program. There are, however, elements that were discussed as important and which may be more difficult to plan for over time. Among these elements are the people involved and also the presence of other opportunities that might compete for school time and resources.

The people offering the program and those participating.

In their accounts of experiences of field trip-based programs, participants acknowledged the important role the people running the program play in determining the program's success. When discussing other field trip-based programs schools have participated in, more than one account illustrated how a program tends to discontinue when the person running it is no longer available. In an ideal world, the PENS would have the same person at the helm of the Youth-Nature Program, continuously cultivating and maintaining relationships with partners at the local schools. However, some level of variability is to be expected in terms of park staff and therefore other measures may be necessary to help maintain some consistency if and when the person in charge of the program changes.

Participants' responses suggested that members of the school community, specifically

principals and teachers, can also have an impact on continued participation in a program. As previously mentioned, several commented on how a personal interest in a program has an important impact on willingness to participate. Some specified that over time, should teachers and administration change, for instance, this could potentially impact the school participation in the Youth-Nature Program. In one instance, a teacher mentioned that new opportunities may eventually present themselves to teachers and their classes which can make it difficult to guarantee their participation in the Youth-Nature Program.

Recommendation 1. This section represents areas that may be relatively difficult to plan for moving forward. The PENS cannot predict changes to administration and teachers one year to the next, however, as some participants pointed out, it may mean that the first few years of establishing the program are crucial to ensuring the program withstands any future changes within the school. It may also mean that in the future, outreach to the schools will require a more hands-on approach whereby the PENS visits the schools to present the program in person, hopefully piquing interest in principals and teachers who otherwise might not have thought to participate. With regards to the presence of other activities that may compete for school time or budget, while this represents a wildcard of sorts, it may also create an interesting opportunity. That is, perhaps this possibility highlights a need for greater communication and collaboration within the community regarding activities that are being offered to the children.

Establishing a long-term collaboration through the Youth-Nature Program.

This study was guided by a critical pedagogy of place approach to environmental education, adopting a social learning framework due to the Youth-Nature Program's goal of effecting change through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. The change in question is

the schools' adoption of the Youth-Nature Program into their annual routine. Taking a close look at principals', teachers', and parents' views and experiences of field trips in general and the Youth-Nature Program specifically revealed that key conditions for social learning are indeed present, however there are still important unknowns to consider with regards to the future of the program.

Social learning and implications for the longevity of the program.

Social learning, Woodhill (2010) states, "is concerned with the ways in which different individuals, or groups (actors) within society engage with each other to understand, contest and influence the direction of social change" (p. 63). In terms of what actually constitutes social learning, for Glasser (2009), any learning that is dependent on interaction with others can be considered social learning, but what is of more import is the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' social learning. While passive social learning is perhaps more prominent in today's world, active social learning can be argued as more effective in generating change because it is dependent on interaction and communication, providing fertile grounds for innovation (Glasser, 2009). Moreover, this interaction and communication can be occurring between parties with different agendas or interests:

Because active social learning can involve diverse players with competing or even conflicting values and interests, I posit that the most successful forms of active social learning will result from non-coercive relationships that rest on building a common language, transparency, tolerance, mutual trust, collaboration, shared interests and, concern for the common good. Such forms of active social learning can employ conflict

in a positive way by challenging complacency and encouraging ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking. (Glasser, 2009, pp. 52-53)

Similarly, in order for social learning to occur it is important to be cognisant of the differences between the players involved, but ultimately the focus should be on identification of common grounds. Based on this study’s findings, the Youth-Nature Program constitutes an important active social learning interface for two types of educational actors in the Brome-Missisquoi region (the PENS and the primary schools participating).

The idea for this study was conceived under the assumption that the primary schools and the PENS have, to some degree, conflicting values and interests when it comes to providing educational experiences for children, particularly with regards to the perceived value of field trips. The study was designed to take into account these values and interests in the hopes of identifying significant gaps and as well as areas of overlap. Reviewing participants’ discussions of their opinions on field trips and of the criteria they value most when considering participating in field trips, it appears that there is a fair amount of overlap already existing in that the PENS program seems to meld with participants’ views. I would argue that to an extent, the PENS and members of the school community interviewed do share a core of common language when it comes to education and the value of outdoor field trips and acknowledging this core will be important moving forward. Moreover, I posit that this common language will only grow as the program continues with each passing field trip and each year, forging an even greater understanding between the parties involved.

This study’s findings also speak to other key components put forth by Glasser (2009): the ideas of mutual trust and collaboration. As with the building of a common language, I believe

these components are being worked on during the field trips themselves, but were also fortified by the interview process as it allowed for an even more intimate, transparent encounter between members of the parties involved. Teachers were careful to acknowledge the appreciation they have for the support the PENS provides in the Youth-Nature Program, from taking on responsibilities they feel overwhelmed by to offering to subsidise transportation. Voicing appreciation of this facet of the program implies a certain trust the principals and teachers are choosing to extend to the PENS through this program.

Krasny and Lee (2002) suggest that in a social learning system, it is equally important to understand the challenges stakeholders may face. As outlined in the findings, lack of time and experience were two major obstacles teachers encountered when planning field trips. Teachers, in particular, acknowledged how this challenge is not so much an issue for the Youth-Nature Program because of the fact that the PENS takes on the majority of the organisational tasks and also provides a well-qualified person to guide the field trips. Removing this barrier has the potential to positively influence the situation for the teachers, inciting participation in the program, however it is important to consider the implications for the PENS.

Recommendation 2. As an organisation with nature education at the heart of its mandate, the PENS is in an appropriate position to provide the expertise required to prepare and lead nature field trips. The PENS will need to carefully consider how they can consistently and reliably provide this expertise to the participating schools, which may constitute a challenge looking to the future. This study has addressed the initial challenge of understanding the needs and motivations of the schools involved which can serve as justification for pursuing the subsequent steps towards establishing this program over the long-term.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has outlined the emergence of a promising social learning platform for environmental education in the Brome-Missisquoi region of Québec and in order to enhance this platform's potential, further research would be advantageous. As a follow-up to this study, I would recommend conducting a similar investigation in one or two years' time with certain key differences in design that would allow for a more profound investigation.

First, I propose conducting interviews after participants have been through a full year of the Youth-Nature Program and would supplement data collection with a survey component. By conducting the interviews after three outings instead of one, participants would have a more complete experience of the program to discuss. Adding a survey component would not only potentially increase the amount of data, but could also provide participants with the opportunity to answer questions as candidly as they please (without my presence). These two modifications to the design would potentially enhance the comprehensiveness of the program portrait.

Second, with the aim of deepening the understanding of the program, participation, and the interactions of those involved, additional perspectives could be explored, namely those of the PENS (other members such as the director general) and those of schools who do not participate in the program. In terms of further delving into the PENS' perspective, I feel it would be a natural next step to focus attention on exploring the feasibility of the organisation's continuing to offer what they are providing schools. In this study, my field notes represented the PENS' perspective, but more so from the standpoint of someone who designs and guides the field trips. Understanding the administrative perspective in greater depth would address an integral portion of the greater system. I believe exploring the perspectives of schools not participating in the

program would be complementary to the research done in this study. Interviewing individuals for this study allowed for a detailed understanding of the factors positively influencing field trip participation and interviewing those who have elected not to participate could shed light on crucial factors that negatively influence participation.

Lastly, this research has focused solely on the perspectives of adults involved in the Youth-Nature Program because the foremost goal was to understand why decision-makers choose to participate in certain experiences with their students or children. If this program is to persist, the perspectives of the students participating should also be carefully considered. While the decision to participate ultimately rests with adults, benefits experienced by students engaging in an activity definitely factors into this decision-making. From a social learning standpoint, the perspectives of the students would constitute a key component to the greater experience.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this study was to understand how the PENS might go about inciting long-term participation in the Youth-Nature Program on the parts of the local primary schools. This goal was pursued by first characterising principal, parent, and teacher perspectives on field trips and identifying key factors that encourage participation in field trips. From a social learning perspective, these first portions of the investigation were crucial to fully understanding the meaning of field trips for the members of the school community before attempting to move forward and develop this educational endeavour.

Contrary to some research suggesting that field trips are perceived as somewhat of a burden to educators, this study's findings show that for the most part, the members of the Brome-Missisquoi school community are appreciative of and open to various types of field trips. This is

linked to the fact that participants have a relatively broad view of what constitutes valuable education for their students or children. This finding asserts that curriculum-related field trips are not the only types of field trips deemed worthwhile by members of the school community in this area. This has important implications for the environmental education goals of the PENS program. While certain aspects of the program may be related to class material, shortcomings are not seen as detrimental to the worth of the program in the eyes of the schools participating. Moreover, regardless of whether the experiences can be related to the curriculum, the majority of participants acknowledged the important role a school plays in providing field trip experiences for children. These findings are key to determining whether the schools and the PENS can find a common ground with regards to the value of field trips, the type of education pursued, and the role of schools in engaging in these experiences with their students.

While teachers in particular did not discuss field trips solely within the context of the added responsibilities they create, they did indeed acknowledge that field trips add a certain stress to their workloads and expressed gratitude that the PENS program provides support in key areas such as organising, preparing for, and leading the field trips. Minimising costs by offering the program free of charge and even subsidising transportation were also seen as very incentivising and together these findings indicate that the PENS' reasoning behind designing the program a certain way can be considered justified. As such, the PENS can continue to build on its current model, knowing that the way the program is set up is not only appreciated, but also encourages participation on the parts of the schools. An important consideration related to this point would be that the PENS ensures their support is met with an equal level of support from the teachers when it comes to facilitating the actual field trips. This would mean ensuring roles and

responsibilities of teachers, parent chaperones, and the PENS guide are communicated clearly prior to the field trips.

The purpose of the Youth-Nature Program (as outlined by the PENS and its partner organisations) is to provide Brome-Missisquoi youth with an opportunity to get in touch with their local natural heritage while engaging in physical activity. Naturally, for the program to continue into the future, it would be favourable for the members of the school community to share an interest in promoting the same type of activities. This study's findings suggest that principals, teachers, and parents do indeed see the value in locally-based activities occurring outdoors, in nature, and that involve a physical activity component. Additionally, they particularly appreciate programs or outings that combine the most of these elements possible- as is the case with the Youth-Nature Program. This represents an important concept when considering the future of this program, however it is important to remember that some unknowns do remain. These unknowns may have the capacity to negatively influence participation in the future, namely: changes to school administration and turnover in teachers or park staff, and the availability of other opportunities that might compete for school time or budget. While these may be difficult to account for, establishing a solid foundation may help curtail the influence of any of the aforementioned unknowns.

In conclusion, this study has revealed that the PENS' Youth-Nature Program initiative has great potential from an environmental education standpoint. Realising this potential will depend on respecting conditions that optimise the social learning that can occur within the context of the program. As such collaboration and understanding between the parties involved needs to be worked on continuously. Important ties have been established through the program

and through this study, but these ties need to be maintained with open communication to ensure the motivations and goals of the individuals implicated remain clear and as synchronised as possible. Ultimately, these findings suggest any challenges this program may face can be addressed by maintaining the program as a purposeful, iterative process of communication and interaction between the parties and individuals involved.

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Appendix A

Description of and Invitation to Participate in the Youth-Nature Program

Invitation to Participate in the Youth-Nature Program

Dear Educators,

Thanks to the enthusiastic participation of several Brome-Missisquoi schools, the pilot year of the Youth-Nature program was a great success! As such, the *Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton* (PENS), the Appalachian Corridor and the Ruiter Valley Land Trust, partners of the *Réserve naturelle des Montagnes-Vertes* (RNMV), are pleased to announce that the program will be offered for the 2016-2017 academic year.

This project was conceived with the goal of providing local children with the opportunity to discover the wonders of the natural world while spending time outdoors, exercising, and building class relationships. As we are still in the process of developing the program, we continue to be able to offer this experience to a maximum of 10 groups of students, one group per school. Due to constraints that became evident during the pilot year, we must specify that **each group contain no more than 30 students each**. Moving forward, we would like to focus on working with students from Grades 4 through 6. Certain exceptions may be made. Priority will be given to schools that participated in the pilot year and remaining places will be granted on a first come, first served basis.

Each of the 10 participating groups will visit the park for a hike once per season. For each visit, 50% of the transportation costs for one bus and 100% of the access and activity fees will be covered. For a tentative outline of next year's program, please consult the page at the end of this letter.

Please contact Jessica at **** for more information or to confirm your interest in participating.

In hopes of having the pleasure of working with you,

Jessica Adams, Project Coordinator
Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton

Youth-Nature Program Outline 2016-2017

The following outline is tentative. Each season will require groups to reserve two dates with one as a backup in case of cancellation.

FALL – September 19 through October 14, 2016

Theme: The ecology of fall

Topics:

1. Tree identification
2. Photosynthesis

WINTER – January 23 through February 24, 2017

Theme: The ecology of winter

Topics:

1. Animal activity in winter
2. Recognizing animal tracks
3. Review of fall topics (i.e. tree identification)

SPRING – May 22 through June 16, 2017

Theme: The ecology of spring

Topics:

1. Bird observation and identification
2. Spring flora
3. Review of winter topics

The topics will be addressed via an activity such as a scavenger hunt or identification challenge. A park employee will accompany groups and will give instructions on how to complete the activity. For the 2016-2017 year, we would like to incorporate small pre- and post-hike components in the form of readings, videos, or activities. Pre-hike material will introduce the material to the students and post-hike material will allow them to reflect on their experience.

At the end of the year, we would like to invite participating students to create a résumé of their experience so that they may present it to other students at the school.

Appendix B

Questions to Guide Small Group Discussion Between Teachers

The small group discussion will be semi-structured and guided by a set of questions. Below is a sample of the questions that may be asked during the discussion. Questions may be altered or omitted as necessary. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

1. Can you please describe your experiences as a teacher participating in field trips and field trip-based programs?
2. Can you explain what you take into consideration when deciding whether or not to participate in a field trip or field trip-based program with your class?
3. You are currently participating in or have participated in the Youth-Nature Program at the *Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton* (PENS) with your class. Can you describe your and your class's experience of this program to date?
4. Can you explain what you might take into consideration when deciding whether to adopt this type of program over the long term, for instance, as an annual experience?
5. Please explain your outlook on the possibility of a long-term collaboration or partnership between your school and the PENS via the Youth-Nature Program or a similar project.