THE VIEW FROM HERE:

The Perspectives of Inner City Youth in Experiential Education Programs

by

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ABSTRACT

This collective case study analyzed the experiences of current and past participants of two experiential education programs for low-income inner city youth in order to understand how participants developed personally and socially through their participation. Drawing on research on risk and resilience, this study focuses on programs that attempt to provide inner city youth with ‘protective factors’ against risks they face. One case represents the experiences of participants in an arts education program and the other in an outdoor education program. At each research site, open ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with current participants (aged 13-15) and past participants (aged 16-21).

Past and current participants in both programs described a series of developmental stages of coming out of one’s shell starting with experiencing success, leading to feelings of competence in abilities, feeling trust for group members, and thus, building the confidence to be one’s self. The agents of change in the arts program were: opportunities for self-expression without formal evaluation in dance, drama, music, and visual arts activities; encouragement from staff; and receiving positive feedback for performances from peers, staff, and parents. The major agent of change in the outdoor education program was overcoming challenges in a supportive atmosphere. Group and individual challenges were encountered during canoe tripping, ropes course activities, and the solo experience. A supportive environment was created by respectful relationships with staff and peers built through overcoming challenges together.
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So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it. (Jiddu Krishnamurti, 1895-1986)

First and foremost, I would like to thank the participants of this research for allowing me the chance to listen and for answering my questions with honesty. This research would not have been possible, of course, without the directors of these two programs being open to listening to my proposal, allowing me to participate in their programming, and interview their campers. I am eternally grateful to both of you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I am interested in how youth develop personally and socially through their participation in experiential education contexts. While searching for my motivations in choosing this topic, memories of my own youth surfaced. Throughout my youth, I participated in several experiential education programs including outdoor education and arts education programs. I believe my experiences as a participant in these programs is in large part responsible for the ways in which I developed personally and socially. Many people don’t believe me when I tell them that I used to be deathly shy. There was a time when I would get so nervous about things that I turned my stomach in knots and made myself sick so I wouldn’t have to swim my first and only race, or go on my first date with a boy. It was a big struggle for me for a long time and I didn’t let go of my fears until well after high school.

I remember key moments during my experiences in experiential education programs that helped me to overcome my fears and form a more positive identity. One particularly vivid memory is of a dance that our creative arts leadership group choreographed as part of our program. I was shy and awkward in my not quite developed body, and truthfully, would never have danced if it were not for the fact that part of the routine involved dancers in coloured nylon square bags that you could see out of, but through which the audience could not see. I remember how amazing the dance looked with the twisting and bending and spinning bags and I remember how free I felt interacting with the others. I was safe inside, able to move my body with expression without fear of being judged, looking stupid, or being rejected by peers. Especially as adolescents, our fear can close us in. It stops us from trying new things, from exploring
possibilities, from moving our bodies expressively. If we have the courage to break that fear, we may feel success, gain confidence, and maybe even discover a talent we never knew we had. I have no special abilities in dance, but it brings me joy, and no longer shame.

A second key moment in my development was an obstacle that this same group faced on a map and compass hike. We found ourselves on a marshy peninsula with a deep muddy stream preventing us from reaching our destination. We had two options. We could backtrack and try to find a way around the marsh, risking arriving at our campsite after dark or we could find a way across the stream. It took half an hour and all of our combined strength to build a bridge, but we did it. The sense of power and accomplishment that accompanied our crossing was undeniable. We all realized that we could not have accomplished the crossing without working together as a group. For me these experiences facilitated important learning because they brought about a transformation in who I was as a person and what I understood about the. In many ways, this research is about my own search for how to facilitate meaningful experiences for children and youth — meaningful in the sense that the participants themselves value the experiences as important for their own development.

I grew up in a rural area populated mostly by white middle class farmers. My experiences as a participant in outdoor and arts education programs were alongside mostly white middle class urban or suburban youth. After working as a staff member in several outdoor and environmental education programs, I came across a unique opportunity to work in a residential camp program with a double mission of environmental and multicultural education. This program serves children and youth from high, low and middle-income families, from diverse cultural backgrounds. Participants
come from both urban and suburban neighbourhoods. It is part of the program’s pedagogy to openly engage with participants regarding issues of race, culture, gender, and conflict resolution. Its goal is to cultivate an atmosphere that embraces diversity and increases tolerance and understanding between people. My experiences at this residential camp opened my eyes to the complex nature of the personal and social development of youth who face the risks of living in poverty in inner city neighbourhoods. Because of my two years of challenging and rewarding experiences working in this program, I have continued to pursue work with other programs that serve inner city youth.

During several experiences in arts and outdoor experiential education programs with inner city youth, I have seen many initially disengaged youth become engaged and highly motivated as a result of their participation in these programs. Unfortunately, I also listened to testimony of the negative impact schooling had on the personal development of these children. Low self-esteem and resentment toward school were alarmingly ubiquitous. After noting positive changes in these youth, I became driven to investigate which characteristics of experiential education programs, such as arts and outdoor education programs, are important in engaging inner city youth. What are the important differences between inner city youths’ experiences in these programs and in school? What is the role of the arts and outdoor activities in the effectiveness of this programming? How does participation in these programs contribute to positive changes in the lives of youth?
Experiential education is an interdisciplinary field that includes both arts education and outdoor/adventure education. As a framework, experiential education is defined as, “a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experiences” (Luckmann, 1996, p. 6). The theory itself has its roots in the writings of John Dewey who explained that there is an “intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (Dewey, 1963, p. 20). In my experience of experiential education practice, program design is concerned with how a concept can be represented through activity to best engage participants. Activities become carefully constructed experiences through which learning goals may be achieved (Carver, 1996). The learning that results is constructed by the participants in interaction with each other and with the experience. Leaders do not stand at the front and tell participants what they should learn; rather the participants discuss with each other what they learned through their experience. In practice, experiential education is characterized by the following explanation offered by Carver (1996):

Experiential education promotes the development of student agency, belonging and competence by introducing resources and behaviours that allow for active learning, drawing on student experience, authenticity, and connecting lessons to the future in a learning environment that usually values caring, compassion, responsibility, accountability, individuality, creativity and critical thinking. (p. 11)

The concepts of experiential education provide a framework within which to investigate the common characteristics of arts and outdoor education.

Experiential education’s focus on learners as the locus of knowledge construction shifts our focus away from planned curriculum, towards the investigation of the
interrelationship between enacted and experienced pedagogy. The *enacted* pedagogy refers to how the pedagogy operates in action, in daily practice. Pedagogy encompasses not only the activities of the program but also the role of the learner and the leader and the organization’s philosophical views of learning (McCormick & Murphy, 2000). Often, experiential education programs do not work from a planned curriculum document, but are based on a tradition of pedagogical practice combined with extensive staff training and a team working environment.

Outdoor education programs use an outdoor setting to provide challenges, and encourage hands-on learning through experience with the aim of facilitating personal and social development (Martin, 2001). Arts education is characterized by programs that offer opportunities for practical skill building and self-expression through participation in a variety of arts disciplines including music, dance, drama, and visual arts (Heath & Roach, 1999). Both the fields of outdoor education and arts education include many variations in practice based on various theories within these disciplines. Within the field of outdoor education, this variety manifests as residential camp experiences in outdoor settings as well as adventure education programs involving wilderness trips. Within the field of arts education, this variety is manifested as arts day camps, residential arts camps, or after school community programming. The focus of this study is on full day, informal (independent from public schooling) arts and outdoor education programs that have experiential education as their explicit or implicit goals and offer programming to inner city children and youth of low socioeconomic status (SES).

**Outcome Research on Arts and Outdoor Education Programs**

A review of literature underscores the effectiveness of both arts and outdoor
experiential education programs for youth in general. Research investigating outcomes of both types of programming provide evidence of positive personal and social development of participants as a result of their participation in these programs (Holloway & Krensky, 2001; Holloway & LeCompte, 2001; Lan, Sveen, & Davison, 2004; Martin, 2001; Martin, Leberman, & Neil, 2002; Shields, 2001). Evidence of positive personal and social development cited by these studies include: increase in self-esteem, development of open-mindedness, development of a sense of empathy, decrease in hopelessness, reports of self-understanding, a feeling of belonging, and a positive attitude toward others. Based on this research, the present study focuses on youth perceptions of their personal and social development resulting from their participation in experiential education programs. It also focuses on elements of experiential education programs the youth themselves identify as being important for their development.

**Personal and Social Development in Adolescence**

This study focuses on a 13 to 15 year old inner city population of low SES. Adolescence is a crucial time in personal and social development, a unique time of transformation between childhood and adulthood. Managing physical changes, changes in cognitive abilities, and broadening social expectations and responsibilities during this time can be extremely challenging. Through facing these challenges, adolescents develop a sense of identity, autonomy, and empathy for others (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006). My study investigates personal development, which includes identity work, initiative, and emotional regulation, and interpersonal development, which includes social skills, teamwork, and positive relationships with peers and adults (Larson & Hansen, 2006). During this often confusing, difficult time, many adolescents do not develop the
adaptive behaviours necessary for achieving maturation into adulthood, but instead
develop behavioural issues, low self-concept, and other difficulties (Zimmer-Gembeck &
Collins, 2006). Larson (2000) claims that there are alarmingly high rates of boredom,
alienation, and disconnection from meaningful challenge among adolescents today, which
he sees as signs of a deficiency in positive development. He attributes this maladaptive
development to an “absence of engagement in a positive life trajectory” (p. 171) rather
than to a response to difficult conditions in their lives. If this claim is true, it is important
to look at what conditions can engage adolescents in thinking about their lives in positive
ways.

Youth Development and Youth Programming

According to Pitmann (1992), facilitating youth development that is socially
positive requires a focus on meeting the core needs of youth that are prerequisite to the
development of competency in adulthood. These needs include: (a) a sense of safety and
structure, (b) a sense of belonging, (c) a sense of worth as a contributing member of a
group, (d) a sense of independence and control over one’s life, (e) a sense of closeness in
relationships, (f) a sense of competence, and (g) a sense of self-awareness. According to
Henderson, Thurber, Schueler Whitaker, Bialeschki, and Scanlin (2006), youth need
experiential opportunities to develop social, physical, civic, and emotional competence. A
growing body of literature supports the claim that well designed and implemented youth-
focused programming provides conditions for adolescents to engage in psychosocial
growth and can result in positive outcomes for youth (Henderson et al., 2006; Larson &
Hansen, 2006).

For Heath (2001), out of school programming constitutes an often undervalued third
element of education beyond school and home. Even though this third element rarely gets the attention of educational researchers, there is a common societal assumption that participation in these extras “reflects ways of learning and types of knowledge predictive of patterns of achievement in higher academic vocational and civic life” (Heath, 2001, p. 10). She gives as evidence the fact that admissions officers to most universities give value to participation in out of school activities such as sports, clubs, community programs, and service-oriented activities. Often, due to financial constraints, inner city youth of low SES do not have access to such programs. To follow Heath’s argument, an imbalance in access to such programs could contribute to the perpetuation of inequality in access to higher education among students from different backgrounds. It is important then to examine the developmental benefits that inner city youth of low SES experience through their participation in such programs.

Larson (2000) argues that, during structured youth activities, adolescents experience a “unique combination of intrinsic motivation and concentration that is rarely present during their daily experiences in schoolwork and unstructured leisure” (p. 180). This state is necessary for the development of initiative, which is seen as a cornerstone of development into adulthood. Upon reaching adulthood, it is assumed that an individual is able to act autonomously. Research has shown the importance of programs that augment the education system and offer opportunities for youth whose home lives are unstable to develop relationships, which grant them the support they need (Bocarro & Witt, 2003).

Impediments to Positive Development

Young people living in poverty face many challenges that may negatively affect their development. In her framework for understanding poverty, Payne (1996) explains
that poverty negatively affects not only financial resources available to children but, among other things, emotional resources, support systems, and access to relationships with nurturing and appropriate role models. “Individual development is influenced by the ongoing qualities of the social settings in which the child lives or participates and the extent and nature of the interaction between these settings” (Gordon-Smith, 2008, p. 17). Young people living in urban neighbourhoods where poverty is concentrated are often exposed to high rates of crime and violence, and often live in substandard housing. Their environments are often more risky, and they receive less support than other children, which can lead to “increasing disparities in preparation for adult life” (Gordon-Smith, 2008, p. 20). In her study on how the structure of urban neighbourhoods and families affect children and youth, Gordon-Smith (2008) found that children from high functioning families that provide emotional warmth and cohesion are still affected negatively, although less dramatically, by neighbourhood characteristics of violence and crime. She also found that those who come from low functioning families may be protected by the fact that their neighbourhood had high levels of social organization, which provided them with a sense of belonging and support. These findings highlight the importance of providing youth with a sense of emotional support during their development.

Often inner city youth do not receive the support they need in school either. In his analysis of how cultures of schools affect urban high school students, Rodriguez (2008) explains that many students feel teachers often overlook their needs and devalue their voices leading to “disengagement from school and apathy toward learning” (p. 776). Disengagement from school is seen as failure in a society where academic achievement is a measure of a person’s success. For children and youth who do not perform well
academically, this view of success may not only be detrimental to their future job possibilities, but feelings of failure may also develop into a negative self-image. Social comparison theories, as outlined by Van Larr (2000), indicate that, if negative social comparisons and negative feedback from poor performance are internalized, a less positive self-concept will develop. “Feelings of low self-esteem can be manifested through negative behaviours, such as experimentation with drugs, family arguments, breaking the law and dropping out of school” (Pommier & Witt, 1995, p. 87).

Those who achieve below standard are, more often than not, poor and from ethnic minority groups (Applebaum, 2002). High numbers of children from minority groups with low SES are not engaged in school, leading to poor academic achievement (Anderson & Keith, 1997). Schooling can be a negative experience for this population. Studies conducted by Rutter (1993) showed that, within this population, positive experiences at school are not associated with academic success, but with sports, arts, and positions of social responsibility within the school. By investigating activities that these youth consider to be positive experiences, we may find ways to help prevent inner city youth living with the difficulties of poverty from disengaging from school and developing a negative self-image.

*Risk, Resilience, and Development*

Resilience is what researchers refer to as “a certain number of competencies needed for ongoing development” (Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lépine, Bégin, & Bernard, 2007, p. 979) in the face of certain risks or impediments to healthy development. Research on resilience has identified several protective factors for youth who face risks, such as low socioeconomic status, poverty, parental divorce, poor parental support, and living with or
witnessing violence. These protective factors are: (a) establishing relationships with caring adults, (b) increasing self-esteem, having a sense of control and sense of acceptance, (c) the existence of controls against deviant behaviour, (d) models for positive behaviour and problem solving, and (e) the existence of community resources to which youth believe they can turn for support (Posner & Vandell, 1994; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993, as cited in Green, Kleiber, & Tarrant, 2000).

Protective factors are often divided into categories of individual, family, and environmental factors. The importance of environmental factors such as “ties with ‘prosocial’ adults and attending an institution that offers support for competencies, determination and a sense of meaning” (Drapeau et al., 2007, p. 979) cannot be understated. Rutter (1993) explained in his conceptual analysis of resilience that “what is important is the interplay between people and their environments. That interplay is potentially open to influence in either a beneficial or a harmful direction” (p. 629). He suggests that environmental factors, such as availability of safe and supportive relationships and experiencing success in accomplishing tasks, influence development in a beneficial direction by promoting self-esteem and self-efficacy. “[S]uccess in one arena gives people positive feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy that make it more likely that they will have the confidence to take active steps to deal with life challenges in other domains of their lives” (Rutter, 1993, p. 629). For these experiences of success to take place, youth need to be exposed to environments that, as Rutter puts it, “open up opportunities of a positive kind” (p. 630).

If we juxtapose the protective factors found in research on risk and resilience with Pitmann’s (1992) analysis of core needs necessary for positive development into adulthood, we find some obvious similarities. The artificial constructs of risk and
resilience tend to cloud the issues at the heart of youth development. If we take, for example, Payne’s (1996) analysis of poverty, she proposes that it is the very lack of relationships with caring adults that creates the risk of not developing positively. It becomes obvious then, that, behind every risk factor, there is a developmental need that is not being fulfilled. A further example is provided by Drapeau et al.’s (2007) analysis of resilience among youth in foster care. Drapeau and colleagues developed their findings on protective factors into recommendations of certain elements that must be in place to increase the likelihood that youth develop positively. These elements are:

the lasting presence and involvement of adults who believe in the young people and their potential; numerous occasions for the young people to succeed at things and garner approval; attention to the needs expressed by the young people and flexibility in meeting these needs individually and at the right time; and, naturally, a general orientation requiring that young people be active agents in their own development.” (Drapeau et al., 2007, p. 994)

I propose that researchers and practitioners take what has been learned from research on risk and resilience about protective factors and consider these factors as necessary conditions for the positive development of youth. If there is a shift in focus on how to meet the needs of adolescents as they navigate through the challenges of their life circumstances towards adulthood, we may come closer to providing the necessary conditions for positive development before youth develop behaviour issues and low self-esteem, which may make them susceptible to gang influences, sexual promiscuity, alcohol and drug use, and criminal activity. From this perspective, protective factors can be considered as preventative rather than protective.

Unfortunately, “knowing what end you want to bring about and knowing how to achieve that objective are two very different things” (Rutter, 1993, p. 630). If a practitioner were to take the elements that Drapeau et al. (2007) proposed and the
protective factors that have been found to foster resilience among youth and try to create a program for youth that aims to influence their development in a positive direction, he/she would probably get as far as hiring staff who care about the development of youth, but may be at a loss of what to do with youth every day. By examining programs that currently exist for this population and consulting youth about which elements within these programs are important for their personal and social development, I hope this study will provide insight into how to create contexts that support positive youth development. By examining two different programs with this aim, I expect this study to increase researchers’ and practitioners’ understanding of how certain activities and aspects of programming influence the development of youth. Further, I expect this study to contribute to practitioners’ understanding of how to support inner city youth during adolescence by discussing with youth which aspects of programming are most beneficial to them.

Purpose

In this study, I investigated the experiences of past and current participants in one arts program and one outdoor education program for inner city youth of low socioeconomic status (SES). The purpose of my investigation was to discover which components of experiential learning inner city youth perceived to have the greatest impact on their personal and social development. The focus of this research was on participants as informants in the investigation of the relationship between their experience and enacted pedagogies of programming. The questions guiding this research were:

1. How do past and current participants feel their experiences, in the arts or outdoor experiential education programs for inner city youth, have affected their personal
and social development?

2. Which pedagogical aspects of programming do the participants identify as having contributed most to the changes they perceive in themselves?

3. What are the common and unique aspects of the enacted pedagogy of these two different types of experiential education programming?

Rationale

“We are more often articulate about how things go wrong than how they go right” (Larson, 2000, p. 170). There are many research-based programs that aim to reduce problem behaviours such as drug use, violence, suicide, and teen pregnancy, but far fewer that apply psychology to promote positive youth development (Larson, 2000). Most studies on resilience and risk are done with youth who have spent time in foster care or youth detention centers or have been involved with drugs, gangs, or crime. There is little research that focuses on the processes through which adolescents become “motivated, directed, socially competent, compassionate, and psychologically vigorous adults” (Larson, 2000, p. 170). More research in this area is needed to move beyond the treatment of problem behaviours toward building programs that help adolescents prepare for adulthood. Both Larson (2000) and Morrissey and Werner-Wilson (2005) call for exploration of how positive activities help adolescents increase competencies that are needed to successfully transition into adulthood. The focus of my research is on the value of youth rather than deficiencies of youth and their experiences.

My research fills a gap in current literature on the arts and outdoor education programming by concentrating not only on outcomes of programming, but also how these outcomes may be achieved. As Larson (2000) claims, most outcome research “does not
allow us to conceptualize or discriminate what processes or experiences create positive development in some activities but not in others” (p. 178). In a review of literature, McKenzie (2000) claims that much adventure education research fails to investigate how outcomes of participation are achieved, and therefore our current understanding is based largely on theory rather than empirical research. In arts education literature, there are also few empirical studies, with the exception of Holloway and LeCompte (2001) that investigated how program outcomes were achieved. As activities vary across and within programming, and are steeped in unique organizational cultures, different activities in different contexts create different developmental opportunities. As such, it is important to examine how activities in context create conditions for youth to engage in psychosocial growth (Larson & Hansen, 2006). Further, Larson’s focus on developmental opportunities across activity types is rare among research on youth development. My study deepens Larson’s line of inquiry by providing qualitative in-depth cases of two different youth programs with differing activity types.

Essential in this investigation is a rich description of program pedagogy. Larson and Hansen (2006), in their study on differences in developmental experiences across organized activities, call for more in-depth qualitative research that investigates the mediating processes responsible for differences between and within categories of activities. This type of description is needed to address the issue of variation within programming of the same type as well as to identify similarities across programming types. In research on outdoor and arts education programming there is often very little description of the philosophies and enacted pedagogies of the programs in question. To complicate matters further, both of these fields are varied in their practices, and often do not have documents outlining their pedagogy. Halpern, Barker, and Mollard (2000) claim
that literature outlining how youth programs for inner city youth function on a day-to-day basis, what activities are offered, and the nature of relationships between youth and staff is almost non-existent. This lack of information limits our ability to identify the characteristics of these programs that are responsible for outcomes and also makes replication of successful programming difficult.

Much of the research with ‘at-risk’ youth in the arts and outdoor education attempts to measure the outcomes of programming using quantitative measures of concepts such as self-esteem and self-concept. The emphasis on quantitative research may come from a view among arts and outdoor education practitioners that using this methodology will be more effective in validating their programs as beneficial educational experiences (Martin, 2001). Reynolds (1992) and Warner (1990) question the usefulness of some quantitative instruments which may only measure one dimension of the multidimensional, context dependent, construct of self-concept. Warner (1990) suggests focusing on the individual experience of participants through qualitative methods as a way to more effectively evaluate programs. Larson (2006) agrees that youth themselves are a valuable source of information on the developmental processes that occur during their participation in settings that actively engage them in their own development.

Studies that use quantitative instruments to report the effects of arts and outdoor education programming on self-esteem and self-concept often report positive results that are not statistically significant, or positive results with only moderate effect sizes (Lan et al., 2004; Quin, Fraser, & Redding, 2007; Shields, 2001). These results may be due to low sample sizes or to the narrow definition of self-esteem and self-concept used in quantitative measures. These studies are often accompanied by comments from researchers and practitioners (Reynolds, 1992) or, in mixed method studies, qualitative
data from participants (Lan et al., 2004; Quin et al., 2007; Shields, 2001) that note an observed positive change in the confidence level of the participants. This finding suggests the need for more qualitative research investigating these observed changes that were not significant in the quantitative data. Using an open-ended concept, rather than a narrow predetermined construct such as self-esteem, may be more useful in helping us understand the benefits of these types of programming, and how the apparent positive outcomes are achieved. If we shift our focus to participants as informants of successful elements of arts and outdoor education programs, we can open a dialogue to investigate why certain elements are more effective than others. This shift has the potential to deepen our understanding of how these elements combine to create positive developmental outcomes for inner city youth.

Specifically in relation to research in the field of outdoor education, Green et al. (2000) point out that most of the studies on outdoor education and ‘at-risk’ youth are conducted with youth who are in or have spent time in juvenile detention centers. There is a lack of studies with a population of low-income minority youth who may be at-risk of becoming involved in criminal or delinquent activities. This observation is important because the same is true for research in risk and resilience. It is important to look at how research on risk and resilience can help us create programs that help prevent youth from turning in this direction. By conducting this study with low-income inner city youth, I hope program aspects that prevent youth from becoming involved in criminal or delinquent activities can be identified. Further, by looking for specific program components that help promote particular aspects of resilience, I hope to offer ideas for improving programming for this population.
Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters, the first of which provided a context for the study, introduced the rationale behind its undertaking, and described the purpose of, and the research questions driving the inquiry. Chapter Two explains the theoretical framework used to inform the analysis and interpretation of data collected, and presents a review of relevant literature focusing on programming in the arts and outdoor education. Chapter Three describes the methodological framework and the processes of data collection and analysis. Chapter Four is a presentation of the findings of the study including a discussion of themes that emerged during analysis. Findings are presented as two cases including rich descriptions of the enacted pedagogy of each of the two cases and reflexive writing and field notes from my own participation in each program. Finally, Chapter Five is an inter-case analysis that juxtaposes the two cases to discuss common and unique themes, with reference to the theoretical framework and relevant literature. It also summarizes the findings of the study, explains the limitations and significance of the study, and discusses implications for practice and for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the two cases in this study are very different from each other, it is important to consider a frame of reference through which they can be viewed that brings to light their similarities and differences. In this chapter, I discuss theoretical literature from both arts education and outdoor education in relation to each other as well as in relation to the theoretical framework created by situated learning theory and transformative learning theory. I also discuss the findings of relevant empirical research studies of various arts and outdoor education programs.

Theoretical Framework: Learning as Situated Transformation

Although arts and outdoor experiential education programs may seem very different, according to theoretical literature, both types of programming share certain assumptions about learning as well as some pedagogical elements. Shared assumptions include that learning involves the whole person, and requires reflecting upon present and prior experiences (Andersen, Boud, & Cohen, 1995). Learning is the search for meaning, through which we gain understanding of connections between things and people (Anderson, 2003; Martin, Franc, & Zounková, 2004). This philosophical base informs the common pedagogical practice of encouraging learning through hands-on experience, observation, and reflection (Darts, 2006; Martin et al., 2004). The assumptions outlined in theoretical literature on arts and outdoor education are in keeping with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory and Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory.
As Rutter (1993) suggested in his analysis of the importance of environmental factors in influencing development, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory views the learner as a member of a socio-cultural community and participation in social practice as the fundamental form of learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe learning as involving the whole person in relation to social community, and moving toward full participation as “becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (p. 53). Systems of relations refer to interactions among members of a community.

In this view, learning itself is seen as transformation and highly influenced by context and particularly by relationships within a social context. This view also recognizes that the context enables and restricts the possible forms of participation in that community. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe identity as “long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice” (p. 53). In this way, learning is seen as “historical production, transformation and change of persons” (p. 58). Lave and Wenger (1991) describe participation in a community as being based on “situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world” (p. 51), implying that experience and understanding are in constant interaction. This idea is similar to experiential education’s view of learning as ‘learning by doing combined with reflection’ but seems to imply that these processes are not prescribed by leaders or teachers in a context, but are rather inherent in the process of learning within a social community. If this is indeed the case, it then begs the question of how we build a context that is conducive to positive development for those who may lack the necessary conditions to develop into healthy adults?
Situated learning also implies that in order for a particular program to be considered part of a person’s community of practice, the person’s participation must be considered long-term. The art program involved in this study only takes place in the summer, but can be considered long-term because participants of this research study consistently participate each summer.

It is important to recognize that Lave and Wenger (1991) do not limit their conception of communities of practice to the immediate social context, but include the structural characteristics of these communities. They define structural characteristics of a community as including:

the socio-cultural organization of space into places of activity and the circulation of knowledgeable skill…the structure of access of learners to ongoing activity and the transparency of technology, social relations, and forms of activity…the segmentation, distribution, and coordination of participation and the legitimacy of partial, increasing, changing participation within a community…characteristic conflicts, interests, common meanings, and intersecting interpretations and the motivation of all participants vis a vis their changing participation and identities.” (p. 58)

Activities are part of a broader context that gives them meaning. In order to understand participation in any community, structural characteristics of the community of practice must be understood. Understanding learning as situated will help in identifying important structural elements of experiential education programs as communities of practice. Program description in this study focuses on describing each program’s structural characteristics. Program descriptions thus provide a framework within which to understand participants’ perceptions as they relate to the pedagogy of each program.

From the perspective that learning is transformation, Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory offers useful guidance in understanding the process of change that takes place in participants of experiential education programs. Although the
concepts of transformative learning are generally used in adult education, evidence of cognitive developments during adolescence provided by Rosenblum and Lewis (2006) suggests that adolescents may also be able to engage in this type of learning. Importantly, adolescents have developed the ability to self-reflect and introspect upon their emotional lives, (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2006) a necessary step in the transformative learning process.

Drawing on the writings of Brookfield (1987), Mezirow (2000) describes several phases through which learners navigate toward transformation (Cranton, 1994). The first is a *disorienting dilemma or trigger event* that is an unexpected experience or situation, positive or traumatic, which leads to the discomfort of learners. This phase triggers *self-reflection or appraisal* wherein learners examine their feelings and ask: ‘what is going on here?’ This phase is followed by *critical assessment and exploration* where learners examine their assumptions; reflect on their perspectives of meaning; are open to new ideas; and are searching for new ways of doing things. The next phase involves *developing alternative perspectives and exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions*. Learners must then try out and develop confidence in a new role; make a plan of action for change; and develop competence to make that change. These are necessary steps for the *integration* of this role in one’s life. At this point, it is possible that either learners choose to keep their original beliefs or modify them to meet the new situation (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 2000).

Transformative learning helps us understand the personal developmental processes that youth navigate through when developing into adults, by outlining a set of developmental steps toward transformation. Literature in both arts and outdoor education support the idea that experiential education programs promote transformative learning.
This study uses situated learning theory and transformative learning theory to postulate how certain aspects of youth programming can influence the transformative process in a positive direction.

The key assumptions of situated learning theory have informed the research design of this study, helped to identify important structural elements of each program, and informed the analysis of how participants developed through their interactions within these two unique contexts. These key assumptions are: (a) learning is transformation of identity in relation to social context, (b) experience and understanding are in constant interaction, and (c) meaning is constructed through the interaction between learners and social context, especially through relationships.

While transformative learning theory focuses on the process that learners undergo toward a transformation, situated learning theory focuses on contextual features that may influence this process. Transformative learning theory helps us understand how a transformation takes place and situated learning theory encourages consideration of the role of social roles, relationships and other structural characteristics of the community of practice in a participant’s transformation. In this way, the two theories complement each other in this inquiry into how contextual features or elements of experiential education programs influence the development of participants.

Literature Review

*Arts Education and Transformation*

What we already know about arts education as an agent of transformation can help us to unlock how arts education influences development. Examining literature in arts education as it relates to Mezirow’s (2000) theory of transformative learning helps to
examine the role of the arts in transformative learning. Maxine Greene argues that people are always in the process of development, and are aided in this development by meaningful engagements with the arts (as cited in MacCarthy, 2007). In particular, the arts lend themselves to Mezirow’s (2000) process of self-reflection and that of trying on new roles and perspectives. Among arts disciplines, there is agreement that arts education programs offer a rich and safe environment necessary for exploration of identity (Holloway & LeCompte, 2001). The arts become a “body of knowledge and a set of tools and practices that help us build individual identity and construct purposes with others” (O'Fallon, 1995, p. 26 as quoted in Holloway & LeCompte, 2001, p. 400).

Holloway and LeCompte (2001) argue that adolescents benefit from arts programming because it offers adult role models who encourage critical thinking, a safe avenue for expression of negative feelings and frustrations, and a way to imagine new ways of being. The arts give people permission to engage their imagination in exploring new possibilities and perspectives, and to perceive alternate ways of being in the world through creating a space in which anything is possible (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995). This process is important to the development of empathy and understanding of the situations and opinions of others, which are vital to social development (Belliveau, 2007; Holloway & LeCompte, 2001).

**Empirical Research on Arts Programming**

In a review of arts education program evaluations, Holloway and Krensky (2001), concluded that arts education promotes personal and social transformation. Specifically in relation to arts education outside of schools, they cited study results from Heath and Roach (1999) that found that, “youth involved in the arts were shown to be significantly
more likely to participate in positive social activities and to feel positively about themselves as the result of arts participation” (Holloway & Kresky, 2001, p. 355).

Heath and Roach (1999) conducted a 10-year study with the purpose of understanding the learning that takes place in youth organizations that young people, likely to be labeled at-risk, choose for themselves in their nonschool hours. Anthropologists observed, and took notes and made audio recordings in 124 youth-based organizations in economically disadvantaged communities across the United States. They focused on three types of organizations: athletic-academic focused, community-service centered, and arts-based. A sample of participants from these organizations also responded to the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS) so that their responses could be compared to a national sample of high school students. Heath and Roach (1999) found that those youth who participated in these organizations had practice decision-making, problem solving, developing ideas, thinking ahead, and building strategies and plans. They also developed maturity and linguistic competence in speaking to adults. The authors also discovered that the environments of arts organizations were somewhat different from the others they studied. In these arts organizations, plans tended to come from young people rather than adults, and authentic evaluation provided by public audiences for performances or exhibitions tended to promote high expectations for quality. Youth in these arts organizations had multiple opportunities to express ideas, create original material, experience and practice critique, and interact meaningfully with adults. They had ample opportunities to engage in healthy and predictable risks of performance and tended to recognize themselves as competent, creative, and productive.

In a qualitative study examining the effects of the theatre arts enrichment program in a public middle school in the U.S.A., Holloway and LeCompte (2001) found positive
effects in the form of the development of empathy and open-mindedness to others’ perspectives; positive identity formation through self-expression; and the development of centering—the ability to focus energy on tasks. The intensive arts program under study offered theater, dance, music, and visual arts, to students from Grades 6 to 8 in the form of 90-minute daily sessions. The researchers conducted regular participant observations and structured interviews about participants’ experiences in the program at the end of each of the two years with 15 and 24 students respectively. Based on these interviews, they chose to focus their study on the experiences of 5 girls who participated for their seventh and eighth grade years in the theatre arts (TA) strand of the program. This choice was based on the observation that this strand “seemed to speak to issues of gender and identity” (p. 369).

The researchers characterized teaching in the theatre arts program as informed by reform-based approaches to teaching for understanding. They provided a “day in the life” description of a classroom session that illustrated the teacher’s pedagogical approach. Holloway and LeCompte (2001) outlined characteristics of reform-based teaching based on Singly and Anderson’s (1989) book, *Transfer of Cognitive Skill*. They gave five characteristics of reform-based teaching, which include: (1) students use knowledge in strategic and flexible ways; (2) teachers are mediators of learning that is actually constructed by the students; (3) students actively construct "meaningful cognitive networks" that are used in problem solving; (4) tasks require students to "define and represent problems and transform existing knowledge into many possible solutions" (p. 405); and (5) students’ learning is self-regulated and peers are seen as sources of learning (Holloway & LeCompte, 2001).
The detailed description of drama pedagogy included in this study allows the reader to contextualize the results within a pedagogical framework. Since there are several ways to teach drama, it is important that Holloway and LeCompte (2001) outlined the specific pedagogy employed in this program. The results can be better understood given this contextual frame.

Similar positive results for participants were found in evaluations of both music and dance programs such as those studied by Quin, Frazer, and Redding (2007) and Shields (2001). Unfortunately, descriptions of the enacted pedagogy of these programs are limited. Literature in these fields is often quantitative or mixed method evaluations, and place little emphasis on participant testimony.

In a mixed methods study conducted in Britain investigating the benefits of creative dance education, children (n=348) aged 11 to 14 participated in a 10-week dance program that took place across two school terms (Quin et al., 2007). The purpose of the study was to assess the psychological and physiological benefits of creative dance for an adolescent population. The dance program was described as emphasizing creative movement, physical fitness, and the development of young peoples’ artistic and expressive skills through dance. From the limited information provided, it seems that creative movement was used as a medium to explore themes of health and body awareness.

Quantitative tests were used before and after the dance program to assess changes in self-esteem and intrinsic motivation as well as several aspects of physical fitness. The results indicated a positive change in all areas, but the changes in the areas of motivation and self-esteem were not statistically significant. Open-ended surveys were also used to give the participants an opportunity to express their attitudes toward dance and the dance
program. Although only one example of participant testimony was included; the study reported that qualitative survey results indicated that 67% of the study participants found the dance program experience to be positive. In the concluding comments of this study, the authors reported that dance increases physical fitness and psychological well-being. This conclusion begs more qualitative participant testimony since the quantitative results were not found to be statistically significant. It also indicates a need for further qualitative research into the perspectives of youth who participate in dance education programs in order to deepen our understanding of why there was a discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative results.

Various research results document that, in general, the arts provide an effective way of reaching at-risk children (Acer, 1987; Taylor, Barry, & Wall, 1997; Thompson, 1995; Trusty & Olivia, 1994, as cited in Shields, 2001). In 2001, Shields conducted a mixed methods study investigating the relationship between participation in music education and self-esteem, global self-worth, and self-concept of populations of ‘at-risk’ students. The study took place with students in Grade 6 over the second semester at an alternative school for the arts in an urban setting in the American Midwest. Students identified as at-risk by their teachers, principal, or guidance counsellors who also chose to participate in choir and/or creative percussion group constituted the study group (n=44). These students varied across socioeconomic status, sex, and living arrangements, with 58% of participants being African American and the remaining 42% being Caucasian. Little information regarding the pedagogy of these classes was provided, except that in addition to music classes, study participants received mentoring from the music teacher.

Qualitative results from interviews with participants revealed that students felt that participation in the choir and/or creative percussion group had “brought about emotions
of pleasure, happiness, and pride and was socially beneficial and fun” (Shields, 2001, p. 281). In addition to students, parents (n=32) participated in interviews. Their responses suggested that their child’s participation in music performance was “a positive experience for their children, provided a vehicle for self-expression, and source of positive motivation” (p. 282). With regards to music in general, both parents and students indicated that “music was basic to life; built self-esteem, confidence, and provided a force for positive change; had therapeutic value; provided happiness, fun, and enjoyment; was a vehicle for self-expression and communication; and was a basic subject” (p. 282).

However, quantitative measures of self-esteem, global self-worth, and self-concept found no statistically significant increases from pre-test to post-test (Shields, 2001). The development of self-esteem is a complex process that, given the discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative data in this study, may be difficult to measure using pre- and post-program tests with quantitative instruments (Reynolds, 1992). Qualitative research that investigates personal development as it relates to participation in arts education programming has the potential to enlighten our understanding of this complex issue.

Investigating participant perspectives of how the arts programming facilitates the apparent outcomes could provide important insight into why these discrepancies between qualitative and quantitative results occur.

Outdoor Education and Transformation

Theoretical literature on outdoor education describes a model of learning that has striking resemblance to Mezirow’s (2000) framework for transformative learning. This model advocates for providing “a series of challenges where participants may push their comfort zones socially, physically, creatively, emotionally and spiritually” (Martin et al.,
The challenges in outdoor education create a “sense of dissonance, or a constructive level of anxiety” (Mackenzie, 2000, p. 20). The purpose of the challenging activities is to help participants “recognize and understand their own particular weaknesses, strengths and resources and thus find the wherewithal to master the difficult and the unfamiliar in other environments” (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997, p. 45). These activities allow for “comprehensive self-examination, self-exploration and self-reflection of the individual in a supporting and caring environment” (Martin et al., 2004, p. 18). By building confidence in abilities, through overcoming challenges in a caring environment, outdoor educators hope that participants will be better equipped to face challenges in their lives.

Along with the activities, the unfamiliar environment in which these programs are held contributes to creating this sense of dissonance through creating a sense of the unknown. As well, several outdoor education theorists argue that a novel environment allows participants to gain new perspectives on familiar environments from which they come, and the freedom to experiment with new roles (Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Nadler, 1993; Walk & Golins, 1976, as cited in Mackenzie, 2000). It is proposed by outdoor education theorists that the experience of being away from home and having to rely on one’s own skills and the skills of others in the group for survival can change a person (Moote & Wodearski, 1997; Skogen & Wichstrom, 1996 as cited in Green et. al, 2000). In this environment, outdoor experiences are designed in a cycle of activity, followed by reflection, with incremental increases in the degree of challenge following mastery. Within this cycle, there is an explicit emphasis on processing experiences, usually in the form of reflection, debrief, and discussion. The goal of processing is to help participants
internalize the meaning of their experience and understand its importance in the context of their daily lives (McKenzie, 2000).

There are several models of processing including the *Outward Bound Plus* model in which the instructor becomes a discussion leader and facilitator and the focus is on recognizing similarities between the activities and the participants’ lives. The *Metaphoric* model of outdoor education involves designing experiences so that activities become experiential metaphors for challenges faced by participants in their lives (Bacon, 1987 as cited in McKenzie, 2000). The aforementioned models represent examples of experiential learning that follow roughly the same steps as Mezirow’s (2000) model of transformative learning.

_Empirical Research on Outdoor Experiential Education Programs_

Although program content varies, outdoor experiential education programs generally include both participant self-development and social development such as team building, leadership, and communication as explicit aims of programming (Martin, 2001b; Martin, Leberman, & Neil, 2002). Program evaluations in this field have found outcomes of programming to be positive personal development in the form of increased self-esteem and self-concept, as well as positive social development in the form of learning to accept others, and working well as a team (Garst, Scheider & Baker, 2001; Lan et al., 2004; Long, 2001; Martin, 2001b; Martin et al., 2002).

In a mixed method study evaluating *Project Hahn*, an outdoor experiential program for at-risk youth, Lan, Sveen, and Davison (2004) found a decrease in levels of hopelessness and increase in self-esteem across participants, as well as reports of learning in social skill development and self-understanding as a result of program participation.
Project Hahn is a six-day wilderness based program serving youth 13-15 who are at-risk of "not making a healthy transition from adolescence into adult life" (p. 38). The project’s developers see the program’s role as a "catalyst or nexus for maturational gains, thus helping to accelerate and (for some) revisit adolescent developmental processes" (p. 38). The most significant findings of the current study were that the scores on the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) (pre n=79; post n=61; follow-up n=34) decreased significantly at post and follow-up and "levels of hopelessness and negative expectancy continued to decline over time, suggesting a substantial change in negative beliefs that are linked to feelings of hopelessness" (p. 41).

Due to the drop in numbers of study participants from pre test to follow-up, the authors conducted a Missing Values Analysis to check if those who dropped out of the study were systematically different from those who remained on any of the primary measures. The Missing Values Analysis was conducted by comparing mean pre-test scores of participants who completed all tests to the corresponding mean pre-test scores of those who did not complete the post-test and follow-up tests. Since the mean pre-test scores of those who remained in the study were similar to those who dropped out, and t-tests of difference between the means were not significant, it was concluded that improvements in test scores were unlikely due to the loss of participants over the course of the study, or to the selective drop-out of participants who had a more negative profile on major measures. These conclusions do not account for differences in the effects of the program across participants. It may be that attrition was due to dissatisfaction with the program itself. I believe that it would have been more useful to compare the scores of the 34 people who did participate in all the tests rather than to try to justify the use of data of those who did not participate in post and follow-up tests.
Qualitative results of this study were included but were underplayed in the authors’ discussion of the results. This lack prompted me to search for studies in outdoor education that used qualitative methods. This search found very few examples, which demonstrates a gap in the current qualitative research into the effects of outdoor education programs. The following is a mixed method study that placed an equal emphasis on qualitative and quantitative results.

In a mixed method study of the impacts of outdoor adventure program participation on urban adolescent self-perception, Garst, Scheider, and Baker (2001) found that there was a significant difference for social acceptance and behavioural conduct among participants that remained significant four months after the experience. Pre-tests, immediate post-tests, and post-tests after 4 months were completed by 36 of the 58 adolescents who participated in 3-day outdoor adventure trips. The trips were described as experiential outdoor education. Activities included hiking, caving, initiatives and group discussions, and reflection following each activity. Participants were also given free time to rest and explore the surrounding wilderness area. Participants were divided into groups and given responsibility for the running of the camp site including cooking, cleaning, setting up, and taking down. Researchers also collected qualitative data through interviews, trip leader journals, and the observation of the principal researcher who attended all trips. The qualitative results indicated that participants appreciated the opportunity to do new and exciting things that they would not otherwise have had a chance to do, as well as appreciated the escape from the city environment. Observations and interviews also showed a positive change in behaviour that was attributed to participants worrying about other’s impressions of them. Researchers attributed this change to opportunities to interact socially in positive ways and the positive
reinforcement by peers and staff of participants’ positive qualities. Researchers indicated that an important element of programming was the division of responsibilities that made everyone responsible for themselves as well as dependent on others. Observations indicated a focus on the group’s needs and an acceptance of each other’s differences. Participants said that their intense experience in the wilderness with their friends strengthened their relationships because they had to get along for three days and discovered another side of their friends that they didn’t see at school.

It seems remarkable that such a short program had an impact on behaviour. Not surprisingly, some of the effects that were found decreased during the four months after the trip. This study indicates that the investigation of longer-term programming is needed in order to understand how the impacts of these experiences are transferred to other environments. This study also shows the promise of qualitative research in this field in understanding how these types of programs impact urban youth.

A study done by Long (2001), using a similar method to the one in my research, offers an important example of qualitative research in outdoor education with ‘at-risk’ youth. The study explored the perceptions of ‘at-risk’ adolescent girls associated with experiential education activities and their perceptions of the impact these experiences had on their lives. The study participants were a group of girls with emotional and behavioural disorders who were participating in a residential long-term therapeutic program with experiential outdoor education components including ropes course, canoe tripping, rock climbing, and overnight hiking. The pedagogy of the program was described as being based on a model of long-term wilderness camping, which was started by Campbell Loughmiller in 1965 as a form of treatment for delinquency. The emphasis
was on establishing a balanced and positive group atmosphere and holding youth responsible for their actions and behaviours.

The girls involved in the study (n=9) were 14 to 17 years old; five were Caucasian and four were African American. When interviews began, the girls varied in the length of their participation in the program between one month and eight months. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant at various series of stages of the program, across three months. The girls expressed feelings of success, confidence, honesty with others, and comfort in leadership roles in association with the experiential education activities. They also expressed understanding of the importance of trusting others, supporting others, putting aside selfish goals to embrace goals of the group, and approaching challenge with a positive attitude. Particular emphasis was given to how the process of interpersonal development was facilitated by the ropes course activities. Long (2001) described several phases through which the girls developed trust for the other group members, changed their focus from personal to group success, and developed understanding of experiential education activities as important to their treatment.

Long’s (2001) study provides evidence that rich understanding of the processes of personal and social development through experiential learning can be gained through the investigation of participant experience. This study was instrumental in guiding my own investigations of participant perspectives of experiential learning.

Chapter Synthesis

Theoretical literature from both disciplines confirms that arts and outdoor education share certain basic assumptions about the nature of learning as well as some basic pedagogical elements. In agreement with situated learning theory, both disciplines
consider learning to be a constant negotiation between the learner and his/her social context. The whole learner changes and is changed by the social context in which he/she participates. This belief translates into arts and outdoor educations’ common practice of using experiential education pedagogy in programming. Hands-on learning through experiences is a common pedagogy in both disciplines.

In empirical studies on arts education programs of various disciplines researchers have found positive developmental outcomes in participants such as the development of empathy and open-mindedness, positive identity formation, and psychological wellbeing. Empirical studies on outdoor education programs have also found positive developmental outcomes in participants such as a decrease in hopelessness, an increase in social acceptance, positive behavioural conduct, and an understanding of and trust for others. Unfortunately, there is also a lack of understanding in both disciplines as to what conditions or program elements are responsible for these outcomes. A significant factor contributing to this lack of understanding is a deficiency in the description of the pedagogy of the programs studied. My study focuses on how developmental outcomes come about and thus includes in-depth investigation of the enacted pedagogy of each program being studied and the perspectives of participants as to which program elements they felt were responsible for these developmental outcomes.

Transformative learning theory is used as a guide in cultivating an understanding of the process of development that takes place when a learner enters a community of practice. A review of theoretical literature in arts education has revealed that arts education pedagogy may provide venues for two phases of the transformation process: self-reflection and trying on new roles and perspectives. Outdoor education literature describes a model of learning used in pedagogy that, like Mezirow’s (2000)
transformative learning theory begins with a disorienting situation that forces learners to self-reflect. In literature on outdoor education pedagogy there is an emphasis on self-reflection after challenging experiences, which is meant to encourage the examination of behaviour and the development of confidence. My study uses both situated and transformative learning theory to examine how aspects of experiential education programming can influence the transformative learning process in a positive direction.
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Qualitative Research and the Voice of Youth

Qualitative methodology is used in cases where the researcher wishes to gain a deeper understanding of an issue, culture, or a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). I chose a qualitative approach because I was interested in understanding the perspectives of participants on the process of their development through their participation in experiential education programs.

Since the 1980s, there has been a paradigm shift toward recognizing children as “active participants in the construction and determination of their experiences, other people’s lives, and the societies in which they live” (O’Kane, 2000, p. 136). This shift is reflected in a growing interest in giving children a voice in research (Einarsdottir, 2005). Giving children a voice is accomplished by trying to enter their world of understanding by interacting with them as knowledgeable experts in their own lives (Mayall, 2000).

My research gives youth a voice by exploring and describing participants’ perspectives in two experiential education programs. Two aspects of the participant’s perspectives are explored: (a) how their experience in these programs has affected their personal and social development, and (b) which aspects of programming they identify as having contributed to these developments.

This study uses the most common method of ascertaining the perspectives of children and youth—the interview (Einarsdottir, 2005). Interviews represent an attempt “to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). The semi-structured in-depth interview method was used in this investigation in order to frame the topics to be
investigated in the interview while creating a conversational tone and allowing me the flexibility to respond to topics highlighted by the interviewee (Patton, 2002). The less structured nature of this interview method allowed me to investigate the complex behaviour of the interviewee, “without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 706). Interview questions were constructed to help research participants explore my research questions from various angles and hypothetical perspectives (Patton, 2002).

To ensure that research participants were able to self-reflect sufficiently to address my research questions, participants aged 13 or over were asked to participate in the study. According to Scott (2000), most children in adolescence (age 11 and older) are able to articulate their perceptions, beliefs, and opinions. According to Rosenblum and Lewis (2006), during adolescence children develop cognitively allowing them to understand abstractions and symbolic knowledge, and in turn allowing them to reason using these abstractions. This change forms a necessary base to enable them to recognize cause and effect relations as complex event sequences with multiple causal factors. Further, this allows them to generate hypotheses about relations between events in the past (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2006). These developments are essential in identifying which pedagogical aspects of programming could be responsible for changes in their lives.

By participating in programming along side these youth, it was my intention to develop a relationship whereby a safe space could be created for reflective dialogue during the interview process. Mezirow (2000) argues that supportive relationships and environments are crucial in creating the conditions for reflective dialogue to occur. My participation in programming has enriched the resulting data because of the rapport I built
with the participants and, because it allowed me to use stimulated recall of certain activities and events during the interviews.

The Case Study Approach

This research is presented as a collective case study (Stake, 2000) involving two cases. One case represents the experiences of participants in an arts education program and the other in an outdoor education program. The case study approach is consistent with situated learning theory as it acknowledges the interconnectedness of learners and their social context. A case study approach allows the researcher to create a holistic representation of a situation where “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). One cannot fully understand the perspectives of participants without a basic understanding of the contextual frame within which they participate. I chose a case study approach in order to give the reader an in-depth look at how the perspectives of the participants interact with the pedagogy of each program. Each case within this study provides a thick description of both participant perspectives and the enacted pedagogy of programming. This approach allows the reader to have deeper insight into how developmental changes in participants may have come about.

Each case includes the perspectives of current participants (aged 13 to 15) and past participants (aged 16 to 21). The decision to include past participants was made under the assumption that their long-term participation in their respective programs gave them significant insight into how certain aspects of each program contributed to their personal and social development.

Criterion-based sampling was used to select the two study sites based on demographic characteristics of the participants and the objectives of each program. The programs selected serve inner city children and youth of low SES, are experiential in
nature, and have a focus on personal and social development. This sampling method served to ensure that each case differed principally in its subject matter of focus, rather than along other factors.

In the case analysis, both common and unique elements of the two cases are examined. My intention was not to compare the outcomes of each program, but to examine two pedagogical approaches to experiential education in order to increase our understanding of the benefits of experiential learning for inner city youth populations.

Recruitment: The Arts Program

The main sampling method of this study was criterion-based sampling. On the first day of the arts program, I met with all 13 participants between the ages of 13 and 15 in the program, introduced myself, verbally explained the study, and gave them letters of information and consent forms. Copies of the letters of information and consent forms can be found in Appendix A. All names used in this document are pseudonyms chosen by participants. Five current participants agreed to participate in the study including three girls: Star, Michelle, and Sally, and two boys: Rosco and Simon. Sally, Rosco, Star, and Simon had all participated in at least 3 summers before the session in which the interviews took place, and Michelle had participated in one session two summers previous. Rosco, Sally, and Star are of Afro-Jamaican descent, and Michelle and Simon are Caucasian of unknown descent.

During staff training, I met with staff who self-identified as being past participants in the program, introduced myself, and verbally explained the study and gave them letters of information and consent forms. Through the interview process, I discovered that only one of these staff members had participated as a camper, whereas the others had only
participated in leadership training and therefore did not fit my study criteria. Their data
were subsequently used, not as primary data, but to complement program descriptions,
and to reinforce opinions of current participants. Daisy, a Caucasian female of unknown
descent, was the only current staff member who fit my criteria as a past participant as she
had participated in the program as a camper. She first participated as a camper at the age
of 11; she spent 3 summers as a camper and two summers as a counselor-in-training
(CIT). She was 16 years old at the time of the study and was starting her first year as a
staff member.

Recruitment: The Outdoor Education Program

Because participants in this program did not meet between the time ethical
clearance for this study was obtained and the time of their summer session, recruitment
was done by mail. Letters of information and consent forms were mailed to all 18
participants of this program between the ages of 13 and 15. Copies of the letters of
information and consent forms can be found in Appendix A. Three current participants
agreed to participate in the study including: two Caucasian females of unknown descent:
Jane and Nicole, and one male of African descent: Billy Joe. All three were 15 years old
at the time of the study and had participated for three years in the program prior to the
session in which data were collected. During staff training one Intern, of African descent,
Andrew, who had also been a participant in the program, agreed to participate in the
study.

Summary of Description of Research Participants

The following two tables give a summary of the characteristics of each research
participant from each of the two cases. They include information on the status of the
participant during the time of research as well as each participant’s age, sex, and years of experience in his/her respective programs.

Table 1: Research Participants from the Arts Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Participant status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Number of years of participation previous to current session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Past participant</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3 as a camper &amp; 2 as a CIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosco</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Research Participants from the Outdoor Education Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Participant status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Number of years of participation previous to current session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Past participant</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 as a camper &amp; 1 as an Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy Joe</td>
<td>Current participant</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

This study was conducted over a five-month period between July and November of 2008. At each research site, semi-structured open-ended interviews with participants (past and current) were conducted to investigate participants’ perspectives of their program experiences. All research participants chose pseudonyms, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed using these names. To protect the identity of those being interviewed both program locations and program names have been kept confidential. Interviews with past participants took place during staff training before programming began. Interviews with current participants were conducted during the last few days of
programming at each site. Interviews ranged from 25 to 55 minutes in length. Although my original research design had included a short initial interview in the first week of programming to gauge the participants initial impressions of the program, I decided this interview would not be useful given that all of those who agreed to participate in the research had attended the program before the current session.

A follow-up interview was conducted in person with each current participant three to four months after the initial interviews. At the time of the follow-up interview, participants were given a paper copy of their interview transcript and asked to review it and clarify their answers to certain questions that remained unclear. Follow-up interviews ranged from 25 to 35 minutes in length. The follow-up was also used to delve deeper into research question number two. As I was transcribing the interviews, I quickly realized that the interview questions were not sufficiently direct and did not get to the root of the issue. I decided to ask each participant my research question directly during the follow-up interview: Which aspects of programming do you think contributed most to the changes you perceive in yourself? As an aid in helping participants identify specific program elements, I gave them a breakdown of program elements that I had prepared ahead of time based on my experiences in the program and on aspects that had been identified as important in the initial interviews. The interview questions and the program breakdown for each program can be found in Appendices B and C. The program breakdown was given to each participant to read and consider. They were asked to mark those elements they found to be the most important. When they were ready we discussed together the elements they had marked and why. These follow-up interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into the original transcript documents. Michelle, a current participant of the arts program could not be reached for follow-up. Her data were included in the study.
regardless.

No follow-up was conducted with past participants as their responses were clear and adequately addressed my research questions. Past participants were sent a copy of the transcript via e-mail and asked to respond if they had any issues. Neither of the past participants responded, and I therefore assumed that there were no issues with their transcripts.

My own participation as a volunteer in one session of programming at each research site informed the description of enacted pedagogy of each program. I participated every day for the duration of one session of each program. For the arts program this participation constituted one week of staff training and three weeks of programming between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday to Friday. For the outdoor education program my participation constituted two days of preparation with staff, a 10-day canoe trip in a wilderness area, and two days of clean up and closing ceremonies. In both programs, I took the role of a participant, with no position of power and no staff responsibilities. During my participation I wrote field notes and had casual conversations with staff about their pedagogy. My field notes consisted of observations of the staff and program pedagogy, and reflexive observations of my own reactions to this pedagogy. These notes were then compiled and used to create program descriptions and to inform the analysis of each case.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was completed over the span of several months using a variety of tools including a basic word processor, its cut and paste function, paper copies of the transcripts, and various coloured pens.
Once audio files of follow-up interviews were integrated into the original interview transcripts of each participant, I coded the transcripts using broad codes that described developmental outcomes. These codes were created with guidance from research from authors such as Larson (2000), Rodriguez (2008), Rutter (1993), and Drapeau et al. (2006). I then grouped participants’ comments according to program elements and contextual features they associated with these outcomes. Relationships between program elements and outcomes were postulated based on the perspectives of participants, with help from both situated and transformative learning theory. I then grouped the program elements into like themes. Through several readings of the findings, I reorganized and collapsed themes until I was satisfied with the organization of the findings. Although I had originally organized the findings according to my two research questions, it became apparent that it would be more useful to group program elements with the outcomes that participants claimed they supported.

The final step of analysis was to juxtapose the two cases to examine common and unique elements and outcomes. This step was completed through a process of reading the findings of both cases and grouping similar elements and outcomes. Those elements or outcomes that were left upon completion were then discussed separately as unique elements/outcomes of each program. After several readings of the material, more of the elements from each program were found to be common. Common elements were then considered in terms of their deeper pedagogical similarities. Unique elements were considered in terms of the qualities, philosophies, and context of each program.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The findings of this research are presented in two cases representing each of the two research sites under study. Each case begins with a rich description of the program including information about the participants, staff, program pedagogy, and goals. Following the description is a presentation of how the findings address both research questions one and two:

- How do past and current participants feel their experiences, in either arts or outdoor experiential education programs for inner city youth, have affected their personal and social development?
- Which pedagogical aspects of programming do the participants identify as having contributed most to the changes they perceive in themselves?

For clarity of analysis, the developmental outcomes described by participants as resulting from their participation are grouped with the program elements which participants felt supported those outcomes. Quotes from current participants are referenced using the abbreviation CP and past participants are referenced using the abbreviation PP.

Case One: The Arts Program

Description

This research site is a summer arts day camp in a large urban center offering visual arts, dance, drama, music, and a variety of other activities including sports and games. Programming runs between 8:45am and 4pm, Monday to Friday. The programming is divided into two three-week sessions. There are approximately 150 participants, divided into groups by age, with a maximum of 12 participants per group. The age range in the regular program is 8 to 14. Each group visits each arts specialty (Music, Drama, Visual Arts, and Dance) seven times during a session, each visit being 1
hour and 25 minutes. Each group visits each specialty together with another group that is closest in age, making the maximum number in each class 24 participants. Each group has two counsellors who remain with the group throughout the day. When the groups are not participating in an arts specialty, they are involved in an activity with their counsellors, during which they play a variety of creative games or sports or sometimes make costumes for a theme day coming up. Toward the end of the session these times are often used to plan or practice performances for Visitors’ Day or the talent show.

Snack is provided twice a day, and campers bring their own lunch. Lunch is one hour long with half an hour being devoted to lunch time activities, which involve sports inside or out or quiet games. On days with a theme, which occur once or twice a week, lunch time activities may be a camp dance or a time for camp cheers, which are created by each group of campers. Once or twice a session there is an all camp afternoon where campers are divided into new groups across ages and participate in team building games and challenges toward a common goal, usually in competition with other groups. Once a session there are also guest speakers, in-house performances from musical groups, or a concert where staff members perform. There is also a field trip once a session where the camp travels for the day to the zoo, an island, a museum, or a gallery.

When participants are 15, they are invited to participate in a leader-in-training program, which focuses on building leadership skills. Upon graduating from this program they are invited to apply for a volunteer position as a counsellor-in-training where they are paired with a counsellor and gain direct experience leading a group of campers.
Participants

The majority of program participants are members of ethnic minority groups, many participants being first generation Canadians, and most are of low socioeconomic status and/or live in underserved communities. Some walk to the program site, or are dropped off by a family member/guardian, while others ride one of two camp buses, which pick up at two locations in the inner city. Some are recruited through programs run by the umbrella organization; others by schools, community shelters, whereas others hear from friends or family who are already in the program. Registration is on a first come first serve basis. The cost of participation is subsidized, and no participant is turned away for financial reasons. Some participants pay as little as $25 dollars for a three week session based on their financial need.

Staff

The staff consists of 20 counselling staff, five arts specialists, and seven senior and administrative staff. The counseling staff range in age from 17 to 25 and represent a range of ethnic groups. Most also grew up in the inner city. Most have an interest in the arts, and most are enrolled in or plan to pursue studies in either arts or child and youth work. Some have other career aspirations, but find this a fun place to work. Specialists are young professionals in their field and are responsible for creating and running an arts program for each group. The role of the counsellors is to participate, assist the specialists, and help address any problems that may occur during the sessions. During visual arts, counsellor participation may take the form of helping with set up and assisting participants, rather than participating in the arts activities themselves. In other specialties
and activities, counsellors are expected to participate along with campers as they are seen as models for the participants.

Goals

The goals of the program include providing participants with opportunities to express themselves artistically, and challenging themselves in a safe supportive environment, while reinforcing valuable life skills such as cooperation and problem-solving (Program Director, Personal Communication, 2008). The emphasis is on trying to create a safe, fun, and supportive atmosphere in which campers feel comfortable expressing themselves artistically and giving voice to their imagination. Staff training is conducted through workshops, group discussions, and role-play. Contributions and participation from every staff member are encouraged. One staff member I interviewed, described the objectives of the program in the context of the population served as follows:

Well, this neighbourhood, I guess you would say is not the best neighbourhood. The kids who come here are not in the best circumstances… and we accept them and we try to help them in the way that we can. We are not trying to change their lives we are trying to help them change their lives. The fact that this is an arts camp and arts is not always their biggest priority compared to the rest of their lives and we show them that you can do this, if it is what you want to do, there is a way to do it. I think because art is so different. Art teaches these campers that it is ok to be different. They are not all the same. They don’t have the same interests, and so [camp name] gives them an opportunity to experience different things, learn about different things and find their own thing out of all these different things. (Bruce, Current Staff, p. 7)

Pedagogy

In order to create this atmosphere, staff are encouraged to build positive relationships with campers based on care, honesty, and mutual respect. Staff are encouraged to use positive reinforcement and help to promote an environment that is
inclusive of all campers. Staff are encouraged to seek camper input into activities and speak to children as peers in a problem solving situation. Staff are asked to find a child’s talent and highlight it using specific praise. The camp philosophy is based on assumptions that children want to learn new things, be accepted into a group, be active and involved in activities with others, voice their opinions, and have their parents and other adults proud of them. Discipline is seen as a process involving the camper, the staff, and the family. There is a social worker on staff who regularly communicates with families about their children. By encouraging campers to work together, encouraging everyone to participate, and discouraging cliques, bullying, or name calling, staff create a safe atmosphere for campers. Because each specialist creates his/her own program, and specialists often change from year to year, it is important to discuss how the specialists present at the time of the study ran their program and how it related to the overall program.

Drama

The drama specialist is also a teacher during the year and explained to me that he finds meaning in teaching skills to those who wouldn’t otherwise have a chance to discover these skills within themselves. He pointed out that often children with drama talent are those who get in trouble at school. He explained that his pedagogical emphasis was on creating a safe atmosphere where activities were open-ended and there was not one correct result. He explained that he tries to use activities that allow campers to enter at any level of skill so that no matter the skill level, they find challenge, but are not intimidated to participate. He explained that a play has many roles and participation does not have to be equal to be fair. When he introduced a skill he created pairs of unequal skill so each member of the pair could help each other learn. At this stage everyone participated. Then as the class progressed, participation became voluntary to reduce stress
and let people be an audience. He put emphasis on how to be a good audience by appreciating the efforts of those who try a skill on stage. He admitted that not everyone will love drama, but it is important that they feel valued for their efforts. During the final free exercise, he paired campers of equal skill so they could feed off each other’s talent and grow as artists. He focused on teaching skills of both acting and performing. He emphasized that character development is the basis of acting, and he worked with the campers to develop their imagination and empathy in creating realistic characters. The skill of performing was emphasized when he taught the importance of voice projection, the difference between on stage and off stage, and the advantage of having a stage face.

*Dance*

The dance specialist described her program as being adapted to a particular group of kids. Her main goals were that participants find dance relevant, and were able to understand the beats, music, and a dance style. It was important that dance be an outlet for expression and a release of energy. Her styles are hip-hop and break dance, and she described them as inclusive and community oriented, giving the cypher as an example. In a cypher, which is a circle formed by participants at the end of each session, each person had the opportunity to dance in the middle of the circle to show what they had learned. Others in the cypher were encouraged to show appreciation for those who stepped into the middle in the form of cheers and clapping. She explained that in hip-hop there is a dance etiquette that includes the validation of courage of stepping into the circle. In the cypher there is only encouragement and support. There is no laughing allowed as it is seen as a sign of disrespect. Hip-hop is an athletic style of dance, and the warm-up is sport related. She told me that she feels kids do not get enough movement in their lives. I saw from her classes that she took their learning seriously and expected them to do the same. She was
careful to work with different levels of ability and give constant encouragement. During the performance of the steps learned in the class, she encouraged each camper to put his/her own personality into the moves and make the dance personal. She continually encouraged the audience to make noise and appreciate those who stepped up and showed their enthusiasm.

Music

The music specialist described his program as one that is focused on music appreciation, listening, communication, working in groups, and the development of creativity, rhythm, and an ear for music. It was important to him that his program came from his own experience and was conveyed with passion to the participants. He spent a considerable amount of time trying to adapt each class to each group based on the group’s musical interests. At the beginning of each class, campers listened to music and tried to pick out different instruments and the form and structural parts of the song. He observed carefully to what music the group responded. After this introduction the lesson continued with a whole group activity where campers, for example, learned several basic rhythms on Djembe drums. Once they had basic rhythms they broke into small groups, usually of three or four. They were asked to come up with a collective piece one minute long. They were given about 15 minutes to prepare, and at the end of the 15 minutes, they performed their piece from where they were in the room. His goal was to help them express their own individuality through music. He spoke about how group work in school is different because you are being marked and there is a competitive dynamic, but, in this situation, everyone had to contribute, and communication among the group members was essential to the co-ordination of the rhythm of the final piece. His eventual goal was to facilitate the skills needed for song writing and improvisation.
The visual arts specialist described her views of art as a way to learn life lessons such as teamwork, open-mindedness, determination, and problem solving. She had high expectations of the participants and described her program as intensive. Her program encouraged the participants to experiment with tools, colour, and materials. She expressed that it is important for kids to play, experiment, and sometimes get dirty. She worked on helping them take time with the layering process and letting go of attachment to each mark they make. Even though, in general, she focused on the process, she believes it is important for participants to have a finished product. Challenging participants was important, as it tends to increase their pride in the finished product. She explained that she had a solid plan for her program, but was flexible in adapting her program to each group. She enjoyed talking to the kids about their work and asking them about the story behind their work.

Through analysis of interviews with participants, two themes emerged that addressed the question of how participants felt their experiences in the arts program affected their personal and social development: (1) an increase in social skill and confidence, and (2) a broadening/expanding of one’s sense of self.

Relating to the first theme, participants spoke of a sense of letting go of their fears of being judged by others, of gaining a sense of emotional competence, and of having a greater confidence in their abilities. The first theme includes both personal and interpersonal development. The two are difficult to separate, as they influence each other continually. According to participants of this program, their increase in social skill and
confidence was supported by (a) opportunities to build skill, (b) structures acknowledging their success (c) the existence of behavioural expectations, and (d) a staff pedagogy of care.

The second theme was a broadening/expanding of one’s sense of self. Participants spoke of an opening of their minds, a willingness to try new things and a discovering of their own abilities and talents. They also referred to possible versions of their own future involving success in the arts. According to participants, a broadening of one’s sense of self was supported by (a) opportunities to build experiences, (b) self-expression through the arts, (c) models for behaviour and success, and (d) the absence of formal evaluation.

These two themes seem to relate to each other in a cyclical manner. In order to broaden one’s sense of self, one needs to be comfortable with one’s surroundings and have the confidence to try new things. Once one starts to expand and explore one’s sense of self and receives positive feedback, one’s confidence and sense of social comfort increase. In the next two sections I discuss the two themes, (1) increase in social skill and confidence and (2) broadening of one’s sense of self, along with program elements participants felt supported these two outcomes. The following table gives an overview of the findings for this case. The table includes a list of developmental outcomes expressed by participants and the contextual features which they identified as supporting each outcome.
Table 3: Overview of Findings in the First Case: The Arts Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Outcomes</th>
<th>Increase in Social Skill and Confidence</th>
<th>A Broadening of One’s Sense of Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Contextual features which supported each outcome | • opportunities to build skill  
• structures acknowledging success  
• behavioural expectations  
• a staff pedagogy of care. | • opportunities to build experiences  
• self-expression through the arts  
• the absence of formal evaluation  
• models for behaviour and success |

*Increase in Social Skill and Confidence*

Both Rosco and Star expressed an increased satisfaction with their own person as a result of participation in this program. They regarded themselves as more exciting people who do good things.

If you had met me before, I wouldn’t really talk, I would be more closed in, but now you would say, ‘she has so much energy, she is so fun’… I am a lot more of a leader….People tend to follow what I do cause I lead good examples. (Star, CP, p. 4)

Through this program, Star has come to recognize her own power and uses it to influence others positively.

Daisy has gained a sense of confidence, which has helped her to let go of the fear that she is being judged by others. She spoke of feeling a sense of emotional maturity and happiness. “I have become more confident… I have always felt that people are judging me, but I don’t really feel that way as much… I have grown and become a stronger person and I am happier now” (Daisy, PP, p. 6). An increase in
emotional competence was also experienced by Sally who learned how to manage her anger and to be respectful to others.

In Simon’s case, he struggled with his identity and was not able to transfer what he calls his camp mood to other contexts. Even though he had difficulty characterizing what he meant by his camp mood, he was able to explain how he is different at school. “I am just really weird at school. I get in trouble more than here…I just misbehave because people make me mad and they make fun of me (Simon, CP, p. 5). He describes his behaviour at camp as different because of the behaviour of his peers. “It is different here because no-one would do that. Cause everyone is nicer and they try to make you feel good and better” (Simon, CP, p. 5). Simon’s case highlights the importance of peer approval in adolescents.

If we examine Simon’s comments in the frame of transformative learning we can see that he is trying new roles, but has not transferred what he calls his camp mood, to other circumstances because of bullying he encounters at school. His comments reinforce the idea that adolescent behaviour is highly influenced by peer group acceptance and the presence or lack of a supportive atmosphere. He told me that he changes his actions and his body language depending on the group he is in. As transformative learning theory points out, if a person’s identity transformation is not accepted in other contexts in which a person participates, it will not be integrated into the person’s life. Simon’s experiences in this arts program provide a strong example of Larson and Hansen’s (2006) conclusion that organized activity settings provide opportunities for growth with less risk of negative experiences than school or unorganized activity.
According to participants an increase in social skill and confidence was supported by (a) opportunities to build skill, (b) participation in performances, (c) behavioural expectations and (d) a staff pedagogy of care.

**A) Opportunities to build skill.** Participants expressed the fact that participating in this program has helped them to discover talents they didn’t know they had. Even if they didn’t have talent in an area, over time they built skill. This building of skill gave them feelings of accomplishment and happiness, and increased their self-confidence. Some spoke of how the skill they have built here transfers to their abilities in school and other community organizations. Building skill, feelings of accomplishment, and competence were associated with participation in the arts, games and performing.

Unlike some other summer programs, this one focuses on building skills in specific areas of the arts. This focus is of specific importance to the relevance of the skills obtained by participants. Daisy, a current staff and past participant in the arts program, pointed to the importance of the difference between a superficial treatment of the arts by some summer programs, and the professional nature of programming that the participants receive at this camp. “I knew that from day one that I would learn a lot about the arts because there were professionals coming to teach” (Daisy, PP, p. 8).

Daisy and Rosco valued being given opportunities to build skills in specific disciplines that, in some cases, helped them develop a talent that they may not have otherwise discovered. Rosco spoke about the excitement of learning dance techniques that he had always wanted to learn and building skill and discovering his talents in drama. “In drama we got to know new techniques how to perform on stage and other stuff... I didn’t
know that I had drama talent, [name of instructor] brought it out in me so I am happy about that (Rosco, CP, p. 2).

Participants spoke of a direct relation between learning skills in an area and increases in confidence and enjoyment. Rosco pointed to a decrease in self-doubt. “If you doubt yourself that you know how to draw, you come here and you discover that you really know how to draw” (Rosco, CP, p. 9). Both Sally and Star admitted that through learning skills in arts disciplines their attitude toward the subject and their own ability to learn shifted in a positive direction. “I hated [visual] art so much…and then when it came to this camp I actually tried. I enjoyed art for the first time…I was able to say, ‘oh I can draw this now, This summer I have been practicing. (Star, CP, p. 3) Activities in the arts were seen as challenging and successfully completing that challenge brought a sense of accomplishment.

After several years participating, Simon recognized the long-term benefits of the program. “If you come more often, after three years or maybe two years, you get a lot better at what you like and so it is an experience… that is why I have improved so much on it” (Simon, CP, p. 3). For Star in particular, it was important that the skills she has developed here gave her the ability and confidence to participate and creatively contribute to other community arts programming such as a dance program in her building and a community drumming group she was a part of. She also explained that her experiences in this program have given her the confidence to participate in planning events at her school.

B) Structures acknowledging success. The arts program has structures in place to ensure that each participant feels a sense of success. At the end of each session, staff create and present a unique award for each camper in their group that highlights the
camper’s strengths and progress at camp. These awards are an example of how a structure is in place to ensure success for each camper. Simon said that receiving a camper award, “…makes me feel like I have done something. It makes me feel good” (Simon, CP, p. 3). Rosco spoke about his awards with pride and was able to list by name all the awards he won.

Small successes are also celebrated by awards that are announced in front of the camp at the end of each day. Awards are given to one person in each group who demonstrates a certain quality during that day. Qualities are announced each morning as themes of the day in the hopes that participants will aspire to emulate this quality throughout the day. Some examples include: enthusiasm, listening, co-operation, friendliness, teamwork, or courage, among others. As a participant during one session, I was also chosen for one of these awards. I was surprised at my own pride in receiving it. It felt good that someone had noticed a good quality in me and felt strong enough to give public recognition of that fact. The Silly Putty I received as my reward, was the icing on the cake.

As performances are the culminating events of each session, they can also be seen as part of the structures in place for acknowledging and celebrating success. There are two major performances that take place during each 3-week session of programming. On Visitors’ Day, which takes place during the second last evening of the session, parents/guardians are invited to come to the site and each group performs a piece/s that they have worked on in the arts specialties throughout the session. The specialists take responsibility for coordinating one or two pieces for each group. Along with the performance, there is a display of all the visual arts pieces created by participants throughout the session. After the performance, guests are invited to stay, have snacks,
meet counsellors, and look at the visual arts pieces on display. As Sally explained, this is an important aspect of Visitors’ Day; “I like showing my mom my best work at Visitors’ Day” (Sally, CP, p. 11).

The other performance is a talent show that takes place during the last afternoon of the session in front of all the participants of the program. Pieces are planned independently by individuals or groups of campers. The acts that will be included in the performance are chosen through auditions conducted by participants and staff in the leader-in-training (LIT) and counsellor-in-training (CIT) programs.

Through facing the challenge of performing in front of peers, family, and friends and receiving positive responses, participants were able to let go of their fear of being judged by others. In fact, all of the participants I interviewed enjoyed performances and associated them with feeling a sense of success Simon associated performances with a sense of accomplishment. “Performing is like, I always get really nervous but by the time I get up there and I am done I feel like I accomplished something” (Simon, CP, p. 2).

In the absence of formal evaluation, audience and parental approval takes over as the measure of success. For example, for Rosco the rewards of parental pride and accomplishment are worth the effort of practicing throughout the session. Often parents are pleasantly surprised by their children’s performances. “Visitors’ Day you show what you have learned and the performing is real fun, it makes the audience laugh, and cheer, say, ‘it is good. I didn’t know my kid could do that’ (Rosco, CP, p. 4).

For participants in this arts program, performance was a particularly important aspect of the program in building confidence in their skills and emotional competence. “It [performing] gave me a chance to let my fear go and just play…when I want to play later I can be like, ‘ok, I can do this,’ because I have done it before” (Simon, CP, p. 2).
Performing was especially challenging and rewarding for Sally who saw it as a chance that she rarely has to make her voice heard.

I am a shy person and I don’t really make people hear that I can sing… but last year I sang at [talent show name] so, I felt good about that. That was the first time I ever did it so performing made me more confident. (Sally, CP, p. 6)

Although both Visitors’ Day and the talent show were associated with a sense of confidence and success, participants spoke of an important difference between them. She explained that the talent show is more about creative self-expression and fun, whereas the performances for Visitors’ Day are more about showing your skills and accomplishments to your parents and receiving parental praise and approval. The talent show was an important venue for Star to express herself during a session when ‘her’ style of dance was not the focus. The talent show gave her a chance to express her individuality and exercise her creativity in creating her own dance routine. “They got to see my type of style out there… it is like, more of your own creative thing, which also makes it very fun too” (Star, CP, p. 2).

C) Behaviour expectations. During interviews, participants expressed that the existence of behaviour expectations was important for personal and social development. Participants considered behaviour expectations within the community as important for their personal growth. They gave evidence that the process of entering this community was important for gaining emotional competence and entering into respectful relationships with adults and peers.

As individuals join a community, as these program participants have, they discover what is acceptable behaviour and what is not; they learn how their behaviour affects their ability to fully participate. Sally recognized that her behaviour influenced her ability to
participate in programming, in turn motivating her to improve her attitude. “Usually when I was bad, I never get to do anything, I had to sit in time out for a really long time, and when I improved my attitude I got to go back” (Sally, CP, p. 4). This comment also shows that Sally is internally motivated to participate in activities and recognizes that consequences for her behaviour affect her ability to fully participate.

Rosco also identified the behavioural expectations of this program as important to his personal growth. He said that his behaviour not only changed during his participation in this program, but also at school.

The behaviours that are accepted here [are important], because my behaviours have improved. It is not like before, when I used to argue with teachers, and I don’t any more, because it wasn’t accepted here. (Rosco, CP, p. 7)

When I asked Rosco if that behaviour was accepted at school, he admitted that it wasn’t, but pointed out an important difference between how behaviours are dealt with at school compared to this program. It was not so much the expectations that were important but how they were communicated. “There is a big difference here than at school. At school I get sent down to the office and here they just talk to you and they say, ‘that is not really acceptable, please don’t do it again’” (Rosco, CP, p. 7). Rosco’s comment about being sent down to the office highlights a communication issue, which was also brought up by a student in Rodriguez’s (2008) analysis of the experiences of urban high school students in the U.S. In his study, he quoted one student as saying that teachers at her school,

…don’t understand, they just send you to the office. And the office, they like really only listen to the teacher, and so they are like, “Okay, she is disruptive,” and then they like suspend you, and that’s gonna make the students worse. So the teachers don’t communicate. They need to communicate better. (p. 775)

It is clear that this student’s concept of communication includes not only communicating behavioural expectations, but also listening to what youth have to
say. The pedagogy of using respectful communication in dealing with behavioural issues with campers is part of a broader staff pedagogy of care within this program.

D) A staff pedagogy of care. During staff training for the arts program, there was a session with a resident social worker on dealing with camper behaviour. Her main message was that listening to campers can help you understand the root of their behaviour and help solve the problem. According to participants, staff in this program are caring and genuine and try to help out the campers. Daisy described an important music specialist she remembers from her time as a camper. “She was very kind and generous and her whole way of approaching things was really genuine… I think that is what made her whole music classes so much more” (Daisy, PP. p. 3).

The visual arts specialist explained that it is important, especially in visual arts class where participants are quick to judge their own work as bad, to give specific praise that cannot be disputed by the participants. She said she has heard people many times telling a child that his/her work looks great and the child telling them it is really bad. Her technique was to describe what aspect of the work is interesting, such as the use of shading, tell campers that it creates the illusion of a more rounded object and makes it look realistic, and then tell them it is good. She said being specific and descriptive with praise can help participants focus on their successes.

Care in this program was also shown through pedagogy of patience and an emphasis on engaging participants in the subject matter. This caring pedagogy provides important support for the development of competency. For example, the music specialist explained to me that, during his classes, the activities change often to keep things fun and there is no pressure to get it right before we move on. He explained that this pedagogy
helps keep kids from getting bored and keeps those with a shorter attention span engaged. The brain can only handle so much, he explained. He broke things down into small sections and kept coming back to several key things in the lesson. He always planned 14 things even though he only needed to do 7 of them. He believed it was important to respond to each group. His goal was to show participants that learning can be fun and to create conditions that allowed them to succeed and build competence. Having taught in other contexts he found this context important for his own personal development. He has a chance to try many things as an instructor here because there are fewer curricular constraints than in a school environment.

Daisy remembers how a music specialist in this program, when she was a camper, gently coaxed her group into, the often uncomfortable, exercise of singing. “She just took it step by step so that everyone was on the same page at the same time and she didn’t rush ahead” (Daisy, PP, p. 3). The key here is a focus on the comfort of the learner. The following comment from Simon reveals a fundamental interest in learning and shows that patience and visual demonstration by staff can engage this interest. “Last year, I liked art, it was one of my favourites because we got to learn cartoons and how to draw properly and all that, cause the teacher took her time (Simon, CP, p. 2).

During my participation in the visual arts classes, I was with the older group as they attempted to create a self-portrait by using a grid to break down the face into manageable squares. This was not attempted until the technique was practiced on faces from magazines. The specialist taught using demonstrations as well as breaking projects down into their parts and re-explaining as much as necessary. She also observed the group and gave one-on-one attention to participants who were struggling.
Consultation of participants in the programming process was constantly emphasized by specialty staff as a high priority. Without a formal evaluation system, participants must either be motivated by staff enthusiasm or internally motivated by interest in the subject matter. With this change in dynamics, staff must be flexible and consult participants about relevance and age appropriateness of activities. Sally eloquently explained this dynamic from the perspective of the participants and offered an explanation of some participants’ motivations. She explained that some kids can give counsellors attitude because they are not being challenged enough. “We want to play more challenging games… so the counsellors should listen to kids and ask them for advice about what game they want to play” (Sally, CP, p. 8). She reinforced that consultation with participants is important for keeping activities challenging and relevant for youth.

Daisy spoke of how it was important to her that her counsellor not only encouraged the group to do well in performance, but also was motivated himself. He participated with the group and thus included himself in the group’s common goal. Daisy’s comments indicate that this is a strong motivating factor. “I remember that our counsellor was really driven…like ‘we are going to do this, we are going to get it right, we are going to work hard as a team.’ I really like that” (Daisy, PP, p. 3). Staff participation was an aspect of pedagogy that was constantly emphasized during staff training. The staff were encouraged to participate in activities, recognizing their role as models for participants. Staff participation changes the dynamic from adult as authority figure to adult as peer working toward a common goal. This change in interpersonal dynamic is an important grounding for relationships of mutual respect.
Broadening/Expanding of One’s Sense of Self.

Broadening one’s concept of one’s possibilities in life is a powerful thing. From my own experience growing up in a rural area, I remember travelling to another community to attend a creative arts leadership program and meeting one of the staff who was a professional book illustrator. I was suddenly struck by the fact that one could do such a thing for a living. “How excellent”, I thought. One’s thoughts of one’s future self are often constructed by the examples in one’s surrounding community. In school I remember thinking that because I was good at biology I should become a biologist, and even though I was good at visual arts, “what could I do with art really”? It was so undefined and foreign. Even though I had relatives who were artists, I didn’t really have a grasp of the variety of possibilities that existed in the arts.

The fact that the participants of this program had a chance to explore various activities in a variety of arts disciplines was reported as important in helping them to find their passion and discover talents that they did not know they had. Star claimed that this program has helped her to become more open minded to trying new things. As she saw her own success, she was willing to open up further.

Before, I didn’t have much of an open mind, I was more closed, if I didn’t want to do something, I wouldn’t do it, if I didn’t like something I would be more like, “No,” more picky. Now I am starting to do things. There are certain art projects that I will be like, ‘oh come on, I don’t want to do this,’ but now I am starting to have a more open mind like, ‘let me try it.’ And when I actually try it, I am actually pretty successful, which is good. (Star, CP, p. 4)

Daisy claimed that this program helped her to find what she was good at and helped her to envision the direction of her future. “I had no clue what my passion was. I felt like
camp really drove me in the direction. I thought you know, ‘Wow, I am actually good at this, maybe this can be an option’” (Daisy, PP, p. 7).

According to participants, broadening of one’s sense of self was supported by (a) opportunities to build experiences, (b) self-expression through the arts, (c) the absence of formal evaluation and (d) encouragement from staff and peers.

A) Opportunities to build experiences. A common sentiment expressed during my conversations with participants was that this program provided them with opportunities to do things they would not normally get a chance to do. They spoke of opportunities to learn new things, meet new people, get out of the house, and go to new and interesting places. “Home is for me more boring, more sitting down, TV, food, you know, not really getting out there and doing exciting things” (Star, CP, p. 3). All participants that I spoke to expressed the fact that if they were not participating in this program they would be sitting at home, bored, in front of the TV. This situation highlights the significant role that programming for inner city youth plays in providing rich and varied experiences that they may not otherwise experience. Although many Canadian families might take for granted the opportunity to visit a zoo or go on a boat, those living in the inner city might not have such opportunities.

Exploration and development of identity were associated with activities such as field trips, games, and arts activities. These experiences give participants opportunities to gain self-knowledge through exploring interests and competences and to develop a stronger sense of who they are and their possibilities for the future. As Daisy explained, the four arts specialties provide, “four directions for the kids to look at. They can say, ‘I am not so good at that, but I am awesome at visual
arts” (Daisy, PP, p. 8). Michelle explained that opportunities to try new things, practice, learn from mistakes, and try again helps you to learn, and explore your identity and your interests, which in turn leads to confidence and maturation.

Camp also changes you cause you learn from more mistakes, so you mature more… Here you get to try new things and get to know what you really want to do…Probably, cause you get more chances to have a go at stuff, you get more outgoing. (Michelle, CP, p. 7)

Rosco’s appreciation for the variety of novel, creative activities he has experienced in this program make apparent that, as participants build a variety of experiences, they are able to expand their sense of what is possible and build competence in areas they previously did not know existed. “I never knew before that I could create my own song with my friends and I am happy about that, really happy” (Rosco, CP, p. 3).

The variety, novelty, and relevance of the activities in the arts were constantly identified by participants as being important in facilitating interest and motivation learn. Simon found the pedagogical focus of music in this program refreshing compared to his experiences at school. “Here music is actually fun, we get to learn about different types of music or rhythms… at school it is just like, read this [music] and perform it” (Simon, CP, p. 2). For Rosco, the music lessons in his school were not in touch with his interests and as such he appreciated the novelty of activities offered in this program. “We have music at school, but we get to play cheezy instruments. We play drums, but not Jibes cause they don’t have those. [At school] we get to play like Trumpet and Saxophone, but I don’t really like that” (Rosco, CP, p. 3). The interest and motivation to learn that resulted from the variety, novelty and relevance of activities was important in facilitating exploration of identity.
B) Self-expression through the arts. Participants found that the arts gave them a chance to express their feelings in a field where there is no one right way to do things. Arts activities provided participants with opportunities to expand their imagination and explore many ways to do things, including their own. “There is no right or wrong answer it is just what you do. I guess, there’s a lot of options to it, you can do whatever and make your own rules” (Michelle, CP, p. 2).

Michelle identified something inherently important about the nature of the arts: its open-endedness. In the following quote Daisy expands on this idea as it applies to other arts disciplines.

As a camper, CIT, to now as a staff, I found that through the arts you can express yourself in a non-structured way. So for example dance, everything is interpretive. You can interpret it any way you want to. It doesn’t have to follow the rules exactly. Like for math you are always right or wrong, there is no in between, but for art there are no borders. Their [participants] imagination grows and grows and I think that is really important… I think it is good for them to expand the way they think. (Daisy, PP, p. 8)

Another important aspect of learning through the arts is that it gives people a chance to express themselves in mediums other than verbal or written.

The verbal so dominates knowledge management and production, especially in schools and academic standards of assessment, that youth in community arts organizations seem almost purposefully to move as far away as possible from the verbal. (Heath, 2001, p. 14)

As a facilitator in youth programs, I have noticed a tendency in youth to avoid writing. When I ask participants to make a journal entry, often grumblings can be heard to the effect of, “this is not school, why should we have to write”. The emphasis in this arts program is on doing rather than writing or talking. The participants are constantly moving, excited, and engaged. Several of the participants identified dance, drama, and music as being important sources of embodied learning. They spoke of feelings of
pleasure during physical movement and made a connection between body and brain function. During the drama warm up, for example, campers went through a routine of accessing power points on their bodies by jabbing the air with different points of their bodies and then doing a series of stretches. During this process of releasing and energizing the body, the room was full of giggles, but everyone participated with intensity. Dance was also an important element when it came to the connection between body and brain. For example, Sally said, “like in dance, they help me get stronger and use muscles and brains” (Sally, CP, p. 4).

Dance was Star’s favourite because she found it easy to express herself through this medium. She did admit that some styles were more challenging for her because they involved moving her body in a feminine way. “I think I like it [dance] because I like moving my body… Certain styles it takes me a while, cause there is stuff that is too feminine for me [laugh]” (Star, CP, p. 8). Star’s discomfort with her own femininity is evidence for Bowman’s (2004) argument that body is constructed within cultural constraints. Her experiences learning salsa have allowed her to explore and become more comfortable with her own femininity.

Simon explained that he gets great joy from music and it has a calming effect on him. “Music, I really enjoy because it is just really calms me down and makes me feel better when I play music or when I listen to it. It makes my day go by better” (Simon, CP, p. 2). Music is not only a representation of feelings and thoughts, it is also real and physical. Vibrations enter the body and resonate, fully embodied (Bowman, 2004).

A particularly salient example of how drama can help adolescents engage in transformative learning was provided by Daisy. Her description of the slow process of becoming more confident is evidence that drama games and role playing can be
particularly effective in helping children understand themselves and the world. The process Daisy described of gaining the confidence to fully participate in drama games is comparable to Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process. As Daisy entered this new community, she experienced a disorienting dilemma, which made her uncomfortable. “I watched other campers who were not shy at all… [I thought to myself] ‘Wow they are making a fool of themselves and they don’t even care. Why would anyone want to do that in front of a group?’” (Daisy, PP, p. 5). She could not understand people’s motivations in acting strangely in front of a group. This lack of understanding triggered a phase of reflection where she observed the reactions of others and compared them to her own assumptions. “I realized that they walked off and they were smiling and everyone was laughing. Then it hit me…‘why am I so worried about it? People get over it and they don’t really remember’” (Daisy, PP, p. 5). As she discovered that her assumptions did not match the reality of this situation, she slowly allowed herself to enter the next phase, which Mezirow calls exploration of options for new roles. “I always was in that tunnel of one way of thinking and I opened the tunnel slowly” (Daisy, PP, p. 5). Her exploration of new roles was facilitated by drama activities of role playing and character building. “I remember in the [drama] games…I would slowly but, surely be less shy to just let everything out... [until] I was a hundred percent the character and I was like, ‘ah yes!’” (Daisy, PP, p. 5). The nature of drama games themselves seemed to me important in the exploration of identity.

The whole idea of being a different person or even animal, or anything, like you can be what you want to be, like you can express yourself through someone else. Basically you don’t have to be yourself. You get into the minds of other people and the way people walk… you learn not to be nervous, to let go of that. Just do it. Get it over with and not worry about what people think. (Daisy, PP, p. 6).
Mezirow’s model of transformative learning recognizes, as did Daisy, that the process of personal development is not easy. The development of identity necessitates multiple opportunities to try out roles and the growth of confidence and competence in the new role. For Daisy, as for myself, the process of ‘opening up’ took years.

My observations of drama class in this program help to characterize the pedagogy that facilitated identity exploration. The following is an excerpt of my field notes taken during my participation in the arts program.

I remember the first class of drama that I participated in, the specialist spoke to the kids about bringing back the skills of pretending that they learned in kindergarten. Through several activities with the group, he encouraged them to think imaginatively and try new things that were outside of their comfort zone. During a character building exercise, we walked around the classroom trying to find the walk and the face of our character. He asked us to think about what the character is afraid of, where they work, how old they are, what makes them happy, what secrets they may have. After several exercises we were given paper and markers and asked to draw a picture of our character and write on the picture what image they show to others and what feelings, thoughts and motivations they keep inside. During an Improv. session, where each character sat in the ‘hot seat’ and others asked him/her questions, he talked about being fully in character even when asking questions and putting on a performance face, even when the audience was laughing. He told us that there is a time to be silly and a time to be serious, and our character would be more convincing if that difference was consistent. During the class he constantly showed appreciation for efforts of campers and used moments during ‘Improv’ exercises to teach important things about drama. (Field Notes, 07/17/2008)

C) Absence of formal evaluation. The absence of formal evaluation emerged from the interviews as an important aspect that gave the participants a feeling of comfort in learning, a freedom to express themselves and try new things without fear of being judged. Freedom from judgment gave the participants a sense that they could try new things without worrying about the end result. “You can try your best, but if it doesn’t look
as you expected you don’t have to doubt yourself, cause you are not getting graded on that” (Rosco, CP, p. 5).

The pedagogy of staff can significantly affect the self-expressive quality of the arts. An important distinction is made by participants between the way that the arts are taught in school and the way they are approached in this program. “Here, art is more free. Whatever comes to my mind I just do it and it is comfortable… At school they tell you what to do and you have to do exactly how they say” (Sally, CP, p. 10). They indicated that the system of evaluation in their schools actually stripped art of its inherently open-ended nature. They found that the evaluation pedagogy used in art classes in their schools restricted their creativity, reduced their enjoyment, and was a source of anxiety and/or stress and self-doubt.

Now that I am continuing drama now as a course, it is very helpful that I did go to this camp, because you kind of see it a different way. The way things are taught is different. At school you know you are getting marked for things. Everything your teacher sees you do you’re getting criticized in some way for it, but at camp it is just kinda like, you do it and it is fun and if you do it wrong, or what you think is wrong, it is not, because there is no right and wrong at camp. …students at school see that there is a right and a wrong. If you do it this way you are going to get a bad mark…Especially for me because I am a perfectionist. In school if I don’t do something right, I get upset, but if I do something wrong here, I am like ‘oh whatever’ like it isn’t such a big deal. (Daisy, PP, p. 5)

Michelle and Star spoke about the complex relationship between student motivation and evaluation. Star pointed out that some people may be less motivated in the absence of evaluation, but that others find it allows them a greater freedom of expression, which she recognizes as leading to identity exploration. “For some people it is like, ‘yes, I get to express my mind’… people get to you know explore their way better” (Star, CP, p. 3). Michelle described a self-defeating ‘why bother trying’ attitude that some students adopt
after multiple experiences of failure. She explained how the absence of evaluation removes a fear of failure and can lead to intrinsic motivation and enjoyment of learning.

There may be some people at school that don’t really try. They don’t really take it seriously and they don’t really like school cause they know they are being graded, but here you can do things that you wouldn’t normally do cause no one is judging you on it. (Michelle, CP, p. 3)

An important aspect of evaluation is the unit of focus. Star pointed to the fact that individual attention at school can be a source of stress. The fact that the unit of focus in this program is the group engaged in a group goal seemed to create a sense of freedom and relief. “At school you worry about individual attention, but here it is more group focused and you can relax a little more, there is not really so much pressure” (Star, CP, p. 8).

As several staff indicated to me in conversation, Michelle confirmed that, in the absence of evaluation, attitudes of staff become a major source of motivation for learning. “The specialists, if they’re nice people then you want to go for it more. You want to give it your best” (Michelle, CP, p. 6). The drama specialist explained to me that the lack of formal evaluation means that motivation of the participants is promoted through the celebration of effort, appreciation of small victories, and the sharing of the passion, care, and energy of the specialists and counsellors.

D) Encouragement from staff and peers. Participants of this program expressed that they were encouraged by staff and peers in the program to try new things, be open-minded and broaden their sense of self. They were encouraged directly by staff and peers in the program, and indirectly through the existence of role models for behaviour and success. This encouragement in turn created a community atmosphere where participants felt comfortable exploring their sense of self.
Participants identified peers as important models for kindness and open-minded behaviour. Rosco felt behaviour modelled in caring peer friendships he had established here were important in changing his behaviour. “Before I came to the camp I was a real bad kid. And now I came to the camp and I met good. In the past I knew bad people” (Rosco, CP, p. 6). When I asked if there were any particular people that were important to his personal growth he named his two best friends and said, “They just change my ways, the way that they act with me an all that, they are really nice” (Rosco, CP, p. 7). It is clear that this program has given him a chance to meet new people and make friends who treat him with respect and kindness.

This program feels like a family to many of the participants that I interviewed. Looking back on their first time at camp, Michelle, Star, and Daisy all expressed excitement and surprise at how quickly they made friends and how the atmosphere was conducive to speaking to anyone there regardless of if you knew them or not. “Here you can definitely be yourself. I think it is cause no one is mean or fake” (Michelle, CP, p. 3).

Star identified counsellor-led activities as being essential programming because, “…that is where you get to know people most cause that is where you spend time with just your group and not everybody…” (Star, CP, p. 6). During counsellor-led activities, a significant amount of time is devoted to games that have the purpose of increasing interaction and communication among members of the group. The first two activity periods are often devoted to name-games and other activities that mix pairings and encourage participants to get to know each other. One activity in particular stands out. We were all given a chance to take Smarties from a bowl. Each colour was then randomly assigned a topic. Those who had picked a red Smarties for example were asked to tell the group a story of her/his most embarrassing moment and those who picked a green Smartie
had to tell the group his/her happiest moment of the year. I noticed that, during this time, participants who were less outgoing had a chance to share something with the group and those who had not known each other found things in common and were subsequently more comfortable with each other. These types of activities may seem common place to those who have participated in such programs as children or youth, but for those who haven’t, they are new and may be the only time they have a chance to speak openly about themselves to others. This sharing is important in building bonds between people.

Star spoke of the power of influence of being around those who are open-minded and willing to try new things. She explained that when a community is full of people who are willing to try new things, it encourages her to do the same. It has changed her behaviour to the extent that she tries to encourage people outside of the program be open-minded. Because she has a wide range of experience with new and different things, she is able to use these experiences to influence others.

At school there are some people that are just so closed in…I usually try to change them and make them more open minded. I just say, ‘come on, just trust me it is going to be fun, I did it before.’ And they will be like, ‘Oh ok, if you did it before, I will try it and maybe it’ll be fun.’ (Star, CP, p. 5)

Participants expressed how they were motivated to participate and try new things because staff celebrated their effort rather than their success or failure. They spoke of how they were constantly encouraged by staff to persevere through challenges.

Participants often spoke of feeling good because of positive feedback and encouragement from staff that they did not receive at school.

They [staff] were always saying, ‘don’t give up, try, you can do this, you can do that’ like always encouraging you, which also made me feel good. At school, it was more like, “quiet, do your work” you know like they wouldn’t really come up to me and be like, “Oh Star, you are doing good.” My teachers, they don’t really do that, so for me to come here and have them encourage me like that it felt good (Star, CP, p. 3).
Daisy explains that, now that she is staff, her goal is to help campers discover their passion as she did. She plans to follow the model of the staff she had—tell the kids what they are good at and encourage them to expand their skills in that area.

When I asked participants about their future goals they either saw themselves as having a career in the arts or as becoming staff in the same program. This tendency is a strong indicator that this program provides important adult role models to participants. The dance specialist sees her own personality and story as a source of motivation for the kids. She told me she has never been trained formally, and it is important to her to show these kids that, with a strong work ethic and dedication, anything is possible. She also pointed out that there are few girls in hip-hop dance and that she is an example to the girls that it is possible.

For many young people whose families do not have the financial resources to send them to post secondary education, winning a scholarship or being recognized for their talent is viewed as their only chance at success. To stand out among many applicants, they need to show that they are special. For Star, it is performing that is key to her success, as well as important for expressing her personality and creativity. She made a connection between ‘putting herself out there’ and the direction of her future. She recognized that, in order to be successful, you need opportunities to express yourself and people have to know who you are. “I want people to know who I am, so I will be like, “yes that is me”, so perform, let people know who I am, so later in the future I am able to get somewhere” (Star, CP, p. 1).

As Larson (2000) might have predicted, several participants mentioned a professional athlete guest speaker as providing them with a model for success, although participants did not necessarily associate this model as being attached to athletics as a
career. This guest spoke of his own difficult circumstances growing up in a single parent family with many siblings, and the determination it took to succeed in his goals. Rosco and Star found this guest speaker motivational for them because he showed them that success could be obtained through hard work and perseverance, even when living in difficult circumstances. “[He] is telling a lot of people that you can do whatever you want if you put your mind to it” (Rosco, CP, p. 3).

Simon’s view of his future is more complex and shows that he has imagined several options but the adult models he has seen on television discouraged him from pursuing his passion in music as a career. “The music business it is hard, because I have seen biographies on TV…Education is to me more important than playing music, because education is your future” (Simon, CP, p. 11). Bruce, a staff member to whom I spoke, echoed the sentiments of Simon who found the route to fame in the arts as restrictive. Bruce commented, however, that he found the specialists in this program as role models justified the value of pursuing a career in the arts without the ambition of stardom. They gave him a different definition of success to strive toward.

I was always interested in acting and theatre and such, and when I came to camp I realized that I could actually do something with that… I realized that these specialists, that is exactly what they are doing… So, I think it helped to push me into deciding on my career path. I could see that the specialists enjoyed what they were doing and they were making a living doing what they do and they were not necessarily looking to be successful in terms of being famous…They had their own definition of success. (Bruce, current staff, p. 2)

Simon’s answer to my question about his motivations for his continued participation in this program indicated that clear paths to future jobs are important in influencing adolescents’ images of their own future. “I came back because I really enjoyed it and there is the LIT and CIT program. I wanted to come back all the years so that I could get a job here” (Simon, CP, p. 4). Like many camps, this program provides an
accessible set of clear steps toward employment, which provide job training. These include a leader in training program (LIT) and the counsellor in training program (CIT). These programs focus on building communication and facilitation skills and building agency and initiative. This structure creates a sense of continuity and community in the program as participants see their older peers and family members go through these programs, take on leadership roles, and obtain employment.

Case Two: The Outdoor Education Program

*Description*

The main site of this program is a small group of buildings in a conservation area within one hour of a major urban centre. This program is unique in that participants of the program begin when they are 12 and graduate four years later. When they are 16 they have the option of applying for the leader in training program. Each age group meets separately and has a distinct curriculum. The participants meet for two weeks during the summer as well as one weekend a month from October until May. If they complete the program participants receive some credits in their local school. During their first and second year the group camps at the program site during the summer and in their third and fourth year of programming the summer program consists of a canoe trip in a wilderness area.

The main activities offered by the program include canoeing, camping, hiking, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, swimming, group games, and initiatives and high and low ropes course activities. Weekend programming typically consists of lessons and workshops, initiative games, or ropes course activities and ends with a community meeting and cleaning the program site. All meals are provided while at the programming
site, but the participants take responsibility on a rotating basis for setting and clearing
tables, doing dishes, sweeping floors and leading meal rituals. When groups are camping,
participants prepare meals, and duties for managing the camp are divided among
participants on a rotating basis. These duties include setting up tents, lighting fires/stoves,
cooking, doing dishes, and acting as leader of the day. During camping trips, participants
have a chance to complete a solo, which involves spending a certain time alone in a
designated area in the wilderness. Every six months, participants meet one-on-one with a
staff member to discuss their goals and how things are going in the program. I further
describe these specific aspects of programming in the analysis section where they are
relevant to analysis of participants’ perspectives.

Participants

Participants are an ethnically diverse group, some of whom are first generation
Canadians. The staff manual describes the participants as those who are in need of extra
support, encouragement, and attention; have a history of not fitting into traditional school
situations; have a range of behavioural and learning difficulties; have the greatest
potential to make ‘bad’ decisions and look for support and attention in the wrong places;
and are at-risk of dropping out, or getting kicked out, becoming involved with drugs, and
getting in trouble with the law. Andrew, a past participant and current intern, described
the program participants as follows:

The people that they pick for this program are not the top grade ‘A’ students or the bad kids that are always getting suspended from school or something, but they are trying to get at those kids that are in the middle and have the potential of going either way, but still have the potential of turning into great leaders. (Andrew, PP, p. 13)
Participants are recruited from several inner city schools in the nearest urban centre. In order to have a place in the program they must submit letters of recommendation from a family member, a doctor and a teacher. Upon entering the program they are expected to remain for the duration of the four years. I participated in the wilderness trip with the 4th year group who were 15-years old. There were three female and four male participants and two staff members on the trip. I also participated in one of the weekend programming sessions where the two smaller trip groups rejoined and became a group of fifteen. Of this larger group, two females and one male program participant agreed to participate in this study.

Goals

The main goal of the program is to help children from the inner city realize their true potential in a supportive, safe environment. Program staff strive to provide meaningful activities in an environment that accepts youth for who they are and supports them in meeting challenges. The program helps participants build the skills, knowledge, and confidence to make life decisions and achieve their goals.

Pedagogy

The three pedagogical approaches of this program are learning through experience, adventure and challenge, and transference. This program’s use of experiential education pedagogy consists of four parts: experience, reflection, processing, and application. Adventure and challenge encourage participants to take healthy risks that build self-confidence within a safe environment. Transference uses metaphors and reflective exercises that help participants understand how to transfer their learning into their daily lives. The curriculum of the program focuses on several topics that are
believed to facilitate positive personal and interpersonal development. Participants learn communication and group skills, including listening, trust, conflict management, and leadership skills. These skills are taught through games, initiatives, activities, role playing, seminars and group discussions, and debriefing of their experiences. Participants also develop outdoor skills such as canoeing, planning and preparation, cooking, and map reading. Also, through workshops on topics including sex and relationships, healthy eating, body image, hygiene, drugs and alcohol, and environmental awareness, participants are informed about issues of healthy lifestyle so they are able to make informed choices. In general, participants are involved in discussions of values, discrimination, culture, and community. They are given workshops on life skills such as resume writing, goal setting, work skills, and establishing contacts in the community. They also are given a chance to give back to their community through local service projects.

There is a structure in place for discipline involving warnings, contracts, and suspension from weekend programming. There is also a conflict resolution structure in place that is taught to the participants. This program tries to provide participants with activities that are enjoyable, but also meaningful; with an emotionally and physically safe space; and a consistent support base from which they can achieve their goals both in and outside of the program (Staff Manual, personal communication and observation).

Staff

There are four staff members for each age group, making the participant to staff ratio 5:1. During the summer trips the group is divided into two groups; each trip is led by two staff members. Most staff are between the ages of 24 and 35 and are often teachers or
experienced outdoor educators. They are trained to carry out the program curriculum, but are given creative freedom to fulfil program requirements. During trips staff are expected to not only lead trips, but also give lessons based on the curriculum and conduct daily debrief sessions with participants. They have excellent observation and facilitation skills and a respectful relationship with participants. They often express that they find this a challenging, but rewarding place to work.

Analysis

During analysis of interviews, three themes emerged that addressed the question of how participants felt their experiences have affected their personal and social development. Participants reported that they (1) gained confidence and emotional competence, (2) developed a sense of empathy and respect for peers and adults, and (3) development of a sense of agency through the program. I discuss these three themes in the following sections, along with the aspects of programming participants felt contributed to these developments. The following table gives an overview of the findings for this case. The table includes a list of developmental outcomes expressed by participants and the contextual features that they identified as supporting each outcome.
Table 4: Overview of Findings in the Second Case: The Outdoor Education Program

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*Increase in Confidence and Emotional Competence*

Participants I interviewed spoke of an increase in their sense of competence in themselves and their abilities. They expressed an increase in emotional competence through experiences of overcoming fears and insecurities. The participants I interviewed all spoke of a struggle to overcome their shyness. Nicole spoke of overcoming a fear of failure that stopped her from participating in class or even communicating at all.

I used to be like really, really self-conscious. The teacher would call on me and I would be like, ‘I don’t know’ even if I knew the answer, I just didn’t want to say it, just in case I was wrong... Now I am just like, If you ask me a question I will try to answer it and if I get it wrong, I am just like, ‘ok whatever, it is no big deal.’ (Nicole, CP, p. 8)

Jane described her former self as shy insecure and added that, through her experiences in this program, she has been able to let go of her fear of failure by recognizing that she has the right to define her own identity. “I didn’t want to do anything wrong... I didn’t want
anyone to be mad at me... This camp has helped me a lot. Knowing that it is not up to other people to choose who I am” (Jane, CP, p. 9).

According to participants, the development of confidence and emotional competence were supported by (a) opportunities to build experience, (b) adult models for behaviour and support from staff that care, (c) strong peer relationships, and (d) overcoming challenges.

A) Opportunities to build experience. Building experiences in new environments can help one feel comfortable and confident in various roles. Each of the participants I interviewed identified this program as being full of opportunities that they would not have otherwise had. These opportunities allowed them to expand their sense of the world and experience different environments that presented different opportunities for learning. As the situated learning and transformative learning theories point out, when one enters a new environment, one is forced to self-reflect and explore one’s identity in the light of new circumstances.

Trying a variety of things one would never have had the opportunity to do otherwise was associated with enjoyment and interest. “It is a better learning experience to do different things and more things instead of doing over and over the same thing you do every day: wake up, go to school, go to bed” (Jane, CP, p. 14). This comment from Jane, not only shows her excitement and appreciation for the opportunities in this program, but also hints at the boredom she feels with her daily routine.

The following quote from Billy Joe emphasized the disconnection that inner city youth may feel from the countryside and the wilderness, and the excitement and intensity that they may feel when they have an opportunity to broaden their perspective of the
world through these new experiences. “The field trips are good because we like to do new things, like we went to an apple farm. I mean, ‘who goes to an apple farm?’” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 9). Among the most important opportunities was a consistent opportunity to escape from the environment of the city. Participants spoke of the main program site and the trip site as calm, beautiful environments compared to where they live in the city. “Where I live in the city, it is very loud, but here it is quiet and peaceful” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 3). “I am so used to the city and coming up here and seeing the stars for once it is so pretty. I think the environment is better… the air was cleaner” (Nicole, CP, p. 6). Many Canadians may take for granted the opportunity to leave the city and spend time in the natural environment, but financial constraints can often hinder inner city youth’s possibilities in that regard. “I was always interested in camping and the outdoors, but I never had a chance to do it” (Andrew, PP. p. 1).

For young people living in the inner city, outdoor education experiences can serve as an escape from family pressures, school pressures, and negative peer influences, and can make way for discovering new interests and capabilities as well as providing a different view on the world (Garst et al., 2001). Participating in outdoor education experiences constitutes entering a new community of practice, which restricts certain forms of participation and enables others (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to the transformative education theory, entering a new community and a new environment may trigger individuals to self-reflect and then be open to trying new identity roles. The duration of the experience would obviously influence to what extent participants are able to explore their identity. This program provides youth with long-term consistent experiences, ranging from three days to two weeks in duration. From my findings it is apparent that this is sufficient enough time to create conditions for exploration of identity.
For example, for inner city youth, clothes are often seen as defining one’s identity. Escaping the city and entering a new environment that does not have the same expectations can be freeing for participants. Andrew spoke of overcoming a fear of being judged based on his clothes, and gaining a comfort with who he was.

When I was in Grade 6… I wasn’t really comfortable about who I was. I didn’t come from a rich family. I didn’t really have very much money in my pocket. I had four pairs of clothes I wore throughout the whole entire year. That made me really self-conscious about myself. But going through the program over the years, I was like, ‘who cares any more? Just be a presence without the clothes.’ (Andrew, PP, p. 10)

Jane explained how escaping the city and its expectations of image were important in exploring and becoming comfortable with one’s identity. “For girls, it is like, without the make-up without all these dressy clothes, just know how to be who you are. Get dirty. Have fun… Having the trip, you are being your natural self” (Jane, CP, p. 11).

When packing for the trip, I remember the participants were mortified that each person is only allowed to take two t-shirts with them. Although practical issues of space and weight are behind the restrictions on clothing, Jane’s testimony gives credence to the idea that this is a priority shift that clears the way for developing a feeling of comfort with one’s identity without the clothes. She also expressed that, as a result of this program, she overcame her insecurities about her body, was able to accept and like herself, and found the strength to resist the judgments of others. “Before I came, I was insecure about my body and stuff and now after those four years of being here, knowing that people like me for who I am and I don’t have to change myself” (Jane, CP, p. 9).

Chances to explore various activities in different contexts can be important in allowing inner city youth to explore identity, escape from expectations associated with the city, and build confidence in who they are.
B) Staff role models for behaviour and support from staff that care. Participants considered staff in this program as role models. By acting themselves and modelling self-acceptance, staff provided models for behaviour and invited participants to be themselves. Through their behaviour, staff created a culture of acceptance where participants felt comfortable expressing their true selves. Nicole explained the power of staff example in changing her perspective on self-expression and acceptance. “They [staff] are just so wacky and they are not afraid to show who they really are, and that makes us feel like we want to show who we really are, so we break out of our shell” (Nicole, CP, p. 7).

According to Nicole, this culture of acceptance does not exist at school. She feels there are certain expectations for behaviour that she must fulfil in order to gain social acceptance. “At school we kinda hold back sometimes because we want to fit in there, but here we just fit in” (Nicole, CP, p. 7).

In order to be considered as role models, adults must first gain the respect of youth. Jane gave an example of a time when she felt supported by a staff member during a difficult time in her life. A feeling of mutual trust resulted from the staff’s attentiveness to Jane’s emotional state and the staff’s openness in sharing a personal story. “She trusted me enough and I trusted her enough that we just told each other our stories… she helped me through one of the difficult times in my life” (Jane, CP, p. 7). These findings relate to a finding by Rodriguez (2008) who claimed that when teachers spoke about their personal lives they changed the power dynamic and the students were able to see the teachers as human. This finding is important in understanding developing relationships with adults based on trust and mutual empathy.
Jane also described how a staff member has supported her growth of self-esteem by communicating observed positive changes in her and encouraging her to pursue her interests. “She was just noticing how I have changed to be like a brighter person about myself… She was like, ‘you have changed a lot in good ways. You can go for what you want’” (Jane, CP, p. 9). Billy Joe said the encouragement and support from staff encouraged him to improve his behaviour and think of himself as a leader. “The staff will always have a talk with you and tell you that you have a great potential to be a good leader… you want to be a good leader, you don’t just want to be a bystander all the time” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 6). The participants considered the staff as role models as well as adults they could trust and depend on for support; this fact has helped them to build their confidence.

C) Peer Relationships. During adolescence the importance of peer relationships cannot be overstated as acceptance by peers trumps most other concerns. Andrew described his feelings in his first year in this program as being more concerned about defining his role relative to others in the group than about defining his own identity.

It was more about figuring out who was in your group than figuring out who I was… The important thing was how I was received in the group… You know you can be yourself here, but how did everyone else in your group feel about that? (Andrew, PP, p. 2)

Throughout the interviews there was a constant reference to the development of a feeling of trust and acceptance among peers and a building of sense of belonging to a community. “I think they [peers] definitely had a giant role for me staying in the program… we were a really caring group. We went through a lot, especially on the trips and everything… it was like brothers and sisters” (Andrew, PP, p. 7). Peer relationships were seen as a motivation for continuation in the program and offered consistently by
participants as an important factor for personal and interpersonal growth. “At school I feel like I have to be quiet and I can’t say anything, but here I am just like, I try to communicate more. I think because I know people here better” (Nicole, CP, p. 3). These relationships created a sense of community, which provided a support network for facing further challenges both in and outside the program. “They [peers] always stick by me. If I wanted to try to do something they always help me accomplish it” (Nicole, CP, p. 7).

One of the aspects of programming that participants felt was responsible for creating this sense of community was the length and consistency of programming. Both the length and consistency of programming were particularly important for Nicole in being able to conquer her shyness. She spoke about a building of peer relationships that helped her slowly build confidence over several program years. “Just being here together with people for 4 years it is like, ‘if I can’t trust them, I can’t trust anyone’” (Nicole, CP, p. 8). She also spoke about the importance of meeting consistently with the group throughout the year in overcoming inhibitions. “I think a good thing about coming on the weekends is we get to see them [peers] constantly... If we just came every summer, we would be shy again. We would have to break out again” (Nicole, CP, p. 2). For Nicole, trust is a central issue with which she struggles. She described how the trusting relationships she has built here have helped her to build emotional competence in trusting others. “It is better to let people know who you are [from the start], instead of waiting till you know you can trust people perfectly, cause that is never going to happen… I think [program name] helped me with that. (Nicole, CP, p. 8)

A further aspect of the outdoor education program that was identified by participants as being important to the development of supportive peer relationships was cabin time. This is a rest period that occurs occasionally after lunch, but more consistently
after evening programming and before lights out. When I spent time in the girls’ cabin in
the evening before ‘lights out’, there seemed to be an established culture of gathering to
discuss things as a group. Sharing activities were initiated either by staff or participants.
Staff often acted as mediators if sensitive issues were discussed. The girls I interviewed
both mentioned cabin time as an important time for them in terms of self-expression, and
in helping build supportive peer and staff relationships. Given the opportunity to discuss
serious things of importance in their lives, these girls expressed a deepening of
relationships and a feeling of belonging and support. “It is a lot of comfort that you get
from them [peers and staff] when you tell them something… It makes you sad and maybe
you will cry, but you know they will be there just to comfort you” (Jane, CP, p. 9).

When I asked the girls why they felt a stronger bond with their friends here than at
their school, Jane gave an answer that implied that this program provided venues where
she felt comfortable talking about serious things that were affecting her life. “I see my
school friends every day, but all we do is talk about things that we like and dislike, we
just talk like nothing, but when we are here, we talk about situations andseriousness”
(Jane, CP, p. 8). This difference confirms what Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003)
found that, due to the existence of structure, challenge, and goal-oriented activities, youth
activities provide more opportunities for social skill development than hanging out with
friends. Jane’s comment also indicates that the challenges the participants have overcome
as a group were important in deepening the bond between them and allowing them to feel
comfortable addressing serious issues. The participants often explained that they were so
close to their peers here because of what they went through together in overcoming so
many challenges over the years.
D) Overcoming challenges. Self-efficacy is one’s perception of how well one can carry out certain courses of action in a situation (Bandura, 1982). It is one’s concept of one’s competence. Participants in this program described a series of developmental stages starting with experiencing success through overcoming challenges in a supportive group, leading to feelings of confidence, feeling trust for group members, and then a feeling of opening ‘comfort zones’ and being one’s self with the group. Several elements of this program provided opportunities for this type of growth including canoe tripping, ropes course activities, and the solo experience that occurred on a trip.

These elements include both personal and group challenges. Personal challenges helped the participants build confidence in themselves and their abilities. Participants often spoke of how the support they felt from their peers in overcoming personal challenges was crucial to their success. Overcoming group challenges was also responsible for creating a sense of accomplishment as well as building trusting relationships among group members, which in turn allowed them to feel confident in facing further challenges both in and outside of the program.

During the third and fourth summer of the program, participants are divided into two groups and they embark on canoe trips in nearby wilderness areas. In Year 3 they go on their ‘first real camping trip’, for nine days. The males and females go on separate trips. The fourth year trip, which I attended, is co-ed and is 12 days long. Jane spoke of how the trip environment is new and challenging. “It is one of those things where you take a giant step to be a leader… we have to cook ourselves and prepare it… so it also teaches us to become yourself and to be on your own” (Jane, CP, p. 12). Andrew described his first trip as a completely new environment, and a welcome physical, and emotional challenge. “It was the first time that I was actually physically and mentally
pushed to the limit. And, you know, I always like those kinds of things that make me challenge myself in both ways” (Andrew, PP, p. 7). Overcoming these challenges was associated with a sense of accomplishment. “Knowing that what you think you can’t do, you can actually do it, by being motivated and becoming a leader yourself” (Jane, CP, p. 12).

Participants took comfort in the fact that they had support from their peers and saw the trip as a chance to strengthen relationships. “There are going to be difficult times and on canoe trips you may get frustrated, but you just have to keep going and you will have people around you to help you go through it…Trips are what brought us together ” (Jane, CP, p. 12). The authenticity of the challenges faced on these trips seems to be central to motivating participants to work as a group toward a common goal. “Being out here there are challenges… we have to watch out for each other… all we really have is each other when we are out here and that sticks us together even more” (Nicole, CP, p. 13).

Participants identified the small group size on the trip and the length of the trip as important factors in building group trust during the trip. Having small groups gives shy participants the opportunity to develop comfort in expressing themselves. Nicole explained that the length of the trip was important in giving those who were shy a chance to become comfortable enough to communicate with others. “We can’t really hold in ourselves for 12 days, 14 days it is really tough, but at school you can totally do it, and then go home and act like yourself” (Nicole, CP, p. 5). During the trip I attended, I also observed that there were several shy people who seemed to bloom when the group was small. When we returned to the larger group I noticed that they seemed to recede again into the background among the more outgoing participants.
During the summer program, participants have a chance to experience time alone in the wilderness. The solo experiences increase in length of time over the four-year program, starting with 20 minutes and then increasing in length incrementally to an overnight experience. The solo experience is the most poignant example of overcoming fears: fear of being alone, fear of the dark, spiders, and bears. In contrast to the trip and the ropes course where participants faced challenges as a group, the solo experience was about overcoming individual fears. The experience was different for each participant, but the sense of accomplishment, pride, and confidence felt upon completion was shared. Andrew spoke about solos as challenging, but also as a time to reflect on the trip experience and gain perspective on his accomplishments during the trip.

On trip it was really demanding physically and mentally, so when you got to do your solo it was like this kind of relief time. It was kinda like this [sigh] let everything out. You got to think about everything that was going on you know, ‘This is my last night. I am going home tomorrow. What do I think I actually accomplished on this trip?’ (Andrew, PP, p. 5)

The current participants spoke about the solo experience they had just completed. In the fourth year the solo is overnight and participants are responsible for building their own shelter. The solo experience was framed before the experience by discussing the purpose, and encouraging participants to develop goals for the experience. The staff spent a considerable amount of time making sure participants were comfortable before they left including planning an activity where participants shared with each other a token that would give them courage during their solo. Along with equipment to build a shelter, the participants were given their journals and a pen and a personal letter written by staff.

Most of the reactions to the solo were positive surprise and appreciation of having completed a challenge. Jane expressed that she gained confidence in her own instincts and competence in her ability to face challenges alone.
The solo helped me a lot... I was terrified... but in the end I was really proud of myself that I accomplished it... Just knowing that when you are on your own you have to trust yourself and your instincts. I used to be really scared of being on my own, but knowing that I can accomplish it during the night it has helped me and I have been OK being by myself now. (Jane, CP, p. 16)

Staying out overnight in the woods alone is not a trivial engagement. When I put myself in their shoes I came to recognize the great accomplishment that they had achieved. The following is an excerpt taken from my field notes, written after visiting the participants on solo and returning to camp.

Even though I just met these kids, it is amazing how proud and impressed I am. It takes real courage and perseverance to stay out there alone. I must admit that I would have some of the same fears as them if faced with sleeping in the woods alone. (Field Notes, 08/16/2008)

Participation in ropes course activities were often described as important moments that stood out in the participants’ minds. The ropes course consists of both high and low elements. The low elements normally require the entire group to work together to overcome a challenge, such as passing all participants through a web using only one hole per participant, or trying to balance all participants on a beam while traversing from one end to the other. High ropes elements consist of an individual with safety equipment overcoming challenges on high platforms, poles, or cables, while receiving physical and emotional support from the rest of the group who are on the ground (Chakravorty, Trunnell, & Ellis, 1995). These activities can include climbing a ladder or pole, and traversing a cable between platforms with a sequence of short ropes that hang down from above. All elements involve physical, mental, and emotional challenge and require commitment of individuals to the task. This program operates on the principle of ‘challenge by choice,’ which recognizes that what constitutes a comfortable risk differs across individuals. Participants choose how they are going to engage in the activity, are
encouraged to challenge themselves at their own level, and are, as such, empowered to take ownership of their own learning.

Participation in high ropes activities was important for participants as it helped them feel supported by the group to overcome fears and insecurities, open their ‘comfort zones,’ and build confidence in their abilities. “In the beginning your comfort zone is so small… you are nervous and scared, but once you do it, it is a really good feeling. It made me grow a lot. My comfort zone now is very open” (Jane, CP, p. 17).

Low ropes, especially, requires communication in solving problems as a group. Participants expressed the importance of the low ropes elements in learning to work as a team, and building trust among group members. “Everybody just works as a team and it is nice. I don’t think it matters what the challenge is. I think it is just important how you work as a group and that you solve it as a group” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 9).

Both elements were considered by participants as important for developing relationships of trust among group members because their success depends on encouragement and support from the group. Andrew describes the nature of the interactions during these activities as necessarily supportive, due to their challenging nature.

When you were doing it, it wasn’t like, ‘you suck because you didn’t make it this far,’ it was more like, ‘good job, good job, keep it up,’ cause it is not easy… no matter how many times you do it you will still feel a little uncomfortable going up there. It is always in the back of your mind, ‘if I fall off this thing are you going to catch me? (Andrew, PP, p. 3)

Both Jane and Nicole spoke about The Wall as being an important ropes course element that helped them overcome personal fears and build emotional competence. Maybe just as important, it helped them to feel supported by their peer group and in turn, build trust for others. The challenge of the wall involves
successfully boosting every member of the group over the wall, with only two people remaining on the top of the wall at one time. “I got up there, and someone accidentally let go of my foot, so I slid a bit, and I was scared and I wanted to get down, but everyone just kept motivating me to keep going and to finish it” (Jane, CP, p. 3). The authenticity of the challenge is important to note. There was real fear and real commitment by the group members.

These findings show a connection between support from peers and staff and the ability to overcome challenges. One cannot separate the confidence gained from ropes course participation from the supportive environment that facilitated achieving success. These findings confirm those found by Green et al. (2000) that engagement in ropes course activities can create significant increases in a sense of acceptance of self, strong peer relationships, the ability to work with others, and confidence in abilities. “In working with others, youth not only learn what their personal abilities are, but also how to function cooperatively in a group” (Green et al., 2000, p. 79).

**Empathy and Respect for Peers and Adults**

A sense of empathy and respect for others is key to developing interpersonal skills such as teamwork, relationship building, and other social skills. Participants admitted that this program helped them to develop a more empathetic approach to their peers and teachers. Billy Joe described a change in attitude toward others and a reduction in bullying behaviour.

I used to be bad, I used to make fun of kids, and then I came to [program name] and now I just try to be positive. I don’t do that anymore, and if people are doing that at school, I just tell them to stop (Billy Joe, CP, p. 6).
Nicole admitted she is constantly working on being less judgmental toward her peers at school. “I am like, ‘I don’t like him, I don’t like her.’ based on the way people look… I have grown to talk to them and try to learn more about them, but sometimes I still judge them” (Nicole, CP, p. 7). Jane spoke of learning to empathize with the limits of others and not make assumptions about what is acceptable to joke about. “A lot of kids have bad habits… like joking around between friends… it could be insulting to people. I think [the program] has taught us all that you have to be careful what you say” (Jane, CP, p. 17).

According to participants, several program elements contributed to the development of empathy and respect for peers and adults including (a) behavioural expectations and structures, (b) focus on the group/non-competitive atmosphere, (c) relationships with staff that care, and (d) a conflict resolution structure.

A) Behavioural expectations and structures. As well as providing models for positive behaviour, staff expect certain behaviour from the participants. “When you come here everyone is expected to act one way. Treat everybody with respect and you can’t push around anybody” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 3). Participants expressed the importance of rules, staff expectations, and conflict resolution structure in creating a safe atmosphere. Billy Joe pointed out a transition from staff regulation of behaviour to peer regulation. He indicates that strong peer relationships are an important catalyst for this transition. “The first two years it is basically just the staff [saying what is acceptable behaviour], but then when you get into your third and fourth year it is like, ‘why would you disrespect someone who has been there for you for the past two years and they are like your best friend?’” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 3).
There is a significant difference between his school atmosphere and the program atmosphere. “In school there are people that just come around and disrespect you. You don’t know everybody in your school because there are 1000 kids. Here it is just 15 kids that you have been with for three years” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 3). The fact that Billy Joe attends a large school makes it difficult to forge relationships and exposes him to many disrespectful relations with peers. He appreciated the opportunity to create relationships in a small group over a long period of time. As Rodriquez (2008) explains in his analysis of the small school movement, smaller groups are important in creating a positive atmosphere for students, but it is not the only necessary condition. Relationships of mutual respect among staff and participants provide a model for behaviour that in turn influences the building of respectful relationships between peers. As Billy Joe said, once these relationships are in place, there is no need for staff to enforce behavioural expectations.

In their analysis of how extrinsically motivated behaviours become internalized, Ryan and Deci (2000) identified peer group acceptance of behaviours and caring relationships with adults as necessary conditions. They also spoke about the need for people to feel competent in the behaviour expected, support for autonomy, and understanding of behaviour regulation with respect to their goals and values. This outdoor education program uses a guiding metaphor to outline a set of yearly expectations for the participants, which correspond to increasing responsibility and behavioural expectations. “Definitely year four is different from year one, two, or three. It is like a higher step of maturity. We know what we are expected to do and what we are supposed to do” (Jane, CP, p. 1). Jane’s description shows that she has transformed these values into her own.
Along with clear expectations for behaviour, this program also has a structure of warnings and suspensions in place to ensure that participants take behavioural expectations seriously. Billy Joe testified to this system’s effectiveness in making him think about his own behaviour and giving him the choice to decide about his future in the program. He described a process he went through that seemed to forge his dedication to the program. Both his family members and the staff who spoke to him played important roles in his decision to change his behaviour.

I got suspended from the program for goofing around, not listening to instructions, just being an idiot. I didn’t like staying at home when I knew I was supposed to be at [program name] and that whole weekend I would be in trouble with my mom and the whole weekend I would think about it. My brothers and sisters were like, ‘how did you get suspended from [program name]? It is like the best program.’ I would just think about it and be like, ‘they are right, why am I in trouble, there are so many opportunities.’ The choice was to change or get kicked out of the program. (Billy Joe, CP, p. 4)

It appears that these structures were important in helping Billy Joe develop a sense of autonomy in choosing his own behaviour in the face of known consequences.

B) Focus on the group/ non-competitive atmosphere. This outdoor education program focuses on creating a non-competitive environment that promotes group cooperation and peer support. The goal is to avoid creating rivalries among participants and to provide individuals with opportunities to succeed that do not depend on others failing. Each participant is as important as another. For example, on trips, responsibilities are divided among participants on a rotating basis. This system created a situation where each person has responsibilities, but participants were also dependent on one another. Responsibilities include leader of the day, preparing and cooking meals, starting a fire or stove, setting up tents and tarps, making sure all canoes are turned over on shore and all paddles and life jackets are under canoes, doing dishes, and writing in the group journal.
Jane testified that during the canoe trip participants showed a sense of caring for their peers. Jane spoke of a change that occurred over the years among the participants from a focus on self-interest to a focus on group interest.

If it is one of the camper’s times to set the fire up, and he is having trouble, we are not all just going to sit back and watch, but before we would have been like, ‘it is his job we don’t have to do it,’ I think that has changed. (Jane, CP, p. 12)

Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and situated learning theory are useful in understanding the process of exploring identity in relation to a new social group. Jane described how at the beginning of the program participants resisted change, but having group goals and succeeding in the face of group challenges helped them develop relationships. In turn they were able to give and accept help from peers.

We were trying to hold our ‘rep’ or way that we used to live… In year one some people wouldn’t accept [help] because they think like, ‘this is my job; you are not supposed to help me; I can find out my own way; I don’t need your help.’ Everyone was independent back then. Now we have grown to be connected and if you need help there are people there to help you. (Jane, CP, p. 12)

Letting go of, what Jane described as, a competitive city reputation is essential in learning to work with others toward a common goal. Situations that engage participants in experiences that involve group goals rather than competition seem to be important to interpersonal development.

As part of creating a supportive non-competitive atmosphere, this program does not share participants’ grades with them. At the end of the 4-year program the final marks are sent to the host school. “The hope is that participants are learning and developing without conscious thought toward their graded achievement” (Staff Manual, 2008). Evaluation is cumulative and formative in that it is based on participants’ personal and social growth
and efforts over the entire program. When I asked Andrew about the evaluation system he had this to say:

It was always brought up every now and then at the beginning of the session or the beginning of the summer… ‘just so you guys do remember you are being marked for these courses and it keeps on adding up.’ They give you that idea, but you know that, ‘as long as I stay a good leader in the group I will get fine marks.’… Some kids that do well here, do horrible at school… so I feel that if you gave it [the marking system] to the kids, it would probably not make them comfortable about being here anymore. (Andrew, PP, p. 12)

None of the current participants interviewed mentioned evaluation during their interviews. This lack indicates a strong tendency toward intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation by graded achievement.

C) Relationships with staff that care. Billy Joe expressed the importance of having adults to who he could talk. Like many urban youth, he attends a large school where personalized student-adult interactions are infrequent (Rodriguez, 2008). He contrasted his relationship with program staff with that with his teachers at school.

They [staff] are nice. You can actually speak to them. Like if you had a problem, you can come up to them and you can actually have a serious talk with them… they are not like teachers… In my school, you can’t really have a conversation with them [teachers], you are there to learn, do your work and leave class and get your marks, that is it. (Billy Joe, CP, p. 4)

Academic priorities and lack of time often prevent teachers from being able to develop relationships with students. Since youth spend the majority of their day in school, youth may be experiencing a lack of opportunities to develop positive relationships with non-family adults. Andrew expressed the importance of having a relationship with strong male role models with whom he could talk. “We always have all these nurturing females, but it is good to have that guy talk every now and then and they give it to you” (Andrew, PP, p. 3). Andrew felt fortunate to have encountered two male role models, who he
described as key to his development. One staff member was important because he was a past participant in the program with whom he could talk and learn from. The other staff member was important because he understood Andrew’s interest in physical challenge.

An important aspect of adolescents’ relationships with adults is adolescents’ perceptions of adults’ interest in them. A second important aspect is adults’ ability to be empathetic, consistent, and patient, and give direct positive feedback (Bocarro & Witt, 2003; Green et al., 2000). When I asked Jane what the participants called the staff in this program, she gave an interesting characterization of the relationship of mutual respect between staff and participants.

They are kind of like older peers. You know you can trust them. They are not like your parents where they will boss you around or tell you what to do. They are not like your brother or sister where they will let you do anything. They are not like your friends where they will hang back and chill. You can get along with them, you can play games with them, but when it comes to doing work, they will do it. They will be there when you need to talk. If you need help they can help. They are motivators and people who are exactly like us, just a bit older. (Jane, CP, p. 6)

This description shows staff as supportive, empathetic to participants’ needs, consistent in their expectations of behaviour, and encouraging in their feedback to participants.

Participants emphasized that staff were active listeners and cared about what was going on in participants’ lives. Participants felt they could trust staff and felt they were respected and supported by staff. Nicole and Jane described how staff empathized with the needs of the participants and gave consistent energy to supporting the efforts of the participants. “I like how the staff, they want to know what is happening to us. They actually care. They want to know because they want to help us” (Nicole, CP, p. 12).
Jane described how staff were non-judgmental, compassionate, support autonomy of participants. “When we are out here we just act who we are, and we don’t change ourselves for them [staff], they just respect us for who we are” (Jane, CP, p. 12).

Through the development of respectful relationships with staff, Andrew was better able to understand adults’ roles in his life and to empathize with adult intentions. He described himself before the program as a student who caused trouble for his teachers. He described a change in his perspective that was facilitated by this program and specifically by the relationships he had with staff members.

[This program] made me more comfortable speaking to my elders and also my teachers. I had more respect for them, and they were more able to deal with me after that… I guess it was because of my relationship with some of my counsellors… you soon learn to realize that the more you respect them, the more they will respect you and you can have a better relationship. (Andrew, PP, p. 10)

Andrew’s change in perspective stresses the importance of providing youth with opportunities to develop caring relationships with adults. As Rodriguez (2008) describes, respect precedes engagement. He found in his study on the small school movement that, more often than not, students were not engaged in the subject matter unless there existed a relationship of mutual respect between student and teacher.

The strength of the relationship between participants and staff was so important that when some staff left, so did some participants. “What kept them there was some of the staff members, because how they expressed themselves was during [one-on-one meetings]” (Andrew, CP, p. 11). For others, the bond they felt with staff that left also indirectly caused them to be reluctant to trust new staff. “I feel like we can trust the staff here, but some of the new staff it takes us a little while longer… because we don’t want to get too attached to them, cause the person we got attached to left” (Nicole, CP, p. 6).
These comments highlight the difficulty establishing trust between these participants and adults and reinforce the value of the relationships established in this program.

_D) Conflict resolution structure._ As a part of the program curriculum, participants learn a conflict resolution technique that they use whenever a conflict arises between participants or between participants and staff. The method is broken down into four steps that start with giving each person a chance to express his/her opinion about the conflict situation. The next step involves participants taking responsibility for their part in the conflict. The third step requires each party to try to see the other person’s perspective on the matter, and the fourth step is to make a plan for what can be done to resolve the conflict. Nicole expressed the importance of recognizing the relativity of the truth through the exploration of the other person’s perspectives. In recognizing that both people can be right and both can be wrong you cannot simply blame the other person for the conflict. “Instead of saying that person is wrong, they are both held accountable for their own actions” (Nicole, CP, p. 3). Nicole’s perspective points to the important role learning and using these conflict resolution sessions plays in the development of empathy for others.

Participants also described the sessions as important in recognizing their own behaviour and the impact it had on those around them. “A [conflict resolution session] is kinda like, ‘there is a problem going on right now, what is it? What is your role in it, and what can you change?’” (Andrew, PP, p. 6). Andrew described a conflict situation with a staff member, through which he learned to respect staff and understand their mentoring role. A staff member challenged his behaviour, and during a conflict resolution session between them, Andrew was able to examine his own behaviour and see its consequences. Respect for the staff member was earned through the staff’s professionalism in dealing with the conflict situation.
I had an argument with him… then after that we had this giant [conflict resolution session] and I started to see a different side of him and I really appreciated him after that… It was the way he addressed it to me it was kinda like, ‘oh, I guess I have been a little rude lately with my tone’… Because of his talk he had with me… [it made me] realize ‘what my attitude is right now, how other people are seeing me in the group’… I felt that because he kept his cool the whole time, while I was really ready to jump him, I gave him respect for that… I stuck up for him after that every time one of the other participants said something… I think it was at that point I realized that some of the staff members were there to really be good role models and good mentors for you. (Andrew, PP, p. 6)

It is clear that having a conflict resolution structure in use is important in the development of empathy for others as well as self-reflection of one’s own behaviour.

*The Development of Agency*

The related concepts of agency and initiative are thought to develop in conditions where adolescents are intrinsically motivated (Larson, 2000). Agency refers to the knowledge of oneself as the agent of one’s own actions, and initiative refers to the ability to devote effort to achieving a goal over time; these are both prerequisites to the development of leadership, altruism, and civic engagement (Larson, 2000). The findings of my study indicate that intrinsic motivation and a sense of agency, combined with an increased sense of self-efficacy, seemed to give participants a chance to develop their voice and recognize themselves as potential leaders. Participants recognized their own power as role models and the importance of being able to speak their mind and speak up for themselves. They recognized that they are agents of change, not only in their own lives, but can be role models for others.

I have a lot of younger cousins and a lot of older cousins that are sometimes bad examples for them. I just want to have the feeling that I can actually be there for them and show them what is actually right to do… that you can do things without people judging you. (Jane, CP, p. 12)
According to participants in this outdoor education program, the development of agency was supported by development of competence and appropriate challenges as described in the first theme, but also by (a) experiential education pedagogy, (b) the relevance of workshops to participants’ lives, (c) opportunities to develop communication skills and take on responsibility, and (d) one-on-one meetings with staff.

A) Experiential Education Pedagogy: “You get the feeling of what it feels like.” In this program experiential education pedagogy consists of four components: experience, reflection, processing, and application. The important elements of reflection and processing are represented by activities such as the solo and the briefing and debriefing activities. Participants identified the experiential nature of the learning and the authentic nature of its evaluation as sources of enjoyment, contributing factors to their sense of intrinsic motivation, and important in the development of agency.

Billy Joe found the experiential nature of the activities effective for his own learning. “Here it is hands-on, it is fun, there is laughter, it is not as serious, but you still get the same things, the knowledge” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 4). He also found the engagement with the group more enjoyable than the strict, isolating individual nature of the pedagogy at his school. “At school it is all individual, you don’t do anything, you don’t talk, they just give you a piece of paper and you just work, you don’t have fun at school” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 4). Jane spoke of how experiential learning is embodied, making it more engaging and real than her experiences at school.

If we are learning a trust thing, we will talk about it and then actually do a trust activity so you actually get the feeling of what it feels like and the support that you have. But when you are in class you are just sitting there. You are not actually getting your body to move and learn it. (Jane, CP, p. 6)
Jane also spoke about how experiential learning was evaluated authentically by the direct application of the skills learned. While participants were learning how to set up their tarp that they needed for their solo, I noticed that attention and internal motivation were high because participants knew they would soon have to perform the skill on their own in an environment where their own comfort depended on how well they performed the skill. This is what Larson (2000) calls engaging in ‘real-world’ constraints. Real-world constraints allow participants to understand consequences of their actions and as such develop a sense of agency.

B) Relevance of workshops: Real issues, real people. As part of earning their school credits, participants take part in lessons with curricular content in health and guidance. They described these lessons as giving them tools for communication as well as providing them with opportunities to play different roles in the group. Participants expressed that it was important that topics relevant to their lives were discussed that were often not addressed at school. Andrew identified workshops on leadership styles as important because they introduced important concepts about communication and leadership. “[They told us] ‘the way you communicate to your peers can really affect what they do and don’t do for you.’ And you take that into your mind and you say, ‘wow that does actually work if you try it’ (Andrew, PP, p. 9).

The examples current participants gave of lessons that had the most impact on them were those that involved guest speakers who had experience in the topic of the lesson. These lessons gave them a broader perspective and understanding of the world in relation to issues that they may face in their lives. “I think it was lesbian and gay sort of. It was really interesting because it was a guy talking, but it used to be a girl so we got educated
on that more” (Nicole, CP, pp. 3, 14). Both Billy Joe and Jane expressed the importance of hearing the life story of a guest speaker who had experiences with drugs and gangs.

There are some talks that they have about drugs and violence and stuff that shouldn’t be going on. At school they don’t even talk about it. But here they brought in some guy who was in a biker gang and he told his whole story. He said he would probably be dead or in jail still, but he changed his life and now he has his kids. It is important because those are real-life situations that happen every day. You see people take drugs. You see what happens to them and if they want to go down that path. He [guest speaker] tells you why you shouldn’t. (Billy Joe, CP, p. 7)

In Jane’s comment about the same guest speaker she expressed an appreciation for the importance of personal choices and how they can affect one’s life trajectory. “He told us that he was introduced to drugs at our age… it is really amazing that he came back so good. That was interesting to hear about someone who got their life back on track” (Jane, CP, p. 6). Her revelation of the power of personal choice is important in her development of agency.

C) Opportunities to take on responsibility and develop communication skills.

Throughout this program, participants are given many chances to develop their communication skills. Participants expressed that this opportunity gave them the confidence to speak with a variety of people and engage in activities, which built their confidence.

[This program] taught me different ways that I can express myself, so it made me more comfortable talking out loud, expressing myself to my mom, which I never really did before…. I was also able to have serious conversations with people. I was more intelligent that way. I also MC at my school now at some events and I really like it… it built up my self-esteem, made me more of an outgoing kinda guy. (Andrew, PP, p. 10)

Participants are also given many chances to take on roles of responsibility that help develop their communication skills as well as give them a chance to develop their sense of agency and initiative. Billy Joe emphasised that being given multiple chances to
practice taking on these roles helped him to build confidence and the ability to develop the initiative to try these roles again. “This program helps me get better at stepping up, cause usually I don’t really step up. I need more practice for it, so if I practice more and I step up, I will become a better leader” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 3).

By giving participants responsibility, you also give participants a chance to develop a sense of agency and autonomy. This sense of agency is slowly developed through the program by giving participants a chance to learn by trying different roles, receiving feedback, and then giving them a chance to practice different roles in several different situations. This process is identified in transformative learning theory as important in exploration and development of identity. Chances to play different roles are given during activities and on canoe trips as well as during workshops and lessons. The main program elements that participants felt were important for this kind of growth were chances to participate as leader of the day, and briefing and debriefing activities such as community meetings.

As part of each canoe trip, participants are given the responsibility of leading the group for a day. They are responsible for waking up participants each morning, facilitating packing tents and canoes, showing the group the route and the plan for the day, making sure everyone is drinking water and wearing sunscreen, keeping the group together, and using the map and compass to guide the group to its destination. The staff took this role very seriously and would often pack up their things in the morning and wait for further instructions. Mornings were often the most frustrating time for me, as I was not a staff and not a participant, so my role was unclear. I respect the staff for their patience, because it was certainly a test of mine. The morning often dragged on as the leaders of the day figured out how to motivate the others to get moving. I came to see that
truly giving responsibility to the leaders of the day was an important part of the trip. Since this was an authentic transfer of responsibility, participants were forced to slowly learn how to manage that responsibility and the consequences that came with it. The responsibility, once assumed, seemed to allow a sense of agency to bloom. Rather than following goals that were set out by adults, participants gained experience autonomously making decisions. In doing this, they acquired skills in communicating with others necessary in developing social skills and initiative that could be transferred to other situations.

During the trip I attended, the leader of the day was done in pairs on a rotational basis so that each person was leader of the day twice but was paired each time with a different person. Each pair was briefed by the staff the night before on its responsibilities and the plan for the next day. It was interesting to see the different personalities paired. The most challenging part for the participants seemed to me to be figuring out how to get moving in the morning and, depending on the pair, figuring out the best arrangement in the canoe. If the leader of the day pair did not have someone who felt comfortable in the stern of the canoe, they often struggled for the first hour to be in the lead of the group. This was a communication challenge for the leader of the day pair as well as a source of frustration for the entire group.

Participants described their experiences as leader of the day as challenging. “When you are leader of the day it is hard, it is a change, it is hard to get everyone’s attention because they just want to do what they want to do” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 9). They also felt that the leader of the day activity gave them important opportunities to practice being a leader that they would not otherwise have. “It helps you express your leadership skills in a way you can’t really do at school or at home… it is what we are here for… it really
helps us out” (Nicole, CP, p. 12). Working in pairs was seen as a benefit by Nicole, who commented on how the strengths of each person complemented each other. “I felt like we got to see people’s strengths we were paired up to” (Nicole, CP, p. 12).

In outdoor education pedagogy, briefing and debriefing elements are important in processing experiences. They give youth a chance to discuss their experience and feelings leading up to or upon completion of challenges. It allows participants to extract meaning from their experiences and recognize how their learning can be transferred into their daily lives (Green et al., 2000). These elements often involve a guided discussion where each member of the group is asked to contribute an opinion, feeling, or thought about an activity that has either just occurred or is about to occur. Participants are encouraged to make associations between their experiences and other aspects of their lives.

An important debriefing element of this program is a feedback session for leaders of the day that occurs at the end of each day. Leaders of the day are given a chance to tell the group how they felt they did as leaders. Then each group member is asked to comment on the performance of the leaders of the day, followed by the counsellors. Along with giving participants feedback on their performance as leaders, it also gives them a chance to practice giving and receiving constructive feedback. Participants identified these sessions as an important aspect of learning about one’s strengths and weaknesses as a leader. “Feedback helped me because it gives you feedback on what you need to change and what you don’t need to change, so it helps you grow and become a better leader” (Billy Joe, CP, p. 3).

Community meetings are the most formal of the debriefing elements of the program. These occur on Sunday afternoon of every weekend session and once at the end of the summer session. Their purpose is to “foster community spirit and facilitate open
communication and awareness.” The practice is based on Kurt Hahn’s philosophy that there is a fundamental relationship between personal development and collective concern (Staff Manual, 2008/2009).

Meetings are divided into four sections: announcements, questions, concerns, and appreciations. For each category a ‘talking stick’ is passed around to each person and he or she is given a chance to say something. While the person is speaking the others are expected to listen until it is their chance to speak. Individuals are given the option of passing the talking stick on if they have nothing to say. Often the ‘talking stick’ is passed around twice to make sure that those who passed have a chance to add something. Once the talking stick is passed around, the floor is often opened for any further comments in that category. Notes are taken on a white board summarizing what each person said.

My experience was that community meetings constituted a sharing exercise where participants and staff shared feelings and thoughts about events that happened or were going to happen both in the program and in their lives outside of the program. For Billy Joe, the concerns section of the meetings was of particular importance as a time for participants to have a voice concerning the program and in solving problems that might arise.

Our community meetings they are interesting… if you have anything to say about the program, like questions, or concerns that nobody really talks about that is the time to bring it up. And then like deal with it there. (Billy Joe, CP, p. 2)

This description shows that these meetings give participants experience in voicing their opinions as well as problem solving as a group. These are both important in the development of agency. Billy Joe also recognized that being in a community means that the individual is responsible to the whole. He described a situation where during a
community meeting an issue was put forward, solutions were suggested, and a solution was chosen with which not all the participants agreed.

There was one time and there was a fight on Sunday morning and we had to have a community meeting right after. People wanted to figure out how it happened and why it happened... The community meeting solved the problem, but nobody liked the solution... [but] it was the only way to stop it. We all had to step up and say ‘alright we will stop.’ (Billy Joe, CP, p. 1)

There is a recognition here of the importance of collective concern and the necessity of some compromise for the greater good of the community. This recognition is an important step towards recognizing one’s place in the community and the importance of communication in the development of agency within that whole.

Billy Joe’s comment also shows evidence of interpersonal skill building in the area of social competence and group process skills (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).

D) One-on-one meetings with staff. Participants explained that their one-on-one meetings with staff, which happen twice during the summer program and three times during the year, were important avenues for self-reflection, self-expression, and goal setting. Participants described these meetings as having elements of self-evaluation, goal setting for personal growth, and a time for discussing problems they may be facing both within and outside of the program.

These meetings are a time to review accomplishments, goals and/or challenges with participants and can therefore be considered as processing elements. It seemed that these meetings created a mentoring relationship between participants and staff and were considered important support for personal growth in the development of agency, especially at the beginning of the program when peer relationships were not yet strong. “I think the [one-on-one meeting] has helped me grow as a person… especially at the beginning, because of the fact that I had a counsellor that I could turn to and just talk to
them about things that were bothering me” (Jane, CP, p. 16). Nicole highlighted the supportive role of staff during these meetings by explaining how staff encouraged participants to set realistic goals for themselves and often develop scaffolding steps to help them achieve the goal, as well as important feedback.

We set goals for ourselves and then the next time we have a [one-on-one meeting], we see if we completed those goals. If it didn’t happen we would try to set up a way that it could happen, build up steps for me to do it… They [staff] also give you feedback, like, ‘You can do it. You are really strong, I think you are capable of doing it. Instead of putting you down… they are like, ‘well, we can try, but if it doesn’t work, don’t be too hard on yourself.’” (Nicole, CP, p. 12)

This program element was considered by participants to be important not only for goal setting and support for the development of agency, but also in the development of trusting relationships with staff members.
CHAPTER 5: CROSSING CONTEXTS: CASE JUXTAPOSITION TO IDENTIFY COMMON AND UNIQUE ELEMENTS

The third aim of this research was to juxtapose the results from each case in order to identify common and unique elements across programs that participants identified as important to their personal and interpersonal development. Even though these programs are distinct in terms of pedagogical approaches, they share important positive outcomes and program elements, which, according to participants, supported their positive development.

In terms of positive outcomes, there were two particular themes that arose from interviews with participants as being common across these two programs. First, participants in both programs spoke of gaining confidence in themselves and their abilities as well as gaining a sense of emotional competence. For those in the arts program, their gains in emotional competence were related to overcoming fears of performing and being able to control their anger. For the participants of the outdoor education program, their gains in emotional competence related to being able to trust others, and overcoming fears of being alone. As found in several studies on out-of-school organized youth activities (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2002), the findings of this study show that during this program youth engaged in personal exploration, gained self-knowledge, and developed a stronger sense of who they were.

The second common theme in terms of outcomes for both participant groups was the expression of intrinsic motivation for learning and development. In his analysis on the psychology of positive youth development, Larson (2000) identifies a central question of positive youth development as how to get adolescents’ fires lit. He identifies engagement
and self-motivation as key to the development of initiatives that lead to other components of positive development such as creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement.

Ryan and Deci’s (2000) research focuses on conditions that facilitate versus undermine intrinsic motivation. Taking intrinsic motivation as an inherent quality, they argue that when social and environmental factors are present that are conducive to intrinsic motivation, it will manifest. They claim that supporting basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and a sense of security or closeness in relationships is essential to the facilitation of intrinsic motivation. In empirical studies they found that feelings of competence cannot alone induce internal motivation, but must be accompanied by support for feelings of autonomy. Conditions that were found to support intrinsic motivation include: appropriate challenges, choice, acknowledgement of feelings, opportunities for self-direction, freedom from demeaning evaluations, presence of open communication and constructive feedback, and a secure relational base (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The excitement and passion that the participants showed in relation to activities is evidence that they were intrinsically motivated to participate. In the arts program, participants expressed that they were motivated to try new things, to meet new people, and to maintain consistent effort in the development of skills. In the outdoor education program, participants expressed that they were motivated to overcome both group and personal challenges, and to commit consistent effort to improving their leadership and communication skills. In the outdoor education program, intrinsic motivation and a sense of agency, combined with an increased sense of self-efficacy, seemed to give participants a chance to develop their voice and recognize themselves as potential leaders.

Since both these outcomes were similar for both sets of participants it is useful to examine the common elements of these programs that participants felt supported these
developmental changes. The elements identified by participants as important across the two cases are consistent with much research on risk and resilience as well as research on positive youth development. Participants identified (a) a culture of success, (b) behaviour expectations and respectful communication, (c) opportunities to expand experience, (d) a chance to play different roles, and (e) opportunities to engage in healthy risks and overcome challenges, as important in the common outcome of increases in confidence and emotional competence. Participants of both programs also identified experiential education pedagogy and opportunities for embodied learning, and a non-competitive atmosphere/absence of formal evaluation, as being important elements, which supported their intrinsic motivation to continue their participation in the program.

This chapter is organized into two sections. In the first section I discuss how each of the common elements were related to certain outcomes in the context of relevant literature. In the second section I discuss the unique outcomes and elements of each program and how they relate to relevant literature.

Common Program Elements

A) A Culture of Success

An immediately evident common element in both programs was a culture of success. The term culture of success was used by Rodriguez (2008) in his study comparing the experiences of students in two urban high schools within the small school movement. In this study, he found that the small size of the school was not the only necessary condition for increasing the engagement and academic achievement of the students, but that the culture of the school significantly affected the performance and attitudes of the students. He argued that, just as failure is manufactured, so is success. He
defined a culture of success as being “beliefs and practices that are proactively employed to result in a desired outcome—student success” (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 776). Despite challenges associated with the urban social context, he observed that a culture of success was created in one school he studied by a commitment to creating relationships of mutual respect between teachers and students, and by constant support and encouragement from teachers. Experiencing feelings of acceptance and belonging has been found to be important for adolescents as they develop into adults (Pitmann, 1992). Participants in both programs felt a sense of community support and belonging. A supportive atmosphere is key to creating a sense of belonging and an enjoyment of learning that is a basis upon which both increases in social skill and confidence and an expansion of one’s sense of self can come about.

The importance of staff in creating a culture of success was evident in the testimony of participants. The role of staff in both programs is distinct from that of teachers in schools. As Heath (1993) explains, youth leaders in out-of-school programs see their role more as coaches than instructors. Unlike teachers, staff do not play as strong an evaluative role in these programs. More often than not staff are working with participants to achieve a common goal. This pedagogy of participation changes the power dynamic and gives participants a chance to work with adults as peers. Once respect and trust are established between staff and participants, staff are seen as models for behaviour. The staff pedagogy of care was reported as important in the arts program for allowing participants to feel comfortable trying new things and in the outdoor education program for helping participants to be open to self-acceptance and identity exploration.

Nel Noddings (1992) has written extensively about the importance of care in schools in relation to student engagement. She argues that a relationship between student
and teacher that is conducive to learning can only be created when teachers model caring. This modelling involves giving the experience of being cared for, and showing what caring looks like and when it is appropriate. The stories of the participants in both programs show that, no matter the subject of focus, experiences in a caring community are key to personal and interpersonal development.

**B) Behavioural Expectations and Respectful Communication**

Participants of both programs reported that the high standards of behaviour upheld by staff were important to their interpersonal. The learner is a member of a socio-cultural community and participation in social practice is a fundamental form of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Each community has behavioural expectations. Often there are explicit rules and unconscious cultural norms that new participants must learn through trial and error or through observing other participants. Joining a group leads to secondary socialization, which includes “assimilation of the group’s norms and internalization of an identity associated with group membership” (Berger & Luckmann, 1996, as cited in Larson, 2000, p. 178).

In both of these programs, these norms caused participants to self-reflect. When a behaviour exhibited was not acceptable, participants were given the choice of whether or not to continue their participation, with a clear explanation that if they wanted to participate they needed to change their behaviour. Participation was considered a privilege that came with responsibilities to act respectfully to staff and others in the group. ‘Controls against deviant behaviour’ is seen as an important protective factor in the promotion of resilience in adolescents (Rutter, 1993; Werner, 1993).
It was also apparent from interviews that an important factor in participants’ decisions to change inappropriate behaviour was the mutual respectful communication between staff and participants. Ryan and Deci (2000) identified caring relationships with adults as necessary for extrinsically motivated expectations to be internalized. Nel Noddings (1992) described how to create an ethic of care in schools. Respectful communication is “a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation” where the “full humanity of each party is recognized” (p. 24). She advocated that each person involved search for motives of a particular action and then confirm that one can see beyond the present action and does not judge the other person based on this act alone. Trust in the fundamental good of the other person is essential in this relationship (Noddings, 1992). The testimony of participants in both programs indicated that this ethic of care was being cultivated between staff and participants.

Ryan and Deci (2000) also identified peer group acceptance of behaviours as being essential for extrinsically motivated expectations to be internalized. Participants in the arts program articulated that a key aspect in their motivation to change behaviours and become more open-minded came from peer modelling of positive, open-minded behaviours. It must be recognized, however, that these changes were often slow progressions. Particularly in the outdoor education program, peer group acceptance of respectful behaviours was described by participants as taking place over the span of the 4-year program. They admitted that at first respectful behaviours among peers were externally enforced by staff members, but as relationships built among peers over several years of overcoming challenges together, respectful behaviour among peers became common sense to participants. Why would one be disrespectful to someone with whom one is so close and with whom one has been through so much?
C) Opportunities to Expand Experience

Many inner city youth do not travel far from their neighbourhoods, due to several factors including lack of financial resources for transportation, busy work schedules of parents, and safety issues associated with gang territories (Atkinson & Tintrea, 2004). Both programs provided these participants with opportunities to get out of the house and do new and interesting things. These opportunities had the effect of broadening their views of the world and the possible opportunities that exist for them. The expansion of one’s concept of the world can help one be flexible and adaptable to various circumstances (Pink, 2005) and may also influence one’s conception of possible future selves. The excitement of the participants in going to an apple farm or going to the zoo is a testament to how few opportunities they have to explore the world outside their neighbourhoods. This aspect cannot be underestimated. If not for subsidized programs such as these, youth would likely remain inside their houses all summer in front of the TV, or worse they might spend their time on the street. Boredom is often a powerful motive for experimentation with drugs and alcohol and petty crime (Larson, 2000). Opportunities to expand experience kept these participants engaged and involved in the world around them.

D) Role Playing in Finding One’s Voice

Participants in both groups described a process of becoming less shy. This process was connected strongly to a feeling of competence in social abilities and skills. The opportunity to practice playing certain roles was often quoted by participants in both programs as important for personal growth. Both sets of participants were able to expand their idea of themselves through playing different roles. Role playing is an important step
in Mezirow’s (2000) theory of transformative education. He describes one of the important phases of transformative learning as *exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions*. He argues that a learner must have opportunities to explore new roles and develop confidence in those roles to be able to make a change in his/her identity and transfer it to other contexts. Participants in both contexts expressed appreciation for opportunities to try different roles and practice these roles in a safe and accepting environment. Outdoor education participants most often spoke about opportunities to take on responsibilities as the leader of the day as being valuable for practicing communication skills in new roles.

Drama was seen as an important aspect of programming in the arts program that allowed participants to explore their own identities. While engaging in drama activities, the act of exploring different characters helped participants feel comfortable speaking and exploring and expressing their own identities. These findings corroborate theories that activities in the arts allow participants to perceive alternate ways of being in the world through creating a space in which anything is possible (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995). “Drama is unique because it allows participants to imagine without having to live with the consequences of their imaginative actions” (Edmiston, 2000, as cited in Belliveau, 2007, p. 49). For Daisy, a past participant in the arts program, participation in drama was particularly important. By learning to be someone else through exercises in drama, Daisy was able to explore her identity without being nervous. This phenomenon was also observed by Heath (1993) who reported that shy youth displayed an assertive confidence while in character that they did not reveal when speaking as themselves. She described a transition that occurs during role play in which, “the self is transformed from the vulnerable, inhibited central self that fears making mistakes into the demands of the
character” (p. 189). She claimed that “in being who we are not, we can call upon a full array of skills and features of projection that our non-playing self would not ordinarily allow” (p. 189). It is easy to see how being freed from the consequences you associate with your own character could allow you to explore parts of yourself that you would not otherwise.

E) Opportunities to Engage in Healthy Risks and Overcome Challenges

Public rhetoric around at-risk youth blinds many to the fact that youth need to engage in healthy risks to learn how to manage risk in their lives (Heath & Roach, 1999). Presenting youth with healthy challenges in a supportive environment is thought to stimulate personal and interpersonal growth (Green et al., 2001; Larson, 2000). Self-efficacy plays an important role in one’s willingness to engage in certain activities or attempt certain challenges. Those with high self-efficacy show high effort to master challenges whereas those with low self-efficacy are hindered by self-doubt and may give up altogether (Bandura, 1982). An increase in self-efficacy can be attributed to a belief that, “one has overcome an obstacle, mastered a situation or surpassed oneself” (Drapeau et al., 2007, p. 992). Participants of both programs expressed a sense of accomplishment and an increase in self-efficacy as a result of opportunities to engage in challenges associated with activities such as the ropes course and performance. This sense of accomplishment and increase in self-efficacy may be a turning point in the development of youth toward a positive direction (Drapeau et al. 2007).

Giving participants opportunities to overcome both personal and group challenges is one of the fundamental pedagogical strategies of outdoor education. Participants of the outdoor education program expressed that overcoming personal challenges, such as
completing high ropes elements and the solo, resulted in feelings of accomplishment, self-confidence, and a broadening of the spectrum of activities they were willing to try. Along with these aspects of personal development, they also expressed that the supportive environment in which they were able to complete these challenges helped them to build trust for others. This insight was true especially for the ropes course, where the encouragement and support from peers was mentioned as an important aspect of these activities.

Group challenges was reported by participants in the outdoor education program as being important for interpersonal development. Participants spoke about how they experienced and witnessed a change in attitude in themselves and other group members from an emphasis on personal image and personal success to a focus on group goals. It seems that the existence of group goals, which depend on contributions from each participant, created a non-competitive environment allowing participants to feel a sense of belonging and accomplishment upon attainment of these goals. I believe an important aspect of this transformation is the authenticity of the challenge as well as the extent to which the goal requires the participation of each member of the group. In an authentically challenging environment such as a canoe trip in a wilderness area, attentiveness to the wellbeing of others is essential in accomplishing the goal of, for example, reaching the next camp site on a windy day.

Participants of this program expressed that a sense of caring grew among the group members, and they felt they were closer friends with their peers in the program even though they spent less time with them than their friends at school. They also expressed that they were able to let go of their city image of themselves and accept help from and offer help to others. This sentiment implies that their city identity was independent and
competitive in nature. Learning to work with others is an important step in interpersonal development and a necessary skill in adulthood. Participant testimony in my study is similar to the findings of Long’s (2001) study in which adolescent at-risk girls expressed a change in focus from selfish individual goals to goals of group success over the course of three months of their participation in ropes course activities.

Their gains in interpersonal development allowed participants to further explore their personal development. Participants explained that, in this supportive group that felt like a family, they were more comfortable exploring their identity and challenging themselves to grow further. The participants of Long’s (2001) study also expressed that they developed trust for other members of the group and were able to approach further challenges with a positive attitude. Participating in canoe trips where they were overcoming challenges as a group in an atmosphere that was free from the pressures of the city to look and act a certain way, allowed participants of the outdoor education program to let their true selves out.

To perform is to take a public risk with your voice and your body (Heath, 2001); without risk there is no learning. If we consider performance to be a public risk as Heath does, we can appreciate similarities of performance to the elements of the outdoor education program that involve taking risks and overcoming challenges. For example, feelings that were stimulated in participants of the outdoor education program during the ropes course activities were similar to those stimulated in participants in the arts program during performances. They felt nervous and apprehensive, but were glad they accomplished a challenging task, and in turn were open to trying other activities that they might not have otherwise done. The end result was an increase in emotional competence in facing challenges and confidence in one’s ability to do so. It could also be said that
performance and canoe trips shared similar characteristics because they were both associated with the building of skills such as canoeing or dance. Coordination and communication with a group are indispensable to the success of both canoeing and performing a dance. They also both involve physical and emotional challenges.

It is likely that the similarities between these activities have to do with overcoming challenges and managing risks, but also with opportunities to experience group success. No matter the size of one’s role, one was part of a challenging activity that was accomplished successfully. Heath and Roach (1999) found that “youth in arts organizations use the predictability of risks in the arts to intensify the quality of their interactions, products and performances” (p. 27). Experiences of success are important to development, but may be rare in the lives of youth who do not do well academically and are not involved in extracurricular activities such as team sports. Feedback, which was provided during debrief sessions in the outdoor education program or by the audience at the performance in the arts program, was important in the acknowledgement of success.

**F) Experiential Education and Embodied Learning**

The human brain is interconnected with the rest of the body (Davis & Upitis, 2004). We learn through our interactions with the world through all our senses. As is claimed in experiential education, the field of embodied learning considers our interactions with the world as central to constructing our experiences and thus our knowledge. “Human knowledge draws its sustenance from corporeal roots and mind is inextricably biological and embodied; and what it can know is always grounded in the material and experiential world” (Bowman, 2004, p. 30).

Participants of the outdoor education program explained that they enjoyed the way
things were taught because they got to feel ‘what things felt like’ rather than simply learning them in theory. They felt the physical support of others around them in ropes course activities; they felt what it was like to be a leader responsible for a peer group; they felt what it was like to spend a night on their own in the wilderness. They described these experiences as powerful and important in their learning as well as in their motivation to participate in activities.

Participants of the arts education program also expressed enjoyment of learning with their bodies through learning different styles of dance, rhythms in music, walking and talking like another person in drama, and doing drip paintings and getting dirty in visual arts.

Participants in both programs were intrinsically motivated to learn experientially and move their bodies in new ways. Programs that engage youth differently may be especially important to development because of how strongly theoretical, verbal, and written forms of knowledge dominate academic learning in schools. Youth who are not involved in extracurricular activities such as sports may not have any chances to challenge themselves physically and emotionally as they do in the two programs discussed in these two cases.

G) A Non-competitive Atmosphere

The existence of a non-competitive atmosphere supported the intrinsic motivation of participants in both programs. In studies on youth involvement in competitive sports comparing several youth activities, it was found that a competitive atmosphere promotes social comparison with other youth and can impede social development, and the likelihood of developing empathy for the perspectives of others (Hansen, Larson, and
Dworkin’s, 2003). The absence of formal evaluation was considered by participants of both programs as freedom from judgment and freedom to try new things they would not otherwise. Although this sentiment was more apparent in the comments of the participants from the arts program, the fact that the participants from the outdoor education program never spoke about evaluation unless probed speaks to the fact that it was not a major motivation factor in their participation. The absence of pressure associated with formal evaluation created an atmosphere that allowed relaxation and exploration. Participants were given an opportunity to try things in an atmosphere where they were rewarded for effort rather than for success. Participants of both programs expressed relief that there was a group focus rather than an individual focus. They felt that their school evaluation system put too much pressure on the performance of the individual.

Of particular importance is the fact that participants of the arts program felt that the evaluation system in their school stifled their ability to use the arts as a mode of self-expression. During arts activities in this program, they found that they could explore their abilities and better express themselves without fear of judgment. Participants in the arts program explained that the absence of evaluation can create a space to explore aspects of identity. With the absence of evaluation as a motivator, personal interest in the subject, the passion and encouragement of the staff, and the group goals of a quality performance provided a sufficient level of motivation to learn.

In both programs, opportunities to test abilities are provided by natural circumstances of physical and emotional challenges such as functioning as a group on a canoe trip or by creating a choreographed dance as a group. Because participants apply their knowledge and skills in real-life, practical contexts, the aspect of experiential
education in both programs creates conditions for authentic evaluation. The context itself provides feedback to the participants rather than an artificially constructed evaluation system. It could be said that this is important preparation for the realities of adulthood.

In the arts program, performance constitutes an authentic evaluative aspect. Performances are evaluated not by staff, but by a future audience. This fact changes the dynamic between staff and participants. Staff are seen as supporters and/or collaborators rather than evaluators. The future audience represents an authentic form of evaluation that encourages participants to challenge themselves and strive for excellence (Heath, 2001).

Although the outdoor education program did have a system of evaluation in place, the staff took steps to make sure that it is not a dominant factor in the motivation of the participants. Evaluation in the outdoor education program was a long-term process aimed at the participants’ growth over time. This system of evaluation created an open non-competitive atmosphere, which seemed to create a space for the development of intrinsic motivation. As Ryan and Deci (2000) explained, unless extrinsic motivators such as evaluation are internalized they can actually stifle intrinsic motivation. Participants gave evidence that they had internalized the extrinsic motivating factor of the evaluation system. Earning credits seemed to be secondary as it was not mentioned as a motivational factor for continued participation.

A contributing factor to the non-competitive atmosphere in the outdoor education program may have been the structure of activities within this program. Garst et al. (2001) found, in their study of the impact of outdoor education trips on adolescent self-perception, that a structure of division of responsibilities created a sense of equality and interdependence among participants. In this situation, “participants appeared to place
more importance on the group’s needs rather than their own needs and became more
tolerant of each other’s differences” (p. 5).

Ryan and Deci (2000) define intrinsic motivation as the “inherent tendency to seek
out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore and to
learn” (p. 70). The word I heard most often during interviews with participants in this
program was fun. The fact that the participants were intrinsically motivated to participate
was a catalyst which supported their personal and social development simply because it
ensured their continued participation and willingness to learn.

Unique Elements

Each program was also responsible for unique outcomes and contained unique
program elements that participants identified as important for their personal and
interpersonal development.

A unique outcome of the arts education program was the expansion of one’s sense
of self, with a specific emphasis on participants imagining their future selves. Unique
elements of the arts program that participants identified as important to their personal and
social development included (a) role models of success, (b) opportunities to build skill
and celebrate success, and (c) opportunities for creative self-expression.

A unique outcome of the outdoor education program was the development of
empathy and respect for peers and adults. Unique elements of the outdoor education
program that participants identified as important to their personal and social development
included: (a) conflict resolution structure, (b) relationships with staff and peers, and (c)
opportunities to take on responsibility and develop communication skills. In the following
two sections, I highlight and explore the unique elements of each program as they relate
to outcomes as well as to literature in the respective disciplines of arts and outdoor education.

The Arts Program

Imagining Future Selves

One of the important aspects of identity development is imagining future selves. Bumbarger and Greenberg (2002) argue that an important measure of positive development is the development of career goals and life plans. Participants in the arts program spoke about a passion and drive to explore the arts further and an expansion in what they were willing to try and imagine for their future. The fact that the participants of the arts program had a chance to explore various activities in a variety of arts disciplines was reported as important in helping them to find their passion and discover talents that they did not know they had.

Heath and Roach (1999) discovered that, in community arts programs, youth had multiple opportunities to express ideas and interact with adults in sustained and meaningful ways. In their comparison with data from the NELS, they found that young people who were not involved in nonschool activities had very little time with adults to practice talking about future plans, developing ideas, or thinking through steps towards a goal. It is not hard to see how this lack of practice would limit one’s abilities to imagine one’s future self.

A) Role models of success.

As many in the field of risk and resilience have discussed, the presence of relationships with adult role models is important to the positive development of youth in allowing them to see various models of what adulthood can be (Larson, 2000). The ability
to imagine diverse options for the future is influenced by the adult role models one sees in
the surrounding community. Larson (2000) explains that, for many youth today, the path
to adult occupations is unclear if not unimagined. The very concept of success in
adulthood may be limited by the fact that contact with successful adult models may be
rare for youth living in low-income inner city neighbourhoods (Larson, 2000). Many of
those who are successful in their education and employment do not remain in the
neighbourhood, which in turn reduces social networks that are important for information
about jobs and other opportunities (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2004). Given this situation, it
seems important that staff in this program for the most part represent successful role
models from the same neighbourhoods as the participants themselves. Larson (2000)
explains that appealing images of adulthood can pull adolescents toward initiating a
course of action aimed at reaching career goals.

Those participants I interviewed imagined a future for themselves in the arts.
Either they saw their future selves as artists, or they saw themselves in the future working
as a staff member in this program. These views are a testament to the strength of the
influence of staff as role models. Even though participants’ relationships with each staff
member did not seem as strong as those in the outdoor education program, participants
did consider staff to be strong role models in terms of examples for future careers. Having
adult role models in the arts helped participants to see a future in the arts as possible and
to imagine the steps necessary to reach these possibilities. Even though becoming famous
is an unrealistic goal for most, success in the arts is often viewed as mutually exclusive
with fame. The view of success demonstrated by staff in this program was valuable
because it showed them that one can enjoy a career in the arts without attaining fame.
B) Opportunities to build skill and celebrate success.

During interviews, participants of the arts program constantly referred to the importance of the skills they built during this program. They connected this skill building with a sense of competence in their abilities and confidence in themselves. Gordon-Smith (2008) writes that in order to support inner city youth in their development they need to be provided with “skills training and increased opportunities to engage in roles and activities that lead to success” (p. 20). Her assessment points to the importance of programs such as this one that build skills and have structures in place to celebrate the success of participants.

Performance was a particularly interesting aspect of the arts program that seemed to have multiple positive effects for participants. Performance was particularly important to participants as confirmation and appreciation of their skills as well as building emotional competence in overcoming shyness and performance anxiety. The two chances to perform in front of an audience that occurred in each session of this program and the positive feedback received thereafter were important in affirming a sense of accomplishment and competence in participants. By continually performing and receiving positive feedback from an audience, peers, staff, and parents, the participants were able to let go of their fears and come out of their shells. Participants expressed feelings of excitement, accomplishment, confidence, and pride when speaking about performing. According to participants, structures such as performances that are in place to celebrate the successes of the participants are important in building self-esteem and a sense of competence in abilities.
C) **Opportunities for creative self-expression.**

Participants found that, through arts activities, they were given a chance to express themselves creatively and explore and develop their identity. These findings confirm those of Larson and Hansen (2006) where participation in the arts was found to lend itself to identity exploration and development. Holloway and LeCompte (2001) identify arts activities as important opportunities for children “to imagine themselves out of their current identities and to try on new ways of being” (p. 388).

An important finding of my study is that participants found they were better able to take advantage of the expressive aspects of the arts in this program than they were in schools. They explained that at camp there is no right or wrong answer, whereas at school, even in their arts classes, there was a specific way in which projects were required to be completed. The pedagogy used in the two different contexts changed the way they looked at the arts. The participants found the way the arts were taught at school to be a source of stress and anxiety. They expressed a sense of openness and creativity when they spoke about the way the arts were taught in this program. Participants’ testimony indicated that arts programming may be much more valuable for personal development in the absence of formal evaluation. That being said, the elimination of formal evaluation does not negate the value of authentic evaluation that occurs during performances or feedback sessions, which were highly valued by participants of this program.

*Outdoor Education Program*

*Empathy and Respect for Peers and Adults*

A unique outcome of the outdoor education program was participants’ expressions of their change in perspectives toward their peers and adults in their lives. They attributed
these changes to several factors including behavioural expectations and a non-competitive atmosphere, common elements to both programs. They also referred to two unique aspects of this program as supporting the development of empathy and respect for peers and adults—conflict resolution structure and relationships with staff and peers. Opportunities to take on responsibility and develop communication skills, the third unique element of the outdoor education program, was important in the development of agency.

A) Conflict resolution structure.

A particularly interesting aspect that participants connected with building a sense of empathy for others was the structure in place to resolve conflict. They expressed that going through this process not only validated their perspectives, but also helped them to see the perspectives of others. They also expressed that knowing this structure was in place created a sense of emotional safety. This feeling of emotional safety underscores the importance of teaching conflict resolution structure to all the participants, not just reserving it for staff use when conflict arises between participants. Even though one of the participants told me that she had never actually participated in one of these sessions, she was able to recite all the steps of the procedure and explain to me why each one was important. She also told me that she no longer gets in screaming fights with her brother because she understands that she needs to go and cool off before she talks to him. This understanding is an expression of transference. She has the language and the skills to carry this conflict resolution technique to her life outside of the program.
B) Relationships with staff and peers.

The strength of both peer relationships and relationships with staff was a unique and important aspect of this outdoor education program. Although relationships with adults were mentioned as important in the arts program, the participants in the arts program did not seem to express the same depth of relationships with peers and adults as those in the outdoor education program. Participants of this outdoor education program reported that they were able to transfer what they learned through engaging with adults and peers in the program to their interactions with others outside the program.

Relationships with adults to whom youth can turn for support and counselling have been found to be important in the positive development of adolescents, especially those who face risks of living in the inner city (Bocarro & Witt, 2003; Green et al., 2000; Werner 1993). These relationships establish a sense of security and trust that enables continued development (Drapeau et al., 2007).

According to outdoor education program participants, relationships with staff were facilitated most strongly through one-on-one meetings with staff. Bocarro and Witt (2003) found that relationships between youth and staff were more fulfilling for youth if the staff spent time developing a connection with youth and allowed participants to set their own goals. These one-on-one meetings are a unique aspect of this outdoor education program and are seen as important not only in building trust for staff members, but also as an important outlet for expression, for building communication skills, and for setting and achieving personal goals. Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasize that placing importance on intrinsic goals and aspirations is associated with self-esteem and intrinsic motivation.
According to outdoor education program participants, interpersonal development was also facilitated by strong peer relationships. They claimed that the group became like a family and allowed them to feel supported in their growth. Program aspects that participants connected to these relationships were the length and consistency of the program, overcoming group challenges, and discussing their lives together in free time in cabins. Even though a few of the participants of the arts program also mentioned the important impact of relationships with peers, there was little mention of the importance of this element in the literature reviewed.

Participants claimed that they would not have been able to form such strong peer relationships if it were not for the long-term, consistent nature of this program. I believe the outdoor education program in my study is unique among outdoor education programs in its length as well as its consistency. If you learn a new way to interact with others, but you do not have sufficient time in a supportive atmosphere to practice this new way, your old habits will return when you return to an environment that is not as supportive. As well as being important in building supportive peer relationships, there is evidence that the long-term, consistent nature of the program may have other benefits. Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003) reported that across youth activity types, including sports, arts, faith based, community oriented, and service activities, those youth who had high rates of participation (more than once per week) showed higher self-knowledge, exploration, goal setting, effort, and physical skills. Their study also found that youth who participated over a long period of time reported higher integration with family members. This finding was echoed in the testimony of participants in the outdoor education program as they explained how they were able to transfer the empathy and respect they had learned through their relationships in the program to peers and adults outside the program.
Most literature that addresses the length and consistency of outdoor education programming focuses on the effectiveness of programming rather than its effects on relationships with staff and peers. Length and consistency of programming have long been discussed in outdoor education literature as important factors that influence the impact and transferability of outdoor education experiences. Garst et al. (2001) identified duration and intensity of programming as important in influencing behavioural change. Their results showed that even after a 3-day canoe trip there was an increase in peer appreciation, respect, and teamwork. However, when follow-up interviews were conducted after this one-time short duration program, the effects were somewhat diminished (Garst et al., 2001). Outcomes discussed by participants are a testament to the positive possibilities associated with long-term consistent programming.

Looking at the testimony of participants through the lens of transformative learning theory, it could be argued that relationships with staff and peers rather than length and consistency of programming are the key factors in the impact and transferability of experiences. It may be that the length and consistency of programming was mainly important for the formation of relationships, which are actually the elements responsible for the depth of the impact of programming. This is an interesting proposition to be pursued in further research.

C) Opportunities to take on responsibility and develop communication skills.

This unique program element relates to the common element of playing roles and finding one’s voice, but it is more specific in that the roles given are roles of responsibility. The development of agency not only requires the development of communication skills but also necessitates opportunities to take on responsibility. When
youth are given roles of responsibility in a group setting, there are also opportunities to develop communication skills necessary for achieving goals as a group. As Heath and Roach (1999) discovered, giving young people roles of responsibility creates “rich environments of challenge, practice, trial and error, and extraordinary expectations and achievements” (p. 22). Insisting that decisions be made by youth is important in helping youth to develop a sense of initiative. Developing social skills and initiative can in turn lead to more confidence in one’s abilities to affect the world (Larson, 2000).

Participants in this outdoor education program consistently identified the opportunity to lead the group for a day as important in learning how to communicate with and motivate a group. In a supportive environment where one can make mistakes and receive feedback, it is easier to try out a new voice or a new identity. Being put in a leadership position gave participants a chance to explore and develop their identity as leaders.

The participants I interviewed claimed that one of the most important aspects of the leader of the day experience was the feedback session at the end of the day. It allowed them to self-reflect, and to understand the strengths of their leadership and the weaknesses on which they needed to improve. They also expressed that the chance to be the leader again after this feedback was important in trying to use this feedback to improve their leadership skills.

It became clear through the interviews with participants in the outdoor education program that they have become accustomed to self-reflection and have developed the language to speak about their feelings and thoughts. Participants connected the development of communication skills and chances for self-expression to various types of
briefing and debriefing exercises that occurred daily, before and after challenges, and community meetings that occurred at the end of each programming session. These exercises are common to outdoor education pedagogy and are seen as necessary in processing experiences and creating connections to the daily lives of participants (Green et al., 2000).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides an in-depth examination of two unique programs that operate under the umbrella of experiential education. This study is important because, following the recommendations of Morrissey et al. (2005) and Larson (2000), it focuses on the value of preventative programs that help adolescents prepare for adulthood rather than on the treatment of problem behaviour among at-risk youth. It provides an example of how a focus on community programs can reveal important conditions that support youth in their development towards adulthood. This focus is essential if practitioners wish to move toward building programs that support positive development among children and adolescents before major problem behaviours arise.

Further, this study adds to a small body of research that starts to ask and answer questions about how certain outcomes are obtained in various educational contexts. The qualitative case study methodology used in this study is significant because examining various activities in context is important in understanding how they can create conditions for positive development. In accordance with recommendations of Larson and Hansen (2006) and Halpen et al. (2006), this study gives in-depth descriptions of how two programs for inner city youth operate in order to facilitate investigation of processes that mediate differences across program types. Uniquely, this study provides insight from the
perspectives of youth involved, not only into the outcomes of these two programs in terms of personal and social development, but also into which aspects of programming are important for certain developmental outcomes. In order to deepen our understanding of how to support positive developmental outcomes, this study explores the deeper pedagogical elements that are common across these two programs. Although the contexts of these two cases are unique, similarities in the nature of participants’ important experiences give insight into different ways in which youth can be challenged and supported in achieving success, and can be supported in exploring their identity and building confidence and emotional competence.

From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to qualitative research that privileges rather than marginalizes the voices of youth. This perspective acknowledges youth as a valuable source of information in evaluating developmental aspects of programming, as is recommended by Larson (2000) and Warner (1990). Perhaps most importantly this study reveals that critical insights can be uncovered when youth are consulted and their voices are heard as experts of their own experience.

Implications for Practice

Within the field of experiential education this study provides insight into the connection between theories and practice. By examining the perspectives of inner city youth of low SES, this study provides a deeper understanding of the issues facing this group and provides insight into how they can be empowered to overcome the risk factors in their lives. This study gives evidence of the value of community experiential education programs to the positive development of inner city youth of low SES. The positive feedback given by participants from both programs speaks to the importance of increasing
financial support for such programs. This research strongly suggests that we need more of these programs in urban communities where there is a high population of low SES youth.

The stories of participants in this study provided insight into factors that are worthy of consideration in program design. Presenting participant testimony and identification of program elements that have positive outcomes offers program designers, teachers, and researchers examples of pedagogical approaches that promote positive development for inner city populations. Specifically, this study identifies two important factors that should be considered in program design: the development of relationships with staff and peers, and opportunities for holistic challenge in the absence of formal evaluation.

Participants clearly expressed that a supportive environment was necessary to both their personal and interpersonal development. Relationships with staff and peers emerged in both programs as important in creating a supportive environment in which development could take place. The long-term and consistent nature of programming was critical in the development of these relationships. A staff pedagogy of care was also key in supporting healthy relationships between staff and adolescents. These relationships helped participants build self-efficacy and emotional competence.

This study also underscores the developmental importance of providing youth with challenging and novel experiences in an environment in which they feel supported. Participants of each program felt that a non-competitive atmosphere created by the absence of formal evaluation increased their motivation to engage in personal and group challenges. Without the burden of pressure created by formal evaluation and relief from a feeling of competition with their peers, participants felt more willing to try new things and explore their identity. The sense of accomplishment and success felt after overcoming
personal and group challenges, were important in the development of self-efficacy and a sense of agency.

Limitations of the Study

I was only able to focus on two very different examples of experiential education programs, making the findings of this study are necessarily limited. Using the qualitative case study approach means that the stories of youth are limited in their context. By describing the enacted pedagogy of each program in detail, I have increased the usefulness of the findings by being clear under which conditions such affects are possible. The point is not to produce results that are context free, but to explore the context in which these results are formed (Patton, 2002). Each reader is responsible for taking the insights of this study and discerning whether they are useful in their context.

The trustworthiness of the proposed relationships between pedagogical aspects of programming and benefits perceived by participants is dependent on the insights and observations of the parties involved. These links cannot be validated except by the evaluation of their application in different contexts over time. Triangulation of data collection across various involved parties in each program (past and present participants) was conducted to increase the trustworthiness of insights (Patton, 2002).

Unfortunately, only a few participants in each program volunteered to participate. The small numbers of participants limited the scope of views represented in this study. In the outdoor education program the small numbers of volunteers were likely due to the fact that program participants did not know me when they were asked to volunteer for the study. In the arts program the small number of volunteers may have been due to issues of trust on the part of the potential participants. Those in the arts program who did volunteer
tended to be those who had participated for multiple years in the program. Although this
tendency allowed me to consider literature that would be applicable to long-term
programming, it limited the inclusion of the perspective of newcomers to the program.
This tendency may have also limited the inclusion of perspectives of participants who had
negative experiences in the program.

As a participant in the program, I influenced my surroundings and the program
outcomes. Acknowledging myself as the main instrument of the research and developing
reflexivity into my insights was of crucial importance (Patton, 2002). Explicitly reporting
my reflexive insights and presenting my results as verbatim participant testimony has
served to increase the trustworthiness of the findings of this study (McMillan &
Schumacher, 2005; Patton, 2002). Open dialogue with the staff in each program around
my role as a researcher was invaluable in establishing parameters around my participation
with which all parties were comfortable. My role as a participant during the program
helped foster a trusting relationship with participants. Although I had no position of
power within the program, participants’ preconceived ideas of what a researcher does and
their view of me as an adult inevitably effected what they choose to share with me during
interviews. I can only hope that my participation in programming alongside these youth
encouraged them to be open and honest about their experiences in these programs.

Questions for Future Research

In order to deepen our understanding of how positive developmental outcomes
can be facilitated in various contexts, further qualitative case study research would be
beneficial in exploring the perspectives of youth participating in other examples of
experiential education programs. Questions that emerge from this work worth pursuing in
further research include: (a) How does a supportive environment emerge across various programming contexts? (b) What are the factors affecting how challenges presented to youth are translated into feelings of success and accomplishment? (c) How can practitioners support youth in successfully taking on roles of responsibility across contexts? (d) Is the length and consistency of programming important in itself, or as a catalyst in the formation of relationships that support youth in their growth? (e) How can evaluation practices in schools be modified to support the inherent self-expressive and creative aspects of participation in the arts?

In further case studies the perspectives of parents and staff in relation to these questions could also be explored in order to triangulate data and increase our understanding of these questions. It would be interesting to explore how multiple perspectives vary in terms of important factors influencing adolescent development.
REFERENCES


Christensen & A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: Perspectives and practices* (pp.120–135). New York: Falmer Press.


APPENDIX A: LETTERS OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FOR PAST AND CURRENT PARTICIPANTS

LETTER OF INFORMATION TO: CURRENT PARTICIPANT

Dear parent or guardian,

My name is Rosie Kerr and I am writing to ask if you will allow your son/daughter to be a participant in a study of his/her views on his/her experiences in this program. I am doing this study as part of my Master’s of Education at Queen’s University. The study is called: The view from here: The perspectives of inner city youth in experiential education programs. This research has the support of [program name] and the director. Your decision to participate or not to participate in this study will not effect your son’s or daughter’s participation in [program name]. This research has been cleared by the General Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University.

There are three goals of this research

1. To better understand the experiences of youth in the this program
2. To find out how these experiences may have benefited them and
3. To find out what parts of the program they think were most effective

To achieve these goals I would like to ask your son or daughter to be a part of two interviews with me. One interview will be in the first week of the program and will last between 15 and 20 minutes. The second interview will be at the end of the program and will last for 40-50 minutes. Interview questions will focus on your son’s or daughter’s experiences at [program name], what changes he or she may be experiencing as a result of participating, and what parts of programming he/she thinks were most beneficial. These interviews will be confidential. I will be a volunteer in this program during the next session of programming so that I can better understand the program and the participants.

I do not foresee any risks involved in your son’s or daughter’s participation in this research. The participation of your son or daughter is completely voluntary. He/she does not have to answer any questions that make him/her uncomfortable. She/he is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on their participation in programming. Your son or daughter may also ask for any or all of his/her data to be removed at any time.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into text. A copy of the text of the interviews will be sent by mail to your son or daughter to read to make sure he/she is comfortable including everything that is in the transcript. I will meet with your son or daughter to review the transcript during programming in the fall. At this time your son or daughter may change or remove any part of the text.

The privacy of the people who participate in this project will be protected to the fullest extent possible.
• Interviews will be audio recorded and then later transcribed. The audio file will then be destroyed.
• None of the data will contain the name of your son/daughter or the name or location of the organization.
• Pseudonyms will be used to replace all names in the data to protect the identity of your son or daughter and others they might talk about.
• Data will be kept in a locked office at Queen’s University.
• My supervisors and I will be the only ones who will see the raw data.
• The information given in interviews will be published as part of my master’s thesis, it may also be presented at academic conferences, but your son’s or daughter’s name will not be attached to the information.

If there are any questions or concerns or you need further information before you make a decision about participation, please contact the program director who will relay your concerns/questions to me. You may also contact my supervisor Azza Sharkawy at 613-533-6000 ext. 77429 (sharkawa@queensu.ca).

For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study please contact the Education Research Ethics Board (EREB@queensu.ca) or the Chair of Queen’s University Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton at (613) 533-6000 ext. 77034 or (greb.chair@queensu.ca).

Thank you for your time and energy
Rosie
Dear past participant

My name is Rosie Kerr and I am writing to ask if you would like to participate in a study of your views on your experiences in this program. I am doing this study as part of my Master’s of Education at Queen’s University. The study is called: *The view from here: The perspectives of inner city youth in experiential education programs.* This research has the support of [program name] and the director. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not affect your role in/relationship with this program. This research has been cleared by the General Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University.

There are three goals of this research
1. To better understand the experiences of youth in this program
2. To find out how these experiences may have benefited them and
3. To find out what parts of the program they think were most effective

To achieve these goals I would like to ask you to be a part of one interview with me. This interview will take place at the program site at a time of your convenience and will last for approximately one hour. Interview questions will focus on your experiences as a participant in this program, what changes you may have experienced as a result of participating in this program, and what parts of the program you think were most beneficial for you. The interview questions will be provided to you at least one day in advance of the interview. These interviews will be confidential.

I do not foresee any risks involved in your participation in this research. Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your position in the program. You may also ask for any or all of your data to be removed at any time.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into text. Text of the interview will be sent to you by mail or e-mail to read to make sure you are comfortable including everything that is in the transcript. If you prefer, we can meet to review the transcript together. At this time you may change or remove any part of the transcript.

The privacy of the people who participate in this study will be protected to the fullest extent possible. These are steps that will be taken to protect your privacy
- Interviews will be audio recorded and then later transcribed. The audio file will then be destroyed.
- None of the data will contain your name or the name or location of the organization.
- Pseudonyms will be used to replace all names in the data to protect your identity and others you might talk about.
- Data will be kept in a locked office at Queen’s University
- My supervisors and I will be the only ones who will see the raw data.
• The information given in interviews will be published as part of my master’s thesis. It may also be presented at academic conferences, but your name will not be attached to the information.

If there are any questions or concerns or need further information before you make a decision about participation, please do not hesitate to contact Rosie Kerr at (6rk14@queensu.ca). You may also contact my supervisor Azza Sharkawy at 613-533-6000 ext. 77429 (sharkawa@queensu.ca).

For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study please contact the Education Research Ethics Board (EREB@queensu.ca) or the Chair of Queen’s University Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton at (613) 533-6000 X 77034 or (greb.chair@queensu.ca).

Thank you for your time and energy

Rosie
CONSENT FORM: CURRENT PARTICIPANT

• I understand that I am being asked to participate in Rosie Kerr’s research project called: The view from here: The perspectives of inner city youth in experiential education programs

• I have read and kept a copy of the letter of information and had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

• I understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate how this program may have benefitted youth and which parts of the program youth feel were most effective.

• I understand that my participation will be in the form of two interviews that will take in total between an hour and an hour and fifteen minutes.

• I understand that these interviews will be audio recorded.

• I understand that confidentiality will be protected to the fullest extent possible by appropriate storage and access of data and by the use of pseudonyms instead of names in that data.

• I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences and can ask for all or part of my data to be removed.

• I understand that I can contact Rosie Kerr, through the director of this program with questions about the study, or my supervisor Azza Sharkawy at 613-533-6000 ext. 77429 (sharkawa@queensu.ca).

• I understand that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study please contact the Education Research Ethics Board (EREB@queensu.ca) or the Chair of Queen’s University Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton at (613) 533-6000 ext. 77034 or (greb.chair@queensu.ca).

• Please sign a copy of this Consent Form and return it to Rosie Kerr. Please keep one copy for your own records

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Name of current participant (please print): __________________________________________

Signature: ______________________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________ Telephone number __________________________
I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO ALLOW MY SON/DAUGHTER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Signature of parent/guardian: ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________ Telephone number ________________________

Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive:

☐ a copy of the transcript of the interviews for follow-up review,

☐ a copy of the results of this study.
CONSENT FORM: PAST PARTICIPANT

• I understand that I am being asked to participate in Rosie Kerr’s research project called: *The view from here: The perspectives of inner city youth in experiential education programs*

• I have read and kept a copy of the Letter of Information and had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

• I understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate how this program may have benefited youth and which parts of the program youth feel were most effective.

• I understand that my participation will be in the form of one interview that will take approximately one hour.

• I understand that this interview will be audio recorded.

• I understand that confidentiality will be protected to the fullest extent possible by appropriate storage and access of data and by the use of pseudonyms instead of names in that data.

• I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences and can ask for all or part of my data to be removed.

• I understand that I can contact Rosie Kerr by email at 6rk14@queensu.ca or my supervisor Azza Sharkawy at 613-533-6000 ext. 77429 (sharkawa@queensu.ca).

• I understand that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study I can contact the Education Research Ethics Board (EREB@queensu.ca) or the Chair of Queen’s University Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton at (613) 533-6000 ext. 77034 or (greb.chair@queensu.ca).

• Please sign a copy of this Consent Form and return it to Rosie Kerr. Please keep one copy for your own records

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Name of past participant (please print): ____________________________________________

Signature: _____________________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________ Telephone number _____________________________

*Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive:
☐ a copy of the transcript of the interview for follow-up review,

☐ a copy of the results of this study.

IF YOU ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 16 PLEASE HAVE YOUR PARENT OR GUARDIAN SIGN BELOW:

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO ALLOW MY SON/DAUGHTER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Signature of parent/guardian: ________________________________

Date: ___________________________ Telephone number ___________________________
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PAST AND CURRENT PARTICIPANTS

Interview Questions for Past Participants

1. When did you first participate in this program?
2. What do you remember as being important about your experience in this program?
3. If I had met you before your participation in this program, what (if anything) differences would I notice in you from who you are today.
4. How have your experiences in this program changed the way you feel about yourself?
5. How have those changes had an impact on your life?
6. How do you think your experiences changed the way you interacted with other people in your life?
7. What parts of the program do you feel played an important role in your experience?
8. Are their particular aspects or events in your experience that you see as essential components of programming?
9. What motivated you to come back and be involved with this program?
10. What do you feel you have to offer the youth in this program?
11. As staff, are there any program elements that you have noticed have a particularly positive effect on the experiences of campers?
12. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked?
Interview Questions for Current Participants

1. When did you first participate in this program?
2. What was this experience like for you?
3. What helped you decide to come here?
4. What were some of the thoughts that came into your head on the first day/or first few days of this program?
5. What activities do you like the most? Why?
6. If you were trying to explain this program to someone who has never been here, but was thinking of coming, what would you say?
7. What do you remember as being important about your experience here?
8. How is the atmosphere here different than other places you hang out?
   
   Ex. Home/school
   
   Do you do any of the same kinds of things at school that you do here?
9. How did the instructors/leaders impact your experience? Can you give examples?
10. How did the people in your group affect your experience?
11. What do you hope to get out of this experience?
12. How have your experiences in this program changed the way you feel about yourself?
13. If I had met you before your participation in this program, what (if any) differences would I notice in you from who you are today?
14. How have your experiences in this program changed the way you act with other people in your life?
   
   Family/Friends
15. Can you talk about an experience here that really stands out in your mind as important?

16. If you had a job designing a program like this, what parts would you change? Why?

17. If there was more time, what would you include more of?
   
   This can include things that already happen that you think there should be more of
   
   Or you can add something new that has not been part of the program

18. If there was less time and you had to take something away what would it be.

19. What do you like about the arts/outdoor ed.?

20. Is there something that you always wished would have happened but never did?

21. Is there anything else you want to tell me about that I didn’t ask you about?
APPENDIX C: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDES

Outdoor Education Program

Which parts of this program do you think contributed most to your growth as a person?

People:
Counsellors/Leaders
People in your group
Atmosphere:
  • How the activities are taught here
  • What behaviour is encouraged here
  • What behaviours are accepted here
  • The relationship between staff and participants
  • The physical environment
Canoe Trip
  o Canoeing, Portaging, Hike
  o Fire building /Cooking
  o Setting up tents and tarps
  o Swimming
  o Map and compass
  o Hopes and Fears
  o Leader of the Day
  o Feedback Sessions about leader of the day
  o Roses and Thorns
  o Solo/ Envelope received on solo
  o Journaling /Reflection
  o Group Contract
  o Closing ceremonies
  o Group Journal
  o Free time
Other Elements of the Program
  • Community meeting
  • Conflict Resolution Sessions
  • Low Ropes course / High Ropes course
  • Individual meetings with staff
  • Opening the meal/ Closing the meal/ 10 seconds of silence
  • Free time
  • Banquet Dinner/ Closing Ceremonies
  • Clean-up
  • Talks about violence, drugs, sex, relationships
  • Group games
  • Field Trips
  • Winter Sports
OTHER THINGS THAT I MISSED!!!!???
Arts Education Program

Which parts of this program do you think contributed most to your growth as a person?

**People:**
Counsellors/CIT’s
Specialists
People in your group

**Atmosphere:**
How the activities are taught here
What behaviour is encouraged here
What behaviours are accepted here

**Activities:**

**Drama**
- Warm up
- Character building
- Improvisation
- Miming
- Creating sound effects
- Performing
- Being an audience member (in class)

**Dance**
- Warm-up
- Creative movement activities
- Learning Steps/Styles
- Working on a routine with your group
- Cypher
- Performing

**Visual Arts**
- Drawing in Sketch books
- Specialist demonstrating a skill, ex. drawing, sculpting
- Practicing a skill
- Working on large pieces
- Working in Groups
- Having a piece finished
- Showing a piece at visitors day

**Music**
- Listening to music and talking about it
- Rhythm Sticks
- Voice
- Percussion and Rhythm
- Games and exercises as a big group
- Creating your own song/rhythm in a group
- Ensemble (playing a song as a group)
- Music with found objects (Junk Band)
- Performing

**Other parts of the program**
• Daily camper awards for (listening, enthusiasm, self discipline, friendship)
• Guest speakers
• Field Trips
• All camp activities
• Counsellor led activities and games
• Lunch time activities
• Camper awards at the end of the session
• Visitors’ Day
• Talent Show

OTHER THINGS THAT I MISSED!!!?????????