

**THE CHANGING CLIMATE OF OUTDOOR  
EDUCATION IN THE QUEBEC CEGEP SYSTEM**

by

William Mitchell

*A Thesis*

*submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements*

*for the degree of*

*Master of Education*

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the manner in which outdoor education programming has changed in the English Quebec Collège D'Enseignement Général et Professionnel (CEGEP) system during the last 20-30 years and the factors contributing to that change. It employs a qualitative case study approach involving participant interviews and document analysis in identifying four major themes of change: curriculum reform, risk management, aging teachers, and student change. Factors contributing to this change include: global educational reform trends, increased risk management awareness and litigation, teacher experience and age, lack of student experience in the outdoors, prevalence of technology, physical health, employment, and student enrolment. The outcome is the recommendation for more course hours, increased professional development for teachers, a dispelling of the misconceptions of outdoor education, new approaches to attracting and connecting with students, as well as continued research in the field in order to verify themes in the broader context of outdoor education.

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## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

My study on the changing climate in outdoor education explored the manner in which outdoor education programming has changed in the English Quebec Collège D'Enseignement Général et Professionnel (CEGEP) system during the last 20-30 years and the factors contributing to this change. I selected to examine this topic from the perspective of teachers with 20+ years of teaching experience in the English Quebec CEGEP system because of their extensive lived experience. While there is a paucity of research in this area, anecdotal evidence suggests a change in outdoor education programming. As such, this study provides insight into how outdoor education in the CEGEP system has evolved over the last 20-30 years in order to build on existing anecdotal evidence in the field.

### *The Researcher*

I am an outdoor educator and have held a number of instructional positions with a variety of outdoor education programs over the last 10 years. My inspiration for choosing to conduct research in the area of outdoor education stems from a general interest in post secondary outdoor education. A graduate of the English Quebec CEGEP system, these experiences in the outdoors helped shape my life. An Honours Bachelor degree in Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism furthered my interest in the field of outdoor education.

I strongly believe in the value of outdoor education as a tool for personal change. My own life has been significantly changed by my experiences outdoors. Through my

exposure as a student to CEGEP outdoor education courses as well as an increased prevalence of experiential learning in my education, my career and recreational interests changed dramatically. Having previously been an unmotivated science student, outdoor education opened a new world of possibility for me within the context of higher education. Looking back, the CEGEP outdoor education courses I took as a student were the first step towards my current educational and professional ventures. As a result, I place a high value on outdoor education and its pedagogy.

My philosophy of outdoor education is aligned with both Kurt Hahn's vision of outdoor education as a tool for character building (Zelinski, 1991) as well as with John Dewey's (1938) philosophy of experiential education. "Experiential education is a philosophy and a methodology in which educators purposefully engage in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education [AEE], 2007). I agree with Dewey on the importance of the experiential development of critical thinking and problem solving skills in place of the mere memorization of lessons. As such, I feel outdoor education, through its experiential nature, can provide life-enhancing experiences for learners and recognize the instructor's significant role in providing those experiences. As a result, I am motivated to better understand change in outdoor education programming as a tool to assist me in delivering relevant programming and instruction in the future.

My interest in this area was sparked through conversations with a handful of teachers, instructors, and co-workers who have described an intuitive sense of change within outdoor education programming. These discussions have led me to believe that

student attitudes and behaviours, risk management, pedagogy, and resources have all contributed to possible outdoor education programming changes. I seek to examine these areas and their relation to a potential shift in outdoor education programming.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The CEGEP system or Collège D'Enseignement Général et Professionnel translates as: College of general and vocational instruction. The CEGEP system is a unique junior college system in the Province of Quebec that acts as a stepping stone for students from high school to either a university education or entry into the job market. It is comparable to grades 12 and 13 in the educational systems of other provinces and states. The CEGEP system was first established in 1967 under Bill 21. The government at the time recognized a need to strengthen post-secondary education and raise the average level of scholarship in the province (Fédération des cégeps, 2007). There are currently 48 CEGEPs in the Province of Quebec that serve over 237,000 students each year and employ 13,000 teachers. Of these, six are English language institutions located primarily in the Montreal area (Fédération des cégeps).

Outdoor education in the CEGEP system is incorporated into the physical education curriculum. All CEGEP students, regardless of program major, are required to take three physical education courses in order to complete their diploma. Physical education course offerings typically include aquatics, dance, fitness, individual sports, team sports, racquet sports, and outdoor education (John Abbott College, 2007). Courses are two hours in duration once a week for 15 weeks, with the exception of outdoor education courses, which often have a condensed classroom portion in order to

accommodate the additional hours associated with weekend trip components. Outdoor education represents up to 25% of physical education course offerings as well as staff specialization.

In the last 15 years, physical education course requirements at the CEGEP level decreased from four courses to three (T. Peters, personal communication, October 31, 2007). During the same time period, G. Russell notes an intuitive sense of change in both student participation and the scope of course offerings (personal communication, October 31, 2007). Anecdotal evidence suggesting a shift in outdoor education programming is also found in the literature. Noble (1995) notes, that during his 30 years as an outdoor educator, there has been a significant shift in student/participant attitudes in outdoor education. For instance, Noble indicated a change in student questions in the field from “What’s that?... Why is this?... Can we stay out longer? to Do we have to?... Can we go back now?... Are we there yet?” (p. 20). Noble attributes this changing student attitude to a decrease in enthusiasm. Noble simultaneously observes a reduction in the scope and scale of outdoor education programs. While there is some support in the literature for a shift in outdoor education programming, there is a paucity of research documenting any such potential changes.

Additionally, there is growing evidence in related literature to support a potential change in outdoor education programming. These areas include student alienation with respect to physical education (Carlson, 1995), a disconnect with nature (Louv, 2005), changing landscapes (Potter & Henderson, 2004; Wilson, 2002), obesity (Noble, 1995; Swinburn & Egger, 2004), student apathy (Hwang, 1995), a shifting focus to traditional academic curriculum (reading, writing and arithmetic) (Humbert, 2005; Miller, 1998),

and a recent focus on physical activity (Humbert). Each of these factors has the potential to influence outdoor education programming. However, research examining a 20-30 year historical change in outdoor education programming has yet to be carried out and therefore highlights the relevance of this study. Noble (1995) and Cooper (1994) also note a need to re-examine outdoor education programs as student participation in them is pivotal in creating an environmentally and socially just future. Outdoor education has the potential to increase active citizenship, develop a sense of belonging, change attitudes and behaviours, and educate for sustainability (Cooper).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine outdoor education programming changes in Quebec English CEGEPs during the last 20-30 years from the perspective of teachers with 20+ years of experience, and identify the factors contributing to those changes.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions were designed to examine the experience of outdoor education teachers with 20+ years experience in the English Quebec CEGEP system. The research questions were identified as the following:

1. How has the Quebec CEGEP system's outdoor education programming changed since the early 1980s?
2. What factors have contributed to these identified changes?

### *Definition of Terms*

*Outdoor Education* is operationally defined as “the experiential philosophy of learning by doing. It takes place primarily, but not exclusively, through involvement with the natural environment.... The emphasis for learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources” (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 17). It differs from outdoor recreation as it offers activities that represent a planned curriculum toward an educational end (Horwood & Raffan, 1988).

*Outdoor Pursuits* are operationally defined as “a subset of outdoor recreation. They represent the self-propelled activities performed in an outdoor setting” (Priest, 1990, p. 114). Additionally, outdoor pursuits are often done in areas “remote from the amenities of telephone, emergency help and urban comforts” (Ford, 1986, p. 8). Examples include walking, backpacking, rock climbing, mountaineering, skiing, and snowshoeing, but do not include motorized activities (Priest).

*CEGEP Outdoor Education Course* is operationally defined as a physical education course being taught within an outdoor setting and focusing on outdoor-based activities. Notably, some outdoor education courses offered in the CEGEP system may reflect outdoor pursuits, yet continue to be classified as outdoor education by both staff and administration. As such, this study will accept the inclusion of outdoor pursuits in outdoor education.

*Programming Changes* are operationally defined as a notable difference in the manner in which a program currently functions versus its prior level of function. These can include, but are not limited to, such factors as student attitudes and participation, pedagogy, curriculum, and organizational influences.

*Significance of the Study*

This study is the first of its kind to document changes in CEGEP outdoor education programming and the factors contributing to them. As such, it adds to the knowledge base in outdoor education literature. For present and future CEGEP outdoor educators, this study provides a summary of change over the last 30 years that can aid in the design and direction of outdoor education programming.

*Delimitations*

This study is applicable to the context of the Quebec CEGEP system. It applies to outdoor education courses as part of the physical education curriculum in the English CEGEPs of Montreal. While this study may also be applicable to other post-secondary educational institutions with a similar setting or context, the findings cannot be generalized to all outdoor education programs or even the CEGEP system as a whole due to its focus on English institutions.

*Limitations*

The scope of data collection was a limiting factor. This study examined the perspective of six CEGEP teachers with 20+ years of teaching experience in the English CEGEP system. This was a result of a relatively small number of individuals, approximately eight, who had the required experience to participate in the study.

Also, the data gathered reflected a predominantly male voice due to the inability to gain equal gender representation among interviewees as outdoor education instructors are and have traditionally been predominantly male (Humberstone, 1990; Neill, 1997b).

This can potentially result in a perpetuation of male dominated philosophies. Researcher gender is duly noted. Gender bias and the association of outdoor education as a male dominated field is recognized, however, gender issues within outdoor education are not part of the framework of this research project. Last, data gathered with respect to student attitudes reflects teachers' perceptions of those attitudes and not student attitudes themselves.

## Chapter 2

### *Review of the Literature*

The literature review begins with a short historical account of outdoor education programming, its major philosophies, and inherent educational value. Subsequently, the literature review draws upon literature from numerous fields of study in order to identify potential factors that may contribute to changes in outdoor education programming. It includes an examination of outdoor education, the human disconnect with nature, student attitudes and perceptions in education, and physical education. Student attitudes and perceptions have been included due to their relevance across all aspects of the education system including outdoor education. The human disconnect with nature is relevant to a societal shift to indoor settings, moving away from outdoor and natural settings. Physical education has been included because outdoor education at the CEGEP level, and in other educational settings, is offered as a selection within a physical education requirement.

### *Outdoor Education*

Outdoor education has its roots in middle class late 19<sup>th</sup> century North America. It began with the appearance of school camps in the eastern United States from 1860 through the turn of the century and was followed by the publishing of *Scouting for Boys* by Robert Baden-Powell in 1908, which led to the rise of scouting (Lund, 1997). Soon after, Kurt Hahn founded Gordonstoun School in 1934, which began the Outward Bound movement that is now well known worldwide as a leader in the field of outdoor education (Lund). In Canada, similar school camps were built during this period and led to the establishment of the Canadian Camping Association in 1937 (Lund). More recently,

outdoor education has become significantly mainstreamed as it is visible in all types of educational institutions and settings: youth camps, schools, colleges and universities, community programs, and commercial outfitters (Potter & Henderson, 2004). Outdoor education has been part of the CEGEP curriculum since the system was first established in 1967 (Fédération des cégeps, 2007).

Within the Quebec CEGEP system, outdoor education is part of the physical education curriculum. Students, regardless of their major, are required to complete three physical education courses in order to complete their diploma. Outdoor education courses are offered as a selection among physical education course areas which include aquatics, fitness, team sports, racquet sports, and individual sports. Outdoor education course offerings typically include rock-climbing, canoeing, kayaking, orienteering, hiking, camping, skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, and wilderness survival.

Historically, outdoor education programming in Canada experienced a rise and fall in popularity. While never being at the top of most school boards' priority list, Potter and Henderson (2004) note that Canadian outdoor education experienced a heyday during the early 1970s and 1980s that saw a number of school boards open publicly funded outdoor education centres as well as provide funding for teachers to attend related outdoor and environmental teaching conferences. The pendulum eventually swung in the other direction, and by the early 1990s, many of those outdoor education centres closed or shifted to private funding (Potter & Henderson). Additionally, between 1994 and 2004, the membership rates of outdoor professional associations in Canada had dropped significantly. "For example, The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario in the mid 1980s could boast over 800 members, but now supports under 250 members" (Potter &

Henderson, p. 80). At the CEGEP level, the 1990s saw a reduction in physical education course requirements from four courses to three (T. Peters, personal communication, October 31, 2007). It is likely this change would have had an impact on outdoor education programming.

In addition to physical and technical skills, outdoor education in Canada concerns itself with intra and inter-personal skill development (Priest, 1986); “A particularly impressive strength is that outdoor education programs seem capable of triggering an ongoing cycle of positive change within participants” (Neill, 2002, p. 191). Additionally, student participation in outdoor education programs is pivotal in creating an environmentally and socially just future (Cooper, 1994; Noble, 1995). Outdoor education has the potential to increase active citizenship, develop a sense of belonging, change attitudes and behaviours, and educate for sustainability (Cooper).

In light of these educational goals, outdoor education can be defined as “the experiential philosophy of learning by doing. It takes place primarily, but not exclusively, through involvement with the natural environment.... The emphasis for learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources” (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 17). Outdoor education differs from outdoor recreation as it offers activities that represent a planned curriculum toward an educational end (Horwood & Raffan, 1988). The term outdoor education became favoured in educational settings in place of outdoor pursuits during the 1970s through an attempt to link it with school curriculum (Nicol, 2002). Outdoor pursuits are defined as “a subset of outdoor recreation. They represent the self-propelled activities performed in an outdoor setting” (Priest, 1990, p. 114). Outdoor

pursuits are often performed “remote from the amenities of telephone, emergency help and urban comforts” (Ford, 1986, p. 8).

Additionally, adventure education, a term which has been used interchangeably with other forms of outdoor education (Hayllar, 1990), concerns itself with interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and focuses on change as a result of exposure to outdoor adventure activities (Priest, 1990). Environmental education also suffers from misconceptions with respect to its relationship to outdoor education as a result of similarities of interest (Greenall Gough, 1990). Environmental education is concerned with ecosystemic and ekistic relationships, which include developing an understanding of biological concepts and the relationship between human society and the natural environment (Priest, 1990).

At the CEGEP level, an outdoor education course is operationally defined as a physical education course being taught within an outdoor setting and focusing on outdoor-based activities. Courses are akin to adventure education but not environmental education. Notably, some outdoor education courses offered in the CEGEP system reflect outdoor pursuits as they lack the “about and for the out-of-doors” (Ford, 1986, p. 1) aspect of outdoor education. Yet they continue to be classified as outdoor education by both staff and administration. Nicol suggests “it is not enough for practitioners to understand the subtle differences between outdoor pursuits and outdoor education if other teachers and the public do not” (p. 96). As such, there is a need to examine the extent to which CEGEP outdoor education courses represent outdoor pursuit rather than true outdoor education as well as how that relationship has changed over time.

*Disconnect with Nature – Lack of Experience in Natural Settings*

There is a growing societal shift to indoor settings, resulting in reduced interactions with outdoor and natural settings. It has been argued that the resulting effect is a human disconnect with nature (Louv, 2005). Therefore, it is important to examine the potential impact that this trend may have on outdoor education programming.

Louv (2005) has coined the term Nature-Deficit Disorder to describe a lack of experiences in and with natural settings. He examines how a lack of outdoor experiences in childhood can lead to changed behaviours in young adults. For instance,

In 2001, the number of visitors who camped in national parks dropped by nearly a third, to its lowest point in a quarter century. The drop-off in camping is especially evident among people younger than thirty, possibly because no one took them camping when they were kids. (p. 148)

He suggests that among the many reasons children are no longer connecting with natural settings, or even playing outside, is due to a severe lack of experiences in nature as a result of a number of contemporary issues in our society. The issues include but are not limited to changing landscapes resulting from increased urbanization, parental fear, increased technology in the home and school, media, and obesity.

While Potter and Henderson (2004) assert that Canadian outdoor adventure education is tied to the Canadian landscape, “[t]he landscape... has changed drastically” (Wilson, 2002, p. 13). The landscape and wilderness areas of North America have been significantly diminished by urbanization. Urban sprawl has become the social norm and severely impacted the natural and cultural landscape of North America, thereby decreasing opportunities for childhood experiences in and with natural settings (Louv).

Urbanization has also impacted parents’ perceptions of safety. Fear in the urban 21<sup>st</sup> century is a large-scale social phenomenon. Parental fear associated with a perceived

increased risk to their children's safety has played a significant role in reducing children's experiences in the outdoors.

The boundaries of children's lives are growing ever tighter. A 1991 study of three generations of nine-year-olds found that, between 1970 and 1990, the radius around the home where children were allowed to roam on their own had shrunk to a ninth of what it had been in 1970. (Louv, 2005, p. 123)

Limited access to the outdoors effectively reduces children's interaction with the landscape, thereby contributing to Nature-Deficit Disorder. From a parental perspective, indoor electronic recreation can mitigate the fear factor.

The prevalence of technology has also played a role in reducing children's experiences in natural settings. Rifkin (2002) acknowledges that technologically fluent youth, who Prensky (2001) refers to as digital natives, are quite different from their predecessors.

There are signs that the first generation to grow up with video-games, computers, palm pilots and cell phones, and who spend so much of their time connecting with one another and sharing information on the Internet and World Wide Web, may be developing a different kind of consciousness and, with it, a new sense of security. (p. 249)

To that effect, "even if kids have all the unstructured time in the world, they're not outside playing. They're inside with their video games" (Kafka cited in Louv, 2005, p. 124). The technological tools available to the current youth generation is unlike any generation has experienced thus far. Parents are providing their children with an assortment of technology that both promotes and perpetuates a sedentary lifestyle (Humbert, 2005), a lifestyle far from the natural world and outdoor experiences.

In addition, the media has a tendency to over-dramatize nature resulting in a growing lack of interest in the outdoors (Louv, 2005). "Kids feel they're not getting

enough action if they don't see a grizzly bear rip apart a caribou calf" (Campbell cited in Louv, p. 142). These unrealistic images are also more easily accessed as a result of increased media availability and the electronic interconnectedness Rifkin (2002) described. As a result, the human disconnect with nature grows wider.

Thus, it is possible that a lack of experiences in the outdoors, due to the factors explored, has resulted in what Louv calls the Nature- Deficit Disorder and has potentially led to a declining interest in outdoor experiences and concomitantly outdoor education.

### *Student Change*

Student change is visible across the educational spectrum. It is relevant to examine these changes in the larger context in which the literature presents them, as they have potentially played a role in outdoor education programming.

Noble (1995) notes that the school culture in Great Britain that he was a part of as an ambitious young teacher in the 1960's was significantly different from recent school culture. Noble is an experienced teacher in outdoor education, who has taken the opportunity to reflect on student attitudes during his 30 year career. He identifies a general declining student interest in outdoor education, giving expression to his shift in attitude through the evolution of questions students have asked: "What's that?... Why is this?... Can we stay out longer?' To 'Do we have to?... Can we go back now?... Are we there yet?'" (p. 20). Noble's reflection on student questions highlights a potentially changing student attitude as observed as a measure of enthusiasm and participation.

Noble (1995) concludes that a decreasing interest in outdoor education has been linked with a decrease in general physical fitness (obesity crisis), a decreasing societal

value on physical activity and education, as well as a shift in values as a result of social change in society at large. He adds: "I accept that man's (sic) concepts of the world have changed, the world itself has not and nor have the values which are worth pursuing" (Noble, p. 21).

Interest in outdoor education may also be shifting as a result of the mainstreaming of outdoor recreation as a lifestyle, which has severely impacted perceptions of and attitudes in outdoor education (Watters, 1997). Mass marketing of outdoor adventure activities has resulted in a wider demographic of participants in outdoor programs (Watters). This combined with Louv's (2005) assertion of the effect of the media's over-dramatized portrayal of nature has changed the manner in which outdoor education programs are perceived, thus affecting the type of individual who might pursue outdoor education programs.

Examining this change from a larger societal context reveals that the relationship between humans and the natural environment has changed significantly. Humans have become so detached from the natural environment that we have mentally disconnected ourselves from the context of the biosphere (Borgstrom Hansson & Wackernagel, 1999). Urbanization has played a key role in perpetuating human-made environments of comfort that continue to distance us from the natural environment, which produces all the resources we consume on a daily basis (Suzuki, 2002). Hence widening the gap between humans and nature, and thereby potentially further reducing student interest in the natural environment and the outdoors.

With respect to student interest in education in general, there is mounting evidence to suggest an increase in student apathy (Riconscente, 2007; Shapiro, 1994).

This apathy is characterized by the absence of a passion for life and lack of commitments felt as compassionate human beings (Shapiro). Recent research suggests that one quarter of high school age students demonstrate an apathetic attitude toward education (Riconscente, 2007). This is a disconcertingly large proportion of students that lack school-related motivation (Riconscente).

Hwang (1995) notes that the decline of the public school system is a result of prevailing apathetic student attitudes. Hwang's research points to failing social structures and values as major contributing factors to an increasing sense of apathy. The National Center for Educational Statistics asked public school teachers if student apathy was a significant issue in their classrooms. Seventy-seven percent of teachers claimed apathy was a significant problem (Henke, Choy, Chen, Geis, & Alt, 1997). "Student apathy and non-involvement are as common as chalk dust in many of our nation's classrooms" (Raffini, 1986, p. 53). Raffini suggests that the prevalence of apathy is directly linked to student perceptions of their own ability. He claims that apathetic behaviour is a manner in which "below-average" students can protect themselves from a sense of failure (Raffini, 1986). Has an increase in the number of "below-average" students with respect to physical health increased apathetic attitudes towards physical and outdoor education?

Coffield (1981) set out to examine how student apathy has changed over time. He used a survey known as the "purpose in life test" which was administered to 455 undergraduate students. Although his results showed little to no change, at that time, in the level of student apathy of freshman college students over a ten-year period, he noted that student apathy over the study's time period was potentially affected by changing

teaching strategies. Coffield's conclusion highlights the need to examine teacher roles with respect to influencing student apathy.

Students entering institutions of higher education during the 1980s underwent dramatic changes (Astin, 1991). Astin came to this realization after reviewing the annual Report of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California. HERI has administered an annual survey to 250,000 college students at 550 institutions since 1966. More recently, HERI (2003) reports widespread disengagement in course work by college freshmen. Causes identified include students feeling bored with course work and increasing student academic disengagement in high school; these trends migrate with students as they enter college (Higher Education Research Institute, 2003).

Spitzberg and Thorndike (1992) attribute student apathy to a lack of student interest in learning. Accordingly, student apathy and disengagement have the potential to impact outdoor education programming. This impact may be visible in declining participation, declining enrolment, and generally a decreasing interest in CEGEP outdoor education.

In addition to apathy, Noble (1995) observes the appearance of what many would classify as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as a catalyst of change in outdoor education. To that effect he notes that students exhibit "an inability to sustain any activity for more than a brief spell. Not only have walks become shorter but so too have canoe journeys and cave explorations" (Noble, p. 20). Louv (2005) offers this observation: "nearly 8 million children in the United States currently suffer from mental disorders, and ADHD is one of the most prevalent" (p. 99). Louv describes that "children with the syndrome are restless, and have trouble paying attention, listening, following

directions, and focusing on tasks. They may also be aggressive, even antisocial, and may suffer from academic failure” (p. 99). Prescriptions (in the U.S.) for methylphenidate, more commonly known as Ritalin, increased 600 percent between 1990 and 1995 (Louv).

A link between television and ADHD has recently become more apparent.

Research has identified that for each hour of television watched per day by preschoolers the likelihood that they will develop concentration problems and other symptoms of attention-deficit disorders by age seven increases by 10 percent (Christakis, Zimmerman, DiGuseppe, & McCarty, 2004). These statistics highlight a noticeable changing trend in childhood behaviour.

Student change has been characterized by a shift in the media and marketing of outdoor activities, an increase in student apathy, the growing diagnosis rate of ADHD, and an increasing presence of technology as part of the student lifestyle. Student physical fitness and obesity rates have also changed significantly. They are further explored in the next section.

### *Physical Education*

Outdoor education in the CEGEP system is offered as an option within physical education program requirements. As a result, an exploration of contemporary issues in physical education is relevant to this study. From a student perspective at the CEGEP level, outdoor education is regarded as a course offering within physical education. Therefore, student perception and participation in physical education may impact outdoor education programming as well. Noble (1995) asserts that the decline of outdoor education is linked to a decreasing societal value on physical activity and education, thus

meriting an in-depth examination of student perceptions of physical education as well as the onset of a North American obesity crisis.

Carlson (1995) examines the rise of student alienation in physical education. According to Tinning and Fitzclarence (1992), there are indications that a growing percentage of students find physical education less relevant and less enjoyable. Carlson notes that “alienation is defined as the persistent negative feelings some students associate with actively aversive or insufficiently meaningful situations in the gymnasium setting” (p. 467). Alienation draws its origins from meaninglessness, powerlessness, isolation, and lack of pedagogical variety (Carlson; Humbert, 2005).

Carlson (1995) employed a mixed methods approach which included in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and surveys. The interviews consisted of sitting down with students who were considerably alienated from physical education in order to gain an understanding of the contributing factors. The results of the study identified lack of personal meaning, lack of control, and isolation as the main factors with regards to why students hate gym. Extrinsic factors identified included teacher behaviour, curriculum, class environment, and out of school influences. Intrinsic factors included ability, self-esteem, and student beliefs. The author noted that these factors are not limited to physical education as they are potentially present in all facets of education.

Humbert (2005) identifies the gap between students and teachers as a significant factor with respect to student alienation from physical education. “Most high school students are not the gifted athletes that their physical education teachers are” (p. 11). As a result, both parties have difficulty relating to each other. Alienation is often the outcome. Secondly, Humbert acknowledges a lack of pedagogical variety as a contributing factor

to students' declining interest in physical education. Students are either bored with doing the same activities "over and over again" or don't enjoy the activities and are rarely presented with new ones (p. 11). Canadian high schools often use team sports as a curriculum model. Most physical educators are competent in team sports and find it difficult to move outside that comfort zone with respect to teaching, despite the fact that their students are alienated from physical education. When approached for suggestions, these students seek non-competitive activities including outdoor education (Humbert). This can be considered positive for the prospect of increased outdoor education; however, alienation in physical education may counteract potential growth.

Student devaluing of physical education may also be the result of a lower perceived status within educational institutions and among students themselves (Thomas & Bolen, 1998). This combined with poor public perception of the rigour and value of physical education has led to its devaluing (Thomas & Bolen) and potentially student alienation and apathy. In fact, Goc-Karp, Kim and Skinner (1985) reported that in higher education, physical education programs are often viewed as "a waste of time" and are given lower status than other academic disciplines. Thomas and Bolen's research identified a significant gap between the perceptions of the rigour of physical education between college freshmen and college seniors. College freshmen significantly underestimated the actual academic rigour of physical education programs compared to seniors (Thomas & Bolen). Therefore, students entering the CEGEP system may be unaware of the true rigour of physical and outdoor education programming.

Hensley's (2000) study with respect to the status of physical education programs in colleges and universities revealed both an interesting trend in enrolment rates over

time and the scope of outdoor education within physical education. Between 1968 and 1998 (a 30 year period), the percentage of institutions with a required physical education component decreased 30 percent. With respect to institution size, smaller institutions (<1000 students) had a significantly higher physical education requirement than larger institutions (>20,000 students). When examining the distribution of activities in basic physical education instruction programs, Hensley found that outdoor education components comprised only four percent of course offerings, while team sports represented 14%, individual sports 26%, and fitness 31%. A general decline in college level physical education is concomitant with Noble's (1995) assertion of a declining interest in outdoor education, as well as Potter & Henderson's (2004) recognition of declining resources and course offerings.

The prevalence of obesity has also had an impact on physical activity (Swinburn & Egger, 2004), physical education, and outdoor education (Noble, 1995). "In the past two decades, the number of overweight American children has doubled. The number of overweight adolescents has tripled" (Winterfield, 2004). Similar to American trends, the prevalence of adolescent obesity in Canada tripled over the past 25 years (Shields, 2005). A recent Canadian community health survey indicates that 82% of Canadian youth are not active enough to meet the international guidelines for optimal growth and development (Statistics Canada, 2003).

The causes include the heavy promotion of fast food, energy dense snacks, and high sugar drinks to children, the low cost and large servings of said foods, and urban designs that inhibit active transportation and active recreation (Swinburn & Egger, 2004). Lack of physical activity is a major component of the obesity crisis affecting youth.

Concurrently, an increasingly inactive population has impacted participation rates in physical activity and education (Swinburn & Egger). “This global epidemic, coined ‘globesity’, has been associated with profound changes in our way of life that have increased the exposure of youth to calorically dense foods and sedentary recreational past times” (Gibbons & Naylor, 2007, p. 9).

Technology has played a significant role in childhood obesity (Shields, 2006). There is a direct correlation between the amount of screen time (time spent viewing television, video game, and/or computer screens) a youngster is exposed to and the risk of physical health issues including obesity (Dennison, Erb, & Jenkins, 2002). Children with higher screen time are clearly at higher risk for obesity and exhibit lower physical fitness levels (Harrison, Burns, McGuinness, Heslin, & Murphy, 2006). Canadian children who log more than two hours a day of screen time are twice as likely to be overweight/obese than those who total an hour or less (Shields, 2006). Trends are similar for Canadian adolescents with those with over 30 hours a week of screen time exhibiting a 50% higher overweight/obesity rate than those who log less than 10 hours per week (Shields).

Schools offer an opportune environment to counteract childhood and youth rates of obesity. Although school personnel often support health promotion, barriers include lack of time, knowledge, and resources (Raine, 2004). In addition, physical education in the school setting is often viewed by the public as being of negligible value in comparison to reading, writing, and arithmetic; a reality of the “back to the basics” movement (Humbert, 2005; Miller, 1988). “In Alberta, reductions in educational funding and a ‘back to basics’ mentality have resulted in reduced support for outdoor and environmental education” (Lund, 1998, p. 33). In the CEGEP system, the required

number of physical education courses dropped from four to three. However, the recent resurgence of physical activity in Ontario and Alberta schools, mandated by the provincial governments, highlights the public's increasing awareness of health issues, in particular obesity. In fact, Humbert offers that, recently the call to increase physical activity levels of all Canadians has never been stronger. According to Gerard Kennedy (2004), Ontario Minister of Education, "Our schools need to be in the business of helping students reach their full intellectual, emotional, and physical potential" (Ministry of Education, 2004). There is, however, in this mandate, a clear movement toward increased physical activity and not necessarily increased physical education. At the CEGEP level, this may equate to students looking for more physical activity based course offerings or outdoor pursuits rather than true physical or outdoor education based courses.

### *Summary*

The review of the literature examined factors that demonstrate a potential to effect change in outdoor education programming. Three areas were explored: a growing human disconnect with nature, student change, and physical education which included a decreasing societal value on physical activity, student alienation, and an obesity crisis. A growing human disconnect with nature has reduced children's experiences in the outdoors leaving them ill prepared for outdoor education programming. Student change which was demonstrated by the prevalence of a declining interest in physical education, apathy, and ADHD can potentially impact enrolment and general interest in outdoor education programs. A decreasing physical activity rate, alienation, and rising obesity can

affect participation in outdoor education to the extent that programs may need to change in order to meet the needs and capacities of a changed student population.

## Chapter 3

### *Methodology*

“At first, there can be fear, hesitancy, and skepticism about the value and purpose of research... in outdoor education. However, if conducted professionally, feedback about the results can increase staff understanding and be used to improve program design...” (Neill, 1997a, p. 5). In light of its descriptive and exploratory nature, this study employed qualitative research methodology to examine programming changes in outdoor education in the Quebec CEGEP system during the last 20-30 years. Qualitative research methodology has been described as an umbrella through which the researcher can collect a variety of data and frame it with respect to investigating the complexity of a topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Likewise, qualitative research methods can be used to gain an understanding of a phenomenon about which little is yet known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Presently, anecdotal evidence suggests a shift in outdoor education programming, yet little is known about the extent and complexity of this change. Qualitative methodology offered an ideal lens through which to examine this issue.

### *Research Design*

The case study approach was employed for this study as it pays special attention to completeness in observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the case under study (Zonabend, 1992). In this study, changes in outdoor education programming in English Quebec CEGEPs during the last 20-30 years were explored. The instrumental case study best describes my research design as it is intended to provide insight into an existing issue (Stake, 2000), thus building on anecdotal evidence presented in the literature.

Additionally, a holistic approach was adopted as it maintains that cases are situational and influenced by happenings of many kinds (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Hence, in-depth interviews with key informants and gaining multiple perceptions (from a number of teachers and institutions working within the same context) to clarify meaning, and verify consistency of observations and interpretations (Stake) were instrumental in gaining this holistic perspective. Triangulation was established through verifying interview data in combination with the analysis of research documents specific to the CEGEP context and document analysis of curriculum documents, pedagogical documents, course timetables, and course descriptions.

An emerging design and inductive analysis was the most suitable framework for this research project as it is less involved in over-emphasized rules and procedures (Creswell, 2005). Instead, the emerging design allows for themes to emerge from the data rather than using specific preset categories (Glaser, 1992). Data were gathered to the point of saturation, the point at which no more new or varied data could be identified (Creswell). This involved verifying issues that arose from later sources with earlier participants.

### *Setting*

The research sites selected for the study were the four English language CEGEPs on the island of Montreal (John Abbott College, Marianopolis College, Dawson College, and Vanier College). Interviews took place with experienced outdoor educators at each of these institutions. The four institutions were first established between 1969 and 1971 as

the Quebec education board established the CEGEP system. The four institutions are currently home to approximately 20,000 students each year (Barquin, 2007).

### *Ethical Considerations*

All research was conducted in accordance with the ethics procedures and guidelines set forth by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. I received ethics approval from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board in February 2008. Additionally, formal research approval was obtained, as required, through separate ethics proposals at two of the CEGEPs involved in this study, while approval was granted by Academic Deans at the remaining two institutions. Prior to data collection, participants were given the cover letter (Appendix A) describing the purpose of the research project and subsequently signed the informed consent form (Appendix B).

My own ethical practices included creating a research environment that, to some extent, can be regarded as participatory. Participants were included in the research throughout its process and given the opportunity to comment beyond the questions asked during the interviews. Additionally, I returned to them on multiple occasions to seek clarifications, additions, and validation; and made myself available for participants to contact me at any time for any issue, thus employing the strength of participatory research in establishing reliability and validity (Thomas & O' Kane, 1999). The result is that through their involvement in this study participants are giving back to the field of outdoor education.

### *Participant Selection*

A common approach in qualitative research is to purposefully select participants, sites, and documents that will best aid the researcher in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2003). Purposeful sampling was employed in selecting participants.

Purposeful sampling involves identifying individuals who are information rich in order to gain an understanding of a central phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Additionally, I sought representation from both male and female outdoor educators. With this in mind individuals identified as information rich were teachers who had 20+ years of experience teaching outdoor education at the CEGEP level. I approached well connected experienced teachers in the CEGEP system in order to assist me in identifying participants who met the selection criteria. For case study research, Creswell (2007) recommends including 4-5 cases in a single study. The sample, therefore, was comprised of 1-2 teachers per institution in the Montreal area for a total of six participants with an average of 25 years of experience teaching at the CEGEP level. Participants were both male and female outdoor educators, although the majority were male (4 of 6) due to the unequal representation of gender in outdoor education positions (Humberstone, 1990; Neill, 1997b).

### *Data Collection*

Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews, analysis of research documents specific to the CEGEP context, and document analysis including curriculum documents, pedagogical documents, course timetables, and course descriptions. I conducted one-on-one, in person, interviews. Interviews are purposeful conversations used to gather

descriptive data with respect to insight on how the participant views the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Audio taped semi-structured interviews were comprised of open-ended questions reflecting aspects of the research questions. Interviews allowed for a guided conversation and served to assist participants in exploring and verbalizing intuitive perceptions with respect to change in outdoor education programming and the factors that contribute to said changes.

Interviews were performed sequentially from one CEGEP to the next. For example, one participant from each GEGEP was interviewed prior to conducting a second round of interviews in the same institutions. This ensured that constant comparative data analysis was not immediately skewed by the perceptions of participants at one particular institution. This rotation process continued until data saturation was reached. The interview process focused on investigating the research questions: How has the Quebec CEGEP system's outdoor education programming changed since the early 1980s and what factors have contributed to these identified changes?

Due to the intuitive nature of perceptions of change, themes emerging from interview data were presented to study participants for validation. Triangulation was achieved through interviews of individuals from multiple institutions within the research framework as well as through analysis of research documents specific to the CEGEP context, and document analysis (e.g., curriculum documents, pedagogical documents, course timetables, and course descriptions) made available through direct contact with research participants during the interview process.

*Interview*

An interview guide was used for the interviews (see Appendix C). It was pilot tested for clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness with an outdoor educator from a CEGEP not included in the research sample. The result was that some of the questions took significant time for the participant to conceptualize answers due to their intuitive nature. Thus I found it would be beneficial to provide the participants with a sense of the questions prior to meeting with them, in order for them to be better prepared and better able to fully express their views during the interview. I relayed this information to the participants via telephone while scheduling interviews.

Interviews were based on Patton's (2002) model of a general interview guide, as a means of ensuring consistency and efficiency. This approach allowed for consistency across participants, limited the issues to be explored, and kept interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives to emerge (Patton).

The six interviews ranged in length from one hour to an hour and forty-five minutes. The average interview length was one hour and twenty minutes. Questioning followed the structure of the interview guide and was consistent throughout the process. Participants were often probed to elaborate with respect to responses to a given question, however, after each probe, questioning resumed following the guide. Additionally, themes emerging from earlier interviews were presented in later interviews for comment and validation. Subsequently, themes emerging in later interviews were also presented to earlier participants via telephone for comment and validation.

*Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness of results was attained through a number of elements. Data were gathered from two sources: interviews and documents. Documents were used to validate interview data where appropriate as well as provide additional data. A consistent interview technique was maintained throughout data collection through the use of an interview guide (see Appendix C). I returned to interview participants a total of four times with additional questions and returned transcripts and findings in order to validate themes and gain additional data. Last, I noted reflexivity, as I recognized my own contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the research process.

*Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method which involved “gathering data, sorting it into categories, collecting additional information, and comparing the new information with emerging categories” (Creswell, 2005, p. 406). The constant comparative method is an inductive approach in which theory emerges from the bottom up, through many pieces of collected information building an interconnected theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell). Following the constant comparative method, data were analyzed after each interview in order to begin building themes as data collection continued. To aid this process, a flow chart of categories and subsequent themes was created in order to clearly organize the emerging data. The constant comparative method is noted as a zigzag process of gathering data in the field, analyzing the data, returning to the field to gather more data, analyzing again, and so on (Creswell).

The analysis involved three levels of coding. Initial indicators derived from transcript data were grouped then compared across the data set in order to identify potential codes. The codes were, toward the end of the analysis, when data saturation was reached, grouped into broader categories in order to facilitate the development of a theory with respect to the research questions (Creswell, 2005). Glaser's steps in the constant comparative method were used and are described below:

1. Begin data collection.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories of focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus, with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories.
4. Write about the categories you are exploring, attempting to describe and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents.
5. Work with the data and emerging model to discover the basic social processes and relationships.
6. Engage in sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 67).

Although the above description is an organized series of steps, it must be noted that the process happened simultaneously and continually doubled back to both data collection and coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This process continued prior to each interview during the data collection process until data saturation was reached. Document analysis was continued until triangulation of interview data was complete. This involved

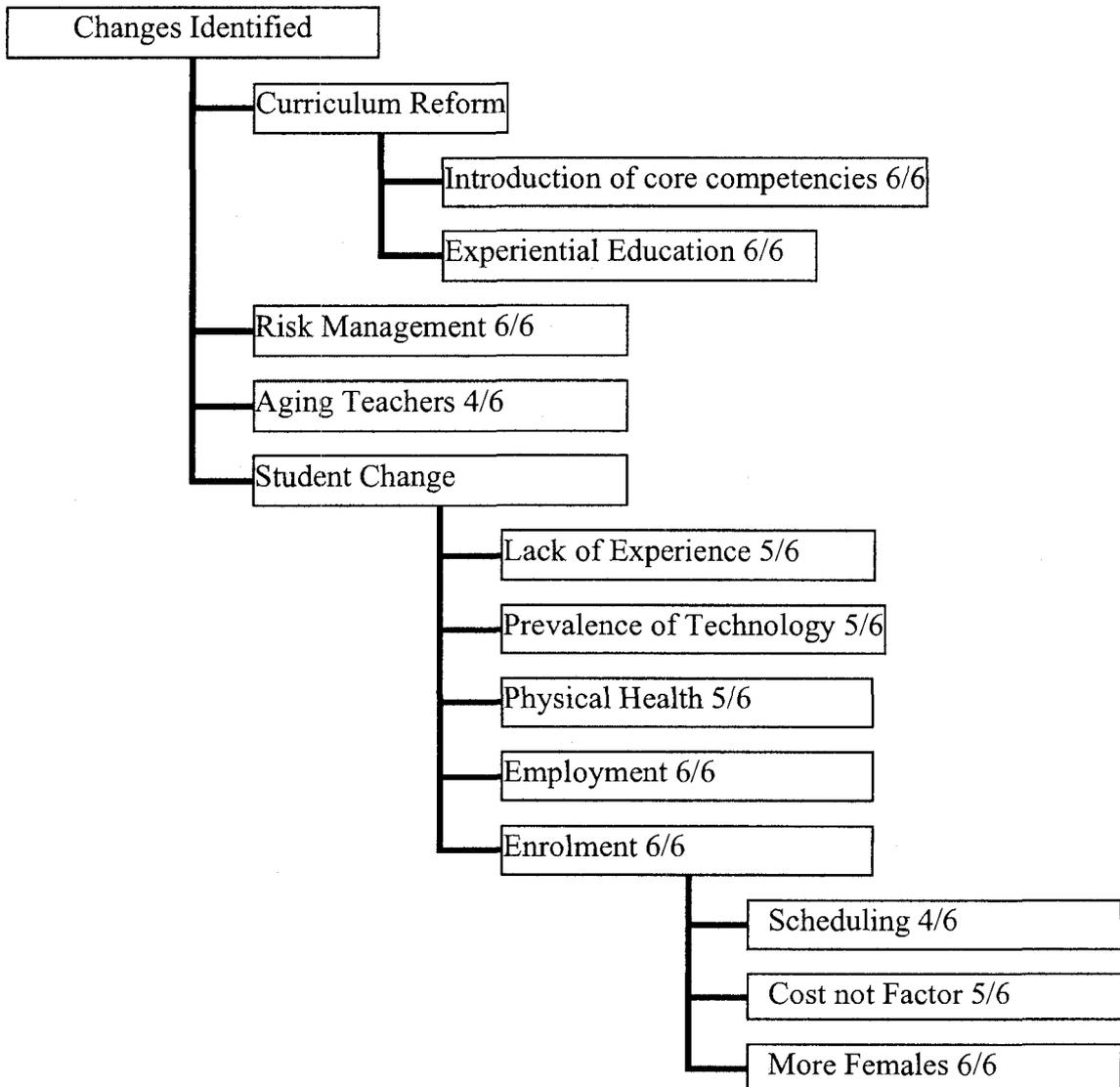
verifying themes and historical accounts from interview data with information presented in research documents, curriculum documents, pedagogical documents, course timetables, and course descriptions.

Additionally, small edits were made to participant quotes in order to enhance their readability. For example: “*We’ve struggled with it for sure. Nobody likes change. Everybody likes to stay where their comfort zone is. But we’re trying to recognize the long term of what they are getting at*” (Claire, Interview #4) has been modified to become: “*We’ve struggled with it for sure. Nobody likes change. Everybody likes to stay [within] their comfort zone.... But we’re trying to recognize the long term [benefit] of what they [the reforms] are getting at*” (Claire, Interview #4). As a result, readability has been strengthened while maintaining the participant’s meaning.

## Chapter 4

### *Findings & Discussion*

Presented here are the research findings of this study on the changing climate of outdoor education. Four major themes emerged from the data: curriculum reform, risk management, aging teachers, and student change. The complete thematic breakdown is presented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Thematic organization of findings.

The numbers associated with each theme represent the proportion of research participants identifying it as a significant change.

Chapter four will first examine the history and effects of curriculum reform, and then explore risk management, aging teachers, and student change over the same time period. Themes are presented in order of their significance.

### *Curriculum Reform*

The most significant change in CEGEP outdoor education programming, identified by all of the research participants, is the introduction of the core competencies approach to curriculum and evaluation, and the rise of experiential pedagogy as a result of the curriculum reforms of the mid-1990s. Claire noted that “*the reforms changed everything*” (Interview #4).

Over the last 30 years, the CEGEP system has undergone a number of significant curriculum reforms. The most significant with respect to physical education were the Robillard and Garon reforms of the mid-1990s. The history of CEGEP physical education and outdoor education, however, begins with the creation of the CEGEP system in the late 1960s. During the 1970s, influenced by a physical fitness craze, students were required to take four physical education courses to graduate (Normandeau, 2006). From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, physical education programming was decentralized allowing individual departments to develop their own objectives and programming in accordance with available resources (Grenier, 2006; Normandeau). In 1988 the first ministerial program objectives were developed for physical education. Although relatively minor, they began the standardization of physical education across the CEGEP

system. These were the only objectives to be adopted before the introduction of the competencies based approach to programming in the mid-1990s (Grenier).

Yvon described outdoor education curriculum prior to 1988: “*There was a lot of freedom in both the curriculum and pedagogy*” (Interview #1). Outdoor education course offerings varied significantly from one institution to the next and included “*canoeing, hiking, ... sleeping in quinzees, igloos, wilderness camping... [and] bicycle touring*” (Karl, Interview #3). “*Open country, map and compass, shelter building, climbing, canoeing, backpacking, canoe camping, small watercraft, [and] wind surfing*” (Mike, Interview #5) were courses offered at another CEGEP.

In 1992, 25 years after creating the CEGEP system, the Quebec Liberal government convened a Parliamentary Commission on the future of CEGEPs (Lorimier & Drapeau, 2002). Feedback, mainly from rural areas, maintained that it was essential to preserve the CEGEP system. As a result, the Liberals took the decision to reform the system rather than abolish it (Lorimier & Drapeau). The first of said reforms was the Robillard reform, which in 1993 under then Minister of Education, Lucienne Robillard, attempted to remove physical education from the general education curriculum of the CEGEP system (Normadeau, 2006). When the reform was ratified in 1994 it reduced the physical education requirement from four to two courses and introduced the core competencies approach to programming (Normandeau). As a result, the CEGEP physical education community was in a frenzy.

*The Minister tried to cut physical education from four to two [courses]. As teachers across the province we went to our students and they came back and said ‘we love Phys. Ed., we want Phys. Ed.’ It was really shocking because for some reason as a teacher you’re always thinking you’re sort of shoving it down their throats a little bit... But it was a real eye opener. Anyway, as a result of all that data collection, we ended up*

*putting pressure on the government and they settled on three. Two would have been a disaster for programs and for teachers; there would have been lots of jobs lost. (Mike, Interview #5)*

“As a result of support shown by students, promotional activities and lobbying efforts by physical educators and support from the health care community the subsequent reform increased the physical education component” (Dawson College Physical Education, 1998, p. 3). The Garon Reform of 1995, under Minister of Education, Jean Garon, added a third course to the two competencies based courses created by the Robillard Reform (Normandeau, 2006).

The implementation of the two reforms was somewhat overlapping and as a result increased the level of complexity and confusion for both teachers and students (Dawson College Physical Education, 1998). The reform strategies of the government during this period caused significant damage to the CEGEP system (Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante [ASSE], 2003), in that it left educators somewhat unsupported in making the change. Claire noted the difficulties of making the change: *“We’ve struggled with it for sure. Nobody likes change. Everybody likes to stay [within] their comfort zone.... But we’re trying to recognize the long term [benefit] of what [the reforms] are getting at”* (Interview #4). The introduction of the core competencies approach was the most significant change as a result of the reforms and the most difficult for teachers to adjust to.

#### *Introduction of core competencies.*

Prior to the reforms, CEGEP physical education curriculum concerned itself with the regular practice of physical activity with a distinct focus on psychomotor skill

development (Grenier, 2006). With the arrival of the core competencies, the challenge for physical educators was to add health and well-being into the existing curriculum (Gouvernement du Quebec, 1998). In essence, Physical Education transformed into Health and Physical Education (Grenier). Additionally, teaching shifted from an objective based curriculum to a competency based curriculum that recognizes prior learning and designs future learning experiences to fill in the gaps (Lorimier & Drapeau, 2002). Claire highlighted the challenges for teachers.

*For many, many years, we didn't think it was the right thing. It was competencies based. We didn't get it. We had been trained traditionally ourselves. There was nobody really around who said: 'these are what your courses should be, these are what your objectives should be, this is how you should teach it, this is how you should evaluate it'. So we were learning as we went. (Interview #4)*

Educators were ill prepared to deliver the new health component using the competency based curriculum, and following the reform none of Quebec's universities offered training courses to prepare future physical educators to work with the new curricular model (Grenier, 2006). The ministry itself only produced a pedagogical guide for teachers to interpret the reforms in 2006 (Normandeau, 2006), eight years after the reforms were fully implemented.

*The ministry handed out... a guide pédagogique [pedagogical guide] so that everybody, all of the CEGEPs, were [sic] on the same track with interpreting the reforms. It's been since '93. So we're talking a long time that people have been struggling with this. And they came out with very clear explanations as to what the courses should be and what types of courses should be in each of the different ensembles [groupings]. I mean, we were all over the place. We were doing all kinds of things a bit different. (Claire, Interview #4)*

The core competencies approach is delivered through three courses. The first course, 103, is Health and Physical Education. The second course, 104, is Physical

Activity Skills. And the last, 105, is called Active Living and combines skills from the other two courses (Karl, Interview #3). Mike noted the challenges of fitting outdoor education into the new competencies structure,

*We really had to restructure outdoor education and fit the new 103, 104, 105. Now the first one is lifestyles, intro, a wide variety of things. Plus let's take a look at nutrition, fitness, and stress management. Then the 104 skills was like the old level 1, so there was an easy transfer there; Skills, rock climbing, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, a variety of stuff. Then 105: plan, manage, and assess. The trip courses are perfect. Find your program, live it, manage it. They [the courses] are not related in terms of the outdoor ed. component. (Interview #5)*

In terms of course curriculum in outdoor education, this meant adding the health curriculum to the existing activity curriculum all within the same time frame. Expressions of frustration in trying to insert the health curriculum were noted among the majority of participants:

*"You can't do it if you don't have time. You got 30 hours? Forget it. We'll go winter camping, we'll have fun, we'll learn about how to do it and we'll say good bye. Give me 15 more hours". (Yvon, Interview #1)*

Nancy explained the challenge of adding a health component to the predominantly activity based curriculum,

*The challenge is that we throw all of it at them at the same time. They have a 30-hour course; they need to keep a physical activity program going to get ready for the hike or whatever they're doing. We need to help them design that program and carry it out. Interact with them to understand and get them involved in carrying out the trip.... So there's the aspect of the skills that they need on the trip, there's the aspect of the planning, the whole team, and the interaction with all of the different members of the group. It's a huge amount to get it all in, in 30 hours. (Interview #2)*

Mike added that "none of those courses are long enough to actually academically touch the subject" (Interview #5). Hence, "the core competencies have taken away some of the meat of outdoor education" (Yvon, Interview #1).

The last aspect of the introduction of the core competencies is that it has eliminated upper level courses in specific outdoor education activities that built on previous course experience. For example *“there used to be a level one/level two system. Where in order to get into level two rock [climbing] you had to have done level one rock [climbing]. That model didn’t fit into core competencies anymore”* (Mike, Interview #5). *“Everything is general. Once a student has done an activity and they want to get more into it, they have to go somewhere else to get that”* (Karl, Interview #3). *“I know one thing. When we eliminated that level one/level two, it eliminated a core of interested people. It kind of homogenized everybody. Those people would support each other and take it to the next level. That doesn’t happen anymore”* (Mike, Interview #5).

The greatest impact of the reform was the reduction of physical education course offerings by 25% (four courses to three). In order to investigate the impact of this reduction on outdoor education programming, I collected data on course offerings through the analysis of archived course time tables at each of the four institutions. I made a historical comparison of the total number of physical education courses offered versus the number of outdoor education courses offered. This involved counting physical education courses and identifying outdoor education courses in the archived course timetables. The quantity of data available at each institution varied as a result of the quality and scale of archives available. At some institutions, records were stored by the administration. While at others, department heads or senior staff members had records in storage. As a result, data from the last 15 through 30 years was collected depending on the institution (see Figure 2).

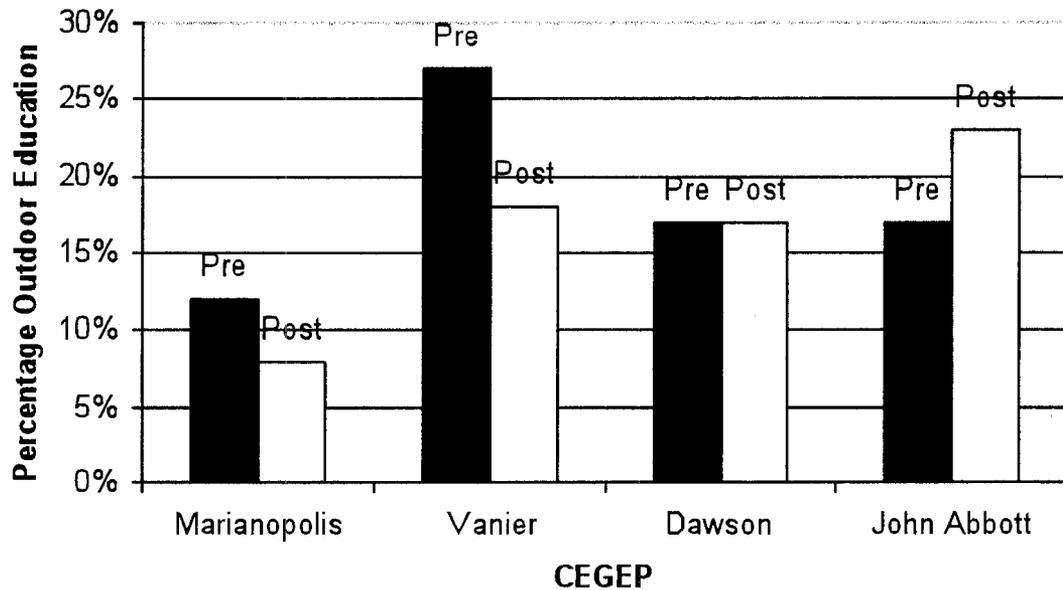


Figure 2. Percentage of physical education course offerings in outdoor education: Pre- and Post-reform.

Both Marianopolis College and Vanier College experienced a 33% reduction in the percentage of outdoor education course offerings in physical education. Dawson College's outdoor education course offering percentage remained constant at 17%, while John Abbott College increased their outdoor education course offerings by 35%.

In order to gain an understanding of these shifts, I returned to the interview participants to seek an explanation. The reasons for these shifts are as unique as the institutions at which they occurred. Marianopolis College staff found it difficult to fit some of its outdoor education courses into the new course curriculum layout. As a result, very few outdoor education courses were placed in the 103 grouping thus reducing course numbers (Interview<sup>1</sup>). At Vanier College, which saw a similar 33% decline in outdoor education course offerings, staff didn't feel as constrained by the new guidelines. *"It was not a problem trying to make outdoor education fit the reform. We just did what we*

*wanted*” (Interview<sup>1</sup>). Instead, the decline at Vanier College is attributed to an increase in condensed walking courses, which became more popular as a result of staff interest, during the mid-1990s reform time period, and the reduction in the number of courses of an introductory outdoor education program for youth at risk at the direction of the administration (Interview<sup>1</sup>). Dawson College’s stable percentage was the result of “*a concerted effort to keep similar representation*” (Interview<sup>1</sup>). The Dawson College staff made a conscious effort to maintain its course offering percentage in outdoor education in order to maintain a variety of courses for students as well as out of respect for the expertise of its teachers (Interview<sup>1</sup>). Last, John Abbott College, which was the only institution to see an increase in its outdoor education course offerings, shifted due to teacher seniority. Teachers with the least seniority were made redundant. As a result of a seniority right within the CEGEP system, an outdoor education specialist from another institution moved to John Abbott College and began adding outdoor education courses to the offerings (Interview<sup>1</sup>).

Since the reforms, outdoor education course offerings represent 8 to 23 percent of the physical education curriculum at the four CEGEPs examined. This is significantly higher than the four percent representation of outdoor education course offerings in basic college physical education instruction programs in the United States reported by Hensley (2000). Thus indicating that, regardless of the shifts, outdoor education representation within the CEGEP system remains seemingly healthy.

*Experiential education.*

Pedagogical practice in physical and outdoor education also changed significantly as a result of the curriculum reforms. Mike described his pedagogy prior to the reforms.

*I can remember courses where we'd take [students] away, prepare them, go out experience it, backpacking, canoe camping, what ever it was. We'd come back Sunday night, get off the bus and everybody would go: "Wasn't that a great course? Yeah, a great course. Okay, thanks a lot see you later" and the course is over. That's the way it was done. (Interview #5)*

The core competencies based approach transformed the teacher's role as it shifted the focus from a teaching model to more of a learning model (Gauthier, 2006; Lorimier & Drapeau, 2002) whereby responsibility for learning was shifted to the student in order to promote autonomy and greater involvement in the learning process (Dawson College Physical Education, 1998). This shift is part of a global trend in curriculum reform over the last 20 years that has seen a significant shift in pedagogy (Gauthier). Nationally, the reform focus for schools included extensive changes in curriculum using essential outcomes (core competencies) as a guide (Anderson, 2000). Karl explained how the core competencies transformed the classroom.

*It puts the student more in a leadership position.... You're giving the student more impact and independence.... The teacher takes on a role referred to as 'a resource person'. ... Students have the opportunity to teach a skill and evaluate each other in the course. ...That's a big change in the design of the course. (Interview #3)*

Nancy described how her pedagogy changed,

*I expect [the students] to bring a lot of the course material to their fellow students. That has changed a lot. Before, I would be doing more of that. Direct-teaching versus student-driven. There's a lot more peer teaching. A lot more experiential teaching. (Interview #2)*

Mike added,

*It's gone from follow the leader to the structure of experiential learning, and the biggest component of that is the processing. That's the biggest change for me. I used to just lead it and wave goodbye. Then I got into the experiential way. (Interview #2)*

Mike and Nancy's comments highlight a shift toward experiential learning techniques and experiential education. Experiential education is defined as "a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values" (AEE, 2007). An important aspect of experiential education is the process of focused reflection (Kolb, 1984; Priest & Gass, 2005). In the CEGEP system, "*reflection and processing have become a bigger part of our pedagogy*" (Karl, Interview, #6).

This knowledge of experiential education techniques, however, was neither used nor acknowledged by the majority of research participants prior to the reform. The extent to which experiential techniques are being employed by teachers varies significantly from one individual to the next. Some have seen their pedagogy change as a result of the reform whose curriculum requires teachers to provide more student-driven learning experiences in both the classroom and the field; while others have concomitantly become more familiar and proficient with experiential education techniques through personal interest.

*I learned about experiential learning and realized that's what I'd been working in for all those years. I was still, even then, using a bunch of those techniques, but there was no idea or understanding of it, it just seemed to work better that way. And then you start to understand it as an effective learning tool. So you start to reshuffle the course so that it is all those things. In other words, you're trying to stay out of the way. And you go through the angst of 'well you're not really teaching unless you're telling and showing and all that'. That was a hard adjustment, just to let it evolve and then learning from the process of the experience. (Mike, Interview #5)*

### *Risk Management*

The second major theme identified is risk management. All of the research participants agreed that risk management was a significant change in outdoor education programming. *“Risk management has been a big change”* (Nancy, Interview #2). *“Now we’re more focused from a risk management point of view”* (Mike, Interview #5). *“There’s a bigger focus on safety”* (Karl, Interview #3). *“We’ve got a lot more risk management”* (Peter, Interview #6).

Risk management in the CEGEP system has seen significant change over the last 30 years. In fact, the English CEGEPs of Montreal have been assembling a combined risk management plan for the last few years. The document, which is close to completion, will serve as a basis for general policy while each CEGEP will maintain its own procedure within the guidelines of said policy (Nancy, Interview #2). The pressure to develop a risk management plan in the CEGEP system arose primarily as a result of an incident in which a student died during an outdoor education course at John Abbott College in the late 1990s. *“Risk management is societal. More institutions are aware of what happened [at John Abbott College] so they ask: ‘What am I going to do about it?’ To make sure we are acting responsibly to avoid undue risk”* (Nancy, Interview #2).

A heightened focus on risk management has been an institutional and industry wide trend in outdoor education and recreation over the last 20 years. This is the result of an increase in litigation in outdoor adventure settings (Attarian, 2001). Although lawsuits are far more common in the United States, the trend is also being felt here in Canada (Potter & Henderson, 2004). Risk management in Canada was brought to the forefront by two particular accidents: The 1978 Lake Timiskaming disaster in which 12 boys and one

leader drowned, and the 2003 Roger Pass avalanche that killed 7 high school students (Potter & Henderson). The result is an increase in risk management planning, policies, procedures, regulations, and insurance. The future of outdoor education will require even more aggressive risk management in order to avoid lawsuits and build stronger safety systems (Attarian).

The increasing relevance of risk management in CEGEP outdoor education has impacted both departmental policies and teachers' practice in both the classroom and the field. *"In the steps that we take as far as teaching goes it has made a difference"* (Karl, Interview #3). Teachers provide students with more information in the classroom in order to better prepare them for the variety of risks they may encounter in the field (Karl, Interview, #3). This includes denying a student participation in field activities if he/she is not adequately prepared or lacks a necessary piece of equipment.

At the policy level, a number of areas have seen considerable change, although this change is not consistent from one institution to the next. It should be noted that the following examples are general trends within the CEGEP system, but do not represent all institutions examined in this study. An increasing awareness of vehicle safety and liability has allowed institutions to better examine their transportation policies and use. Generally, there has been a move away from the use of 15-passenger vans and private vehicles out of both safety and insurance liability concerns (Claire, Interview #4). The length of travel to and from program locations has typically decreased to minimize risk. This includes avoiding border crossings due to increased regulations and insurance issues (Claire, Interview #4). The CEGEPS have also moved much of their field work to the Quebec National Park System<sup>2</sup> as a venue. The parks offer a variety of facilities and

services including emergency rescue that aid in reducing risk in the field (Mike, Interview #5). Additionally, across all institutions, there has been an increase in the required certification level of both instructors and most notably field assistants with respect to first aid. The days of bringing a high-achieving student as an assistant are gone in place of individuals with certifications and experience (Claire, Interview #4). In fact, advanced wilderness first aid certifications are becoming the standard (Potter & Henderson, 2004).

It is clear from the changes outlined that risk management planning has a significantly stronger presence in CEGEP outdoor education programming than it did 20+ years ago. For today's instructors, risk management planning is integral to outdoor education programming.

### *Aging Teachers*

Aging teachers is the third major theme identified in this study. All of the research participants agreed that they themselves have changed as a result of their age and experience over the last 20-30 years. All of the research participants have over 20 years of experience working in CEGEP outdoor education programming and ranged in age from mid 40s to mid 60s. Their practice has been shaped by their experience and maturity. *"The maturity of teachers has brought better teaching, a more balanced perspective, and stronger risk management"* (Peter, Interview #6). Ryan and Kokol (1988) note that as teachers age, they modify their teaching methods as a result of their experience, especially teachers who are beyond their mid-career reflective period, which often leads to the most profound change in teaching methods. For study participants this

reflection has allowed them to modify their teaching methods to better match student and program requirements as well as their own abilities, strengths, and weaknesses.

Additionally, the effects of age on the body have had their impact on teachers and what they are able to do in the field. *“We’ve changed. We’ve gotten older, more aches and pains.... Our bodies are definitely in our 40s and 50s... feeling the effects of our 20s and 30s. I think we’ve all had surgeries for various things”* (Claire, Interview #4). Mike added, *“I’m getting older and it hurts more”* (Interview #5). In some instances these effects combined with the physical rigor of working as an outdoor educator on a daily basis have led to burnout (Yvon, Interview #1). For outdoor educators this includes long work hours, time away from home, and difficulty maintaining relationships (Thomas, 2001). In fact, many outdoor educators have succumbed to the combination of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting in burnout (Birrell, Gray, & Chapman, 2001; Priest & Gass, 2005). For study participants, however, this is not necessarily the case as they are still working in the CEGEP system. Many teachers, due to their changing physical capacities, have had to make small changes either in the particular courses they choose to teach or aspects of field work they no longer feel comfortable leading. Examples include choosing not to demonstrate activities beyond their current physical capacities. Participants note, however, that the changes they have made as a result of physical constraints are virtually imperceptible to the students (Claire, Interview #4).

### *Student Change*

The final major theme identified is student change. All of the research participants agreed that students have changed. Claire emphasized that, *“The students have changed drastically”* (Interview #4). Student change can be viewed within the larger context of socio-cultural change. In the last 20-30 years, society itself has changed considerably, affecting students in all aspects of their lives. Claire elaborated on the complexity of this change: *“It’s not specific to our school. It’s not specific to our city. It’s societal. There are a lot of factors involved”* (Interview #4). Factors include technology, work, and lack of experience in the outdoors (Claire, Interview #4). Part of the change has been an increasing societal pressure on the student. *“Certainly societal pressure on students and the students themselves have changed. There is a sense that they are almost bombarded with ‘what’s life all about?’ all the time, and that makes it difficult [for them] to focus on what [they] want”* (Nancy, Interview #2). This section will present the sub-themes of lack of experience in the outdoors, prevalence of technology, physical health, employment and student enrolment, and how they relate to student change.

#### *Lack of experience.*

Five of the six participants have observed a general reduction in students’ outdoor experience. *“I had a student in my last winter camping [course], she had never camped in her life. Period! And very often before we were getting students who had camped before so they were bringing some experiences with them”* (Karl, Interview #3). *“Last week in an intro course, cross country skiing... there were 30 of them. And out of 30 only 3 had ever been on skis before. They were absolute novices on skis”* (Mike, Interview

#5). These descriptions of lack of experience among students are consistent with Louv's (2005) description of a growing disconnect with nature and a lack of experience in natural settings which he calls Nature Deficit Disorder. Louv suggests that among the many potential causes, parenting is potentially the most relevant. The lack of experience in the outdoors of young adults is a direct result of parents not exposing them, as children, to nature-based recreation. Claire offered: *"They're not familiar with the outdoors like they may have been before because their family always had a cottage and, at least in the summers, they went there on the weekend.... [being outdoors is] very foreign, a bit uncomfortable, [and] a bit scary"* (Interview #4). Part of the parenting change is a change in parents themselves, which the majority of the research participants recognized as a contributing factor to a reduction of student's outdoor experience.

*"What's changed? Maybe it's the parents' perception. Whereas 15 or 20 years ago... the parents were experienced [in the outdoors] and so they could pass that experience on to their kids. But now, the culture has changed those parents too.... Now that everybody has 2 SUVs in the driveway they don't spend time with their kids.... 'TV will take care of the kids.... I don't have to take them skiing or I don't have to send them to camp in the summer.' I've seen the change for sure. (Mike, Interview #5)*

This is consistent with Louv's work which examines the combination of these factors in reducing children's experiences in the outdoors. He notes a decline in camping rates among people younger than thirty which he attributes to the fact that no one took them camping when they were kids. Reduced experience in the outdoors is equally a result of a growing sedentary lifestyle. *"I think families just don't go outside as much as they used to"* (Claire, Interview #4).

For the majority of the participants, family background is also perceived to play a role in the reduction of outdoor exposure and experience. *"Your students, whether it's the*

*multicultural background, they're not familiar with being outside at all*" (Claire, Interview #4). Yvon noted that *"we have a lot of first and second generation immigrants.... They don't have the kind of background [in outdoor recreation]"* (Interview #1) that non-immigrant students do. According to Hutchinson (1988) underparticipation in outdoor recreation among ethnic minorities is the result of cultural differences in values and expectations related to outdoor recreation experiences. Additionally, marginalized groups in society perceive more constraints to outdoor recreation participation than their counterparts (Johnson, Bowker, & Cordell, 2001). Generational status (first, second, or third generation immigrant) is equally relevant to participation in outdoor recreation as it provides an indication of the length and depth of exposure to a host country's culture and thereby determines the likelihood of participation (Carr & Williams, 1993). It is also linked with acculturation which involves the loss of traditional cultural traits and the acceptance of new ones (Carr & Williams). In essence, first and second generation immigrants are generally unfamiliar with traditional Canadian outdoor recreation, which includes backpacking, canoeing, climbing, skiing, snowshoeing, etc. (Searle & Brayley, 1999), and are therefore less likely to participate in such activities.

Parental fear has also played a role in the growing lack of experience in the outdoors. Claire noted,

*There's a fear as well. You just don't send your kids outside as much anymore to play, to go in the woods, to explore all those kinds of things. There was never a worry when we were kids doing that stuff. You took off and your parents didn't even know where you were, you came home you ate and you took off again. (Interview #4)*

Louv (2005) notes that fear, a large scale social phenomenon, has played a significant role in reducing children's experiences in the outdoors. The direct impact of parental fear is that children's lives are growing tighter, in that they have a narrower experience than they did 20+ years ago. As an example, the area in which the average nine-year-old plays has been reduced by 90% between 1970 and 1990 (Louv) thereby reducing children's experience outdoors.

Lastly, the media has played a role in reducing children's experiences in the outdoors, especially with respect to changed societal perceptions of outdoor education. *"It's been a real swing in the culture and it's sort of media driven"* (Mike, Interview #5). Mike elaborated on outdoor education in the media: *"What's the focus on now? Extreme games. Right? You don't see the Bill Mason show on TV; Going camping for the aesthetic beauty of nature and all that. That's not selling. They [the students] don't perceive it as exciting"* (Interview #5). Additionally, Yvon explained that students prefer to gain their outdoor experience from media rather than first-hand: *"I don't have to go do a survival experience. I watch 'Survivor' on TV all the time, I know what that's about"* (Interview #1). An over-dramatization of nature and outdoor activities in the media has led to a declining interest in the outdoors as a result of lack of perceived excitement (Louv, 2005). The result is a student who is less interested in pursuing outdoor experiences and hence has fewer "real" experiences in outdoor settings.

There is, however, some good news. Claire noted that in light of the change in students, *"that's what's more exciting and challenging with these courses now. You get kids in there [with very little experience] and you can show them things they'll never get*

anywhere else” (Interview #4). Yvon added that “*then they often turn around and say ‘how do I get more?’*” (Interview #1).

*Prevalence of technology.*

The prevalence of technology in society was recognized by five of the six research participants with respect to affecting student change. “*The internet, television and indoor recreation have been a significant factor*” (Yvon, Interview #1). Mike noted, “*I think students of that age just get more wrapped up in their culture. Their culture of electronics and their cultures of cinema and their cultures of music*” (Interview #5). Nancy added that “*it has made it more difficult for students to focus*” (Interview #2).

Part of the technological revolution is the need to be connected. “*There’s a need to be more connected to everything around them*” (Claire, Interview #4). As a result, there’s almost a sense of distress if the technology they are connected to doesn’t function. “*People want to be close to a cell phone.... When they are put in situations where there’s not a cell phone, there’s no electronic devices, somehow they seem a little lost*” (Karl, Interview #3). This need to be connected has had its effect on outdoor education programming. “*I have had a hard time when I say that there’s no electronic devices [permitted] on an outdoor education course*” (Karl, Interview #3). Mike elaborated that

*Given the opportunity they [students] would walk up the side of that mountain with music in their ears and they’d have a telephone so they could call somebody from the top of the hill. So you have to physically take that technology away from them.... It doesn’t punish them; it just allows them to be influenced by other things.* (Interview #5)

Rifkin (2002) acknowledges that the next generation is very different as a result of the prevalence of technology; students are developing a different kind of

connectedness. That connectedness is a consequence of the popularity of video games, computers, palm pilots, cell phones, and the internet (Rifkin). The result is that students aren't playing outside; they're inside playing video games (Louv, 2005).

Karl felt that the prevalence of technology in society has led to a decrease in physical activity. *"We are in an electronic age. People are sitting at their desk more. They're not as active... That's big, not being active"* (Interview #3). This is consistent with the connection between screen time and increased risk of obesity and declining physical health (Harrison et al., 2006; Shields, 2006) as well as Humbert's (2005) assertion that an assortment of technology promotes a sedentary lifestyle, which is connected with a host of health issues examined in the next section.

#### *Physical health.*

Five of the six research participants noted that students' *"amount of physical activity has decreased"* (Peter, Interview #6). *"Students aren't moving as much physically"* (Karl, Interview #3). Grenier (2006) found that 60% of CEGEP students are physically active less than one hour per week and 18.5% consider themselves not physically active at all. Chaisson (2000) found that 24% of students at CEGEP Lévis-Lauzon engaged in less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week. These findings are consistent with an increasingly inactive population described by Swinburn and Egger (2004).

As a result of decreasing physical activity, fitness levels have significantly declined.

*Any activity, what we can do or how much we can do or what intensity at which we can maintain, has dropped. You see that in fitness assessment results. Everyone is sliding down. The Canadian standardized fitness testing norms, pretty much the same norms, are still in place. In other words, there hasn't been an adjustment; they are still where they were. I can see the whole population dropping. Where 60% [of the students] used to be [classified as] average, 60% are now [classified as] fair. And that means that a larger group of them are poor or worse. (Nancy, Interview #2)*

Claire brought a similar perspective: *"We have standard fitness appraisal testing.*

*Whether it's the step test or the shuttle run, we've been doing this for 20 odd years. We have certainly seen that they just can't do what they used to do" (Interview #4). "I have some students that have a hard time doing [one] push up" (Karl, Interview #3). A study completed at CEGEP Lévis-Lauzon in 1999 shows that student fitness has deteriorated significantly since 1981. Over the 19 year period examined, aerobic capacity decreased 14% in males and 3% in females (Chaisson, 2000). Additionally, with regard to a "sliding down" of fitness levels, the students who scored in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in 1999 would have been classed in the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in 1981 (Chaisson). Similarly, the proportion of students with a body composition classification of "at risk" for health issues has increased from 25% to 55% among males and from 30% to 40% among females since 1981 (Chaisson).*

Mike, contrary to other research participants' assertion of declining student fitness, felt that,

*Today's student is a little more tuned in on the need for physical fitness. I believe it's true but I know I could get in a big argument [with my colleagues] on that. I believe its media driven because everywhere you*

*look people are wearing tight clothes and people are working out and going to the gym". (Interview #5)*

There may, however, be a disparity between wanting to look fit and being fit. According to Grenier (2006) 50% of CEGEP students are less than occasionally physically active, but have the intention of becoming more physically active in the next six months. An intention to change a behaviour is classified as the second of six stages of behaviour change (O'Connor, 1994). This second stage, called contemplation, is the stage in which participants seriously intend to change in the next six months, yet on average they remain in this stage for at least 2 years (Prochaska & Marcus, 1994); whether or not students' intentions will be carried out remains to be seen.

Students' reduced health related fitness has impacted outdoor education programming.

*It's just that people are not able to do the same intensity as long. So we have to kind of move everything down. Where as we used to hike with a full pack and camped somewhere along the trail, now we are doing more base-camping and hiking with a lighter pack. ...It's a different experience for sure. (Nancy, Interview #2)*

Outdoor education programs have been forced to adjust activity levels and experiences in order to meet the needs of a less active student population.

#### *Employment.*

All of the research participants agreed that students in the CEGEP system are working more while pursuing their studies. *"It seems that more and more of them are working. Twenty years ago there was definitely not the same amount of students working. It has gone up and the number of hours worked by students has also gone up"* (Nancy, Interview #2). According to Roy's (2003a) research, six out of ten CEGEP students work

while going to school. That's more than triple the number who worked while going to school in the early 1980s (Roy, 2003b). Of the 60 percent of CEGEP students who are working, two thirds of them are working 10 hours or more per week (Roy, Gauthier, Giroux, & Mainguy, 2003). Claire observed that,

*Some of them are working 10, 20 hours a week. And again, they need to work because they need to buy the things they want. These things that they are wearing, that they are showing to the world, are important to them.*  
(Interview #4)

According to Roy (2006) students are not working out of financial necessity but rather through social necessity. Work allows them to occupy their place in society and enjoy appropriate autonomy while living at home with their parents (Mackay, Miller, & Quinn, 2006). Claire noted that *"for the most part it's about what they can own, what they can carry, what they can show"* (Interview #4). *"It seems to have a lot to do with society's expectations in terms of that they are set up as consumers"* (Nancy, Interview #2). Yvon added that *"They're driving the economy, kids. They've grown into this material existence. They have to have it now.... I think that there's a syndrome. I've done some research and identified it myself; it's that whole material thing"* (Interview #1).

Additionally, advertising focusing on youth has increased significantly in the last 15 years (Valkenburg, 2000). This combined with a 33% increase in adolescent incomes in the 1990s has led to increased consumerism among youth (Austin & Rich, 2001). *"They think that it's all about getting as many things as you can"* (Claire, Interview #4).

Nancy has felt the impact on outdoor education courses which often have weekend trip components. *"The first questions we are always faced with for outdoor education courses with trips are: 'I need to get time off work'. So that's much more prevalent than it was 20 years ago"* (Interview #2). Mike has felt a similar pinch, *"to a*

*point where, you publish the dates of your trips but you still get students coming and saying: 'I can't go. I've got to work'” (Interview #5). The result, beyond favouring students who don't work, has been an increase in the number of students who drop the course after attending the first classes and a smaller number of students who remain enrolled after the final drop date (Nancy, Interview #2), thus creating a reduction in enrolment.*

#### *Enrolment.*

Enrolment trends, identified by all of the research participants, have changed significantly over the last 20-30 years. These include a decline and shift in enrolment and the increasing prevalence of females in outdoor education programming. *“There has been a noticeable decline in student enrolment” (Peter, Interview #6). “My recollection is that every course was full and that's changed. ...now, and this is typical in the last four or so years, we've seen a decrease in enrolment” (Mike, Interview #5). Work, as mentioned in the previous section, can play a role in reducing enrolment. Especially in courses that have weekend trip components. Scheduling can also be a factor. “There were some times when we weren't full. I remember going away with like seven or eight kids. But there were various glitches for that. Sometimes it was [the] time slot where they were offered” (Claire, Interview #4).*

In addition to a decline in enrolment, the type of student taking outdoor education courses has changed. *“Over the last few years... I've been seeing more students who get last pick in registration have only outdoor education courses to choose from” (Nancy, Interview #2). Mike added that “I always ask that question: ‘how many people are in*

*here because it's their first choice?' I would say maybe 30% of them"* (Interview #5).

*"Sometimes you get students who are just taking the course because it fits their schedule"* (Karl, Interview #3). Mike added that *"I think their first thing is the schedule.... As a student 'I want to build a schedule that I'm comfortable with'. That's a constant, it hasn't changed"* (Interview #5). Scheduling when considered in combination with an increasing student employment rate has the potential to strongly affect enrolment in outdoor education courses.

Five of the six participants made it clear that cost is not a contributing factor to declining enrolment. *"I don't think that the finances are the issue in terms of these courses not filling"* (Claire, Interview #4). Mike added that *"We always tried to keep the price reasonable. Just because it was important to do for recruiting; allowing people to afford to do it.... We've always had a thing of 'let's try to keep the cost under \$100'"* (Interview #5). In fact, a departmental survey of students addressed the issue. *"The outcome of the research was, money wasn't a factor, students weren't worried about the cost of the course"* (Mike, Interview #5).

The last trend with respect to enrolment noted by all of the research participants is the increased proportion of women in outdoor education courses. This is in spite of the fact that historically outdoor education has a male-dominated culture and philosophy (Allin & Humberstone, 2006), which has been perpetuated by a male-centric stereotype present in the media (Humberstone, 1990). Peter noted, *"there are more females than ever"* (Interview #6). *"Definitely more females doing it than there were"* (Claire, Interview #4). Mike offered that *"Where it used to be 75% percent male, now its 75% female for outdoor pursuits"* (Interview #5) in his classes. This example may be an

anomaly; however, according to a survey conducted by Grenier (2006) at four CEGEPs, outdoor education courses were more popular with females than with males.

Participants were unsure of the cause of an increasingly female student population in outdoor education. The main explanation given was “*there are probably just more females period at this level of education than there may have been 20 years ago*” (Claire, Interview #4). In fact, between 1992 and 2002 the gender distribution of students in post secondary education institutions in Canada rose from 55% female to 58% female (Statistics Canada, 2004). This, however, cannot account for the shift from 75% male to 75% female that Mike identified. There may be other factors at play here, which have yet to be explored. Further research is required.

### *Summary*

Outdoor education programming in the CEGEP system has experienced notable changes over the course of the last 20-30 years. This study revealed four major themes, which were explored, and remain listed here, in order of significance as indicated by study participants: curriculum reform, risk management, aging teachers, and student change.

Curriculum reform was the major factor affecting the arrival of the core competencies approach and the rise of experiential pedagogy. Increased risk management is a result of an incident in the system and a heightened awareness of the need for risk management in the field of outdoor education. Aging teachers and the physical and mental competency associated with them are the result of maturity and evolving physical

health. Last, student change is the result of factors including: lack of experience, prevalence of technology, physical health, employment, and enrolment.

The portrait painted, particularly with respect to student change, can seem quite gloomy. Study participants, however, continue to see the value of outdoor education programming in the face of change in the larger societal context. Mike observed that *“this whole focus on environment... if people are hearing about it, as young people, of it’s importance as a focus in our lives, then for sure go look for environmental connections. We can serve that purpose really well”* (Interview #5). Claire adds that *“we know the situation that not only our population’s health is in but our planet is in and we’ve got to tie the two together somehow. So that’s what’s exciting about these courses”* (Interview #4). Additionally, Noble (1995) and Cooper (1994) note outdoor education programming has the potential to provide the necessary guidance in creating an environmentally and socially just future. In fact, the shift to an experiential pedagogy and the inclusion of health curriculum are steps in a positive direction. They offer variety in pedagogy, which allows students to take more responsibility for their learning and essential knowledge of health issues in light of declining fitness rates and rising obesity.

## Chapter 5

### *Summary & Recommendations*

This study is the first of its kind in documenting changes in the CEGEP system. It simultaneously adds to the knowledge base in outdoor education literature. The study's strength is rooted in the strength of its participants, who provided a wealth of experience through which to examine change, as well as a strong institutional history of outdoor education which served as context. As a result, the study provides evidence of a shift in outdoor education programming, through documenting changes, in order to build on anecdotal evidence in the literature. The themes curriculum reform, risk management, aging teachers, and student change provide evidence of significant change in outdoor education programming over the last 20-30 years. Factors contributing to this change include: global educational reform trends, increased risk management awareness and litigation, teacher experience and age, lack of student experience in the outdoors, prevalence of technology, physical health, employment, and student enrolment.

The most significant change in CEGEP outdoor education programming over the last 20+ years is the arrival of the core competencies approach and the rise of experiential pedagogy as a result of the curriculum reforms, more precisely the Robillard and Garon reforms of the mid 1990s. These reforms significantly altered the curriculum and pedagogy of physical and outdoor education. The changes gave teachers a new direction and approach to teaching physical and outdoor education. This shift is consistent with both a national and international reform trend toward competencies based instruction and student-driven learning (Anderson, 2000; Gauthier, 2006). In fact, the prevalence of

school reform is currently an international trend as countries around the world have recognized the need for and begun implementing large-scale reforms (Fullan, 2000). This is the result of growing recognition of the complexity of an emerging global society and the need to better train citizens to function in it (Fullan).

The CEGEP reform is characterized by changes in curriculum, teaching approaches, and pedagogy, which Fullan (2007) notes are the three vital dimensions of educational change. All three aspects are necessary because together they represent the means of achieving a particular educational goal (Fullan). In the CEGEP system this has involved the change to a health and physical education curriculum delivered through a core competencies based approach and strengthened by an experiential pedagogy. The success of the reform is due to its attention to all dimensions of educational change. There were, however, implementation challenges. These included the lack of initial buy-in from teachers, lack of curriculum supports for teachers, and a lack of professional development opportunities. The result was a slow implementation of change over a duration of approximately 10 years.

An increase in risk management is the second most significant change. A larger focus on risk management has become an institutional and industry wide trend. The major factors affecting this change are an increasing awareness of incidents and the need to better manage them within the outdoor community as well as an increase in litigation in outdoor adventure settings (Attarian, 2001). For the CEGEPs this has resulted in the creation of a risk management plan and policies that have impacted aspects from travel to teaching and training. It is noted that the future of outdoor education will require even more aggressive risk management (Attarian).

The third most significant change in outdoor education programming is aging teachers. Not only have teachers gained more aches and pains as a result of their age and years of service, but more importantly their teaching methods have evolved as a result of their experience. Factors of this shift include years of service and age; as the mid career reflective period offers the most profound change for teachers (Ryan & Kokol, 1988). As a result, teachers are more in tune with meeting the needs of their students and working to the best of their abilities.

Last, student change is the fourth most significant change in outdoor education programming. Students themselves and enrolment trends have changed noticeably. Factors affecting student change include lack of experience, the prevalence of technology, and decreasing physical health which can be regarded not as separate issues, as they have traditionally been regarded, but perhaps part of a larger socio-cultural phenomenon called the Nature Deficit Disorder (Louv, 2005). Nature Deficit Disorder includes the above mentioned factors as well as sub-factors such as media, sedentary lifestyle, fear, and parenting as part of a larger picture approach to analyzing student change (Louv). Additionally, increasing student employment rates are a significant factor of student change as they have been mirrored by an increase in student consumerism (Austin & Rich, 2001). This trend has affected participation in extended outdoor education programs. Additional factors affecting student enrolment included scheduling and work, but not cost.

*Implications*

The implications of change in CEGEP outdoor education programming are that students are getting a different experience than they were 20+ years ago. It is clear that the Government of Quebec and the Ministry of Education used the Robillard and Garon reforms in an attempt to enhance CEGEP education within the province. The infusion of a health curriculum in physical education, in light of a decline in student health and a rising obesity crisis, can be regarded as positive and a proactive decision. However, it is clear that the addition of new curricular components without increasing the number of hours for course delivery have left teachers struggling to cover all of the topics adequately. Additionally, the lack of a pedagogical guide, for eight years, to assist teachers in making the transition was a major oversight in the implementation of the reforms. The simultaneous reduction of the number of required physical education courses from four to three reduced the scale of physical education in the CEGEP system. As a result, it can be argued that the initial intention of enhancing physical education has not been fully established. Thus the argument for an increase in either the number of physical education courses or the number of course hours is well supported.

The addition of the health curriculum within the same number of course hours necessitated the reduction of the depth of outdoor education curriculum covered. The result is that courses are currently grounded more in outdoor pursuits than outdoor education as much of the focus on relationships with the natural world, including outdoor living skills, have been removed from some courses. Therefore, outdoor pursuits, though they continue to be regarded as outdoor education by both faculty and administration, are on the rise. Outdoor pursuits, which can be considered a component of outdoor education,

lack the connection with the natural resources of a place. Thus an increase in outdoor pursuits in the CEGEP system may continue to reduce students' experience levels in the outdoors as well as perpetuate a human disconnect with nature. There is a need for educators to return to and maintain true "outdoor education" curriculum in order to reverse this trend.

The increased prevalence of experiential education in CEGEP outdoor education programming is a move in a positive direction with respect to student learning. Non traditional learning environments, like those currently being used by CEGEP outdoor educators, can provide more beneficial behaviour change, greater learning, and longer retention of knowledge among students (Kraft, 1990).

The question, however, begs to be asked: to what extent are teachers truly embracing experiential education? I offer that it varies significantly from one individual to the next. I see CEGEP teachers on a continuum, with respect to experiential education, which is determined by the level to which they have altered their teaching as a result of the curriculum reform and their subsequent self-directed personal development in the area. The variability therein, reinforces the need for professional development in this area in order to provide teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to provide quality learning experiences for their students. Curriculum supports and training are essential in promoting successful educational change (Fullan, 2007).

Improved risk management procedures will continue to reduce risk and strengthen field experiences for students with respect to learning. Through the policies being developed, students are made more aware of risk in the field and are better prepared by their instructors in order to aid in mitigating said risk. As a result, responsibility for a safe

learning environment is shared equally by students and teachers. Although this study didn't explicitly seek evidence of a shift, research notes that field experiences have become somewhat watered down for fear of litigation (Potter & Henderson, 2004). This watering down may have had its effect on the CEGEP system but is not explicit in the minds of research participants as many other more prevalent changes were being felt simultaneously. In the future, a balance will need to be found between reducing risk and maintaining learning opportunities that are inherently risky in order to continue to provide students with authentic field experiences.

Aging teachers provide a stronger learning environment for students. Due to their experience, they have modified their teaching methods to provide a richer experience for their students (Ryan & Kokol, 1988). However, many will soon retire which will create a void that will need to be filled. The CEGEPs should consider a transition plan as a result of the impending retirements so that expertise and knowledge can be shared between teachers leaving the profession with those entering to take their places. Meeting this need in the CEGEP system has involved hiring candidates who possess master's degrees in related disciplines as well as relevant certifications.

Student change has led to potential misconceptions of outdoor education and the natural environment (Bixler & Carlisle, 1994). This change is the result of a lack of experience, the prevalence of technology, decreasing physical health, increased employment, and changing enrolment trends. Teachers, however, are already modifying their courses to meet the needs and interests of students. An example is the inclusion of Global Positioning System (GPS) technology in course work (which is already present in at least one institution). GPS training may stimulate students who connect with modern

technology. However, it is important to keep in mind that traditional technologies should not be abandoned if one of the program goals is to provide meaningful engagement with natural settings (Cuthbertson, Socha, & Potter, 2004). I feel that, in the future, a middle ground needs to be sought which involves teachers adjusting to a changing student, while students need to be open to the different connectedness potential outdoor education can offer.

In order to increase participation in outdoor education, its misconception must be dispelled through the realistic advertising of programs. Educators need to consider connecting with students who are inexperienced, engaging students with relevant outdoor education technology, further promoting physical activity and health, and offering flexibility in scheduled field activities to meet students' increasing busy work schedules.

The implications of change in CEGEP outdoor education programming highlight both the outcomes of trends over the last 20-30 years and the need to continue monitoring and conceptualizing change through future research in the field.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

One of the major limitations of this study is that it does not include the voice of students. The perceptions gained with respect to student issues have been through the eyes of teachers, a secondary source. During the initial design phase of this study, it was determined that gaining a direct student perspective of outdoor education in the CEGEP system over the last 20-30 years would be nearly impossible due to the difficulty of gaining a student perspective from 30 years ago. There is, however, potential value in examining current student perspectives with respect to outdoor education programming

as it would allow for a more holistic understanding of the changes explored. Student input could shed light on perceptions of fitness, sedentary lifestyle habits, employment, and enrolment trends.

Additionally, this study is context specific to English CEGEPs and cannot be generalized to all outdoor education programming. However, themes presented may be useful to a broad readership both specifically and in a general manner. There is a need to examine these themes in other outdoor education contexts over the same time period in order to validate their relevance to the field.

Last, there is a need to explore the growth of female participation in outdoor education. If the study participant's perceptions of increased female enrolment in outdoor education course can be verified through additional studies, a traditionally male-dominated domain may be on the verge of a significant shift. In fact, Attarian (2002) notes there are already signs that outdoor education participation among women is on the rise.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Pseudonym withheld to ensure anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> The Quebec National Park System is in fact a provincial park system. Federal National Parks are known, within the province, as Parcs National du Canada.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Cover Letter

Dear Teacher,

February 22, 2008

Thank you for taking the time to read this cover letter. I (Bill Mitchell), a graduate student at Lakehead University, am conducting a study entitled “The Changing Climate of Outdoor Education” as a partial requirement for the completion of my master’s degree in education. You have been chosen as a potential participant for this study due to your extensive experience as an outdoor educator in the CEGEP (Collège D’Enseignement Général et Professionnel) system.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the changing climate of outdoor education in the Quebec CEGEP system during the last 20-30 years from the perspective of teachers with 20+ years experience in order to identify CEGEP outdoor education programming changes and the factors contributing to those changes.

Your participation in the project is strictly voluntary, and there are no apparent risks to the participant associated with this study. Benefits may include opportunities for professional reflection. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and may refuse to participate in any portion of this study and/or may refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of the withdrawal will not be used and will be destroyed. Your participation in the study will involve being interviewed during the months of January and February 2008. Interviews lasting approximately 1-1½ hours in duration will discuss your experience as an outdoor educator.

The interviews will be audio-taped so that discussions can be transcribed and analyzed. The audio-tapes and the resulting data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. All data gathered will be considered confidential and accessed only by me and my thesis supervisor. Pseudonyms will be used on all transcripts and in the final thesis. As such, any information that may identify you or your institution as a participant will be excluded from the final report. A summary of the research results will be made available by contacting me in June 2008. The research findings may be presented at a scholarly conference and/or submitted for publication to a scholarly journal.

The return of your completed informed consent will indicate your agreement to participate in the project. Thank you in advance for your interest in this research study. Should you have any questions concerning the study, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the other members of Lakehead University.

Sincerely,

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## Appendix B – Consent Form

### The Changing Climate of Outdoor Education

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understood the cover letter, and I  
(please print)  
agree to participate in the interview meetings conducted by Bill Mitchell of Lakehead University.  
I understand that there is no identified risk to participants. Additionally, I am aware that I may  
withdraw at any time from the study without repercussion, even after signing this form, and that  
all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be used and will be destroyed. I  
acknowledge that all data gathered will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of  
seven years. I can request a summary of the results from Bill Mitchell as of June 2008. Any  
information that is collected about me during this study will be kept confidential. I and the  
institution I work for will not be identified in the report in any way.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Institution

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me,

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## Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interviews will be semi-structured. The following questions will form the basis of the interviews; however, they may extend beyond this line of questioning depending on the natural flow of the conversation between the researcher and the interviewee.

### Demographic Questions

- What led you to become an outdoor educator?
- In what year did you begin teaching outdoor education at the CEGEP level?
- How many years have you been teaching outdoor education at the CEGEP Level?

### Discussion Questions

- Describe outdoor education programming at the CEGEP level when you first started teaching in terms of...
  - Curriculum
  - Pedagogy
  - Resources
  - Student attitudes
  - Student enrolment
- Describe outdoor education programming at the CEGEP level today in terms of...
  - Curriculum
  - Pedagogy
  - Resources
  - Student attitudes
  - Student enrolment

- Based on your descriptions of Outdoor Education programming, has Outdoor Education programming in the CEGEP system changed from when you first started teaching to the present?
    - If so, what has changed?
      - Curriculum
      - Pedagogy
      - Resources
      - Student attitudes
      - Student enrolment
  - Of the programming changes you've identified, in your opinion, which one is the most significant?
    - Why?
  - What factors do you believe have contributed to these changes?
  - In your opinion, what is the most significant contributing factor to changes in Outdoor Education programming? Why?
  - (After discussing previous two questions to exhaustion)
- Have any of the below listed topics contributed to the changes mentioned?
- Disconnect with nature
  - Student alienation
  - Prevalence of technology in society
  - Obesity crisis
- If so, which changes, and how?
  - Any other comments or additions?