Remembering why forest schools are important: Nurturing environmental consciousness in the early years

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ABSTRACT

This thesis used a narrative inquiry approach to examine the memories that led certain individuals to support the forest school movement in Canada. Forest schools, a form of outdoor alternative education, have been gaining popularity in North America and Europe in recent years. The first forest school in Canada opened in 2008. By 2014, there were 12 Canadian forest schools serving children in the preschool to kindergarten age group.

Who are forest school supporters? What first motivated them to become interested in forest schools? Were these individuals raised in rural areas, or were they urban dwellers who were intrigued by the forest school concept? What significant events in their lives caused them to be drawn to forest schools? What has made forest schools so special to them? These research questions are answered by examining the memories of forest school supporters.

Memories influence personality, knowledge and identity. The theoretical framework for this thesis is based on the notion that the forest school movement is motivated by the ecological consciousness of its supporters, which is derived from memories of experiences in nature. Ecological consciousness represents an active, memorable relationship with nature.

The author examined his own personal memories and those of five forest school supporters, using an autobiographical approach (*currere*) and participant interviews. Narrative writing formed the first step of the analysis. The collected memories were written into chronologically-arranged stories that captured important aspects of each person's life and significant experiences in their formative years. The detailed memories in the narratives were then coded, categorized and themes were extracted.

Major findings were that support for forest schools was largely influenced by formative and memorable experiences in nature. Cultural background, opportunities for independent learning, the exhilaration of childhood exploration, and finding refuge in nature were the themes that most influenced ecological consciousness and later forest school support. This study raises fundamental questions about the role of outdoor education in early childhood and its effects on developing the ecological consciousness of future generations.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse s'appuie sur l'analyse narrative pour examiner les mémoires qui ont conduit certaines personnes à soutenir le mouvement d'Écoles de Forêt au Canada. Les écoles de forêt, aussi appelées écoles de plein air, constituent une formation scolaire alternative, elles ont gagné en popularité en Amérique du Nord et en Europe au cours des dernières décennies. La première École de Forêt au Canada a ouvert en 2008 et en 2014 il y avait 12 écoles forestières canadiennes au service des enfants du préscolaire et à la maternelle.

Qui sont les partisans de l'école de forêt? Quel premier les a motivés à se intéresser dans les écoles de la forêt? Ces personnes ont été soulevées dans les zones rurales, ou étaient-ils citadins qui ont été intrigués par le concept? Que significative des événements dans leur vie les fit tirer des écoles forestières? Ce qui a fait les écoles forestières si spécial pour eux? Ces questions de recherche sont répondues en examinant les souvenirs de partisans de l'école de forêt.

Les souvenirs influencent la personnalité, les connaissances et l'identité. Le cadre théorique de cette thèse, dérivé de souvenirs et d'expériences dans la nature, est basé sur la notion que le mouvement des Écoles de Forêt se maintient par la conscience écologique de ses partisans. La conscience écologique représente une relation mémorable et active avec la nature.

L'auteur a examiné ses propres souvenirs personnels et ceux de cinq partisans des Écoles de Forêt, en utilisant une approche autobiographique (de *currere*) et en organisant des entrevues avec les participants. L'écriture du contenu narratif a constitué la première étape de l'analyse. Les souvenirs recueillis ont été consignés dans des récits chronologiques qui ont capturé les aspects importants de la vie de chaque personne et ses expériences significatives de croissance. Les souvenirs détaillés ont ensuite été codés, classés et les thèmes ont été identifiés.

Le soutien aux Écoles de Forêt a été largement influencé par des expériences formatrices et mémorables dans la nature. Le milieu culturel, les possibilités d'apprentissage indépendant, l'euphorie de l'exploration de l'enfance, et la nature comme refuge sont les thèmes qui semblent avoir influencé la conscience écologique et plus tard, le soutien des Écoles de Forêt. Cette étude soulève des questions fondamentales sur le rôle de l'éducation en plein air dans l'enfance et ses effets sur la conscience écologique des générations futures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a greater understanding of the reasons for the development of forest schools in Canada. This thesis reflects on the human connection to the natural world and the memories nature instills upon us. Acknowledging those who supported me through this journey is very important; without them I would not have been able to complete this work.

First of all, I would like to thank my wife who has been so kind to support me during my studies and to critique this work throughout its many revisions.

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INTRODUCTION

Outdoor woodlands are an idyllic surrounding to stimulate a learning adventure among the young and old alike. Nature is comprised of the world of plants, animals, sky and landscapes. Given nature's diverse terrain, every plant, rock, uneven surface and moving cloud can inspire exciting inquiry. I realized nature can inspire learning in the spring of 2010 as I encountered a group of kindergarten children and their teachers on my walk along a forest trail in central Norway. The children were engaged in seemingly unstructured learning through play and interaction with the environment. Students appeared to be allowed the opportunity to explore their world at their own rate and according to their own curiosity, rather than from direct teacher instruction. I wondered how these teachers had managed to carry out this field trip in such a way that made it appear as if the children could manage their own learning successfully. I watched as the children found their way into hiding spots in the trees and around bushes in an incredible outdoor space filled with rolling hills and mature trees. This memory is what first came to mind when I began to write this thesis.

My journey into the realm of the educational experience of forest schools began two years earlier while watching the evening news on television. I became captivated by a report on Canada's first "forest school" in Carp, Ontario (CBC News, 2008). In the Carp Forest School, children of preschool age spent their entire school day outside instead of in a classroom. I thought to myself that Canada is a perfect fit for this outdoor school concept, particularly because of its history and abundance of natural surroundings. Upon investigating these schools further, I learned that outdoor schools had been operating for many years in countries in northern Europe, such as Norway. With a Norwegian climate similar to that of southern Quebec and Ontario, I wondered what benefits this form of alternative education could serve Canada. In 2010, I traveled to Norway to visit family where I witnessed a forest school in action, as described above. During this visit to a real forest school, I recognized how intrigued I was to learn more about what they could contribute to provincial education systems in Canada.

In 2011, I began a Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Ottawa where I further explored the concept of outdoor education. By this time, popular interest in forest schools had increased substantially (Forest School Canada, 2013; Nease, 2014).

Upon completion of my B.Ed., I decided to pursue a Master's of Education on the topic of forest schools. I began to wonder about the stories behind the people who supported and organized the few existing forest schools in Canada. Who are forest school supporters? What first motivated them to become interested in forest schools? Were these individuals raised in rural areas, or were they urban dwellers who were intrigued by the forest school concept? What significant events in their lives caused them to be drawn to forest schools? What has made forest schools so special to them? As I began to ponder these questions, I reviewed various methodological approaches. I learned I could begin examining these questions using memory research (I elaborate on this process in my methodology chapter). These became my research questions.

With this inspiration, I embarked on a journey to develop an understanding about those involved in forest schools by examining their memories, under the supervision of Teresa Strong-Wilson, an expert in memory research, and Mindy Carter, an expert in teacher identity and autobiography.

This thesis aims to share not only my story, but the meaningful stories of forest school supporters in Canada. By sharing their stories, I hope to gain a better understanding of their aspirations for forest schools, discover the reasons why their support for forest schools is so strong, and elaborate on their contribution to a Canadian movement towards increasing youth access to outdoor education.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I began my literature review by searching for research on personal memories and forest schools. However, I was unable to find literature that included these two topics together. Therefore, to my knowledge, this is the first study of its kind that examines the memories that influence educators' involvement in forest schools. I begin my research by defining a forest school. To provide background for this research, this chapter will focus on the history of the forest school movement and the larger role of ecological consciousness. Despite the diversity of reasons and contexts for forest schools, I discuss some important commonalities for why they are gaining popularity in Canada.

Defining Canadian forest schools

Forest schools have been defined in a Canadian context by MacEachren (2013a). The fundamental defining idea behind forest schools is that children spend time learning outside rather than inside. Unlike their name might suggest, forest schools do not have to take place in a forest. Forest schools are a broad term used to identify schools which use nature to educate children in an outdoor setting. These open-air schools are mostly aimed at preschool and elementary children. In Canada, this could be considered to be any school which gives students access on a regular, repeated basis to a local municipal park, a farm or even a beach where children are provided opportunities for learning outdoors (MacEachren, 2013a). Forest schools are classified as a form of alternative education (MacEachren, 2013a, 2013b). Alternative education refers to schooling that is outside what is considered the traditional education system (Aron, 2006).

Forest School Canada is a forest school training organization which formed in 2012. Forest School Canada's mandate is to provide professional development and training to educators interested in becoming forest school practitioners (Forest School Canada, 2014). Forest school practitioners work as teachers and organizers at forest schools.

Although not representative of all forest schools, a day in the life of a child attending a forest school in Canada can be described in the following excerpt quoted from Forest School Canada's 2014 resource guide; entitled *Forest and Nature School in Canada* (2014):

On a damp, wet spring day, the children meet in the forest. They're dressed head to toe in waterproof clothes, rubber boots, wearing layers of insulation to keep them warm. They clamber up a huge, u-shaped log, yelling as they greet each other. "Hey, climb on my space ship, we're going to take off!" says one child, throwing her pack on the ground so she can hold on. "I'm going to play hide and seek," says another child who's hiding behind a tree. "Start counting!" Some of the children decide to play, tucking themselves into the forest.

The day begins with a song to gather the children in from their first explorations. The children meet in their "classroom" without a room, at trail's edge. They arrive dressed to learn; to get dirty, explore, touch, engage the senses, ask questions, find answers, assess risk and even make mistakes along the way.

The forest is misty after the rain. As they walk up the trail, the children come upon a tree that fell a few weeks before. Its squishy core oozes water when they sit on it, and they try squeezing the pulpy centre in their hands. "A mushroom!" yells one of the children, looking behind the log. Everyone looks at the mushroom and debates why it is growing there. They decide that it would make the perfect house for a fairy, or perhaps a forest animal. One of the children picks up a fallen branch and drags it from side to side on the trail, moving very slowly up the hill.

Another child says he's hungry, and the group decides to move into the forest, ready for a snack. Sitting in a circle under the shelter of the trees to wash their hands and get out their snacks, the children begin to share and listen to one another's stories. Today the children wonder whether a bear might come to visit this park; they tell real-life stories as well as

> "talltales" about times they've encountered bears, raccoons, and other animals in the woods. The educator sees that the children are using this time to engage in story, but they are also planning and assessing risk—deciding what to do if they encounter a live animal, and consoling one another's unspoken fears.
>
> After snack, the group fans out into their favourite spots. Some of the children climb on the low and bending branches of a maple tree. Others create a fort around a fallen branch, hiding themselves in it because there could be alligators loose in the forest. They find a stick that looks like an alligator and nurse it back to health in their fort.
>
> On the way back at day's end, the children discover that the open field beside their forest hideout now features a mud puddle they can play in. One child jumps into the middle, getting his boot stuck—a fact that he announces with relish. He's a little frustrated when it won't come out, so the teacher asks everyone how they would get their boots unstuck. The other children join in, standing around the edges of the puddle or splashing into the middle. One falls down on her bottom with a splash, giggling. There's a stump of a tree beside the field, and one of the children decides that he'll paint it with mud. Soon, many of the children are placing mud on the stump (Den Hoed, 2014).

The excerpt from this Canadian forest school guide demonstrates how children in forest schools direct their own play by using the natural environment that surrounds them. As a result, the curriculum used in Canadian forest schools is known as emergent curriculum – curriculum which children have control over. Children are permitted to explore their surroundings and use their imaginations using any resources available to them. For more information, Forest School Canada's new guide is an excellent resource, which provides a detailed overview of what a forest school is, how children learn, how to start a forest school, and the resources available to parents and others wishing to start their own forest school. This guide is available on the Forest School

Canada website at: http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/wp-content/themes/wlf/images/FSC-Guide_web.pdf.

Early and modern inspirations for forest schools

Denmark, 1950

The earliest known forest school began in Europe in 1950. According to Niels Ejbye-Ernst, a researcher from Copenhagen University, Ella Flatau organized her own outdoor forest preschool in Denmark which focused on walking in nature (Stasiuk, 2014). She called her forest school a "Walking Kindergarten" (Stasiuk, 2014). Using her approach, children went for long hikes in the forest as part of the curriculum. A few months after opening her forest school, mothers living in crowded urban neighborhoods in Copenhagen started organizing their own forest schools that followed Flatau's teachings. The urban mothers achieved opening forest schools by coordinating buses to send their children for outings in the countryside (Stasiuk, 2014). As Danish women increasingly entered the workforce in the 1970s, local governments began to take responsibility for child care and managed the forest schools (Stasiuk, 2014). Forest schools became viewed as an incentive for the state to keep families from leaving the city of Copenhagen to live in suburbs (Stasiuk, 2014). Therefore, forest schools served to meet the desire of Danish families to connect their children with nature, while reducing suburban sprawl and allowing them to maintain the benefits of an urban lifestyle.

Germany, 1968

In 1968, Ursula Sube opened the first forest school in Germany designed for preschoolers. This forest school was formed out of necessity to address a lack of nursery space in local preschools. She identified that there was a problem when her friend expressed frustration that she could not find preschool space for her four children. Sube decided to open her own private school where she would educate children outdoors as an economic and a wholesome alternative to traditional preschool. At first, the local youth welfare office did not support this form of childcare, but allowed the operation to remain open. In the 1980s, Germany finally approved the initiative and other forest schools were soon established in the country. Sube went on to head her forest school, which operated for thirty years (Friedrich & Schuiling, 2014a, 2014b).

Scandinavia, 1985

In the 1980s, Scandinavian countries joined the forest school movement, but for different reasons than Germany. For example, Siw Linde became the founder of the first forest school in Sweden in 1985. She was influenced by a homegrown Swedish concept known as Skogsmulle: "Skog" meaning "wood" and "Mulle" was the name of a fictional character that teaches children about nature (Endaf Griffiths, 2010; Robertson, 2008a). Swedish children grew up with stories and activities involving Mulle and his friends that were developed in 1957 by a man named Gösta Frohm. His goal was to encourage appreciation of the natural world among young children. Frohm's stories and activities were presented by Skogsmulle leaders who underwent training to learn how to dress up as his characters and produce outdoor puppet shows. Linde was a Skogsmulle leader who began to get involved in Skogsmulle forest activities in the 1970s when she had her own children. Linde enjoyed working with children and leading Skogsmulle activities so much that she decided to train to work in a local preschool. However, after she began working in a traditional preschool, she felt unsatisfied. She wondered if there was a way to combine traditional preschool with the outside teaching lessons of Skogsmulle. With support from her family and colleagues, Linde organized the Rain or Shine forest school that initially enrolled six children and tripled in size by the following year (Robertson, 2008b).

Inspired by Linde, a year later in 1986, the neighboring country of Norway opened its first forest school (Lie, 2011). Linde's approach using Skogsmulle also influenced the establishment of forest schools in Finland, Latvia, Japan, Russia and Germany (Robertson, 2008b).

United Kingdom, 1993

In 1993, the Early Years department at Bridgewater College in the United Kingdom visited a Danish forest school which influenced the development of the first forest school for preschoolers in England (Knight, 2009). Since the 1990s, forest schools flourished across the UK following the implementation of a practitioner's course for new forest school instructors at Bridgewater College (Knight, 2009).

United States, 2007

In 2007, an American named Erin Kenny, inspired by German forest preschools and the forest school movement in Europe, opened the first forest school for preschoolers in the United States called the Cedarsong Nature School. Kenny (2014) published a book called *Forest Kindergartens: The Cedarsong Way* (2014) and created a U.S. Forest Kindergarten Teacher Training and Certification Program to train new teachers. Her program is akin to the practitioner's courses established in the UK.

Canada, 2008

In 2008, Canada's first forest school opened in Carp Ridge, Ontario (Carp Ridge Learning Centre, 2014; CBC News, 2008). By 2014, there were at least 12 known forest schools established in Canada (Forest School Canada, 2014). The UK forest school practitioner's courses and the U.S. Forest Kindergarten Teacher Training and Certification Program are responsible for influencing and training many forest school educators in Canada (Forest School Canada, 2013; Kenny, 2014).

The forest school movement has grown around the globe since the first school was established in Europe in the 1950s. As discussed above, there were many reasons for their growth. The primary reason seemed to be that parents and organizers were not satisfied with the programs that existed, or did not have the resources to make a traditional school. Forest schools are traditionally a very cost-effective and perceivably healthy way to occupy young children. However, as time passed, the reasons for forest school development appear to have begun to change, mirrored by an increase in environmental consciousness, conservation efforts and awareness. An overview of the reasons why forest schools began in North America is provided in the section below.

Overall, the question of why forest schools began to emerge in North America was a source of my curiosity and a reason why I began to research forest schools and the individuals who helped to promote them in Canada.

Back-to-nature initiatives

The environmental movement has helped to foster some back-to-nature initiatives which encourage children to reconnect with nature. Since the 2000s, children have spent more time indoors on computers and playing videogames than ever before (Crain & Crain, 2013). This reality coincided with grave climatic predictions and public acceptance of the reality of climate change that may have impacted participation in the forest school movement, and potentially even stimulated it in recent years.

For example, climate change has become an issue of safety, security and health. Climate change was once an issue that had little traction in world discourse, but has recently become a forefront issue of concern. Canadian media outlets have covered the issue of climate change in both English and French in recent years more than ever before (N. Young & Dugas, 2012). Furthermore, the number of scientific publications about climate change has also grown, as demonstrated in a search for "climate change" in a leading life science publication database, PubMed, as shown in the figure 1 (PubMed, 2014).

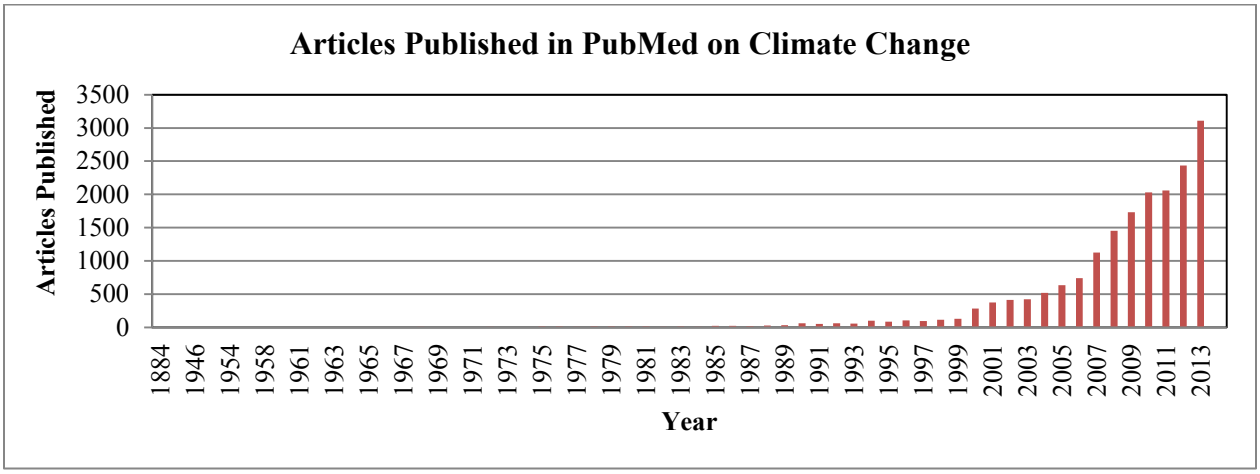

Figure 1: Total number of life science articles published annually on climate change, 1884-2013 (PubMed, 2014).

Since forest schools may be perceived by the public as an initiative that supports sustainable living and connection to nature, increased publicity about environmental issues likely created a supportive atmosphere for forest schools to establish themselves in society.

Moreover, a modern sense of disconnect from the natural world due to busy indoor lifestyles and parental concern over safety have become popular topics. For example, Richard

Louv discussed the decrease in exposure of children to nature in his bestselling book *Last Child in the Woods* (2008). In it, he coined the phrase "nature deficit disorder" to refer to the lack of time children spend in nature due to parental concerns over safety (Louv, 2008). Many parents cite fears of children becoming injured and other risks associated with outdoor play. Forest schools attempt to address these concerns by providing a monitored setting for experiential learning and trained staff to teach and respond to safety issues that arise.

Well known Canadian environmental activist David Suzuki also encouraged reconnection of children to the natural world. As children spent more time indoors with technology and because of parent concern for their safety, his activism may have gained more attention in recent years. Suzuki established the David Suzuki Foundation and publishes books, broadcasts documentaries, hosts a website and participates in cross-Canada seminars to speak about environmental issues and rekindle societal connection with nature (Suzuki, 2013). In addition, famous Canadian painter Robert Bateman, known for his many detailed artistic paintings of wild nature, also came out in support of promoting children to spend more time in nature (Bateman, 2012). These two individuals are examples of integral actors in the environmental movement which influenced the children of the 1980's and 1990's, many of which are parents themselves today, and also happen to be the primary age group of the individuals involved in starting forest schools.

The culmination of these efforts has resulted in back-to-nature initiatives, where Canadians have been encouraged to reconnect with nature on multiple levels. These efforts may partially explain the growth of interest in forest schools. However, even though forest schools seem to be a relatively recent phenomenon in response to contemporary concerns, they actually have deep historical roots in theories of children's learning.

Forest school theories and rationale

Throughout the history of education, many important theorists have examined the benefits of exploring areas of teaching and curriculum, which are integral to forest schools, such as the learning environment, outdoor education, unstructured play, and learning by doing. These philosophers recognized the importance of children's interaction with their environment hundreds of years before any such movement began. Their ideas crop up across disciplines and throughout time, seemingly disconnected. However, the culmination of such ideas may provide a

historical backdrop to the incremental grassroots effort from which the forest school movement was born.

Learning environment

The concept that the environment affects child learning has been the foundational perspective of many educational theorists. Dewey (1938) was one of the first to draw attention to the environment and learning in contemporary education. Dewey stated that "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment … the environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create the experience which is had" (p. 43). Learning can be defined as gaining knowledge or skills, and occurs as a result of a learning experience. An experience represents an interaction with the surrounding environment. In order to learn, an individual must therefore interact with their environment.

As Dewey suggested above, the environment can take many forms. In the case of forest schools, the outdoors is the primary learning environment. Outdoor learning as discussed here is defined as learning that occurs in an outdoor environment. Poets, philosophers and theorists throughout history have recalled the impacts of their experiences with nature and have encouraged use of natural spaces for learning.

Poets of the Romantic Era (at the end of the 18th century) such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, appreciated the important meaning that feelings, nature and imagination had for society (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1798a, 1798b). Wordsworth's poems in particular paid tribute to the emotions he experienced during walks in natural spaces. For example, while strolling through the springtime English forest he wrote: "Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife: Come, hear the woodland linnet, How sweet his music! On my life, There's more of wisdom in it" (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1798a, p. 187). Following Wordworth's logic, nature can teach us things that books cannot. Even though he wrote this poem over two centuries ago, it appears to maintain relevance with the emergence of Canada's forest school movement.

Friedrich Fröbel, a German from the early 19th century, and Maria Montessori, an Italian from the late 19th century, both promoted the idea that learning in natural environments benefits children. They argued that children need to play and experience space with all their senses to develop the mind and body in a healthy way (Wales, 2014). Friedrich Fröbel was responsible for

opening the first Kindergarten. His idea began when he opened a Play and Activity Institute in Germany as a social experiment for children entering school. At the time, young children under age 7 did not attend school because it was thought that they did not have the capacity to be schooled before this age. Fröbel experimented with young age groups by providing opportunities for self-guided play and craft activities. Fröbel believed that children should be nurtured like plants in a garden (Borge, Nordhagen, & Lie, 2003). He renamed the institute Kindergarten, which is German for "children's garden". His institute was a success, and soon women whom he had trained were establishing kindergartens around the globe. Therefore, modern kindergartens - which often require children to remain seated and perform academic work - may have strayed from their original design. The modern forest school movement could be perceived as an effort to return Fröbel's original concept (Early Childhood Today Editorial Staff, 2014). Examining Fröbel's early years, it was found that "much of his time [was spent] alone in the gardens surrounding his home. Here, as a young boy, he would play all day and explore his surroundings. His experiences outdoors led to a deep love of nature that would remain with Fröbel to the end of his days and influence all of his future achievements" (Early Childhood Today Editorial Staff, 2014, p. 1). The above excerpt demonstrates the powers of early experiences on memories later in life that certainly affected Fröbel.

In the American context, during the 19th century, Henry Thoreau was an environmentalist and philosopher who influenced modern day thinking about environmental issues. His greatest work was *Walden* (1854), an autobiography about his experience living simply in a cabin near Walden Pond. In it, he said "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 61). He encouraged greater understanding of natural phenomena and development of connections to the natural world in order to avoid the uncultured desperation of common consumerist culture. Thoreau stated that being in the natural environment provides the opportunity for self-reflection and unhindered exploration.

A common theme among the aforementioned writers, poets and philosophers and contemporary education theorists is that of a learning environment which remains flexible enough for children and adults alike to modify and explore. Such freedom is thought to permit free thinking and encourage reflection and creativity, as echoed by educational theorists Carolyn

P. Edwards, Lella Gandini and George Forman. They argued that "…the environment has to be flexible: it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge" (Gandini, 1998, p. 177).

Italian theorist, educator and child psychologist Loris Malaguzzi became famous for developing an approach to early childhood education, which he called the Reggio Emilia approach, named after the town where it was conceived, Reggio Emilia, Italy (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Reggio Emilia early childhood pedagogy emphasizes the importance of the organization of diverse and sufficient space devoted to the learning process (Hansen, 2009; Moser & Martinsen, 2010). Malaguzzi argued that children have three teachers: adults, peers and the physical environment. The physical environment contributes to a child's development and understanding of the world by providing the atmosphere to permit children to make sense of their surroundings and create meaning by developing relationships and ideas through experience (Edwards et al., 1998). Therefore, according to Malaguzzi, the choice of environmental setting in which children are placed is important.

The principles of providing a flexible environment apply to both the indoors and the outdoors; plants, sticks, rocks, water and other natural resources can be manipulated for engaging learning experiences. Environments, whether outdoors or indoors, can impact learning.

Norway is a Scandinavian country whose people embrace the notion that both indoor and outdoor learning environments are important for children. Outdoor learning has a particular place in Scandinavian culture. For many years, Scandinavian countries have embraced learning outdoors as a way to connect with nature. The practice of learning outdoors, despite unpredictable weather conditions, has been said to be influenced by the Scandinavian notion that there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing (Hansen, 2009). In fact, what some parents may consider to be negative effects from playing outside (e.g. getting dirty or exposing their child to the risk of outdoor injury) are understood in Scandinavia to be important learning experiences (Hansen, 2009; Knight, 2009).

Norwegians have traditions rooted in the concept of friluftsliv, which translates to 'open air life'(Knight, 2009). "In Norway, friluftsliv is an important part of most people's lives and a way of living close to the beautiful landscapes of the country" (Gelter, 2000, p. 79). Friluftsliv is a concept that refers to a lifestyle that involves spending quality time in nature. For example,

friluftsliv can have different meanings, from spending time walking your dog in familiar local nature to the adventurous experiences of explorers in the arctic (Gelter, 2000; Grimwood & Henderson, 2009).

However, the outdoors alone will not provide a well-rounded learning experience. Education philosophers argued that children must also be given the freedom to learn according to their own ambitions. This concept is typically referred to as unstructured play.

Unstructured play

Unstructured play allows children to have control over their own learning and promotes engagement in the learning process. Control is one of the most important criteria for unstructured play because it removes limitations of structure. Children need to manipulate their environment in order to take ownership of their own learning at a pace that matches their individual development. As part of their own development, children will "make persistent efforts to gain control of their lives and to share that control with each other" (Qvortrup, Corsaro, & Honig, 2009, p. 302).

Strong-Wilson and Ellis (2007) elaborated on children's desire to modify their environment by reminding us of what Rasmussen (2004) distinguished as the difference between places for children and children's places. Places for children are places that we as adults design and intend for children, while children's places are the places that children interact with and choose for themselves (Rasmussen, 2004; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). In other words, whereas playgrounds represent places for children, forest schools are predicated on the knowledge that children will create their own places (MacEachren, 2013a, 2013b).

Learning by doing

Perhaps the most famous and profound thinker who understood how we as humans need to have control of our own places to learn is the philosopher Aristotle who once said in 300 B.C., that we learn when we are in the process of doing things (Halloran, 1982). If to learn is to do, the greater variety of diverse opportunities, the more children will learn. The environment that a child chooses has fewer restrictions and allows children to fully explore, which stands in contrast to heavily structured learning environments most often associated with indoor classrooms and

pre-assembled playgrounds. Being outdoors presents more opportunities for children to freely experiment.

In the 18th century, a teacher from France named Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote a book on education called Émile (Rousseau, 1762). He argued that more can be learned by interacting with the physical world than by studying books. He cited an example of how children can train their hand and eye coordination by flying a kite (Rousseau, 1762, 1789). Émile presented the ideal way in which a citizen should be educated, not only for Rousseau but for others. During the French Revolution, Rousseau's book later inspired curriculum for the new national system of education in France (Boyd, 1963).

Conclusion

The educational philosophies I have connected together in this thesis help create a context and rationale for the opening of forest schools. The environment is central to experiential learning, particularly in outdoor spaces, because it can be explored and manipulated in many different ways. Moreover, play that is unstructured shares an equal role in the development of children's understanding of their world, by allowing them to pursue their own individual curiosities that engage them in learning. These experiences foster memories that may persist into adulthood, and are the interest of my study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I put memory research into context by reviewing literature about the process of memory development - from the importance of place and outdoor experiences to ecological consciousness. This theoretical framework is the theoretical basis upon which I will use to examine the memories that influenced individuals to support forest schools.

Introduction

Family, education, culture, geography and language are just a few of the influences that shape individual identity. However, they all have one common theme: memories. People have memories of places they have been, languages they have spoken, and the cultures they have embraced. Memories are important, because they serve to help us understand who we are, where we come from and where we are going.

Places craft memories

On a cool Sunday morning, as I breathed in the crisp winter air, I saw children playing hockey in the alley. The church bells rang, the baker opened his store, and I knew I was home. Memories of places can remind us of who we are, where we are, and the culture we are a part of (Kunstler, 1994). Kunstler described the importance of memorable physical environments. Environments play important roles in our lives by impacting our sense of identity. However, Kunstler (1994) pointed out that modern rapid growth of commercial and suburban landscapes has come at the cost of losing places we find meaningful. He suggested that people living in sprawling commercial suburbs often live in places that they do not find memorable (Kunstler, 1994). These environments rarely reflect the cultures of the people who live in them.

Kunstler (1994) noted that such suburban landscapes are built primarily for the automobile - not for people. People driving through these environments cannot easily appreciate them. The generic features of suburbs make recognizing one community from another more difficult - and as a result, less memorable. The interior environment of the car actually becomes more important than the place the individual is traveling through (Kunstler, 1994). Overall, in recent years there has been a lack of attention to outdoor public space built for community and play.

In order to have places that people feel safe, where children can play and people can recognize their collective identities, public spaces are needed. In contrast, where there is a lack of space perceived as inviting for pedestrians, people may not feel as safe, because there are less eyes to monitor the safety of others (Jacobs, 1961). Goodenough (2007a) remarked that many streets which were once filled with children playing have now become empty. She argued that as the automobile triumphed in urban spaces, fewer streets were built with sidewalks and there became less opportunity for walking to neighboring communities. Goodenough (2007) pointed out that parking lots have overtaken what were once green spaces as well, and cities have increasingly neglected maintaining spaces for children. As reflected in the title of her documentary film, she begged the question, "where do the children play?".

Goodenough (2003) has explained that children need the option to be creative and play in secret places. She defined secret spaces of childhood as places where children create forts and hideouts that are not necessarily known by their parents. Goodenough (2003) explained that many children are attracted to secret places, especially those outside in nature, because "they operate according to systems and rules separate from those imposed by adults" (p. 148). Children may seek out hiding places, because it is in these locations where adults are absent; where children are only bound by the rules and order within their own imagination. These places allow children to explore their fantasies and shape their identity through imaginative games, such as role playing and storytelling (Goodenough, 2007a, 2007b). Goodenough identified that childhood secret places are often remembered fondly in adulthood. She argued that as we grow into adults, our childhood memories "live in specific places, and sometimes you can find the entrance to the past if you can just find the right place" (Goodenough, 2003) . In other words, adults revisiting a secret childhood place, or one that reminds them of it, may recall memories of the fond experiences they once had.

Architecture, like secret spaces in childhood, can subtly elicit memories. Bachelard (1994) examined how our imagination relates to the spaces we inhabit. He explored the poetics of the contemporary house, and cited the intimacy of the interior and exterior spaces. Bachelard explored how attics and cellars are perceived with various levels of fear and imagination. The noise of mice scurrying in the attic or the mysteriousness in the darkness that roots the house into the depths of the earth have the ability to spur our imagination as we think about and experience

these places. Therefore, architecture, and spaces in general, have the capacity to impact our imagination, experiences and thus, our memories.

As a result, memory is intrinsically linked to place – and place linked to memory because physical places can help form our memories, which become places in our minds that are thus worth remembering and caring about (Allnutt, 2009; Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse, & Allnutt, 2012; Yates, 1966).

Chambers (2003) stated that where we learn may be just as important as what we learn, especially in Canada. She argued that because Canada is a vast country with a rich and diverse physical and social geography, Canadians become attached to the memories of particular places where they grew up, and they fondly remember the learning experiences they had in them (Chambers, 2003). I wonder how the physical learning environment may contribute to the vividness of memories; i.e. the smells, tastes and sounds of the outdoors that vary from place to place.

Sobel argued that our diverse natural surroundings are important for building a sense of place in childhood (Den Hoed, 2014). He has the belief that learning from local surroundings is a pre-requisite to understanding the complexities of other distant locations through abstract means (such as a picture of the desert in a text book). He theorized that if children cannot relate to their own backyards first, how can they understand the geographic complexities of another location?

Sobel's argument makes me wonder: can we have memorable connections with nature from our windows? If using electronics indoors within virtual worlds is how children spend most of their time, they may miss out on memorable opportunities to have real experiences; to socialize, manipulate physical objects, and stimulate the senses.

Sobel (2004) referred to learning from one's own environment as place-based education. Place-based education is based on the theory that when all the senses are engaged in an outdoor setting, individuals will remember more because they will have a richer experience than if someone had shown them a picture or simply explained it.

Memories are created in places where memorable experiences occur; which Sobel referred to as having a "sense of place" (Den Hoed, 2014). Gussow (1997) defined a sense of place as: "…a piece of the environment that has been claimed by feelings. We are homesick for places … and the catalyst that converts any physical location into a place is the process of experiencing deeply" (p. 160).

It is therefore possible to assert that a physical place becomes meaningful when an emotional attachment is formed. Foer (2011) argued that the more deeply connected and engaged we are in the present moment, the more we will feel and remember. He suggested that modern day fast-paced, technology-driven life has led to a decrease in memorable experiences. Foer's work reminds us that the time people spend sitting in an office at the computer, driving cars, or watching TV are the periods of time that are easily forgotten. People need to be engaged with their experiences or they will not remember them (Foer, 2011). As early as 1938, John Dewey (2007) argued that paying attention to the quality of experiences for learning is important to avoid boredom and disengagement. Consequently, to form lasting memories, we must be mindful of the quality of our experiences, to ensure they are meaningful to our lives. Nature and the environment would appear to encourage quality experiences that lead to memorable moments.

Memories shape identity

Memories of quality experiences help to shape personalities, knowledge and identity. Rousseau (1762, 1782) argued that childhood experiences help to form adult personalities. Aristotle (2006) stated that experience is important for gaining knowledge, and that "several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience" (p. 3). Dewey (1938) wrote that all "genuine education comes about through experience", but that "does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25). Therefore, the strength and accuracy of our memories is subject to the level of interest that we gain from experiences in life.

Our identity is shaped by our experiences. For example, Chawla (1998) examined the links between memories of natural environments and adult environmentalism during the 1980s. She interviewed a small group of environmental conservationists, and concluded that "the most frequent responses [that led them to environmentalism] were many free hours spent outdoors in natural habitats in childhood or adolescence; and the example of a parent, teacher, or other adult who fostered their interest in nature" (Chawla, 1988, p. 17). Gibson (1979) and Barker (1968) also explored how environmentalism supports future behavior. Gibson believed that it is the experiences in the physical environment that are the most influential in shaping behavior, while Baker agreed but argued that the social environment is important as well (Barker, 1968; Gibson, 1979; Heft, 2001). Therefore, being in nature and having an adult role model seem to be

significant influences in a child's experience that affect how interested they will become in environmental affairs as adults.

Path to ecological consciousness

Ecological consciousness is "a consciousness that is based on value attitudes oriented toward the preservation, restoration, and rational use of the natural world" (Biriukova, 2005, p. 34). Honos-Webb (2005) and Puk (2010) provided similar definitions which stated that ecological consciousness is an informed understanding of natural spaces, acquired through having a relationship with nature. Individuals who spend time in nature – and who feel that they themselves are a part of nature – are described as ecologically conscious. In this thesis, ecological consciousness represents an active, memorable relationship with nature.

A bond with nature develops when there is a conscious effort to understand nature and experience it (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004a, 2004b). To understand consciousness means to recognize "how we think, how we interpret what we see, indeed, what we see and experience [which] is recognized as critical in the unfolding of our history and our lives" (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004a, p. 5; 2004b, p. 5). Consciousness is a vital component of our relationships – with others and with our environment. Young and Saver (2001) pointed out that "so inescapably bound are we to consciousness that we lose sight of how consciousness most often leads us to think" (K. Young & Saver, 2001). What is profound about this statement is how it reminds us of how little we pay attention to the one thing that is so familiar to us: our consciousness. If you are not conscious of your experiences, you are less likely to remember them. We view the world through the lens of our memories and what we learn from them.

Merchant (1987) explained that as societal perspectives about the value of nature continue to evolve, people's awareness co-evolves. She defined this evolving awareness as consciousness; it is everything a person thinks and feels in the moment. However, our consciousness is affected by more than just our own thoughts. Merchant argued that there are external factors that play a role in how we consciously perceive the world around us. For example, she stated that individual consciousness can be affected by the society and group in which a person is associated. A person may change his/her way of viewing nature when the perceptions of nature among community members changes. It is my assumption that personal experiences in nature may also affect environmental awareness. Repeated exposure to nature

offers the opportunity to develop deeper relationships with the environment, particularly when an individual consciously reflects on their experiences. As a result, I presume reflecting upon environmental experiences are critical aspects of forming ecological consciousness. Individuals with fond memories of nature may form emotional attachments it, and become involved in actions to spend time in nature, educate others about nature and protect nature.

Forest schools are based in an ecologically conscious curriculum. Each day is spent outdoors in nature, and children are taught how to learn from nature and to ensure that their activities are sustainable so that they can conserve the land area they use. As such, I wondered whether children exposed to nature eventually become ecologically conscious adults.

Chawla's research confirmed my suspicion. When children have meaningful experiences with nature, the likelihood that they will become ecologically conscious adults increases (Chawla, 1988). Children are more open to new ideas and experiences than adults (Birukova, 2005). Birukova (2005) highlighted that because shaping attitudes towards the environment is difficult in adults who may be set in their ways, "it is essential to get started on strategic work in this sphere with the younger generation" (p. 35). Puk (2010) also stated that more education in outdoor settings focusing on ecology needs to be present in public schools to create future citizens who are literate and care about environmental affairs.

Environmentally conscious parents also influence a child's exposure to nature, and affect the likelihood of their children becoming ecologically conscious adults. Vadala, Bixler, and James (2007) pointed out that the individuals who live environmentally conscious lifestyles and/or demonstrate deep interests in nature often had parents who provided them with outdoor experiences and items from nature to play with. Furthermore, they found that parents of ecologically conscious adults frequently encouraged their children to get dirty and did not overly limit their children's exploration of nature (Vadala et al., 2007).

Ecological consciousness is an important state of mind. An ecologically conscious adult is one with nature. Experiences in nature reinforce ecological consciousness, and the protective feelings associated with it. Having conscious experiences in nature, especially during childhood, seems to impact the likelihood of becoming an ecologically conscious adult.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on the idea that place plays a large role in developing memorable experiences that lead to ecological consciousness. Experiences we have in places help form identity. Having memorable experiences in nature can influence people to care about nature and for some, ecological consciousness is attained. Since the mandate of forest schools is to educate children using nature, I assume that individuals who are interested in education and whom are ecologically conscious are those who would likely support forest schools initiatives.

Based on this theoretical framework, the objective of my research is to examine the memories that have led particular individuals to support the forest school movement in Canada. It is my goal to establish why forest schools are so important to these individuals, and which memories had the most influence on their participation and support of forest schools as adults. In the next chapter, I will explain the methodology I used to conduct my research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the memory and narrative methods I use to conduct this research. In the context of this thesis, the use of narrative refers to a written reflection of memories derived from the themes of lived experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009; K. Young & Saver, 2001). I elaborate further on the definition of narratives later in this chapter. I also identify the personal motivations that influenced my choice of these methodologies and discuss the reasoning for using autobiography and interviews to collect my data. To examine my own memories, I used autobiography, narrative inquiry, and *currere*. For the participants of this study, I used interviews, narrative inquiry, and touchstones. This process created rich narratives. I analyzed the results using coding and extracted themes. These stories enabled me to gain a better understanding of why participants in this study became interested in forest schools.

Motivation for my methodologies

I have a long history of interest in nature and education. I remember the exhilarating feelings I experienced as a teenager, exploring new places outdoors in the forest on the back property of my high school. In those woods, I built a raft inspired by Mark Twain's fictional storybook, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Reading this book about Huck Finn's travels up the Mississippi River on a raft left me curious. I thought: what is it like to travel on a raft? As a result, I decided to build a raft myself. At the time, I was attending a very small private school of sixteen students and my science teacher encouraged me to try to build the raft as a project. First, I gathered materials and tested them for their buoyancy. I was fearful I might fall in the water or lose the raft in the rapids. However, after several trials and errors, I was able to create a small raft using scraps I collected. I tested the raft with my classmates and discovered it was capable of carrying two people at a time. I recall teaching my classmates how I built the raft, and how to control it in the water. I remember feeling the success of building this raft, and how good I felt about all that I was able to do. Sitting next to the creek with my raft docked with the rope tied to a tree, I remember the sounds and smells of the wind and water. These positive sounds and smells evoked a sense of calmness and peace, but also of adventure. All of these emotions

played a role in why natural environments are so important to me. I developed an emotional attachment to nature from these experiences.

Hampton stated that our emotions motivate research. Hampton (1995) argued that it is only once we have formed a memory of something that we have knowledge of it. Emotions associated with the memories we create are therefore vital drivers in research. The emotions I experienced in the woodlands behind my high school motivated me. Every time I think about how it felt to sit by the water's edge under the trees, I remember why I conducted this research. I want to know more about which memorable emotions instilled not only my interest in forest schools, but which emotions were significant for others as well.

The good feelings I associate with nature represent only one reason for the methods I chose. Another reason for my research stems from my own interest in teaching. I realized when I was young that I enjoyed teaching other children what I knew. This passion expanded over my teenage years, as demonstrated in my example of instructing my classmates on raft construction. My interest in nature and education led me to pursue a degree in each field: a B.A. in Geography, and a B.Ed. in primary education. Following my introduction to forest schools during my B.Ed., I knew that I wanted to pursue a Master's degree on the topic. In my first year as a graduate student, I took many courses within my department and explored interesting topics and themes. I was particularly interested in a course taught by Teresa Strong-Wilson on curriculum inquiry. In the course, I learned about the significant role that memories play in pedagogy. For example, I learned that Mitchell identified that teachers' memories influence their practice (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). I pondered that if memories can influence teachers' practice, what memories affect individuals who are supportive of forest schools?

As described in detail later on, to learn more about my own memories, I began to write my own autobiography. In a story format, called a narrative, I began writing about the memories that led me to become interested in forest schools. To learn more about other people's memories, however, required a different approach. I had limited resources about other people's memories such as journals, diaries, and other texts. I decided the best way to learn about other people's memories was to ask them directly. Therefore, I interviewed five forest school supporters. After the interviews, I re-wrote the transcribed interview text as narratives of the memories participants shared with me.

Writing my own narratives, as well as re-writing the texts based on the memories of others, allowed me to identify themes and connections between stories. The stories I gathered in this thesis are not designed to create generalities or stereotypes. Instead, each individual story will contribute to a greater understanding of why the participants of this study choose to support the idea and/or practice of forest schools in Canada. In the next section, I explain the methods I used to collect and examine the narratives in this study.

Memory methodologies

Memory as a phenomenon

Memory has been described as: "a methodological tool for constructing knowledge and one's identity" (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 226). Shirinian (2004) stated that "how memory is remembered will affect the identity one claims" (p. 35). As a result, memories can define individual identity over the culmination of life's experiences, but memories are also subject to how they are remembered by each person. From this perspective, the factual nature of experiences, while important to memory formation, are less important than the memories from the experiences, remembered in the present. As Strong-Wilson et al. (2013) pointed out, "the past is never past, because it can always be reconstrued through the lens of the present" (p. 6). As a result, when we remember, we are actually reconstructing the past in a new light through the lens of our present perspective. Memory is something that is ever evolving as a person grows and reflects on their experiences. I use this concept of evolving memory as the foundation for which I later define memory in this thesis.

Memory-work: Recording my memories

As I began to write down my own memories, I realized I was engaging in a form of memory-work. Memory-work is described by Mitchell and Weber (1999) as the act of uncovering memories used to communicate self-lived experiences. Memory-work is about identifying particular memories through critical reflection and discussion. The memory work process aims to uncover details such as feelings and events associated with past, present and future memories.

Chambers' approach to memory inquiry called Life Writing focuses on personal memories that inspired me to create my own autobiographical reflection (Chambers, 1998, 2004,

2013; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009). In my reflection, I examine memorable childhood experiences that led to my interest in the study of forest schools. In my life, there have been many places and situations that have affected my learning and development, in ways I found both positive and negative, which affected my path towards ecological consciousness, and forest school support.

I used the stories from my autobiography to foster a dialogue with participants during interviews. Creswell (2008) discussed this method of exchanging stories as a useful tool to learn from one another. By sharing stories with my participants, I aimed to make them feel at ease telling me their stories.

The paragraphs below describe the theories and process behind the memory work methods of autobiography.

Autobiography

Autobiography is the process of writing about one's own biographical life. Eakin provided many definitions for this literary genre. He asked the question, "Why do people tell and sometimes write their life stories?" (Eakin, 2008, p. 151). He responded to that question from a cultural and psychological lens, by arguing that it has much to do with exploring narratives of self-identity, self-experience and the cultural process of forming identity through memory talk. "Narrative identity [is] the notion that what we are could be a story of some kind, it is not merely the product of social convention; it is rooted in our lives in and as bodies" (Eakin, 2008, p. 74). In this sense, autobiographies help to form our changing identities and anchor them in time and place. Autobiographies begin with a series of stories from our lives that are woven together; they often begin with our childhood and describe the purposes of the narratives we tell (Eakin, 2008).

Child autobiography

When writing an autobiography, it can be especially important to give attention to one's early beginnings. In his detailed description of over 600 childhood autobiographies from around the world, Coe (1984) described childhood autobiography as vital to understanding an individual's identity. When multiple autobiographies are examined together, common themes can be extracted and analyzed. Childhood autobiographies are written by adults from the perspective of a child, with the premise that children understand the world differently than

adults. These differences involve their responses to experiences, and the way they explore their imaginations. As a result of these differences, Coe believed writing from the perspective of childhood should be an autobiography subgenre because he asserted that childhood is fundamentally situated in another world dimension. Coe argued that the childhood autobiography helps adults to reconstruct their childhood narratives by letting go of reservations with the past.

For the purpose of my research, the period from childhood to adulthood is important to show the growth of ecological consciousness. I did not use childhood autobiography in this thesis because my focus is on how the adults have used their childhood memories to make decisions (support forest schools) in adulthood. Therefore, what matters most for this work is how adults actively remember and interpret their childhood memories. Coe's focus on childhood autobiography as an independent genre can aid understanding of the importance of childhood, as well as how those childhood memories mature and grow in the adult, contributing to such phenomena as ecological consciousness.

Participant study: Eliciting memories of others through memory-work

The act of uncovering memories of lived experiences or memory-work (as I discussed earlier) is comprised of helping people to recall things they may have otherwise forgotten, but which are important to them. Mitchell et al. (2012) argued that people do not always remember the importance of their childhood. Therefore, forest school supporters may not always think about how their childhood experiences may be linked to their support of outdoor learning. By inviting my participants to recall earlier experiences outdoors, they were able to remember details more deeply. This recall process helped them to create more connections between their past and present.

Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt, and Pithouse-Morgan (2013) argued that one way to make use of the notion of memory as a phenomenon is to engage in what is called productive remembering. Productive remembering is remembering that brings out memories that otherwise would be forgotten, and that are tied to agency or social action, such as how ecological consciousness can guide support for forest school education. For example, if a person looks at a photograph of themselves, while they are being asked to recall memories of that place, they may recall more details than if they relied on memory alone. The visual aspect of any productive remembering method is important, because it contains a direct window into the past. However,

smells, sounds, touch and other stimuli that evoke memories, are also important. As a result of conducting most of my interviews over Skype, I mainly used photo elicitation as a primary productive remembering technique to aid the recall of my interviewees. Photo elicitation is a data gathering technique where photographs, films, or other visual cues are solicited as part of the interview process (Harper, 2002). Harper (2002) argued that photo elicitation is a method that allows researchers to delve into a deeper part of the human consciousness than is possible during interviews with words alone. He explained that photos effectively capture a moment in time that is in the past and gone, and that photo elicitation therefore aids in memory retrieval. In my invitation e-mail to participants, I requested that they bring memorable photographs from their past to refer to during the interview.

Looking at photographs and other objects from the childhood of my participants helped them to recall memories of their past. Strong-Wilson et al. (2013) called objects from one's past used to elicit memories, *rememberers*. In my research, *rememberers* were the childhood photographs of my participants, used to recall lived experiences. These memories created details for rich life stories.

Even though I primarily used photo-elicitation as my method for productive remembering, there was one exception. I interviewed one participant on location where many of her memories occurred. We walked along a trail through her neighborhood forest, a trail she spent a lot of time on as a child. This meant there were not only visuals for her to recall experiences, but also sounds, touch, and smells. It is important to remember when participants engage in productive remembering within this study, they may be further galvanized in their work with forest schools.

Narrative inquiry: Crafting memories into stories

Narrative inquiry is a method that uses stories, field notes, autobiography, artifacts, and conversations to better understand people's lived experiences by analyzing the ways in which individual meanings are formed for different people (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that "experience happens narratively, and therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively" (p. 19). Experiences, memories and our consciousness can be shared through various art forms that may be visual, written or oral. These art forms have an interesting characteristic in common - they can tell, or relate to, a

narrative within the course of human experiences. Bruner (1987) stated "we seem to have no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of a narrative" (p. 692). Narratives are a reflection of memories derived from lived experiences, and our consciousness, our state of awareness and alertness, is what we use to focus and capture moments in time (K. Young & Saver, 2001). These captured moments become our memories. Therefore, whether we recognize it or not, we understand our lives through narratives and our consciousness. Interestingly, our narratives shape our consciousness – the way we look at and interpret the moments we capture. Shirinaian (2004) stated that "from memory come the narratives, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves to ourselves and to others" (p. 35). In addition, Goodenough (2003) argued that narratives "reflect deeply internal ways of organizing experience. Young children construct stories as a way of wrestling meaning from daily experiences" (p.156). Britton (1990) also believed that stories are a way that children construct knowledge, and the physical world around them. Bruner also argued that our minds use narratives to comprehend complex thoughts (J. Bruner, 1990). Essentially, Britton, Goodenough and Bruner argued that our stories and our reflections on them, especially from childhood, create purpose and meaning in our lives, and affect the way we understand, interpret and remember our experiences.

Telling stories to explain significant moments in life has been used in Canada by Inuit Elders for centuries. Inuit Elders tell narratives about sustenance on the land to pass on environmental knowledge (Chambers, 2011). In this way, stories create a bond between people and the land (Chambers, 2011). As I began to understand the memories of my interviewees, I realized they had created stories in their minds about their experiences in nature. These stories were often part of a larger narrative; portraying their life stages towards becoming ecologically conscious adults. Somewhat-like the environmental narratives of Inuit Elders, forest school supporters, including myself, may be reinforcing our ties to the land, by the stories we tell ourselves.

Narratives have also been particularly of interest to studies in education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The process of conducting narrative inquiry in education brings together both research and practice. Robinson (2003) stated that practice is enhanced through inquiry, in both research and practitioners, by allowing them to "step outside [their] frame of reference to see things in new ways" (p. 28). Creswell further highlighted this point, by reminding us that "educational researchers establish a close bond with [their] participants. This may help reduce a

commonly held perception by practitioners in the field that research is distinct from practice and has little direct application. Additionally, for participants in a study, sharing their stories may make them feel that their stories are important and that they are heard" (Creswell, 2008, p. 511). Therefore, in the field of education, narrative inquiry research can impact, and may even benefit, its participants by giving them the opportunity to reflect and express their thoughts and views.

In the next paragraphs, I explain how I went about collecting data from my own narrative autobiography, through to interviewing selected forest school supporters.

Data collection

Narrative autobiography with currere

In designing the framework of analysis for my narrative autobiography, I turned to a method known as *currere*. These descriptions are used for the purpose of analysis and gaining a sense of self-understanding. *Currere* was developed into a method for self-study by Pinar and his academic colleague Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). Pinar coined this term to describe the act of writing reflections upon educational moments. The word *currere* is derived from Latin and means "curriculum". Pinar (2014) took an etymological perspective on curriculum, stating that *currere* is a verb representing an action. *Currere* is a process of perpetual motion within us, as we experience it. Grumet added that "*currere* is a reflexive cycle in which thought bends back upon itself and thus recovers its volition" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, pp. 130-131).

Grumet (1981) believed that curriculum "is the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present and our future" (p. 115). She also stated that *currere* can be linked to Dewey's initial understanding of curriculum. Dewey argued that experience forms the evolution of a learner's development, within a given curriculum (Graham, 1991).

Pinar argued that *currere* could revolutionize education, by allowing teachers' creative sides to blossom, resulting in self-understanding, and the actualization of innovative change. From a broader perspective, Graham (1992) asserted that *currere* is useful as a self-reflective tool, but not necessarily to actualize what he called "concrete proposals for reconstituted curricula" (i.e. to make an actual change to curriculum) (p. 38). Graham stated that the reality of societally-imposed limitations needs to also be considered, which limits a teacher's ability to change constructs. A *currere*-based approach is useful to gain a better understanding of how educational

experiences have influenced an interest in the curriculum of forest schools. *Currere* is comprised of four phases;

1. Regressive (thinking about one's educational history)
   Example: I thought about the educational moments that were inspirational to me that influenced my interest in forest schools;

2. Progressive (looking towards the future)
   Example: I thought about the way I see myself in the future and the goals I hope to achieve;

3. Analytic (examining the meaning of one's past, present and future education)
   Example: I reflected on the meaning of the content in the regressive and progressive phases;

4. Synthetic (connecting the events and contexts of one's learning experiences, within corresponding macro cultural perspectives)
   Example: I related my own experience with that of transcendence into ecological consciousness (Graham, 1991; Pinar, 1975).

Since its original inception, arguments to add a final step to the *currere* process have occurred. For example, Carter (2014) suggested that a fifth step called illumination should be included.

5. Illumination (moving change to a mindful understanding, which affects body, spirit, and emotion)
   Example: I explain how ecological consciousness is embedded within my being, and how this has led me to involvement in the forest school movement.

For the purpose of critically examining my own interest in forest schools, I organized my life's learning experiences into three main categories: past, present, and future, in order to write a

narrative that comprises each stage. The narrative appears in Chapter 4. My own narrative joins the other narratives I wrote as in a chorus of individuals drawn to forest schools, as well as being, through a *currere* lens, the significance of my own story to this research.

Recruiting participants

Participants were selected based on their involvement and support in outdoor education for children. Five participants were chosen for this study. This number was primarily based on the time allotted for this thesis. However, given more time, more participants may have been included.

I found e-mail addresses of these participants through outdoor learning websites and through the snowballing approach. Snowballing is a strategy whereby willing participants provide names of other potential candidates. This technique is a useful in difficult-to-find populations (Goodman, 2011). Since the concept of a forest school is an emerging idea, particularly in Canada, there is a limited population who are actively involved in forest school activities and support. The criteria I used to select people to interview were based on their support and involvement in the forest school movement in Canada (as I defined in my literature review). Some participants were more involved in the forest school movement than others, but they all agreed to the idea that learning outdoors in early childhood is important, and believed it was necessary for a child's development. They were all also attracted to how forest schools can deliver outdoor education.

Once I had the e-mail addresses of several prospective participants, I contacted them to ask if they would be interested in this study. The email was sent in the form of a formal letter of invitation (see Appendix I). The letter of invitation provided participants with a description of what the study entailed, and asked them to confirm their interest in participating, by telephone or email. Following my reception of a positive response, I sent them a consent form which explained the study procedures, ensured confidentiality of their private information, and allowed them to withdraw from the study voluntarily at any time (see Appendix II). As part of my privacy guarantee, I decided to keep the names of my participants anonymous, by using pseudonyms. I did this to assure that participants felt comfortable sharing any memories they had, even those which were unpleasant, without fear of identification by the general public (Bar-

On, 1996). Following receiving the consent form signature of each participant, I scheduled the interviews.

Interviews

Since forest schools in Canada are a relatively new phenomenon, collecting information about the memories of forest school supporters from published diaries, journals, autobiographies or other publically available written accounts was not possible. Therefore, I decided to conduct interviews, which were supplemented by any other information participants had, such as photographs.

There are three kinds of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Unlike structured interviews, where the researcher never veers from pre-determined questions, and controls the information that is collected, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are less rehearsed, and allow the researcher and participant to engage in mutual dialogue (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, because I wanted the freedom to ask further questions that may develop during responses, but I also wanted to pre-arrange a structured set of interview questions, which would give me a framework for which I could collect and identify common memory themes for the development of ecological consciousness and later forest school support among participants. Using semi-structured interviews helped to provide me with richer clarity of participant responses, and helped to ensure I had sufficient responses to re-tell life stories (Corbin & Morse, 2003). The oral interview guide I used is available in Appendix III.

Interviews were performed both in person in quiet locations, and over Skype at the homes of participants, when vast distances made it difficult to meet.

Touchstones

During interviews to help interviewees identify their most influential childhood memories, I turned to a concept known as touchstones. Strong-Wilson (2006) used touchstones as a metaphor to describe memories that emerge from childhood and early adulthood. These touchstones can be compared against other memories to judge their value. Touchstones originally were “smooth dark stone[s] that, when rubbed against gold and silver, proves the

metal's quality" (Strong-Wilson, 2006, p. 69). Touchstones essentially help individuals decide which memories were significant in causing change in their lives. I used my own modified version of the touchstone method by asking participants to compare memories that came to mind, and reflect on which ones were the most important for their ecological awareness. For example, I asked which memories participants believed to be formative in support for forest schools, when compared to other memories they recalled. The people I interviewed used personal memories that they thought of most frequently, to compare them against other memories they recalled during prompts. Together, we discussed which memories were felt to be most meaningful in the journey to environmental awareness, education, and forest schools.

Transcripts

Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to extract important quotes and details. The audio recordings and transcripts were stored in password protected digital files, and permanently deleted upon completion of the research. Given that the interviews were done in person or via web camera on Skype, I also took notes to record body language, tone of voice, and emotion. The transcripts were then developed into narratives.

Table 1 is a chart that displays each person's name (their pseudonym), biographical facts, and their connection to forest schools. There is also a column that notes how long my interviews were, how many I had, and the form they took.

Table 1: Participant descriptions

Pseudo Name	Biographical Facts	Connection to Forest Schools	Interview Format	Number of Interviews	Total Interview Length (Minutes)
Maria	Age: 32 Sex: Female Home: Ottawa, ON	Owner and operator of a forest school teacher training program	Skype from her forest school teacher training office in Ottawa, ON	1	85
Hailey	Age: Late 30s Sex: Female Home: Ottawa, ON	Owner, teacher and operator at a forest school	On location at her forest school in Gatineau, QC	1	65
Rose	Age: 33 Sex: Female Home: Vancouver, BC	In the process of organizing the creation of a forest school in rural BC	On location in the forests behind her childhood home	1	63

Pseudo Name	Biographical Facts	Connection to Forest Schools	Interview Format	Number of Interviews	Total Interview Length (Minutes)
Joanne	Age: Late 30s Sex: Female Home: Vancouver, BC	Teaches at an outdoor pre-school and was on the Forest School Canada Committee	On Skype from her home in Vancouver, BC	1	72
Ingrid	Age: 41 year old Sex: Female Home: Toronto, ON	Promotes curriculum of forest schools to parents through her website	Skype from her home in Toronto, ON	2	123

Table 1 also displays the orders in which the stories are told, from top to bottom after my narrative. The order is deliberate, because after I introduce my narrative that influenced this study, I wanted to begin with the person's story who is involved in forest schools as an owner / coordinator and gradually work out to people on the fringes who are supporters, but who seem equally as influential in the forest school movement. These supporters have supported the growth and establishment of forest schools and promote forest school curriculum in Canada.

Writing narratives

"Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). From the transcripts, I began ordering the memories I had recorded chronologically. The purpose of chronologically ordering remembered experiences was to provide context for understanding. When memories are placed in the order of life stages in which they occurred, I found it makes it easier to understand connections between them. This approach is in line with J. Bruner (1990), who argued that "people do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures (p. 64).

Polkinghorne (2006) took an approach in his narrative analysis where events and details are formed into a plot before being examined. Polkinghorne explained that "plot is the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship among the events and choices of their lives" (2006, p. 7). To write a plot, he first recommended that researchers begin by searching for themes in their data. Secondly, he advised researchers to seek connections and

relationships between themes in order to write stories. This is the procedure I followed for each narrative in this thesis. In putting together these narratives chronologically, I included not only past, but present, and future ideas (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This method of reorganizing data details within a framework like a plot, has been called re-storying (Creswell, 2012). As a result of retelling the stories of participants, I did not resort to using many direct quotes, unless I felt they were significant to understanding the story. My rationale for this is that I wished to avoid interference of quotes with the flow of my storytelling. In addition, some participants requested that I not quote them directly; since they were self-conscious about their grammar. Therefore, I mainly retold their stories using my own words, drawing from their spoken words and the ideas they expressed. Composing the narratives was the first step in interpreting the interview data, through the process of understanding as "re-storying".

Member checking

At the end of each interview, I informed participants how their narratives would be used in the final version of this study. I told them that I would only use quotes they provided me that were significant to this study and that I would avoid quoting them where there were grammatical errors in their speech.

After developing the conclusion to my paper, I also discussed the narratives and results with my participants by sending them their sections by e-mail to review. I asked them in these e-mails if the stories and quotes I chose were to their satisfaction. It was important to ensure that the narratives I retold and my interpretation of the results was representative of the participants lived experience (Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

Coding to find themes

As explained in greater detail below, to analyze my research data, I conducted reflective analysis to extract relevant themes, such as the role of social relationships in shaping ecological consciousness. Reflective analysis helped me to explore how each participant's memories (including my own) may have influenced ecological consciousness and each participant's interest in forest schools. The analysis was followed by a discussion of each narrative's significance, in terms of ecological consciousness and forest school interest.

Pre-coding

To conduct my analysis, I began with a process known as pre-coding, whereby I reviewed each narrative several times, and underlined, highlighted and circled important sections of text (Boyatzis, 1998). Pre-coding is the process of preparing pieces of text for coding. I did this by noting major ideas that stood out in participant narratives, such as memories of formative activities, events in their lives or social relationships.

Coding

A code is a word or phrase used to capture the essence of a portion of text or data (Saldaña, 2012a). I began coding by printing out each narrative, double spaced, leaving a wide margin on the right side of the page for my codes. I then went through the text, line by line, noting codes (or concepts) that appeared to describe the text.

I then looked for patterns, such as similarities and differences between codes, including frequency and the sequence they occurred (Saldaña, 2012a, 2012b). I found that as I coded one narrative and moved to another, my codes were influenced by the previous narrative, which often occurs (Saldaña, 2012a, 2012b). I therefore coded each individual's narrative once, and then went through all of the narratives multiple times to ensure I had properly and uniformly coded the narratives.

It is important to note that codes are heavily based on the perspective of the researcher and the pre-existing premises of the study being conducted. Sharan B. Merriam (1997); Sharan B Merriam (1998) asserted, "our analysis and interpretation – our study's findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place" (p.48). This means that my interpretations will ultimately be affected by the perspectives and theories I described in my literature review and theoretical framework. Sipe (2004) also stated that "all coding is a judgment call", because we have "our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, [and] our quirks" that we carry with us (p. 482-3). Therefore, coding is also a subjective process and is reliant on the interpretation of the researcher.

Categories

Qualitative coding helped me to capture the essence of the components of the narratives. I then organized all of the codes by their similarities and patterns, which helped me to identify categories (Saldaña, 2012a, 2012b).

Bernard (2006) stated that analysis "is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (p.452). The process of systematically organizing codes into categories, based on their characteristics is also known as codifying (Saldaña, 2012a). The categories created from codifying helped to show the relationships between codes (Saldaña, 2012a, 2012b). Charmaz (2006) used the following metaphors to describe the difference between codes and categories: she stated that codes are like the "bones" of the analysis, and categories are like the "skeleton".

After I codified the narratives into categories, I refined the categories using an inclusion rule, before I began comparing the categories. This meant the content for each category had to fall under a rule for inclusion, which is essentially a definition for the category. For example, to be included in the category of "parents", a participant would have to mention their mother, father or caregiver. By refining my categories, I also created sub-categories.

Themes

Following categorizing the codes, I compared the relationships between categories to extract themes in the data (Saldaña, 2012a, 2012b). Unlike categories that represent more obvious distinctions, themes are more subtle and are often found following extensive refinement of coding and categories (Saldaña, 2012a, 2012b). The themes represent the main ideas of the data as a whole. To achieve determination of themes, I examined conceptual bridges between my participants' narratives, my narrative (as *currere*), and my interpretations of those narratives. I examined each category and theme through the lens of ecological consciousness, searching for links which could have led to it, and for evidence of individual's expressions of it.

Finally, I used a network diagram to display the connections between the categories and themes (Thomas, 2006). The diagram allowed for a visual representation of the relationships in the data to help discuss the results. A network diagram for each theme is presented in the results section in Chapter 5.

Discussing results

The narratives were the first sustained, in-depth interpretation of the data, presented as a re-storying, a process that began with my own autobiographical story. I will say more about this process in the introductory sections to the next two chapters, each of which will explain the mechanics of how the analysis was done.

After I turned the memories from myself and my participants into chronological narratives, I related the narratives and the emergent themes within them back to the literature. At the same time, I explained how the process of writing the narratives helped me respond to my interview questions. I also elaborated on what ecological memories are, and how they can be fostered at different stages in life; contributing to a person's formative years.

In my concluding chapter, I discuss what my findings explain about the forest school movement as an alternative education practice. I relate my findings back to the literature, and I relate my own story back to *currere*, where this inquiry began; describing my memories of education with learning in and from nature. I elaborate on what ecological memories are, and how they can be fostered at different stages in life; contributing to a person's formative years. In addition, I identify further areas for research and recommendations for practice. Based on my findings, I discuss the implications for my research and the questions that remain to be explored.

Methodological strengths and limitations

Using memory-work as a method allowed me to capture important, in-depth memories in people's lives. However, five participants is a small number to analyze and can be considered as one of the limitations of conducting memory-work and narrative inquiry. However, interviewing and re-writing life stories of individuals cannot easily be done with large numbers of participants, and therefore requires choosing a select few.

The strength of narrative inquiry is that it can capture the complex nature of an individual's life, by illustrating memorable thoughts and experiences in the context of a story. Completing this process helped me to understand the meaning of individual memories, and how they related to the larger narrative of a person's life. However, the narrative analysis I conducted is limited to how I analyzed the narratives from my own perspective. One advantage of narratives is that they can be re-examined by other researchers, using different angles, to develop further analysis for discussion.

I also understand the limitations of *currere*, which will not necessarily result in promotion of curriculum change in favor of forest schools, but rather allow for self-awareness about the importance of these schools, which can itself provide the impetus for change.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the importance of memory, *currere* as a self-autobiography, and the participant interview process. I also discussed the use of narrative inquiry, touchstones, and coding for narrative analysis to extract themes. This process helped me to identify the development of ecological consciousness in myself and the participants. In the next chapter of this thesis, I display my own story first as the basis for my interest in other people's narratives. The narratives themselves provided the initial level of interpretation.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS - NARRATIVE STORIES OF ECOLOGICALLY RELATED MEMORIES

Introduction

Creating narratives from the memories collected during the interviews with participants and from my own autobiographical approach using *currere* was the first step in my data analysis. I began by thinking about who might be reading these stories, such as individuals interested in forest schools: educators, policy makers, researchers and parents. I thought these individuals may be curious to learn about significant memories in people's lives. As a result, I created rich descriptions in the form of chronologically-organized narratives based on the individual's reported memories. In writing these stories, it was my aim to allow others to experience the memories of these individuals as the narratives were read. In this way, writing and reading the narratives helped to understand factors that influenced individuals' forest school support.

The order in which I tell these stories is also important. I decided to order the stories according to the level of forest school involvement or support. For example, individuals actively involved in building the forest schools were placed first, followed by teachers who taught in forest schools, and ending with forest school supporters. I began with my own story, because even though I had the least involvement in the forest school movement among the participants, it was my own initial memories and curiosity that ultimately inspired the basis for this study. Together, these narratives form the core of my thesis.

My narrative

Early years

As an only child, my early childhood education was largely shaped by my grandfather on my father's side, and the time I spent with him. During the summer, I would spend weeks with him at his cottage in the Eastern Townships, exploring the trees and stream that meandered near his property. Along the stream I would find rocks and stones that I would collect in my pant pockets. I would take them home and carefully choose different colored crayons to colour the rocks with. Then I would rest them atop my bedroom dresser. I had so many fond memories playing by the stream that when he eventually sold the cottage, I was heartbroken.

As a child of a busy working mother and an alcoholic father who divorced by the time I was 10, I spent more of my time in the care of my grandfather than I did with my parents. My grandfather's influence on shaping my understanding of the world cannot be underestimated. As a World War II veteran, he would tell me stories of his adventures in Europe - how on many occasions he narrowly escaped death, encountered the enemy, lived outdoors for many weeks without a change of clothes and hunted wild animals for food to supplement meal rations. He constantly reminded me of how grateful I should be to have "a roof over my head". However, despite his hardships, I wanted to understand his experiences, and even relive them through his stories. Each night before bed he would say these words that were echoed from his life as a soldier: "tonight we sleep and tomorrow we'll live to fight another day". He would explain to me that the moral of this phrase was not whether we would survive another day, but whether we will make an *effort* to live for tomorrow. His saying was a constant reminder of the value of each day and to cherish each moment. Every night before bed, it also became a ritual for me to ask him questions about the world that would often relate back to his experiences in the war. I remember asking him as the clock ticked at my bedtime, "Can I ask one more question?"

I spent so much time at my grandfather's that I even had my own bedroom in his small, 4 ½ apartment where I spent most of my time alone creating cartoon drawings of people and animal life. I remember one day deciding that I would draw my grandfather who had so much meaning in my life. This drawing still has a lot of meaning for me today because it shows a portrait of him from the way I remember him sitting across from me in his armchair in his living room. Below is a drawing I drew at the age of 6:

Figure 2: Drawing I made of my grandfather at age 6

At this age, I knew I was an artist and felt destined to fulfill an occupation as such. I created weekly newspapers for my grandfather to read, started a television station with a small T.V. transmitter and a video camera, and even animated my own films inspired by the Warner Brother's cartoons. I enjoyed teaching myself advanced animation techniques through trial and error, and by used the resources I had around me, such as books, crayons and toys.

My grandfather's philosophy of raising children was that they should explore the world without interruption. My grandfather's own parents were strict and from a relatively poor working class background. Coupled with his upbringing and his experience as a soldier who dealt with many hardships during World War II, he held the belief that it was his responsibility to

shelter me from the suffering associated with difficult life experiences. As a result, he insisted on treating me like as a guest in his home, while continuously reminding me to enjoy my life now, because in his words, “the world will beat you up enough later on”. My grandfather’s care for my basic needs as well as the freedom he gave me to explore the world on my own in his guest room allowed me to spend much of my time learning through play and exploration on my own terms. I believe this had an impact on why I would later become comfortable as an independent student and a researcher in university.

However, my relaxed philosophy on life had consequences for me in elementary school where listening to the teacher and filling out worksheets was the evaluation of success. By second grade, I had failed many tests and was considered the student of my class that was “slow” or “developmentally delayed” – these were the terms used by my teacher who informed my parents of my shortcomings. This teacher insisted that my responses to questions in class showed that I was behind all the other children and was not ready to attend the next grade. The teacher’s insistence infuriated my parents who did not want to accept that something was wrong with their child. With my teachers constantly talking about my learning problems, but with no follow-up intervention by my parents or the school, I felt stuck in a problem with no solution. This process also shaped the way I would understand myself as a learner which would take years to repair and ultimately affected my self-worth. Consequently, I repeated grade 6 as a measure my parents felt would help prepare me for high school, as my grades continued to decline.

In grade 6, my best friend from school invited me to go see the opening premier of the Disney film “The Adventures of Huck Finn”. Before the film began, a speaker rose from the front of the theatre explaining the significance of Mark Twain’s stories on American childhood culture. I had never read his books or even heard about the author before. However, by the end of the film, I was deeply moved in a way that was life changing. Following the film, I asked my parents for copies of Mark Twain’s story books. For the first time, I found myself excited about reading and I spent long hours reading them under shady trees and in quiet places during the following summer.

Norwegian heritage

The summer after repeating grade 6, I moved from Montreal to Toronto. This change of place caused major psychological distress upon my life, because it occurred at a time when my friends at school were very important to me. I also dreaded moving away from everything that was familiar. However, my grandparents on my mother's side lived in Toronto, so this opened a new chapter in my life where I began to spend more time with them, rather than with my grandfather in Montreal. Spending time with my Norwegian grandparents helped me to better understand the Norwegian side of my family. Both of my grandparents on my mother's side were raised in Norway, and they told me many intriguing stories of their lives growing up in their country. I began to understand the deep connection between nature and Norwegian culture, which as a child who grew up in the city of Montreal, I found fascinating and wanted to experience.

My grandparents told me about how they spent much time hiking and even skiing to school as children growing up in Norway. As is common in Norway, each of my grandparents grew up having a cottage by the fjord for the summer and a chalet in the mountains for winter, which they visited frequently for weekends, vacations and during the holidays. These cottages were minimalist, with no electricity, plumbing or running water.

My grandparents would take the train from the city to go skiing in the mountains. They told me that when they would go skiing, they wore their traditional wooly Norwegian sweaters and knickers with wool socks. Some skiers had very long skis to do what is called *telemarking* (alpine skiing using downhill skis with cross-country toe bindings, allowing the heel to move) and others had traditional skies to perform cross country skiing. Most of the skiing was done above the tree line with incredible views of the valleys. The trails were very long, and because the trails were so wide, you did not notice other skiers very much. Everyone brought their own lunches and ate outside in the snow, enjoying the nature near their chalet and warming up by the fireplace indoors. At nighttime, regardless of the temperature, the window would remain wide open – sometimes allowing for snow and ice to build up on the floors. Norwegians, my grandfather would say, loved the cold and having the window open at night, even during the depths of winter. My grandfather would say that skiing was a way of life to Norwegians, a pastime and an adventure all at the same time, as it was a way to explore the country's natural beauty. Skiing connected them to the land during the long winters.

In the Norwegian summer, berry picking was also a popular event, as various varieties of berries ripened throughout the countryside. My grandparents would talk about how they were sent to collect berries for their parents to bring home to make pies, cakes and crepes. As was common for many Norwegians, my grandmother also owned goats, since a staple of the diet is to eat goat cheese and the best kind was homemade.

During the war when Nazi Germany occupied Norway, my grandparents used their survival skills to live off the land and to travel; at the time, food was scarce and the trains were out of service. When the Nazis came to occupy my grandfather's home, his mother sent him to live on a remote farm with friends. My grandmother, who was attending university at the time, fled from the Nazi occupation in Bergen, Norway and attempted to make her way across the country alone on her bicycle to reunite with her sister in the nation's capital, Oslo.

These stories would later influence me to get my first job working on a goat farm at the age of 14, as well as contribute to my desire to spend time in nature. In the meantime, my performance in school as a teenager did not improve, but my interest in nature and country living did.

Teenage country living

When I entered high school, I attended a school that backed onto a forest and a small winding stream. At the time, I thought that the environment was similar to what Huck Finn might have experienced in Mark Twain's books. I was so intrigued by this stream that I decided to build my own raft like Huck Finn had in the book. Figure 5 shows a photograph of me (in the rear end) of a raft I built, travelling with and a friend from school during recess.

Figure 3: Rafting with classmate in the creek behind my high school at 15 years old

Building this raft allowed me to learn in a very effective why ‘density’ was important. This cross-curricular activity exposed me to the importance of the mathematical equation of Density = Mass / Volume, and the scientific understanding that denser objects sink, while less dense objects float. Before building this raft, I had no understanding why some materials I wanted to use would float while other I used would sink. Building my raft was a tangible learning experience that I could only get outside the classroom in a natural setting. The stories I read about Huck Finn inspired me to do more.

During school recess and my lunch breaks, I would also go outside to scout the forests for suitable locations for building tree forts. I constructed several tree forts throughout the woodlands, using only fallen tree branches and debris I found on the forest floor. As a child who grew up in the city, I found myself drawn to the contrast of life as a teenager in the countryside. I reflected on nature as a young boy as an opportunity to explore the world from a new perspective.

Farm life

Following my move to Toronto, my mother moved me again shortly later to a small country property north of Toronto, in a town called Alliston. In Alliston, I was hired as a farm hand on a goat farm by a friend of my mother's. At the time, my mother had begun taking horseback riding courses, and I tagged along and helped on the goat farm. I became increasingly emotionally attached to the goats. They were all given names that I would call them by, and I would often speak to them.

After working on the farm for a while, the woman whom I worked for allowed me to take home a few baby goats to my barn in Alliston. However, there was a lot of work to be done to prepare the barn for livestock first, because it was not insulated for winter, and needed repairs to the siding. My Norwegian grandfather helped me fix up the barn. It was at this point that I learned valuable carpentry skills, which improved my mathematics comprehension significantly. The property quickly became an obsession of mine as I attached myself to the land and what it could provide. Below is a picture of me at age 15 when I was conducting the weekly chore of cleaning the manure out from my barn:

Figure 4: In my barn at 15 years old

During the long winters, I would diligently ensure that snow was cleared for my animals and that their water was thawed for them to drink. During the following year, I decided to build a home for ducks which I became interested in for collecting eggs. I chose to have ducks instead of chickens, because my grandfather talked about having a pet duck during World War II. I chose to have Pekin ducks which laid large white eggs that were often double yoked and very tasty. Below is a picture of the addition I built for my ducks:

Figure 5: Holding a Pekin duck on my farm

In the summer, I would also grow a 20 x 20 foot sized fruit and vegetable garden. I would till the soil manually and plant each vegetable from seed. Gardening allowed me to practice growing my own food and I learned to appreciate where food comes from and how it is cultivated.

Living on my farm gave me a sense of creativity, independence and control in the same way that the activity of drawing made me feel as a child. My farm and the surrounding environment not only provided me with unforgettable learning experiences, but it helped in the formation of my identity in ways that any formalized schooling I had attended was unable to do. In high school, my grades did not improve. I ended up changing schools multiple times, and eventually decided to pursue home schooling, where I could learn at my own pace.

Pioneer villages

As a teenager, I began to want to visit pioneer villages in order to connect more closely with traditional country lifestyles and to understand my grandparent's stories of the past. My mother would frequently bring me to either Black Creek Pioneer Village or Upper Canada Village on our way to Montreal, where we returned frequently to visit family and friends. These environments brought me back in time and to places I found inspiring, and helped to further fuel my desire to learn about the past. As a result, I even became interested in the science of time travel which opened my understanding of physics and to the concepts of space from Einstein's theories.

Weather

During my time on my farm, I also began to appreciate the importance of weather systems as they affected many aspects of my life, including when I could plant crops and when to expect a frost or snowfall. I began to create elaborate, detailed logs of each day's weather conditions. I would record both the high and low temperatures of each day, as well as the precipitation amounts. I would use this information as a guide for the following year's weather expectations in my region. Creating weather logs gave me a fundamental understanding of how weather is predicted, and what the difference between 5 and 0 degrees Celsius can mean for tender crops.

Return to Montreal

At the age of 19, due to quickly melting snow, my farm was flooded, and I was forced to evacuate my animals to the property of a helpful neighbor. However, while in this new location, the animals ate poisonous plants and each one died as a result. Their deaths were a terrible loss for me, in which I had great difficulty and suffered from depression for months. My mother decided that we should return to Montreal so that I could attend Cegep. Back in Montreal, I met my girlfriend, who is now my wife. Together, we were enrolled in the Child Studies program at Dawson College, and she tutored me when I had difficulties in class. As time passed, my grades significantly improved. I completed the Child Studies program at Dawson College and went on to complete a degree in Geography of the Human Environment at Concordia University, where I enjoyed taking urban planning classes. It was at this point that I decided that I wanted to pursue a

career in education – which could combine my knowledge from Cegep and University studies – in order to teach others about the environment. Therefore, I was naturally curious to learn more about forest schools when I discovered their existence in Canada and Norway.

Future

Imagining my future education, I want to never stop learning. I refuse to succumb to the notion that I am not able to learn something new. As a teacher, my goal is to learn how to better help my students using my experience and knowledge. I realize that the more I know, the more I grow. Learning is the culmination of experiences, and it is what individuals do with their experiences that matter.

Maria's narrative

Maria is an advocate for the forest school movement in Canada. She has dedicated many years of her life to establishing forest schools - even quitting her career as a social worker - to make forest school's her life's mission. She is currently seeking policy changes that favor the establishment of forest schools and outdoor programs within public education in Canada. I spoke to her over Skype from her location in Ottawa.

Life on the coast

Maria grew up in a small remote fishing village off the coast of Newfoundland. Her childhood home was on property that had a large wooded lot. Her home was so close to the ocean that it invited the wind to blow in forcefully. She remembers from as early as four years old, going out with her twin sister and exploring her surroundings without parental supervision. Together, her and her sister took care of one another outside. During most mornings after breakfast, they would play outside until their next meal. Maria said "we would hang out in the woods and make imaginary worlds with ferries, create mud pies and pop sap-bubbles on the trees". Her world was an imaginary place, full of opportunities for exploration. Their imaginations would run wild. They enjoyed envisioning what happened in the forests during the nights when they were home sleeping. She would also talk to animals and insects she encountered.

Safety

Living on the jagged coast of Newfoundland resulted in some limitations for Maria's childhood with regards to play. The ocean can be an unforgiving place, with its rough waves and ice pans in winter. Therefore, Maria's parents were always warning her and her sister about the dangers and how to be safe near the ocean. They were not allowed to jump onto ice pans, go out on a boat unsupervised by an adult, or let the ocean waves touch them.

Water connection

Maria remembers much of her time under six years old being close to water. For Maria, there was always a river or beach nearby. She enjoyed swimming and reminisced about how she and her sister "spent a lot of time down by the river and being close to water".

Maria and her sister would comb the beaches near their home, looking for objects washed ashore, such as fossils, mussels and other objects. They would collect and examine them. Maria viewed these objects as nature's toys.

Secret places

Maria and her sister had several secret places in the forests that they would go to play in. Maria's parents would acknowledge that she and her sister were not far away, but they wouldn't know exactly where they were. Maria said they were always within a four kilometer radius.

Moving trauma

When Maria was 6 years old, her parents moved her and her sister from their rural home on the coast to a larger town inland. This move led to "traumatic and dysfunctional experiences" for Maria at home. She preferred not to reveal details about these difficulties. However, she did explain that these troubles led her to seek refuge and healing in natural environments.

Maria found healing by going to summer camps and enjoying outdoor experiences in nature. Summer camps had many benefits, both emotionally and socially. She remembers building meaningful relationships with other children that helped give her support through difficult times. She realized that not all children in her circumstance had the opportunity to go to camp. She felt fortunate though, because Maria's parents knew how to apply for the right state grants to allow her to attend summer camp.

When Maria was eight years old, her family moved again. At her new home, they had access to a small patch of trees close by. She was also not far from the Atlantic Ocean coast. So, Maria would go biking with her sister down to the coast, but pretend that they went much further than they did from home. Maria really liked to explore at this age. In the small patch of trees in the parking lot of the shopping plaza near their home, she and her sister would hide inside the trees' dense canopy. She would collect garbage that would blow under the tree, such as newspapers, and pretend they were dropped by someone from a foreign land. Maria explained that by identifying the blowing objects as foreign, they felt like they had found something valuable. Maria would also hide other intriguing objects under this tree which she found while walking around town.

Life in social housing

More moves awaited Maria as she would continue to move to different towns and cities in the following years. She remembers having to live in social housing. Even during these difficult times, she would gravitate towards whatever nature she could find close by. Maria credits her time spent in nature for her "creativity and resilience to bounce back from the earlier experiences to those later in life". She said "I think [nature] has been a resource for me with mental health… distress…. and all the things that come with that. I gravitate towards nature and it is calming and soothing and teaches me ways to solve problems".

Social work

When it came time to decide a career path, Maria decided to study social work at university. She really wanted to help people in challenging socioeconomic circumstances, knowing the difficulties families can go through from her own troubling experiences first hand. She graduated university and soon found work outside Newfoundland as a social worker. Maria also coordinated workshops as an additional part time effort, to help parents and educators mentor children and youth about how to benefit from outdoor experiences in nature.

As she began to accumulate more experience in her career as a social worker, she felt like something was missing in her life, but she could not identify it. Her career in social work hit obstacles she felt were making her lose connection with her true self. Maybe it was her job, or maybe it was where she was living - she could not tell. She said she began to feel "lost on the mainland" (the mainland referring to Canadian land that is not part of the island of Newfoundland).

Connecting Canadians to nature

Maria began reading books like Richard Louv's *Last Child Left in the Woods* and Carle Onerware's *Under Pressure,* both of which discuss how families and schools deal with a fast-paced society that has become adverse to risk, to the point that the children are "protected" from healthy development. Onerware's book explored a forest school in Japan that captivated Maria's imagination as she became pregnant with her first child. She realized what had been missing in her life - it was a lack of connection to the natural world. With so much of her work weighing her down, she felt disconnected from life and realized that "nature has the same feeling to me as

family, it's part of my DNA and comfort". After realizing the lack of available daycare options for her child that resembled anything like the forest school model in Onerware's book, she decided to turn to her love of nature to find ways to spend more time in it both personally and professionally. It was a Eureka moment when she exclaimed, "I wanted to start a forest school!" But how would she start one, she thought?

To learn more, she began to look for forest schools in other countries and got in contact with forest school organizers in England and Scotland to find out how they started. It was then that she began to take that inspiration and try it out in Canada. Maria told me that she had a much bigger vision after realizing how the forest school movement evolved in other countries. She thought - why can't we create them in Canada too? She stated that she felt if she really wanted to help the public, like social work, forest school options need to be readily available to the average person.

Solving problems

Beginning Maria's first forest school was not without challenges. She faced many encounters where people she needed support from would not give her approval, either to begin her school, to obtain funding, or deal with public regulations. One thing she learned about herself through this process was her determination to find solutions and to never accept "no" as a final answer. This philosophy can be traced back her belief that nature helped her learn how to solve problems, including working around bureaucratic policies around licensing, administrative rules and other barriers.

Future

Maria said her future will focus on bringing this movement forward into mainstream education in Canada. But, she also emphasized that taking care of her two children and managing her health are also top priorities. She said "the biggest drivers are the work I do and my connection with nature on a regular basis, and running and hiking… but I also value how [nature] provides an opportunity for me to walk and hike and explore. I feel so alive because I get to do that with children [as part of my job] and that adrenaline rush and movement and activity is part of the magic and creativity and imagining and emotional intelligence and being able to be really active that we don't always talk about".

Hailey's narrative

Hailey operates her own English private forest pre-school in Quebec for children aged 5 and under. It has been open for only 3 years, and attracts customers through word of mouth. She has a passion for the outdoors and promoting the growth of these schools in Canada. I met Hailey and interviewed her on location at the cabin she uses as a shelter during severe weather events at her forest school.

Childhood home

Hailey's earliest memories outdoors stem from when she was around 5 years old, when she spent a lot of time around an "overgrown raspberry bush". This bush grew on the side of her suburban home. Her home was located in a quaint residential area with many children living nearby on a dead end street in a suburb in southern Ontario. Hailey can fondly remember picking and eating the raspberries on this bush. Her mother would often ask her to collect berries whenever they would be used in meals. Hailey was always quick to volunteer to go pick some. The place of this raspberry bush also served as an area she could go to be out of sight from others, when she wanted to be alone and collect her thoughts. Many memories were gathered around this raspberry bush, mostly because it was close enough to her home that her parents would let her spend as much time as she wanted there. It was as if the raspberry bush was her personal connection to the natural world by providing not only fruit, but a peaceful oasis for relaxation. Furthermore, Hailey described her neighborhood as a wonderful place to grow up, because there were many children and few cars or other dangers.

Hard lesson

One day, Hailey noticed something up in a tree near the raspberry bush. It was a robin's nest with eggs in it. It was the very first time she had ever seen a real bird's nest up close. In her excitement, she climbed up the branches to get a closer look. As she got closer to the eggs, she thought it would be fun to show her father. So she carefully picked one of the eggs out of the nest and climbed down the tree. Ever so gently, she carried the egg towards her father, until suddenly she tripped. The egg slipped through her fingers as she fell to the ground and the egg broke and splattered. She was utterly "devastated". Hailey said "the idea that these parents had spent all the time building the nest and caring for the egg… and it was going to hatch. I felt

awful and solely responsible." As a result of this memory, it seems as if she developed more respect for how fragile nature can be.

Grandfather's cottage

Hailey's grandfather's cottage was another place full of outdoor memories. It was here that she remembers going on a canoe trip when she was about six years old. One evening, her father and three brothers decided they were going to take their grandfather's canoe out on the lake. Together, they paddled across the lake towards a narrow river where they came upon a few small turtles; each not much larger than a "two dollar coin". She had never seen such small turtles before. Her father let her touch and feel the shells of the turtles' backs. Hailey and her brothers "were just dying to tell [their] mom" when they returned home. The idea of touching and feeling the turtles was very important to her and even more significant as I saw her face light up telling this story.

Hailey's father would also take her and her younger brother to look for crayfish down by the dock in the evening. The experience was special to her, because they would go out in the dark, wearing only their underwear, and with the aid of the flashlight, they would try to capture crayfish. "That cottage was a really awesome place and holds a special place in my heart and in my family", she said recounting these stories.

Cottage rental

When Hailey was a few years older, her parents rented a small, cozy cottage. This cabin was immersed in mixed deciduous forest and had a lake with a dock they could dive off to swim in. Many fond learning memories were had here. For example, one day she managed to swim across the lake with her life jacket and she felt so proud of herself. That same summer, her brother also learned how to dive.

Water connection

Hailey also remembered being out on the lake in her family's boat, canoeing, and fishing as a young child at her grandfather's cottage. Hailey described these times as formative years. Hailey recalled warm spring days when she would take off her socks, and feel the dirt between her toes. She thought these experiences were "just thrilling".

Chipmunk happenstance

Hailey enjoyed close encounters with wildlife. For example, she told me how one day she was coming up from the cottage dock and there was a chipmunk at the top of the stairs. Hailey remembers approaching it slowly. As she was telling me this story, she was giggling with laughter. Then she said she began to pet the fur on this chipmunk, and talk to it. The chipmunk encounter reminded her of a fairy tale or an excerpt from a classic Disney film, and was something Hailey would never forget. After her encounter with this chipmunk, she went to tell her parents about her incredible experience.

Farm life and peace

In addition to spending time at a cottage each season, Hailey also remembers spending a lot of time at her friend's father's farm. Hailey would love to jump in the hay bales and climb trees in the woods nearby. She remembers the "smells" of the farm most fondly. She stated that whenever she smells hay or the "sweet scent of cut grass" now, they immediately remind her of her childhood. Furthermore, she also loved the "warm spring and summer nights" of summer on the farm. She remembers her childhood as a quiet and calm period in her life.

Teenage gymnastics

Hailey described to me how agile she was as a teenager; something she remembered well. This was a period in her life when she began to understand her physical abilities. Gymnastics was a big part of understanding the limits of her physical capabilities. She competed in gymnastics, which meant she had to spend a lot of her time at the gym. Again, she could remember vividly the smells of the gym, from the equipment to the scent from the walls. The gym is where she remembers developing strong bonds with peers and forming relationships with adults that were not her parents, such as coaches and organizers.

It was in the gym where Hailey developed her strong work ethic, through understanding the importance of mental and physical persistence to achieve gymnastic goals. She also learned how to listen to her body. Hailey became aware of her physical limitations and how to overcome them with practice and technique. As a result, there were many hours spent training her body and mind to become the person she is today. Even though her gymnastics did not take place outdoors, it was the agility she learned in the gym that she later began to appreciate in nature when hiking

and climbing. Hailey's ability to be agile led her to be attracted to the very physically challenging environment the outdoors represented to her.

High school outdoors

As Hailey was reminiscing about the lack of time children spend moving outdoors these days, she recalled her time in high school when students in her class would beg their teacher to take them outside on nice days for lessons. She found that whenever they went outside, it helped her classmates focus on their school work. Going outside and getting some fresh air during school breaks made her realize the potential opportunities for physical activity outdoors. When she would return to class, she was surprised by how much easier it was to focus on her school work. It was at this point that Hailey believed there may be a connection between physical activity and a focus on learning.

During Hailey's last year of high school, she decided to enroll in the Ontario Junior Rangers Program that took place in a provincial park in Northern Ontario. She went on lengthy canoe trips to monitor the condition of parkland and wildlife. The Ontario Junior Rangers Program was an experience that tested her perseverance, where she said she would "lose all sense of time and people around [her]". Hailey also developed close relationships while working on projects that were really important when she was a teenager. Whether it was building a trail with her peers or making a fort, she grew closer to her peers because of these experiences. Therefore, memories of her experiences in the Ontario Junior Rangers Program were the first step in establishing the importance of working outdoors for Hailey.

West coast sailing and relaxation

When she was 18 years old, she told me how much she realized she loved water when she went sailing on the west coast. She said that "on the water I learned how drawn I am to being on and near water. I like to be on the water more than even in the water, though I enjoy swimming I am not a fish… when I was on the west coast sailing I would take day trips to waterfalls and see spectacular nature on the west coast… unreal… [I] learned how much I just loved that!" Hailey sailed the ocean waters on what she described as a "tall ship". Hailey would sail so far out in the ocean that she could no longer see land, and she would reflect on the enormity of the Pacific Ocean. She remembers sailing with her younger brother and witnessing the beautiful landscapes

from the view on the boat, but also that there was "exertion and physical toughness" required. It was "working really hard… and resting really hard". These were times she said where her body was working in such a positive way both mentally and physically that she rested incredibly well at night.

Biology degree

Hailey explained that she learned many abilities from her practice in gymnastics, sailing and other physical activities. The same is true when it came to learning biology at university. Hailey said "so much of [her biology courses required] practicing and memorizing and all those details, learning about myself and my limitations and how I could challenge myself and approach a problem and problem solving." Similarly, when she learned to sail, she also had to practice to improve.

As a biologist, she went to conduct field work in Nova Scotia in her early 20s. Her field work was conducted in a protected area with old growth forests. There were no trails in these forests, so she had to "bushwhack" her way through the trees. It was in these woods she remembers conducting lichen studies. Hailey remembers learning about navigation in the wilderness using landmarks and a compass, but she also remembered having the sense that she was in a place "no person had ever set foot in". At the end of her long days conducting fieldwork, she remembers that she would go to sleep in a tent overlooking a beautiful river. Here, she would sit on the rocks or swim in the water until the sunset. Hailey said this experience was when she truly realized she had a "love of being outside and of natural history and natural places".

Office confinement

Despite remembering how much she loved being outside in Nova Scotia, it took another experience to truly solidify her passion for the outdoors. After her work was completed in Nova Scotia, she accepted an internship at an Outdoor Science School in Toronto, only this time, she would be working inside the office instead of out in the field. It was at this turning point in her life when she realized how awful she felt after long days of being confined to an indoor lab where she remembers too much of her time was spent on a computer. Even though she would coordinate some ecological monitoring programs and educational tours outside, the majority of

her time was in her office. Hailey said "I loved working with people in that coordinating role, but sitting at a desk and being inside day after day… my physical or mental state did not respond well". This carried on for 3 years and it began to wear her out emotionally.

Something else significant happened at the Outdoor Science School while Hailey was giving a tour outdoors to a group of inner city children. She said "I remember this one kid saying wide eyed… 'You mean we get to go in [the forest]?!' [He was] dumbfounded that we would go into the forest! I asked him then, have you ever been in a forest? And he said 'no, never'". This experience made Hailey realize how much she took her experiences in nature for granted and how important it was to share these experiences with children.

Career change

During the end of her internship in Toronto, she heard about Canada's first forest school in Ontario. It was at this point that she became very interested in becoming an outdoor educator for children, and forest schools became a very appealing concept. With forest schools, she said, "you get the same quality of care you would in a daycare setting, but there is freedom to roam and explore and express yourself as a child, and the natural materials and space to play in, and it made me realize of course, it just makes sense!"

To become a certified teacher, she enrolled in the one year outdoor experiential program at Queen's University. It was here she met likeminded students in the teacher's program that she made connections with and shared ideas. While at university, she learned about other educators in Canada who were involved in establishing forest schools or teaching at them. Hailey looked up to these individuals for inspiration. Their inspiration led to the eventual establishment of her present forest school.

Hailey stated that her work is important for young children, because activities at her forest school help develop a student's motor skills early in life, because motor skills are easy to develop on uneven terrain outside. "Large movements, small movements, climbing, running, jumping, balancing… are part of… any day [outside]", Hailey said. She believes that "to see children work… and achieve [their goals] physically; whether it is climbing a rock face they need help with or putting a log across a ditch and balance on it… is so important to [her forest school curriculum]". She said "it is the brain connections that are built when we are moving, whether we are conscious or not" that are so important.

Hailey's experience conducting lichen studies after her biology degree has also led to her organizing pond studies for students. She believes that studies by the water help them understand children connect with the science of nature.

Future

Hailey has begun to realize that as time passes, she is not happy if she does not make time to go outside every day, even if it is just for a walk. She does not look forward to the times when she is forced to be inside.

Hailey also wants to help more children succeed in their goals. As part of her pedagogy, she has been considering focusing solely on allowing children to "move". She realizes that moving allows children to figure out who they are and how strong they are. Physical movement gives them a sense of their abilities, strengths and weaknesses. She finds that as a society, we are forgetting to move, which is leading to physical and mental difficulties. Therefore, she wants to make moving our bodies part of a primary mission carrying forward with her own forest school.

Joanne's narrative

Joanne is an early childhood educator from British Columbia (B.C.). She teaches children outdoors at a daycare center that provides opportunities for experiences in nature. Even though not all lessons take place outdoors, on days without significant weather events, the children are outside. Joanne supports forest school initiatives in Canada, and has assisted others attempting to establish forest schools. I conducted my interview with Joanne over Skype. She spoke to me from her home in B.C.

Early years

Joanne was raised on the Sunshine Coast in British Colombia. Joanne's love of nature began with water. She described herself as a "water baby". Joanne showed me photos of her and her sister playing near their home at a beach off the Sunshine Coast of Vancouver Island. These photos reminded her of the many waterways she had access to as a child, including the ocean, lakes, streams, and rivers nearby. Joanne and her siblings were frequently exploring these waterways together as young children.

Her parents also loved to take her for adventurous hikes in the forests during her childhood. She recalls going on many overnight treks in nature with them.

Joanne's father was raised in British Columbia. His unwavering and fearless approach towards physical endurance in nature was demonstrated by his passion for rock climbing, mountain biking on steep terrain, paragliding off cliffs, and performing other challenging outdoor activities. Joanne showed me a picture of her father smiling at Joanne at the age of four as she climbed up to the top of a rustic wooden play structure. He was a tall man with wavy blonde hair and a scruffy beard. Joanne said this photo represents the philosophy of her father, which was "to conquer anything". She told me her father would remind her and her siblings to "keep going", whenever they were out playing and to "always rise to challenges, even when things are tough". He was always encouraging her to climb.

Her father taught her how to overcome fears by encouraging her not to be afraid of challenges. One day Joanne scraped her knee, but it was not bleeding, so her father encouraged her to continue moving. He wanted her to test the limits of her endurance, despite the unpleasant moments.

Joanne remembers how her early outdoor experiences with her father in nature challenged her physically and emotionally. Her father taught her that "when your legs burn [from climbing], you must keep going" if you want to make it to the top. She also learned how to overcome the unpleasantness of splinters from wooden playground structures she would climb. For Joanne, splinters became part of the experience of climbing outdoors.

Joanne's father also instilled upon her the importance of being resourceful with the things she had. One warm summer day, Joanne and her father were out at the beach and it looked inviting to swim in. However, they forgot their bathing suits. Rather than going home or waiting for another time to go swimming, her father suggested to swim with the clothes they had on.

Like her father, Joanne's mother was also a model for being resourceful. Joanne described her mother as the one she looked up to for confidence. Joanne believed her mother could do anything she put her mind to. Joanne's mother, like her father, was a resourceful person that involved herself in physical projects. However, unlike her father who was more interested in outdoor challenges, her mother also liked practical projects like repairing the family car, painting the walls, or fixing the plumbing in their family's house.

Joanne's mother came from Ontario. Even though there was plenty wildernesses to explore in British Columbia, Joanne's mother wanted Joanne and her siblings to experience Ontario's wilderness too. As a result, her family spent time exploring the nature of both provinces. Joanne remembers fondly swimming in Lake Superior as a child. For Joanne, it was like stepping into the ocean, because of "how big and cold it was", she said.

Feeling small

In the wide open space outdoors as a child growing up, Joanne often had the feeling of being "small". She realized early on that the mountains and oceans are so much larger than people, and it made Joanne feel humble. She said she felt like she "was not a person, but the 'other' in nature". In her reflections as a child, being the 'other' meant understanding that she was a spectator in the elements of a much larger and wider landscape.

Overcoming challenges

However, Joanne realized that nature presented many physical challenges, which helped her learn to deal with life's challenges. Whether these challenges were social, emotional or

psychological, various outdoor expeditions helped her practice how to approach life's difficulties. Joanne's motivation to continue participating in outdoor expeditions as a child was signified by the rewards she would receive when she accomplished her goals; such as reaching the summit of a mountain top and seeing the view. Rewards like these taught her at an early age that overcoming struggles in life can lead to positive outcomes.

School restrictions

Even though Joanne had fond memories of experiencing nature with her parents, she had many negative memories of experiencing nature at school. For example, her freedom to climb trees and play in the forest at the back of her school was against the rules of the public school she attended. She did not enjoy the limitations of the school playground, because school was mired in rules for how she was allowed to play, which was different from the freedom her parents gave her at home.

Father's passing

Tragically, before her father got to see Joanne grow into a teenager, her father passed as a result of a paragliding accident. His passing was devastating for Joanne, but her father would remain an inspiration for her. Joanne would often think about him as she grew older, especially his advocacy for the outdoors. She began to see that her thrill seeking behavior was directly related to him, because he would always push the boundaries of outdoor adventure.

Joanne also always lived near a park boundary as a child. As she grew older, she would build forts in the forests near the park. When a tree would fall down, she would often find a big hole inside the trunk that she loved to explore. Joanne would saw off dead branches from these fallen trees, and stack them overtop the tree's frame to create a shelter. Then she would bring candles inside to tell stories with her siblings. However, she rarely brought her friends from school to these places. These were the secret places she shared only with her siblings.

When she was twelve, Joanne saved her babysitting money and bought a dirt bike to ride in the forest near her home. She remembers what a reward it was to ride this bike up and down the terrain of that forest.

Teenage experiences

During her teenage years, Joanne said that she was always the first one in her high school class who was always eager to sign up for outdoor excursions. She remembers agreeing to go on a five day canoe trip, where she paddled 80 kilometers each day and camped along the way.

She said she would invite her friends to climb alder trees with her. The idea was that she would climb these trees until they bent over almost to the ground. Climbing alder trees and bending them over became a competition to see how far each of her friends could bend these trees, until the branches flung back into an upright position.

Joanne also encountered a frightening experience while walking along the summit of Sun's Hill. She climbed up the hill with her siblings and they found themselves on a very steep cliff. Suddenly, her brother began to lose his balance and slide off the edge. Fortunately, Joanne's sister moved quickly to grab his leg, and caught it just in time to pull him up to safety.

College

After high school, Joanne pursued an outdoor recreation leadership diploma at a local college, while working as a nanny part time. In her program, Joanne learned the importance of going outdoors regardless of the weather. Her professors would set a schedule for outdoor hikes, and students would be expected to meet that schedule no matter what the forecast. As a result, she was always prepared for the worst weather; she knew that nothing would be dry unless she had everything properly secured in her dry sack.

Furthermore, her experience as a nanny was just like operating a mini-daycare. She was responsible for the care of four children at their home. It was her experience as a nanny that gave her the freedom to provide lots of outdoor learning and recreation activities for these children. Joanne felt that her work as a nanny was her internship into teaching children outdoors.

Forest school discovery

After college, she pursued a degree in early childhood education, because she wanted to teach children professionally. As the time for her university internship began to inch closer, she was eager to find an elementary school that shared her philosophy of teaching outdoors. However, as the time drew near, her advisors came up empty handed with any choices relating to an "outdoor school". At this point, Joanne became discouraged, believing that perhaps outdoor

schools did not exist. It was then that she began searching for a school on her own. After conducting a lot of online research, she found one of Canada's first forest schools nearby. Sadly, she was unable to complete her entire practicum there, because it was an unlicensed educational organization at the time. Therefore, she was forced to complete her internship at a traditional school where students were taught indoors. However, the requirement of her practicum studies to find a school led her to discover that forest schools did exist in Canada.

Joanne was also understandably shocked that there was a lack of outdoor educational material offered at the university level for teachers in her education program. As a result, she used her knowledge of the outdoors to write a teacher's guide for outdoor curriculum. She then went on to work at an outdoor elementary and preschool.

Outdoor education teacher

Joanne's first job as an educator was in a small preschool. Her principal gave her a class on which she could experiment her outdoor teaching methods. Joanne had the freedom to teach her students outdoors and create outdoor lessons.

Today, Joanne works at a child care centre for preschool and school aged children with ten other staff, where eighty percent of her teaching takes place outside. The preschool uses a play-based curriculum inspired by the Reggio Philosophy that natural environments have a lot to teach children. When students are inside, they play with materials that are based on the outdoor environment. As an outdoor educator, Joanne's students are involved in many nature projects, such as building forts. Joanne's students have already succeeded in building their own outdoor playground, comprised of little temporary huts. To accomplish this, they collected rocks from a riverbed and have been carrying them in buckets for weeks so the floor of the fort will become all stone. She is also cutting down some trees with the children and making them into small round stumps; these will be used to make seating for the circle they will form for storytelling activities.

Her students are also building planter boxes for gardening. She recalled how one of her students had never made anything like a planter box before when she introduced the activity. Building planter boxes created a special memorable teaching experience for both Joanne and this student. Joanne witnessed the little girl looking at the planter box in awe after she had built it with Joanne's assistance. This child looked up at Joanne and said she could not believe how she

transformed a “pile of wood” into something useful. As an adult, Joanne had not ever before stopped to think about what a special experience transforming “nothing” into “something” was. At this point, Joanne realized that her freedom to build and create three dimensional objects all her life was taken for granted.

Future

Joanne faces particular challenges in her current teaching position that she hopes to overcome. For example, because her outdoor school operates on school board land, they are not allowed to build a permanent shelter unless they buy their own land (which is out of their budget). The importance of a shelter is to find refuge when weather conditions are poor while they are out in the forest. As it stands now, Joanne’s school cannot easily bring children indoors from the forests outside because of the distance from their indoor facility. Therefore, Joanne has made creating temporary shelters (like the ones I mentioned earlier) into a project with the children. However, these shelters are not waterproof, so she would like to find a better solution. In addition, because liability has become such a concern, children are not allowed to climb trees unless carefully supervised. Since lessons take place on public school grounds, Joanne is not allowed to have a camp fire with the children either. She hopes one day she may find solutions to these liability concerns.

Rose's narrative

Rose is a certified teacher and forest school supporter. She is currently working with various groups in British Columbia that promote forest schools, and encourages outdoor learning for children and adolescents. My interview with Rose began at her childhood home in rural Quebec. She told me that she would be taking me on a stroll to her favorite childhood places, through trails that lead into the woods behind her country home.

At home in the wilderness

Rose's childhood home is nestled on a quiet narrow rural road, just outside a small Quebec village north of Ottawa, where she lived her entire childhood and where her parents currently reside. Surrounding her home was untouched forest with trails meandering their way to the lake. Rose's father was from Finland, and when Rose was a baby, he would carry her down the trails to the lake and relax along its shoreline. In Finland, her father would spend a lot of time in nature and loved to pick berries there.

By the age of five, Rose was allowed to walk by herself to the lake. Rose said her parents were not too concerned about her safety, because there were always other children nearby. She would love to swim at the lake and sit on small rocks that stretched out into the water. There was also a large rock that was carved out of the landscape, in which people would use to dive off into the lake. For Rose, the large rock was a landmark, and as a result, Rose decided to name this place "Big Rock". Also, Rose would love to swim out to the middle of the lake where there was an island. Rose named the island, "Turtle Island", because it looked like a turtle's back.

When Rose was alone in the forest or by the lake, she would bring her family dog for company. Her dog was a "big fluffy lion" and a "harmless teddy bear", but she felt safer with him by her side. Rose's brother and sister would also play with her in these woods, along with other children who lived nearby. She loved spending summers building forts and exploring this forest. Rose felt so comfortable in this place that she began to describe it as an extension of her home's living space, and her very own "outdoor playground".

On Saturday mornings, she would watch her favorite cartoon, *Fables of the Green Forest*. The cartoon was a children's program about personified animal adventures in the wilderness which sparked Rose's imagination. She enjoyed this T.V. show so much, because it reminded her of the forest surrounding her home. As a result, Rose named the forest behind her home, the

"Green Forest". As a child in this forest, she remembers the way "the light would shine through [the trees] at the end of the day... it literally glowed green and so it would be sunny and felt a mystical feeling and we were convinced this is where the animals [from the cartoon *Fables of the Green Forest*] lived".

Tranquil retreat in the forest

As Rose grew older, she experienced some stressful days. However, she found peace from these experiences in the Green Forest behind her home. She revealed that her father had been suffering from alcoholism, and that sometimes it would lead to confrontations between her parents at home. The forest was always there as an oasis of peace and calmness, especially when things were not well at home. She said the forest is "where I would come to relax".

Forts and imaginative play

Rose also loved to "play house". As a young girl, she built forts and shelters in the woods with sticks that she found on the forest floor. Building forts was an enjoyable pastime.

Rose had a pine cone and a pressed flower collection too. She found nature so interesting to study and pretty to admire.

Rose also made clay sculptures with the clay soil found near the water. She loved to play in the mud and in the puddles.

Rose said "I learned without being taught… just experimentation and working together and spending time [with siblings and friends] and having the time, peace, and quiet, so your mind could wander… we had a lot of imaginative play… [like] hide and seek, but also just… [pretending to be] different characters, and re-enacting different stories… [from] movies and make believe".

Playing outside would be an all-day event for Rose as a child. When the weather would turn rainy or windy, she would seek shelter beneath the canopy of the evergreen trees near the lake.

Nourishment

Rose discovered edible nourishment from the land as a child. Rose loved to forage for blueberries; inspired by her Finish heritage. Her Finish grandfather would love to take her out

berry picking. Rose also learned how to pick and use spearmint by experimenting with the usefulness of outdoor plants for consumption. Rose and her friends would find spearmint in the forest and make their own chewing gum. In addition, her neighbor had his own sugar shack and would tap the maple trees in the area to create syrup that was shared with her family.

Early school days

Rose attended elementary school a short distance down the road from her home. She remembers struggling with the restrictions of school life that demanded she stay within the fence lines at recess. Beyond the fence was a mature and dense forest. Sometimes she would break the rules by finding holes to crawl through the fence. Rose could just not understand why she was not able to go in the forest at school, but was allowed to roam freely in her forest at home. She also did not like being confined to a classroom during the day.

Ski days

During winter, Rose's parents would drive her to a nearby ski hill to go skiing with her friends. Rose would be allowed to ski until late in the evening. She loved the trust that her parents had for her and her friends to be able to go out and have fun as children without a lot of supervision.

High school years

During Rose's teenage years, she remembered becoming focused on building relationships and becoming involved in competitive soccer. As time passed, soccer and socializing with her friends took up most of her time and she spent less and less time in the forest.

Injury and healing

One day while playing soccer, Rose suffered a devastating concussion and her soccer playing came to an end. Rose was diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome. This syndrome left her with headaches and pain for months. It was at this point that she began to return to spending more time in the forest. Loud noises were agonizing for her during recovery and connecting with

her spiritual side became important. The woods she called the Green Forest provided healing. She also said she began to reflect on "how peaceful and beautiful this place truly was".

Outdoor education program

As Rose grew into a young adult, she met her fiancé Jack, who worked with an organization to bring educators and youth to the Arctic and Antarctic regions on polar expeditions. The goal of these trips was to provide students, educators and scientists with the opportunity to experience remoteness, tranquility, and adventure in the far reaches of the earth; to foster a deeper respect and understanding for our planet. Rose and Jack began to work together in this outdoor education program.

As a result of seeing what an impact she could make in students' lives in her work with Jack, she decided to become involved in teaching and enroll in a University degree for teachers. It was in her teacher training program that she learned about Canada's first forest school in Ottawa, and she became inspired to get involved.

Rose then moved with Jack to an area of British Columbia where many forest schools are being established. Together they have continued to provide trips to the arctic for youth and assist others with the establishment of forest schools.

Future

Rose plans to continue working to help youth discover the wilds of nature, but her focus has shifted to promoting forest schools and educating others about the importance of outdoor learning. However, she indicated a desire to one day return to her childhood hometown to become involved with her community in establishing a forest school there as well.

Ingrid's narrative

Ingrid is the founder of an online blog, and an outdoor parents group for children's nature activities based in Toronto. Her mission is to provide parents with simple activities and ideas to enjoy an outdoor lifestyle. Even though she does not operate a forest school herself, she became interested in Canadian forest schools after organizing her own outdoor parental meeting group, and connecting with other parental outdoor enthusiasts.

Childhood memories in Norway

Ingrid grew up in western Norway, and lived amongst traditional rural houses of practical design. These dwellings reflected the local culture; they had steep roofs to ward off snow and iconic colourful exteriors. Like the homes she was surrounded with that provided comfort and a sense of belonging, she remembered the surrounding natural environment as a safe place to explore, and her parents did not worry about her being alone outside.

Ingrid's early life can be summed up as having what she calls a "free-range childhood." She explained there was a "freedom" for her to roam outdoors in nature, without many boundaries or adult supervision.

It is important to remember that in Norway, most land is available for free public use and recreation, even if it is considered privately owned.

Ingrid's parents owned a cabin, nestled on one hundred acres of Norwegian countryside. Ingrid would be taken there on frequent visits throughout the year, especially on holidays. Unlike modern cottages that may have electricity or indoor plumbing, this cabin had no modern luxuries. As a result, her family used an outhouse in place of bathrooms, and fire for heating and cooking. In addition, like many Norwegian cabins, they did not have a driveway to the cabin's front door. Access to the cabin meant parking their car at a parking space several hundred or more meters away, and hiking on a trail by foot to reach the cabin. Her cabin is still an important place for her, even though she no longer lives in Norway.

Ingrid described her family's cabin as a place where she found peace and quiet in the trees nearby. She also learned many outdoor skills through practice and exploration; such as how to tell when ice is thick enough to safely ski on, and where to find mushrooms and berries that are safe to eat.

These memories of acquiring survival skills in nature became part of what she describes as an outdoor "lifestyle". Ingrid continues to treasure these skills deeply and explains them as part of her identity.

Nature as a part of life in childhood and adolescence

Ingrid's concept of a nature-based outdoor lifestyle can be attributed to the Norwegian concept of "frisk luft livet" (which translates into "fresh air life"). This concept essentially refers to meaningful experiences in nature. For Ingrid, Norwegian children's literature and her memories of nature helped to define what these experiences became.

One of the experiences she remembers as a child was first realizing her appreciation for sunlight. Whenever it was a beautiful sunny day, she found it shameful to stay indoors when she has an opportunity to be out. She always had to find a way to be outside whenever there was sunshine, whether it was on a hike or simply sitting outside - especially in the evening when she could catch the last rays of light as the sun set over the horizon.

Another important family tradition for Ingrid was to go hiking or skiing on Sundays. Since she lived in what is known as the Christian part of the country, Sundays were considered the day of the week to spend with family. Through the notion of *frisk luft livet*, exposing children to nature is a responsibility of parents in Norwegian society. For Ingrid's family, f*risk luft livet* meant not only walking in the woods, but foraging for edible fruits and plants to eat.

University

As Ingrid became a young adult, she became increasingly interested in combing her skills of find edible plants in nature by making tasty meals. Her passion for cooking grew and she pursued a degree in the Culinary Arts.

First introduction to forest schools

Ingrid was not raised with the knowledge of what a forest school was, since they did not exist in Norway when she was young. She first heard about the idea of a forest school when it was publicized in Norwegian media that many male teachers were entering the kindergarten teaching profession, during the 1990s. Males were beginning to teach outdoor skills that led to specialized preschools and kindergartens known as *frisk luft livet barnehage* (which translates

into fresh air life kindergartens). *Frisk luft livet barnehage* are what are known as forest schools in Norway. Ingrid became more intrigued by forest schools, after researching different European forest school models.

Moving to Canada

It was not until Ingrid moved to a major city in Canada that she learned that providing an outdoor lifestyle for her children would not be easy. Most parents she encountered in her new home in Canada kept their children indoors most of the time and did not let them play outside unsupervised. Ingrid desperately wanted to meet other parents who shared her philosophy of outdoor parenting, so she would not feel so alone, and so her children would have others to play with. It was at this point that she realized she would have to take the initiative and start an outdoor group for parents. She created a website to seek other parents with children who wished to join Ingrid and her children in outdoor activities.

Living in a large urban center, Ingrid found herself much farther from the wilderness than she was accustomed. Her distance from nature posed some challenges for experiencing *frisk luft livet*. For example, finding a place to go mushroom picking within a reasonable distance proved impossible. However, Ingrid realized that even though she could not pick mushrooms, she could pick mustard garlic. Mustard garlic is considered to be a weed in the Toronto area where she lives, and is cut down by the city, but she found it made "a fantastic pesto". In addition, Ingrid managed to find mulberries and other small fruit that she could pick with her daughter to eat with their family meals. However, when the need arises, Ingrid will drive several hours with her daughter to find crown land to go mushroom hunting.

Noticing similarities within differences

Even though Ingrid lives in an urban area, she described her neighborhood to be similar to a small Scandinavian town, because of its main street and proximity to the waterfront. This quiet neighborhood is not unlike many towns in Norway.

As a result of her outreach to other parents through her website, Ingrid came in contact with other forest school supporters and organizers in Canada. She shares with these supporters the desire to see more outdoor play for children.

Future

Even though Ingrid found herself drawn to forest schools in Canada, their various definitions have led her to remove her focus from forest schools, to encouraging parents to be outdoor role models for their children. She tries to reach out to parents, and educate them about simple ways they can provide experiences for their children in nature. As her children are getting older, she is also refocusing her attention on activities in the outdoors for not just children, but for the general public.

Conclusion

I presented my own narrative through *currere*. Currere helped me to examine my own memories and how they affected my decision to become interested in researching forest schools. In addition, I presented the memories of other forest school supporters in the form of stories in order to better understand the background of these individuals and share their experiences with others. In the next chapter, I examine details from each story to identify and discuss common themes among the narratives. I based these themes on details I thought were significant to understanding how each individual (including myself) became interested in forest schools.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION

Introduction

These narratives were an important stepping stone, which allowed me to identify key moments in each person's life which influenced their support for forest schools. As I began to unravel the memories that emerged during the interviews and from my own autobiographical *currere*, I began to identify common themes.

This chapter presents the core themes that seem to have influenced individuals in this study to support forest schools. The themes included in this section draw from the narratives of each subject's memories (including my own) (discussed in Chapter 4). For each narrative, I used coding (outlined in my methodology chapter) to highlight factors that influenced each individual. I grouped these codes together into categories. These categories were then organized further into themes. Tables 2 to 5 demonstrate the codes I used to build categories, and the categories used to create the presented themes. I inserted the phrase "not mentioned" to spaces in which the participant did not have a code related to the category. I used this term because the codes may not be reflective of all of the participants' experiences. All codes are from child and adolescent memories, unless otherwise specified; to provide readers with an understanding of the context in which they occurred. I used charts to display the results because charting allowed me to show all of the data together with their connections, allowing for easier organization of the information. This model of data presentation allowed me to easily identify concrete examples from each narrative for study. The results of my analysis led to the following four themes that may have influenced individual interest in forest schools - culture, independence, exploration, and refuge.

Theme 1: Culture

Table 2 displays how each participant's significant memories of cultural experiences were strong factors in the participants' attachment to nature during their formative years. For an explanation of how this data was gathered, please refer to the methodology chapter.

Culture played an important role in why participants became interested in nature, because it encouraged and supported opportunities for the participants to have outdoor experiences as children. Codes that demonstrated participants had cultural ties to nature were defined as those that were linked to participants' exposure to media about nature, cultural ancestry, access to

nature, nature appreciation or role models that embraced outdoor experiences. These codes helped me to identify the theme of culture as an influence for supporting outdoor learning.

Table 2: Culture theme

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Looked up to grandfather's military stories	Admired author Richard Louv for his book about children's nature play (as an adult)	Was inspired by forest school organizers in Canada for their work in creating forest schools (as an adult)	Admired her father who challenged himself outdoors	Looked up to her parents who felt that nature was important	Ingrid looked up to those practicing the Norwegian concept of outdoor air life	Inspirations
Grandfather who took me to his cottage	Parents supported her outdoor play by providing ocean safety guidance	Her father who took her and her brothers on outings	Father was her primary role model who she looked up to	Parents brought her to the lake when she was a baby Grandfather who showed her how to pick wild fruit	Parents and family members who brought her to the cottage to spend time in nature	Family Role Models (parent, grandparent)
Book - The Adventures of Huck Finn Old pioneer stories Influences from books on nature	Books about children and nature – such as *Last Child Left in the Woods* and *Under Pressure* (as an adult)	Disney films and fairy tales	Not mentioned	Saturday morning cartoons in nature contexts - *Fables of the Green Forest* Television show	Not mentioned	Media
Norwegian heritage encourages spending time in nature	Newfound-land heritage Nature as part of rural life in Newfound-land	Having a family cottage and visiting it regularly	Raised in a community surrounded by nature	Finland heritage Growing up in a community that was close to nature Berry picking as family tradition	Norwegian heritage Growing up with access to nature, free play Berry picking as family tradition	Nature as heritage and way of life
Grandfather told me outdoor adventure stories	Reading stories about forest schools in Japan (as an adult)	Not mentioned	Mother telling her stories about nature in Ontario	Fables of the Green Forest Television show Learning about Finnish traditions	Not mentioned	Storytelling – stories told to them

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Grandfather's cottage	Lived in a rural home with access to forest and ocean	Grandfather's cottage	Lived in a rural community with access to forest	Lived in a rural community surrounded by accessible forest	Family cottage	Access to nature
Farm property		Friend's farm visits			Sunday hikes with family	
		Backyard with trees			Berry picking near cottage	
Reflected on appreciation of rural life	Reflected on importance of nature in her life	Reflected on importance of nature in her life (as an adult)	Reflected on appreciation of rural life (as an adult)	Reflected on importance of nature in her life	Reflected on the importance of nature in her life	Appreciation of nature
Attachment to farm land						

In the following text, I highlight the primary cultural influences expressed within the narratives of each participant.

I personally experienced cultural influences that encouraged my interest in nature. These influences derived from the outdoor stories of my mother's Norwegian heritage, and my grandfather's military stories of his experiences outdoors. I remember these stories inspired my imagination, thereby encouraging me to try to re-experience their stories on my own as a teenager through outdoor play in the forest, and by working on my farm.

Maria was strongly influenced by the culture of rural Newfoundland where she grew up on the coast, and by her twin sister who shared her outdoor experiences. In her young adult years, she idolized authors like Richard Louv who wrote books about the lack of exposure that modern-day children have to nature. Maria identified with his writings, and wanted to do something to create change.

Hailey had the cultural support of her family who encouraged her to spend time in nature, including in her backyard at home, which provided her with memorable outdoor experiences as a child.

Joanne had the strong cultural influence of her father, who encouraged her to take on outdoor challenges such as climbing difficult objects and hills. She also grew up surrounded by a rural landscape, where she was given the freedom to engage in unstructured outdoor play that led to fond outdoor memories.

Rose was influenced by the heritage of her Finish parents, and the rural community she was raised in which encouraged children to play outdoors. She would often play with her friends, and have her dog beside her when she was alone to discover the forest. The television series

Fables of the Green Forest, further reinforced her love for nature and influenced her to call the forest behind her house, the "Green Forest".

Ingrid's view of nature was strongly influenced by her Norwegian heritage, and the cultural concept of *friluftsliv*, or 'open air life', as discussed in further detail in Chapter 1, and in her narrative in Chapter 4. Her family owned a cottage with one hundred acres of land that she would freely play in, without structure or adult constant supervision as a child.

Theme 2: Independence

Table 3 shows each participant's significant memories (codes) that represented examples of independence from others (especially parents) in nature. Defining codes for this theme included codes that demonstrated an interest in self-motivated and adult unsupervised activities.

Table 3: Independence theme

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Agriculture involvement Farm animals for milk and eggs Growing vegetables in my garden	Finding emotional support and healing in nature	Picking berries from her raspberry bush and finding peace in nature for emotional wellbeing	Emotional needs met by spending time in nature	Finding healing in nature after her soccer injury Picking spearmint for chewing	Foraging for wild edible plants	Nature as sustenance / living off the land: physically and/or emotionally
Independent outdoor activities	Spending many hours unsupervised outdoors	Responsible for managing trails/outdoor projects as a Junior Ranger Sailing on the west coast	Built forts on her own in the forest	Went into the forest on her own	Played in the forest on her own	Autonomy / Responsibility
Building secret tree forts in the woods	Played under the trees near the shopping plaza	Reflected and played on her own terms near the overgrown raspberry bush next to her home	Building secret forts on the park boundary near her home	Had special places in the forest behind her home where she would play games with other children	Not mentioned	Secret places

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Playing outside in forest as a child and on my farm as an adolescent without organized activities	Playing outside unsupervised as a child without organized activities at her home	Playing on her own as a child unsupervised and without organized activities	Playing with the supervision of parents as a child, but without organized activities	Playing outside on her own as a child without structured activities and without supervision	Playing on her own unsupervised as a child and without organized activities at her cottage	Unstructured play
Created artwork from my own ambition Practiced how to draw by myself as a child and make my own raft	Explored nature on her own as a child and learning from it	Experimented in nature on her own as a child and later pursued a biology degree from her own interest (as an adult)	Motivated herself to learn how to overcome outdoor expedition challenges	Experimented and learned on her own as a child through play in nature	Learned through free play how to know when it is safe to walk on ice in winter	Self-directed learning

Independence was revealed as a significant theme as I analyzed the codes. Participants revealed how nature provided the opportunities for them to be independent of others, by using nature in resourceful ways. Nature was a place that many participants described as unsupervised and where they had personal control over their actions.

In my case, I felt that I found freedom in the outdoors with the independence I had operating my farm, growing vegetables and taking care of my animals. I also loved exploring the forests of my high school as a teenager on my own and taking initiatives like building rafts and secret forts. The outdoors was a place where I was able to have autonomy over my own actions.

Maria developed independence in nature from an early age when she was outside without adult supervision for many hours. She learned how to amuse herself in nature, found emotional healing in difficult times, created her own secret places, and understand herself through reflections of her outdoor memories. By learning on her own how to cope with difficult situations, her memories in nature provided her opportunities to become resilient; a characteristic she carried into adulthood.

For Hailey, the outdoors represented an environment for responsibility and independence. Her memories of picking berries at a young age by herself in her secret place to be used for her mother's cooking, enrolling herself in the junior rangers program to build trails in northern

Ontario, operating a sail boat on the west coast of Canada, and pursuing a degree in biology demonstrate how nature provided her with interests and responsibilities that she was able manage on her own.

For Joanne, outdoor natural environments are where she learned to take on challenges on her own. She built secret forts, challenged her physical limits and nurtured her emotional wellbeing through experiencing the rewards of breathtaking views and humble feelings (such as feeling small) in natural spaces.

Rose also expressed memories of experiencing independence in nature as a child and adolescent. In the forests behind her home, she was able to amuse herself without adult supervision. For example, she self-motivated herself to role play with her friends in the trees and discover nature's wonders. She played games with her friends in her own secret spots in the woods. Rose also was resourceful in nature. She discovered ways of easing her healing with nature's peacefulness and silence after her sports injury.

Ingrid's memories revealed that she found subsistence in nature, such as picking berries to eat as a child. Her parents also allowed her to play without constant supervision outdoors, especially at her cottage. Ingrid remembers fondly the things she learned through experimentation in nature (such as when it is safe to walk on ice). Practicing skills like these and learning through hands-on experience allowed her to learn from her environment on her own.

Theme 3: Exploration

The following memories link to the theme that nature was an interesting or a mysterious place for participants to explore (See Table 4). Codes that were included within this theme demonstrated an attraction to nature, an interest in nature, physical activity, having companions, interest in animals, adventure outdoors or using the environment as a way to experiment and learn.

Table 4: Exploration theme

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Collecting rocks and colouring them	Collected objects from the beach	Picking the eggs from the birds nest to examine them closer	Collecting wood for building forts	Making art with natural materials found in the forest and having a pine cone collection	Picking berries to eat	Collecting objects in nature
Thinking about how fortunate I was to have so forests close to my high school to explore	Wondering about what happened in the forests during the night	Thinking about the role that nature had in her life as she grew into an adult	Thinking about the role that nature had in her life as she grew into an adult	Thinking about the role that nature had in her life as she grew into an adult	Thinking as an adult about how nature was important to her	Reflecting on the role of nature
Had pet farm animals outdoors	Played outside with her sister frequently as a child	Played outdoors with her brothers	Followed her parents on nature hikes	Played outside with her family and dog	Went on hikes outdoors with her parents	Outdoor companions
Responsible for farm animals	Talking to animals and bonding with them	Talking to animals and bonding with them / smells of nature like cut grass	Admired the view from the summit of mountains	Swimming and relaxing at her childhood swimming hole	Enjoying free play in nature at her cottage	Learning experiences
Learned how to care for animals	Learning how to find healing in nature	Satisfying curiosity about bird eggs / turtles up close	Feeling small in the vastness of nature	Mystical feeling of the sunshine through the trees	Learning from nature experiences such as when it is safe to walk on frozen ice	
Talking to farm animals	Talking to wildlife she encountered	Talking to a chipmunk	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Personification of animals
Raft construction	Playing near water and popping sap bubbles	Approaching wildlife	Climbing mountains and building forts	Swimming to Turtle island in the lake	Learning about safety on ice	Activities done for the purpose of experimenting
Exploring new ways to experience nature – farm activities and raft building	Exploring nature and under the tree near the shopping plaza	Exploring wildlife such as birds eggs and the turtles	Climbing mountains and canoeing eighty kilometers a day - testing physical limits	Role playing with friends and playing make believe	Going on hikes with family	Adventure / thrills

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Working outdoors	Being active outside	Gymnastics experience to movement outdoors	Climbing mountains and testing physical limitations	Going swimming at the lake and walks in nature	Moving your body and being generally active / skiing	Physical activity / outdoor feeling
Building a raft to explore the river behind my high school	Playing near the ocean	Loved to sail on ships	Loved to swim and play on the beach as a child in the ocean on the coast where she grew up	Loved to swim and rest on the rocks at the lake	Liked to play on the ice	Water play and enjoyment

Exploration of nature as an admirable and curious place was a significant theme for all participants. Codes suggesting nature was an attractive place for outdoor play and learning were often linked to participant curiosity of wildlife, beauty and opportunities for adventure. These codes and categories led to the development of a theme of nature as a mysterious place to explore and learn from.

For example, I was attracted to exploration adventures in nature, such as building my raft and floating down the stream, feeling the waves beneath me. I also bonded with my llamas and goats on my farm, whom at first I found mysterious and interesting, and I enjoyed the work of caring for them.

Maria found nature to be fascinating, beginning at an early age when she would explore a four kilometer radius around her home with her twin sister. She would speak to the animals she encountered, wondered what happened in the forest at nights when she slept, collected objects she found combing the beach, and experimented with sap bubbles on trees.

Hailey was also curious about animals and spoke to them, like the time she encountered a chipmunk in the woods. She was not afraid to get close to wildlife and explore, smell, and touch the creatures she came across. She also loved to be on the water and had fond memories of adventurous sailing activities.

Joanne's memories showed she also found nature to be a fascinating place to explore and develop. She would find wood fascinating, and built forts as a child. She was mesmerized by the view from the summit of mountain tops. Joanne loved to test her physical limits outdoors and she loved the accomplishment that doing so made her feel.

Rose's time spent in nature as a child revealed her fascination of natural materials. She would collect objects she found in the forest and produce art with them. Rose was drawn in by nature's beauty, like sunshine pouring through the leaves of the tree tops. She would love to swim to the island at the lake at her house that she named Turtle Island. Her interest and exploration of nature's wonders is illustrated by her memories of activities and cherished moments in the woods behind her home.

Ingrid was intrigued by her experiences in nature picking berries and other edible plants. She learned how nature was a place to explore for nutritious food. Ingrid demonstrated her knowledge of forging for food outdoors by finding creative ways to pick plants in urban areas as an adult. Ingrid's interest in nature was largely influenced by her Sunday hike rituals with her parents as a child, and visits to her cottage.

Theme 4: Refuge

Table 5 displays each participant's significant memories (codes) that represent reasons why nature was used as a refuge. Codes for nature as a refuge were defined as those that reflected feelings of restriction in life, searching for an outlet from negativity, instability or tragedy in childhood.

Table 5: Refuge theme

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Career change into education (as an adult)	Career change out of social work into outdoor education (as an adult)	Career change from confined office job to outdoor education/see king privacy, relaxation and movement (as an adult)	Did not like the rules of her school's playground	Did not like the rules of her school's playground	Feeling restricted with outdoor education options for children in Canada (as an adult)	Feeling restricted (Nature is freedom)
Solitary childhood – much time spent alone drawing	Fighting at home	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Fighting at home / alcoholic father	Not mentioned	Abuse / Neglect (Nature is comforting)
Multiple moves	Moving multiple times	Not mentioned	Loss of her father	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Instability (Nature is stable)
Difficulties in school	Unstable income					

Codes						Category
Christopher	Maria	Hailey	Joanne	Rose	Ingrid	
Death of farm animals	Finding healing in nature from difficult experiences	Not mentioned	Death of father	Soccer head injury	Not mentioned	Tragedy (Nature is peaceful / healing)

In this theme, individuals often vocalized what they were running away from – but not necessarily the characteristics of nature they were escaping to. This table is designed in a way to illustrate the examples used. However, in the category column, I identify in parenthesis the characteristics I felt they were seeking in nature. Nature emerged as a refuge for peace from events in life that were very stressful to some participants. Nature provided a place for individuals to relax their minds. Many of the people interviewed expressed that they found peace and a haven in the natural spaces they had access to growing up.

For instance, I moved several times as a child which created instability in my life that made it difficult to keep friends. I was also not performing at a level I was happy with in school. However, I was able to find bonds among my farm animals and enjoyment admiring and working in nature that helped neutralize these difficulties. When my farm animals died tragically, this only further increased my time spent walking in forests near my home as a way to find tranquility and reflect.

Maria had traumatic experiences and instability growing up with arguments at home, moving several times and having parents with unstable income. However, the one thing that was stable in her life was nature and her memories outdoors. Maria would seek out natural spaces, even in urban settings, such as the area beneath the large evergreen tree near a shopping plaza. She found healing and peace in nature, which helped her through difficult moments in her childhood and throughout her adult life. Her memories in nature ultimately influenced her to move towards a career in promoting forest schools and opportunities for young children to experience nature.

Hailey did not mention using nature as a refuge from abuse, tragedy or instability. However, she did experience nature to be a place where she found refuge from the confines of sedentary activity in her previous employment. She realized that she really did not like to be inside sitting down all day and craved working in the outdoors.

Joanne did not initially seek refuge in nature as a result of traumatic experiences; she already loved the freedom that the outdoors offered her. However, the death of her father at a young age gave her pause for reflection on his passion for outdoor challenges. Reflecting on her father's love for challenges in nature inspired her to follow in his footsteps. In this way, nature was a refuge from the pain of losing her father, by allowing her to feel more connected to him.

Rose's troubling revelations at home showed that nature was a refuge from difficult times. When her father would drink, things would not be as pleasant at home and her parents would also argue. Rose found that spending time in the forest was a way to escape into a different world. Using nature as her refuge also benefited her after her traumatic head injury. Rose would find peace and tranquility for healing during her pain following her injury.

For Ingrid, the memories she vocalised to me did not reflect as a young child that she was seeking nature as a refuge from negative experiences. However, she felt restricted by her choices in Canada for the environments she could educate her children. Natural spaces in Toronto became an oasis for fulfilling her needs to provide similar outdoor memories she had as a child to her children and to other families.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the codes, categories and themes among the research participants. The primary themes expressed from the narratives that seem to have influenced each individual's involvement in nature were culture, independence, exploration, and refuge. Cultural influences involved heritage, media, role models and family members who encouraged outdoor experiences. Most individuals found the outdoors as a place where they could be independent and in control of their own activities as children. Furthermore, often such independence allowed individuals to explore nature. Most participants recognized nature as a place that was interesting and from which they could learn. Finally, most participants also used nature as a refuge – whether it was from stress, tragedy, abuse or instability – nature was used as a comfort and relaxation tool by the participants.

In the next chapter, I discuss my interpretation of these themes in relation to ecological consciousness and to the literature I referenced in my theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The question that motivated this study was: what memories may have influenced individuals to support forest schools? By creating narratives from the memories of myself and participants, I began a process of interpretation of these memories. As demonstrated in the Chapter 5 interpretation, memories of time spent in nature emerged from the interviews with participants. All of the themes I identified my results chapter are consistent with themes found from other research, as I will discuss below.

This chapter examines the participant memories that may have led to their interest in outdoor learning in relation to other themes identified in the literature. The ideas I focus on in this chapter draw from the narratives that I wrote from interviews with participants, as well as my own *currere*. The aim of this section is to explain how these themes may have influenced support for forest schools. To begin, the presence of ecological consciousness development in participants is identified. Then the themes in relation to the literature are discussed.

Ecological consciousness

As explained in Chapter 3, ecological consciousness is a state of environmental consciousness that can develop when individuals actively spend time in nature and feel that they have a relationship to, or feel that they are a part of nature (Honos-Webb, 2005; Puk, 2010; Vadala et al., 2007). The importance of ecological consciousness is to understand if participants had a strong connection to nature before they became interested in forest schools. Table 6 shows selected examples from participant narratives that strongly suggest development of ecological consciousness.

Table 6: Examples of conditions for and development of ecological consciousness in participants

Participant	Examples of conditions for and development of ecological consciousness
Christopher	• Spent a lot of time in nature growing up, especially as a teenager on my farm • Had memorable moments in the forests at my high school • Support and admiration of nature stories by grandparents • Felt my farm animals were like a part of my family
Maria	• Spent a lot of time as a child in nature exploring the terrain around her home • Supported by parents to spend time outdoors as a child • Reflected on what happened in the woods at night • Reflected on how she was a part of nature • Enjoyed playing with natural objects - like sap bubbles • Sees herself as a part of nature • Currently actively involved in developing forest schools
Hailey	• Parents took her to the cottage as a child • Connected deeply to animals and wildlife • Gained interest in biology and nature as a teen • Currently actively involved in running a forest school
Joanne	• Outings in nature with her parents as a child • Spent time on the beach, climbing mountains, and building forts in the woods as a child • Feels the need to be outdoors daily • Currently actively involved in an outdoor-based childcare centre
Rose	• Influenced by *Fables of the Green Forest* television cartoon as a child • Collected natural outdoor objects and made crafts • Felt nature is an extension of her home • Supported by parents to spend time outdoors as a child • Currently actively involved in developing outdoor education activities
Ingrid	• Spent significant time in nature at her cottage as a child • Went on hikes with parents • Learned how to forage for edible plants in nature • Feels that exploring nature should be a part of everyday life • Currently actively involved in organizing outdoor parent groups

This table suggests that all participants (including myself) expressed some form of ecological consciousness, mainly because we all had previous experiences in nature, feel connected to nature, and are attracted to spending time in nature.

Connections to the research literature

In analyzing the research, it is clear that all participants, including myself, have common memories that may be responsible for why we became interested in forest schools. As mentioned in the Results chapters, these memories form common themes of culture, opportunities for independence, admiration and curiosity for nature as a place to explore, and finding nature as a refuge. Memories such as these appear to be consistent with other research that I discussed in my literature review and theoretical framework at the beginning of this thesis. In the following text, I explain how the themes I found in my research relate to those discussed in the literature.

Culture

As discussed previously, each of my participants had cultural influences which led them to have experiences in nature. These influences primarily involved heritage, role models, and media. Chawla (1988) concluded that role models such as parents, teachers and other adults who support a child's interest in nature are particularly influential to a child's future perspectives on nature. The results from this thesis are in line with the conclusions of Chawla. All individuals included in this study (including myself) experienced influence from adult role models who allowed us to spend time in nature. Spending time in nature during childhood then fostered later interest in nature (Vadala et al., 2007).

Scandinavian culture has also been highly influential in the creation of forest schools in Norway and Finland (Robertson, 2008b). The Norwegian concept of *friluftsliv*, or "open air life" is especially influential in the perspective of nature in Norwegian culture (Gelter, 2000, p. 79). Of the three participants (including myself) that had ties to Scandinavian culture, all of us were influenced by our heritage. Each of us experienced learning about stories or role models from Scandinavian society, and outdoor traditions, such as berry picking. However, Ingrid did not mention stories as having influences on her childhood memories of the outdoors, but did state that her time spent in nature as a child was important to her. Using gathered data about culture from the narratives in this thesis, it appears that forest school support by these participants with Scandinavian heritage is connected in part to the knowledge passed down to them from their cultural upbringing.

Independence

The notion of independence in childhood and adolescence has been explored by some researchers. Goodenough (2003) argued that secret places are important for play, because they can function outside the limitations imposed by adults. It has also been argued that children need to be able to manipulate their environment in order to be responsible for their own learning (Qvortrup et al., 2009). Children's places are places children choose for themselves to interact with (Rasmussen, 2004; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). MacEachren (2013a) also suggested that forest schools are based on the knowledge that children learn from the places they choose. Most participants, including myself, but except for Ingrid, mentioned the importance of a secret place in childhood or adolescence, and all participants cited memories of responsibility for their learning, and unstructured play.

Furthermore, Thoreau (2006) reflected on what he learned from his self-discovery in the woods and how the environment offers opportunities for self-reflection and exploration. His observations connect with the self-directed teaching of all participants who had memories of self-motivated independent learning.

It appears that participants wanted to be in control of their learning and nature provided that opportunity. In nature, they were able to find secret places, be creative, and understand how to be self-sustaining.

Exploration

The notion that interest in exploring nature is linked to admiration for nature has been referred to by others in the literature. Fröbel argued that young people need to be given opportunities to explore on their own in nature (just as he had done in his garden growing up), and this focus on exploration was the rationale for his establishment of Kindergartens (Borge et al., 2003; Early Childhood Today Editorial Staff, 2014). Fröbel found much peace studying plants in his garden while suffering a neglectful childhood, and he felt that time spent in his garden was responsible for fostering his love of nature (Early Childhood Today Editorial Staff, 2014; Fröbel, 1889). Moreover, knowledge gained from exploring environments has been linked to how flexible an environment is to modify (Gandini, 1998). Nature offers ample opportunities for modification and exploration.

Malaguzzi argued that children are not only taught by adults and peers, but also by the physical environment (Edwards et al., 1998). Wordsworth further emphasised this point, by arguing that nature can teach us things that books may not (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1798a). As reflected in my analysis, some participants expressed memories of experiences with peers and companions who would often accompany them in outdoor activities. For example, Joanne talked about accepting challenges in life and influences of father. Hailey talked about how her experience with the egg falling was a lesson in the fragility of nature. I learned about how sensitive nature is through the death of my animals following them eating a poisonous plant. Maria was taught by her parents the fierceness of nature on the coast, but also learned through her own experiences in nature that it can be healing and relaxing from the fierceness of daily life. Rose was often accompanied in nature by peers where she learned how to interact with other people, but also how to use nature for fun in a sustainable way by building forts and making crafts. Ingrid learned from her parents all of the things that nature can provide – for example, berries, mushrooms and wood for sustenance and heat.

All participants, including myself, had influential memories about nature as a curious place to explore. These memories included collecting outdoor objects, reflecting on natural experiences, enjoying the outdoors with companions, encountering wildlife and other animals, being creative, finding adventure, engaging in physical activities and spending time near water.

With regard to fond memories of physical activity among participants and a connection to the development of an admiration for nature, Aristotle stresses that we learn through our actions (Aristotle, 2006). Malaguzzi also argued that the environment is a teacher for children (Edwards et al., 1998). Therefore, knowledge of nature and fond memories may be linked to what we learn through opportunities to be active responsive learners. We may learn from our environment by exploring it through physical activity. This idea is consistent with participants in this study who learned through participating in various outdoor activities.

Refuge

The idea that nature can provide refuge from unpleasantness in society has been suggested in the literature. Thoreau (2006) believed that nature was a refuge from the detriments of consumerism in society. As I argued in Chapter 1, forest schools may also be a way of finding refuge from the more academic framework of modern kindergartens, and returning to the outdoor

learning that was part of Fröbel's original Kindergarten concept (Early Childhood Today Editorial Staff, 2014). (Fröbel) himself suffered neglect in childhood and nature was in turn where he eventually found his refuge (moving his devotion away from his religious church life) toward nature's plants. Like Fröbel's neglect in childhood, four participants, including myself, vocalized using nature as a refuge.

Furthermore, Goodenough (2003) pointed out that children need places to escape the restrictions imposed by adults. Secret places in nature can provide these opportunities. All participants, including myself, at some point in our lives felt restricted, which led to a desire to pursue the freedom that nature provides. Therefore, participants (including me) found peace and a haven in the natural spaces they had access to.

The process of writing and analyzing the narratives helped me to recognize the themes in relation to one another. The narratives told life stories that identified an evolution from childhood to adulthood, which a child autobiography could not as well demonstrate. For example, like Hailey's, my own story about growing up in the city with a cottage and later moving to the countryside, in contrast to others like Maria and Rose who grew up in the country and later moved to the city, helped me to realize how individuals can come to appreciate nature through many different pathways. These stories show the gradual development of ecological consciousness within varying contexts and at different ages.

Conclusion

The research results strongly support that forest schools (as opposed to other forms of education) are related to ecological memories from formative years, ranging from childhood to early adulthood. Therefore, I conclude that forest school supporters (including myself) who were a part of this study, wanted to provide access to natural educational experiences, because nature touched our lives in many ways. Natural places were a part of our culture, interesting to explore and a way to form responsibility/independence, and provided a place for relaxation and refuge.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I provide a summary of my research and discuss its limitations, implications, and opportunities for future research.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I conclude by revisiting my research questions in light of my results, in order to summarize what I found. I also identify the usefulness of my study for teachers, researchers and parents, while examining further questions that remain unanswered.

Objective

Following my introduction to the concept of forest schools in 2008 and my trip to Norway in 2010 where I witnessed forest schools in action, I began to wonder about the origins of these institutions, which seemed to incorporate many aspects of learning that were important to me. What benefits might this form of alternative education serve Canada? For example, how might it contribute to different provincial education systems? I also began to think about the stories behind the people who supported forest schools in Canada. What motivated them to become involved in supporting forest schools? Were all these individuals raised in rural areas, or were they urban dwellers who were intrigued by the curriculum of forest schools? What significant events do they remember that caused them to reach a point at which they were drawn to forest schools? These were some of the questions I began asking myself when I started this thesis.

The aim of this thesis was to share not only own story of what led to my interest in outdoor learning, but the meaningful stories of other forest school supporters in Canada. By sharing their stories, I had hoped to gain a better understanding of identifying the aspirations for forest schools, to discover the reasons that motivate certain forest school supporters, and to elaborate on their contribution to a Canadian movement towards increasing youth access to outdoor education.

Literature

To begin my research, I began to write a literature review to examine the research and authors that discussed topics related to forest schools previously. After conducting this literature review, I discovered that the conceptual foundations of forest schools were echoed in the centuries-old teachings of Aristotle, Fröbel, Thoreau, Wordsworth, and more recently in the last century by Malaguzzi, Chawla and Goodenough. I used the writings from these authors, among

others, to suggest that forest school supporters were ecologically conscious individuals. Based on the literature, I defined ecological consciousness as experience in nature that leads to a connection with nature. Using this theoretical framework, I interviewed five forest school supporters and wrote narratives about the memories they had which influenced them to support forest schools. With the help of a *currere* method of self-reflection, I also wrote my own narrative.

Narratives

I first organized the interview data as continuous narratives, for each of the participants, as well as wrote my own autobiographical narrative. I further analyzed the narratives, identifying primary themes that emerged. The four common themes I discovered were: culture, independence, exploration and refuge upon influences of ecological consciousness in participants. I found that culture – influences from heritage, parents, and society – were memories which all individuals expressed during their interviews. Even though participants expressed that they were pulled to nature as they experienced the absence of it at some point in their lives, previous early childhood cultural pressures they faced also pushed them into frequent contact with nature.

It could be argued that culture was the beginning of the participants' journey to forest schools. I found that independence was also a grand theme, which had profound impacts on themes of exploration and refuge as well. Each individual expressed how they were able to be independent in nature. The ability to be independent, to go where they wanted to go, to use the fruits of nature as a way of sustenance, were arguably strong influencing factors. These moments of independence seemed to be moments that individuals were proud of, or at times, were forced into. When participants in this study, including myself, were independent, opportunities arose for the construction of secret places and exploration of further learning activities. The independence that nature provided also allowed participants to use nature as a refuge – as a place to collect their thoughts and be alone when the need was felt.

When I started my thesis, I initially thought that most memories would have been from childhood. However, I discovered that ecological memories were developed at all ages, for example, in … and in … (referring to the various stories of your participants). Furthermore, it is interesting that it appears as if individuals continue to actively develop memories of nature in

adulthood as a means of reinforcing their commitment to the work they do. Strong-Wilson et al. (2013) argued that productive remembering is also part of returning to what adults found sustaining in childhood. In the case of participants of this study, nature experiences led to their future support for forest schools.

Implications

If we can better understand the memories that influence why people support forest schools, we can use this knowledge to improve curriculum in education, lesson plans for teachers, outdoor programs for municipalities and policies for government. These initiatives may help to meet goals that are favored by forest school supporters.

My research also helps to identify the important memories that can lead to forest school support. My research also explains the direct influences that culture, independence, exploration and refuge had on participants of this study. Forest schools that aspire to deepen child connections to nature could incorporate these aspects into the outdoor experiences they provide. For example, reinforcing cultural traditions may help strengthen the memories children have and deepen their connection to nature. Schools could also permit and encourage student independence to craft their own play areas, and to take on new and exciting topics of interest as they choose. Allowing children to choose where they learn may also permit students to explore topics they are interested in. In turn, allowing children to follow their interests would help provide children with opportunities to manage their own time, development of skills and self-reflect within nature. All of these factors that I suggest may be useful for schools to adopt, as they seemed to influence the development of ecological consciousness in these participants, and influence later support for forest schools.

The results of this study may also be consulted by educators, researchers and policy-makers interested in creating curricula for forest schools. Overall, this study was exploratory in nature, and asserts to a theory, but cannot state that a theory was indeed found.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size used to extract themes, which prevents drawing general conclusions. However, having fewer participants allows for a deeper understanding of the lives of these individuals that could not be possible within a larger group.

It might also be thought that a limitation of this study is the fact that all participants, except me, were female. However, most people involved in issues related to early and primary childhood education are female (Johnson, 2008). Therefore, the sample in this study is reflective of the reality that females make up the majority of caretakers in early childhood and primary education.

Interviews could have been longer and participants could have been asked to revise their own narratives. In addition, follow-up interviews with certain individuals (who had missing codes in the categories) could have been conducted to inquire about codes that showed up in other people's narratives to see if they may actually be there, but were simply forgotten. This study is also limited to the subjectivity of my own perspective in the questions I asked in the interviews, my *currere*, how I interpreted people's narratives, and the themes I discovered.

Future research

The results of this study will likely be valuable to develop future research to examine reasons for ecological consciousness and support for forest schools by parents, educators and policy makers. Further research may examine the narratives I display in this thesis from different perspectives for further analysis and discussion. Researchers may also be interested in looking at a larger group of individuals using a quantitative survey to confirm or negate the results of this thesis on a greater scale. Furthermore, a future area of study could respond to whether children who attended forest schools are more likely to be ecologically conscious (and support forest schools in the future) compared to children who attended other schools. Researchers may also want to examine if there is a relationship between a desire to be an independent learner and live a sustainable lifestyle. Finally, researchers may want to expand upon the theoretical and methodological grounding of this thesis by answering these questions through a memory lens in further depth.

Conclusion

When I began this research, I did so after years of curiosity about learning what forest schools were and more distinctly, why they were important to other people. However, after conducting this research, I found something more. This study helped me to understand my own life, identify and passions and where they came from. I hope it did the same for my participants, and that it inspires others to undergo the same reflection process into their own lives. As a teacher, I feel that it is important for me to reflect on my own passions in order to show or help students find theirs. Forest schools have become one of my passions; even more so since starting this thesis research. I plan to continue learning about forest schools and reflecting on my life experiences. My next project involves incorporating outdoor learning into my teaching practice.

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APPENDICES

I. Letter of invitation

Dear (participant's name),

My name is Christopher Nixon and I am a McGill University M.A. candidate in Education and Society. I am writing to you in regards to a research study I am conducting on forest schools in Canada. I wish to invite you to take part in my Masters project titled ***Remembering Why Forest Schools are Important.***

Purpose of this research
The goal of my research is to examine the perceived need for forest schools as an alternative form of education within Canada, by learning more about the memories of people who support forest schools and how these memories have affected their decisions to be involved in this alternative form of education.

Benefits of this research
By learning more about the people who support forest school education and why they became involved in these schools, further research will be able to ask questions surrounding the needs these schools are addressing and whether or not these schools have a place in public education.

Ethical considerations
Your name and personal information will remain confidential throughout the study and only shared between myself and my faculty supervisor at McGill. You may also withdraw at any time and participation is completely voluntary without conditions.

What is involved?
Your participation will involve two to three audio-recorded interviews that will last from one to two hours in order to discuss your view of education and the memories that you believe have influenced you to support this alternative form of education in Canada. Audio recordings will be transcribed. Following completion of the thesis study, the audio recordings will be permanently deleted. The transcribed material will be anonymized, and may be used in future publications. If you have any memories of your childhood captured through photographs that are memorable for you, you are invited to bring them to aid/prompt you in describing your memories during the first interview. Photos will not be collected. During the second interview, you will be asked to draw a "memory map" of a memorable childhood place. The memory map will be collected and with your permission, may be used in publications. A third interview may be necessary to complete or verify any remaining questions.

Compensation
There will not be any financial compensation for this study.

Concerns or Questions

If you are interested in participating in this study, or have any questions please contact me at (819) 968-2788 or e-mail me at christopher.nixon@mail.mcgill.ca. You may also contact my faculty supervisor Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson by phone at (514) 398-4170 or by email teresa.strong-wilson@mcgill.ca. To learn more about your rights or welfare as a potential future participant of this study, you may also contact the McGill Ethics Officer (514)-398-6831 or at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Sincerely,
Christopher Nixon

II. Participant letter of consent

McGill

Dear (participant's name),

You are being invited to take part in a research study on ***Remembering Why Forest Schools are Important***. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask Christopher Nixon if there is anything that is not clear of if you need more information.

Purpose of this research
The goal of my research is to examine the perceived need for forest schools as an alternative form of education within Canada, by learning more about the memories of people who support forest schools and how these memories have affected their decisions to be involved in this alternative form of education.

Study Procedure
Your participation will involve two to three audio-recorded interviews that will last from one to two hours in order to discuss your view of education and the memories that you believe have influenced you to support this alternative form of education in Canada. Audio recordings will be transcribed. Following completion of the thesis study, the audio recordings will be permanently deleted. The transcribed material will be anonymized, and may be used in future publications. If you have any memories of your childhood captured through photographs that are memorable for you, you are invited to bring them to aid/prompt you in describing your memories during the first interview. Photos will not be collected. During the second interview, you will be asked to draw a "memory map" of a memorable childhood place. The memory map will be collected and with your permission, may be used in publications. A third interview may be necessary to complete or verify any remaining questions.

Benefits of this research
By learning more about the people who support forest school education and why they became involved in these schools, further research will be able to ask questions surrounding the needs these schools are addressing and whether or not they have a place in public education.

Compensation
There will not be any financial compensation for this study.

Confidentiality
Your name and personal information will remain confidential throughout the study. Only myself and my faculty supervisor, Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson, will have access to the data you provide. Your information will be kept on encrypted, password protected files on a password-protected hard drive. In all publications and presentations, pseudonyms will be used to protect your name. Your audio recording will not be published. Anonymized quotes and memory map drawings may be published.

Voluntary Participation
Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any question or questions if you choose. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Should you decide to withdraw from this study, all the information collected; audio recordings, my observational field notes, your personal drawings and writings will be permanently deleted or destroyed and not used in any publications or presentations.

Publication
The data collected from you will be used for Christopher Nixon's Master's Thesis, but also may be used for university or conference presentations, publications, and online on websites for education purposes and my portfolio.

Concerns or Questions
If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, please contact the researcher, Christopher Nixon, by phone at (819) 968-2788 or by e-mail at christopher.nixon@mail.mcgill.ca. You may also contact my faculty supervisor Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson by phone at (514) 398-4170 or by email teresa.strong-wilson@mcgill.ca.

McGill Ethics Review Board
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer, Lynda McNeil by phone at (514)-398-6831 or by email at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Unforeseeable Risks
There may be risks that are not anticipated. However, every effort will be made to minimize any risks.

Voluntary Consent
Please check the boxes next to the statements below:

I give my permission for my childhood map to be used in this study.	❑YES	❑NO
I give my permission for the data collected in this study to be used in future related studies.	❑YES	❑NO

Please sign below if you agree to participate in this study:

Name of Participant	Signature	Date

III. Oral interview guide

I wish to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research as part of my Master's degree. The aim of my research is to interview supporters of Canadian forest schools to discover what memories or stories they believe influenced them to become involved in the establishment of forest schools and why. By examining what is motivating a desire for you and others to support these schools, I hope to create a better understanding for what needs these schools fulfill and what importance this alternative approach has within Canadian education.

Your name and information will remain confidential throughout this study. The focus is not on who you are, but is on how your memories have affected the growth of forest schools in Canada.

You may withdraw from the study at any time, and you may refuse to answer any questions without providing a reason.

I will begin by asking you a few questions. To start with, I would like to know a little about you. These questions will help me to understand the context you are coming from.

1. Before I begin asking you my interview questions, I will ask you a few basic questions about your relationships to forest schools in Canada:
    a. How did you first hear about forest schools? When and where was that?
    b. Can you describe your first encounter with these schools and your involvement since that time?
    c. What do you share in common with other forest school supporters that you know?

2. [If the participant has brought any pictures with them] I would like to ask you about the picture(s) you have brought of the outdoors. I would like to know why you chose to bring this/these particular picture(s). Before I ask you questions about this/these, could you please describe what you feel when you look at this/these picture(s).
    a. What is special about this/these picture(s)?
    b. [If nothing is said about the environment the pictures was taken] What is the importance to you of the place that this/these picture(s) was taken?
    c. [If nothing is said about the person/people who took the picture(s)] Who took the picture(s) and what importance did this/these person/people have in your life?
    d. [If nothing is said about other people in the picture] Who are the other people in the picture(s) and what significance did they have in your life?
    e. Were you learning anything in this/these picture(s)? If so, what were you learning and how?

3. Now I would like to learn more about your memories as a child (0-18). Write down one or more positive experiences you remember as a child that have helped to shape you as an adult that you believe stands out in the story of your life above all others. I will ask you some questions about them when I finish.
    a. What were significant about these occurrences?

   b. [If nothing is said about identity] How did these occurrences help shape your identity?
   c. [If nothing is said about learning experience] What did you learn from these occurrences?
   d. What do you think the value of this occurrence had in your life?

4. I would like to know more about your view of the meaning of particular environments. I would like to begin this second interview by asking you to draw on a piece of paper a memorable place you visited as a child. Think about the environment and what it felt like. After you have done this, I will ask you some questions.
   a. Why do you remember this particular place?
   b. [If nothing is said about the meaning] What is meaningful about this place?
   c. [If nothing is said about people] Did anyone share this place with you and if so, what were you doing in this place?
   d. Did this place teach you anything? If so, what and why do you think it did?

5. Now I would like to ask you about one negative experience that you would describe as a turning point in your memory as a child (0-18). Write down one negative life changing event that has helped to shape you as a person that you think stands out in the story of your life above all others. I will ask you some questions about them later.
   a. What were significant about these occurrences?
   b. [If nothing is said about identity] How did these occurrences help shape your identity?
   c. [If nothing is said about learning experiences] What did you learn from these occurrences?
   d. What do you think the value of this occurrence had in your life?

6. I just have some final questions that I would like to ask you about how you think these memories as a child have influenced your support for forest schools in Canada.
   a. How do you think the negative turning point(s) in your life as a child contributed to your support for forest schools in Canada?
   b. How do you think the positive turning point(s) in your life as a child contributed to your support for forest schools in Canada?
   c. What early memories do you think are the most significant which led you to want to be involved in forest schools?
   d. The last question I have is at what point in your life did you realize your memories had an effect on your decision to support forest schools?

Thank you for all your responses and the time you have taken to share your insight and memories with me to help me understand the growth of forest schools as an alternative form of education in Canada. This is the end of the interview and I wish to thank you once again for agreeing to participate and contributing to my knowledge as well as others in the education field through my Master's Thesis.