1-1-2007

Outdoor education as a protective school-based intervention for "at-risk" youth: A case study examining the Muskoka Woods Leadership Experience for "Students of Promise" program.

Marsha-Lynne Murdock

University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/6991

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.
OUTDOOR EDUCATION AS A PROTECTIVE SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTION FOR "AT-RISK" YOUTH: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE MUSKOKA WOODS LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE FOR "STUDENTS OF PROMISE" PROGRAM

by

Marsha-Lynne Murdock

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

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

AVIS:
L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l’Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n’y aura aucun contenu manquant.
ABSTRACT

The Muskoka Woods Leadership Experience for “Students of Promise” (MWLESP) is a school-based protective intervention program using outdoor education as a means to work with “at-risk” youth. Through a case study analysis of this program, I explored three sub-problems:

a. Creating and implementing a non-traditional protective school-based intervention program
b. The three phase Outdoor Education Model
c. Student responsiveness to school-based intervention programming

This study was completed using participant-observations, interviews, and document analysis – approaches that fit within the larger framework of Participant Action Research. Findings suggest that outdoor education programming can be used to work with “at-risk” youth to help them experience a successful high school experience. Structuring the intervention program according to the three phase model enhances participants' ability to optimally benefit from their program experience. Responsiveness to the MWLESP program varied amongst the “at-risk” students, with some students notably benefiting more from their program involvement than others.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An African proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child – well it has certainly taken a number of people to help me get to this point in my life and to complete this project. I owe a great deal of gratitude and appreciation to so many people without whom this document would have never been completed. It is with a grateful heart that I thank God for the following people that have left their footprints in my life and on this study.

To the staff and administrators from the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, thank you for allowing me to be involved in the MWLESP program and for the opportunity to work with the teachers and students from two of your high schools.

To the students of promise that I have had the privilege of getting to know and working with this year, it has truly brought me sincere joy getting to know each of you. My deepest hope is that each of you sticks with school and realizes that you are capable of doing great things.

To my committee members, Dr. Salinitri, Dr. Smith, and Dr. Forsyth, thank you for your willingness to work with me during this process and for sharing with me your insights and recommendations.

To Dr. Paraschak, I don’t even no where to begin. Thank you for patiently walking alongside me and believing in me when I didn’t think I could even finish my first year of grad school, let alone tackle writing a thesis. You have challenged the way I see and understand the world and have helped me become a better person. I could not have gone through this journey without your guidance.
To my family, Nanny & Grampa, you are my rocks and without your constant support, guidance and encouragement I would not be who I am today. Didda, you’re one of my best friends, thanks for keeping me grounded, for making me laugh, and for always being there to listen! Robert, kid I love you to bits. I’m so sorry for leaving and that I didn’t fight harder or sooner for you to have a better go at school – I’m fighting now and I promise you that I’m going to keep fighting! Mom & Dad, I now understand that you did the best you knew how and it’s okay! Thanks for reaching out to Nanny & Grampa when you didn’t know what else to do. Kristin & Cheynne, “isn’t it ironic….don’t you think…” Much Love!

To my friends who in many ways are an extension of my family. Thanks for keeping me grounded and making sure that I don’t sell out! Thanks for the late night phone calls, the random emails, msn messages, and facebook comments to simply encourage me. Thanks for the open-door invites out to Koino, B’Town and everywhere in between, for cross country road trips, play dates in Pirate Coves, for daydreaming and trip planning with me, and for snapping me back to reality when I’m feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Y’all have been a huge part of my life and are a big part of why I am, who I am today. Looking forward to many more years of good times and memories - Peace!
We gotta make a change,
It's time for us as a people to start making some change.
Let's change the way we eat,
Let's change the way we live,
Let's change the way we treat each other.
See the old way wasn't working
So it's on us to do what we gotta do to survive.

- Tupac Shakur, 1998
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**CHAPTER**

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iii
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... iv

**I. INTRODUCTION**

i. Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1
ii. Statement of Problem .............................................................................................................. 2
iii. Operational Definitions .......................................................................................................... 3
iv. Outdoor Education Overview ................................................................................................. 7
v. Theoretical and Practical Justification ....................................................................................... 13
vi. Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................... 17
vii. Assumptions .......................................................................................................................... 21

**II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

i. Sub-problem 1 ......................................................................................................................... 26
ii. Sub-problem 2 ........................................................................................................................ 43
iii. Sub-problem 3 ........................................................................................................................ 57

**III. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

i. Data Collection ....................................................................................................................... 71
ii. Selecting Participants .............................................................................................................. 73
iii. Methodology ........................................................................................................................... 75
iv. Delimitations and Limitations ................................................................................................. 82

**IV. RESULTS**

i. Reflection on Data Collection ................................................................................................. 87
ii. MWLESP Program Timeline ................................................................................................. 96
iii. MWLESP Participants' Perspectives ....................................................................................... 114

**V. DISCUSSION**

i. Sub-problem 1 ......................................................................................................................... 176
ii. Sub-problem 2 ........................................................................................................................ 201
iii. Sub-problem 3 ........................................................................................................................ 263

**VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

i. Summary .................................................................................................................................... 274
ii. Conclusion ................................................................. 276
iii. Recommendations .................................................. 280

VII. REFERENCES .............................................................. 288

VIII. APPENDICES

A. Risk Classification ............................................................. 297
B. Participant-Observation Guide ............................................ 299
C. Interview Guides .............................................................. 302
   SP1 interview guide .......................................................... 302
   Student-Leader & SST interview guide ................................ 306
D. Student Leader Evaluation Questionnaire ............................ 309
E. Conceptual Baggage ......................................................... 311
F. Results Organization Chart ................................................ 317
G. MWLESP Program Recommendations ................................ 319

Vita Auctoris ........................................................................... 327
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout Ontario, the population of “at-risk” youth entering high school with a variety of behavioural and academic concerns is on the rise. In 2003, prior to the launch of the Student Success/Learning to 18 Ministry of Education campaign, the province graduated less than 68% of its student population (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), with many of its “at-risk” student population opting to leave school prior to graduation (Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005). King Warren, Boyer, and Chin (2005) explain that of the estimated 30% of Ontario students who do not graduate each year, most are at serious “risk” of becoming early leavers and will likely never earn their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Factors causing students to become “at-risk” begin early in these students’ educational experience, with the Ministry of Education reporting that “thousands of students enter high school each year already struggling and are at a high risk of dropping out before graduation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, retrieved May 31, 2006 from http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario). Many “at-risk” students move through the education system without having their concerns adequately addressed, because neither they, their families or their schools have access to the necessary resources (i.e., human, material, financial) needed to create change. Consequently, “at-risk” youth enter high school with deeply embedded negative views towards the education system and any of its associated agents (i.e., teachers) and/or structures (i.e., support programs). These negative beliefs are one of the barriers that make it difficult for educators to support and work with the “at-risk” student population (Barr & Parrett, 1995).
Working with "at-risk" youth can be very challenging, as it is much easier to deal with them than to work with them. This explains why many educators still employ coping strategies that involve removing "at-risk" students from the classroom environment (via suspensions and/or expulsions). Teachers may also ignore the problems by continuously passing these students through the system, rather than working with students to address and correct the behaviours (Barr & Parrett, 1995). For most "at-risk" youth, high school is the last opportunity for positive changes in their lives to occur (Barr & Parrett, 1995). This is because, with the exception of the family structure, schools are one of the few institutions "within which the development of adolescents can be directed and shaped" (Simmons-Morton, Davis Crump, Haynie, & Saylor, 1999, p. 101). Schools thus play an important role in the lives of all students, especially those who are "at-risk." It is imperative that resources be directed toward the creation and implementation of school-based intervention strategies that will enable "at-risk" youth to experience success in high school and more broadly. Until a serious effort is made to work with "at-risk" students and to develop strategies that will benefit them, educators and school officials are not fulfilling their responsibilities to mentor and guide all students towards becoming positive members of society. The cycle of allowing "at-risk" students to 'slip through the cracks' must not continue to be perpetuated, or else the rate of early school leavers will continue to rise (King et al., 2005).

Statement of Problem

The aim of this study is to examine if outdoor education is an effective protective school-based intervention strategy when designed to provide "at-risk" students with an opportunity for a successful high school experience. To explore this general research
question, I begin by providing a general history and analysis of how outdoor education programs have typically been used. This analysis is followed by a review of literature addressing three sub-problems that stem from my research question. Briefly, what will emerge in the literature review is that research pertaining to outdoor education is limited to its use as either a school-based, curricular enriching program and/or as a commercial/therapeutic program. Through a case study analysis of the Muskoka Woods Leadership Experience for “Students of Promise” (MWLESP) program, I am attempting to bridge a gap in the literature by exploring the possibility that outdoor education programming can be employed beyond its “typical” uses, as a protective school-based intervention strategy for “at-risk” students.

Operational Definitions

“At-risk” youth

In this thesis the term “at-risk” youth will be used as a general term to refer to male and female adolescents between the ages of 13-21, who for a variety of reasons and through various pathways experience significant academic and/or behavioural difficulties. To have or to be “at-risk” of having significant academic or behavioural problem(s) means to possess two or more of the following antecedent factors:

- have a history of emotional and/or social problems
- history of mental illness, engage in deviant behaviour
- have a poor school attendance and/or performance record
- a member of a low-income family
- engage in risk-taking activities (i.e., the use of drugs, alcohol, being sexually active)
• unhealthy coping skills (i.e., self-harm/self-mutilation, suicidal thoughts or attempts)

• a wardship of the province

(Cragg, Cameron, Craig, & Russell, 1999; Ferguson et al., 2005; Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002; WECDSB “at-risk” student identification criteria, 2006).

“Students of Promise” (SP)

Although “at-risk” youth is the most commonly used term to describe and identify students with various academic and behavioural difficulties, in this research I, in keeping with the MWLESP program philosophy, will refer to and view every student participant as a “student of promise.” Rather than reinforcing the negative naturalized beliefs and stigmas that are associated with “at risk” youth, the term “student of promise” has intentionally been constructed and used within the MWLESP program and this study.

Referring to student participants as “students of promise” also reflects the theoretical framework – Duality of Structure (Giddens 1984) and the Strengths Perspective (Saleebey, 1996) - from which the MWLESP program and my study are operating. The term also recognizes and acknowledges the inherent ability within every student participant to behave as a leader. In most instances, a number designation of 1, 2, 3 or 4 will accompany the term “SP” as a means of distinguishing student participants involved in the MWLESP program from one another, as well as to identify the student’s year of involvement in the program – for example SP1¹ would refer to a student of promise in year one of the MWLESP program.

¹ SP1’s predominantly consist of grade nine students, however, it may include students who should be in grade 10, but belong to the credit recovery program. SP2’s refer to students in year two of the MWLESP program. For the 2006-2007 MWLESP program, SP2’s will consist of senior students (i.e., grade 12) or recent graduates. However, in future years of the MWLESP program, SP2’s will be mostly grade 10

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Early leaver

The term *early leaver* refers to “at-risk” students who leave high school prior to receiving their high school diploma and do not return to any formal education setting to receive their high school diploma or its GED equivalent – the General Education Development (Ferguson et al., 2005).

Protective Intervention

A protective intervention refers to school-based strategies (i.e., programs, activities) that are intentionally designed to engage “at-risk” students academically and socially in order to facilitate the *successful* completion of high school and *success* in life more broadly (i.e., improved quality of life). Moreover, protective intervention strategies help “at-risk” students develop and put into practice healthy alternative coping skills, which differs from the otherwise destructive and ineffective coping skills that these students commonly use. Although education literature commonly refers to school-based intervention strategies as preventative (Barr & Parrett, 1995), I am consciously using the term *protective* as a means of maintaining consistency with Ferguson et al.’s (2005) reference to *protective factors* and their role in improving student’s sense of connectedness to their school, as well as minimizing their likeliness of becoming disengaged from school and thus becoming early leavers. One of these protective factors is relationships between students and caring adult figures (p. 72). Relationships formed between participants and leaders (i.e., teachers, student-leaders) during outdoor education programming can act as a protective factor that will help to minimize the likeliness of a student becoming an early leaver. Extending this idea, the use of outdoor education as an

---

students. SP3’s will consist of students in grade 11 in his/her third year of the MWLESP program, and SP4’s will generally be grade 12 students in their fourth and final year of the program.
intervention in a school-based setting can be viewed as a protective strategy to improve student connectedness early in students’ high school experience as a means of minimizing or rather protecting these students from becoming disengaged.

**Student-/Youth-Centered**

In this study, the terms *student-/youth-centered* may be used interchangeably, and refers to decision makers placing the needs of students and/or youth at the center of all decisions taken and enabling the students/youth to become active and engaged participants in their learning experience.

**“Success”**

Throughout this study, there will be two meanings associated with the term “success” and how it is used within the MWLESP program. The first meaning of “success” will refer to academic success and will employ SP1 credit accumulation and academic achievement (i.e., grades) as its indicators for “success.” As part of a longitudinal effort to measure student “success,” achieving high school graduation as a fourth year “student of promise” (SP4’s) in 2010 will be used to measure the “successfulness” of the MWLESP program as an intervention strategy. However, using academic achievement as the sole value or indicator of “success” does not adequately represent the underlying values driving this program. The MWLESP program recognizes that the benefits students gain from their program involvement are not always immediately apparent, but rather can be seen weeks, months or years later. Thus, academic achievement, such as full credit accumulation at the end of the academic year, becomes one of the visible meanings of success but not the only meaning of the term. The second meaning associated with “success” entails a broader definition, referring to an
improved quality of life for “students of promise.” Indicators that will be used to measure improved quality of life will include: improved teacher-student relationships, improved attendance, and a decrease in the number of disruptive behavioural outbursts and/or harmful risky behaviours students engage in.

“Affluent Students”

In this thesis the term “affluent students” refers to students who, in general, have more access to protective support (i.e., family) and/or resources (i.e., human, material and financial), which Ferguson et al. (2005) have indicated help to increase the likelihood that students will experience success in high school and more broadly.

Outdoor Education Overview

Outdoor education is a form of experiential-learning that has historically been used to foster positive personal growth and character development in participants, by engaging them in healthy risk-taking activities (Wurdinger, 1997). Participating in outdoor education is believed to enhance students’ learning experience because it encourages them to become active participants in their learning process. Outdoor education emphasizes learning through doing, which differs from the traditional learning approach found in the classroom (Wurdinger, 1997). Unlike a classroom setting, students participating in an outdoor education program are presented with a task or problem, which they are then encouraged to solve by taking a hands-on, problem-solving approach. Through an involvement in their learning process, students gain an authentic understanding of course material rather than simply memorizing the information (Wurdinger, 1997).
In addition to the hands-on learning style, outdoor education programs traditionally build reflective activities into the learning experience. Reflective activities allow students an opportunity to develop their processing and intrapersonal skills, by providing students with an opportunity to enter into a process where they can take time to reflect and/or debrief about the learning experience. The combination of "learning by doing" and reflective activities has been identified as central to outdoor education programming; finding a balance between the two types of activities is critical to facilitating an authentic and meaningful learning experience (Gass, 1993; Wurdinger, 1997).

Benefits

Outdoor education research has indicated that benefits such as leadership development, improved communication skills, the development of problem solving skills, and improved feelings of self-confidence and self-worth can be gained through an involvement in outdoor education programming (Green, Kleiber, & Tarrant, 2000; Linney, 2004; McKenzie, 2000; Pricola, 2000). Research in this field has typically been limited to: (a) school-based programming - emphasizing enriching learning opportunities through outdoor education, and (b) commercial therapeutic programming - designed to help delinquent, disadvantaged, and/or at-risk youth "discover and develop their potential to care for themselves, others and the world around them" (McKenzie, 2000, p.9).

Although every participant can potentially benefit from an outdoor education experience, there is a strong consensus within the literature that it is "at-risk" youth who have the greatest potential to be positively affected by an involvement in an outdoor education program (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Collingwood, 1997; Linney, 2004; Sibthorp, 2003).
Traditionally, outdoor education programs have been recognized for the environmental and curricular benefits that participants can gain through an involvement in an outdoor education program. However, in recent years, research in the fields of social work and education have begun to emphasize the therapeutic and character development benefits that may be gained through an involvement in outdoor education or a wilderness therapy program (e.g., Moote & Woodarski, 1997; Sibthorp, 2003; Ungar, 2003). Specifically as it pertains to education, participating in an outdoor education program is believed to provide students with "powerful and unforgettable experiences that are transformational, [because] they empower today's learners to become tomorrow's responsible, productive and fulfilled citizens" (McGuinity cited in Linney, 2004). Thus, students are able to gain and develop skills that are relevant to both in-school and out-of-school situations. Furthermore, participating in an outdoor education experience is believed to foster meaningful relationships between students and positive adult figures, as well as increase their sense of connectedness to the school, both of which are linked to improved academic performance and character development (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Ferguson et al., 2005; Sibthorp, 2003; Simmons-Morton et al., 1999). The recognition of outdoor education programming as a "powerful" and "transformational" experience has led some schools to consider or begin using outdoor education as a protective intervention strategy for working with and empowering their "at-risk" students (e.g., Brewer High School in Maine: Pricola, 2000; and the MWLESP program). Yet, in general, outdoor education programs targeting "at-risk" youth still remain underutilized as a protective school-based intervention strategy. This occurs in part because most of the available literature emphasizes outdoor education's enriching educational contributions (i.e., school-based...
programs) or its rehabilitative/therapeutic use for delinquent youth (i.e., commercial programs), thereby ignoring its possible preventative contributions (i.e., as a protective school-based intervention strategy).

*Outdoor Education Learning Outcomes*

Moote and Woodarski (1997) have suggested that “no two adventure [outdoor education] programs appear to be the same in their manner of implementation” (p.154). Subsequently, depending on the “type” of outdoor education program and its designed purpose, a program will be structured in a way that promotes different learning outcomes for specific types of participants. The participants that an outdoor education program seeks to attract will thus differ based upon the desired outcomes that a program aspires to achieve. Both the “type” of participant that a program is directed towards and its intended purpose (i.e., learning objective) are considered to be distinguishing characteristics between school-based and commercial or therapeutically based outdoor education programs (McKenzie, 2000; Moote & Woodarski, 1997; Simmons-Morton et al., 1999).

The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (2006) has indicated four major learning outcomes that can be derived from an outdoor education program. Moreover, these learning outcomes are used as rationale for why outdoor education programs are able to facilitate meaningful learning experiences. The council suggests that because students have an ability to derive four unique learning outcomes from a single experience, a more enriching and meaningful learning opportunity will occur. A detailed description of these learning outcomes follows.
1. Education for environment

Outdoor education exposes participants to the natural environment in ways that allow for lifelong appreciation and respect for the surrounding environment – including in an urban, rural or remote setting.

2. Education for curriculum

Outdoor education broadens and deepens students’ knowledge base by integrating curriculum material into authentic situations that create a meaningful learning experience.

3. Education for character

Outdoor education provides participants with opportunities to develop their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. This includes the development of individual traits such as confidence, empathy, and a sense of responsibility, as well as learning how to work in a group setting towards a common goal.

4. Education for well-being

Outdoor education promotes lifelong physical activity and healthy lifestyle choices to participants as a means of maintaining emotional and physical well-being.

(Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 2006)

Although these four learning outcomes can be derived from participating in an outdoor education program, it is rare for either a school-based or a commercial/therapeutic outdoor education program to be structured in a way that formally emphasizes all four objectives. Deconstructing a program’s learning objectives provides a better understanding of the underlying values shaping both the program’s structure and its intended participants. For example, school-based outdoor education

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
programs have typically been constructed to emphasize education for environment and curriculum and consequently have been predominantly directed towards the "affluent" student population. However, commercially-based or therapeutic programs focus on the education of character development and the personal wellbeing of participants, thus explaining why these programs are most commonly directed towards "at-risk" and/or delinquent participants (Wurdinger, 1997).

School-Based Outdoor Education

By design, school-based outdoor education programs are structured (both informally and formally) to emphasize learning outcomes that facilitate an enhanced and enriched learning experience for participants. These programs typically offer students a 2-5 day excursion in an outdoor environment. During this time, students are encouraged to explore and learn course material through hands-on activities (Wurdinger, 1997). School-based programs are structured in a manner that favours (i.e., informally) students who are physically active, in good academic standing, and can afford the associated compulsory fees. These are characteristics that are typically associated with the "affluent" student population. Consequently, "at-risk" students often find themselves excluded from accessing school-based outdoor education programs, despite being the group that has the greatest potential to benefit from an involvement (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Collingwood, 1997; Linney, 2004; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Sibthorp, 2003). Still, most school-based programs continue to target "affluent" students as the primary participants. This is in part because of an informal belief, held by educators, that views "affluent" students as an "easier" segment to work with as they are more likely to immediately benefit from an involvement in an outdoor learning experience, then the "at-risk" student population
(Barr & Parrett, 1995). This fundamental belief that “affluent” students are more suited to an outdoor education experience has limited some educators’ willingness to employ outdoor education as an intervention strategy for working with and empowering its “at-risk” student population.

Commercial/Therapeutic Outdoor Education

Commercial or therapeutic programs are structured to promote character development, enhance personal wellbeing, and/or address rehabilitative/correctional objectives. These programs operate for longer periods of time as compared to school-based experiences, lasting anywhere from a month to a full year in duration. Project D.A.R.E suggests that a longer outdoor education experience can increase the long term sustainability of benefits associated with character development and personal wellbeing. However, the increased length of commercial programs may result in the experience being more costly, thereby limiting the extent that disadvantaged and/or some “at-risk” youth (i.e., those youth lacking financial resources) can access these programs.

Theoretical and Practical Justification

Practical Justification

The Ontario Government and its Ministry of Education have begun a province wide campaign entitled Student Success/Learning to 18. The goal of this campaign is to “improve student success” and thus increase graduation rates to 85% by 2010 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). As part of this campaign, the Ontario Government and its Ministry of Education have commitment to allocating resources (i.e., financial and

\(^2\) Outward Bound programs run anywhere from 21 days to a full year depending on the course. Project D.A.R.E, which is a therapeutic program for troubled, delinquent and/or at-risk males, has a minimum residency requirement of four months and can last upwards of a year.

\(^3\) In Kagan’s (1991) modified “at-risk” taxonomy, students lacking or having limited financial resources belong to the “social environmental” risk category.
human) towards the development of Student Success Strategies\textsuperscript{4}, which has led to the introduction of Student Success Teachers (SST’s) in 2003. Premier McGuinty (2005) has pledged that "Ontario won't give up on its youth. Instead, we're working to challenge and engage young Ontarians by making school more responsive to their needs" (October, 2005). More specifically, the Ministry of Education is intentionally seeking ways to move away from “one-size-fits-all” programming approaches, towards more inclusive student-centred programming for all students – especially those considered to be “at-risk.”

Recognizing that “adolescent learners are not all the same” (Gouthro, Griffore & Armstrong, 2003), the Ontario Ministry of Education has undertaken a number of initiatives designed to “improve student success” and tailor school to the needs of its students. For example, the Ministry of Education has been developing school-based programming and early intervention strategies that will address the needs of its “at-risk” student population. In December 2005, the Ministry expanded its co-op credit program to include more of an emphasis on apprenticeship training (e.g., school-based student success program). More recently, in September 2006, the grade 8 to 9 transition plan\textsuperscript{5} was launched, which is a program dedicated to developing early intervention strategies that will ease this difficult transition for students “at-risk” of becoming early leavers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

Other decisions taken by the Ontario Government as part of the Student Success/Learning to 18 campaign include the Royal Assent on December 20, 2006 of Bill 52 – an Ontario legislation Act to amend the current Education Act. This Act was

\textsuperscript{4} Information pertaining to the Student Success Strategies developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education was retrieved from the following website: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/6ways/

\textsuperscript{5} Moving from grade 8 to grade 9 has been identified as one of the most critical transition periods. These students have the highest risk of dropping out during this difficult transition from elementary school to high school.
introduced and passed as part of phase three of the Ministry’s *Student Success Strategies*, as a means of minimizing student disengagement, thereby increasing graduation rates. As part of this Act, Ontario students are now required to remain in high school until the age of 18 or graduation; prior to this amendment students were legally entitled to leave school at the age of 16. Moreover, the Ministry of Education’s 2004 *Ontario Excellence for All* discussion paper outlines that Premier McGuinty is lobbying for provincial support to implement the following four changes for Ontario’s education system, changes which the government believes will help them achieve the 2010 target graduation rate. These proposed changes include: (a) smaller class sizes, (b) emphasis on early education, minimizing disengagement prior to age 12, (c) early emphasis on numeracy, literacy and character development and (d) providing an additional $120 million dollars towards supporting “struggling learners.”

Drawing on some of the available resources (financial, material and human) from the Ministry of Education’s *Student Success/Learning to 18* initiative, the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board (WESDSB) has allocated some of its *Student Success Initiative* resources towards the development and implementation of the MWLESP program. This program is an example of an alternative early intervention strategy designed to address the needs of the WECDSB’s “at-risk” student population. Specifically, the program is attempting to use outdoor education programming to work with “at-risk” grade nine students and help them achieve *success* in high school and more broadly. The intervention strategy is reflective of the Ministry’s commitment to “improve student success” as well as to ease the difficult transition students experience while moving from elementary school to high school. However, research examining the use and
effectiveness of outdoor education as a school-based intervention strategy is limited. This study thus serves a practical purpose in that it is attempting to develop a framework from which other educators can operate in terms of creating and implementing a non-traditional, school-based intervention program that aims to work with “at-risk” youth by actively engaging them in outdoor education programming.

*Theoretical Justification*

The use of outdoor education as a protective intervention aligns with the Canadian Sport Policy’s (2002) suggestion that participation in physical activity can contribute towards the positive physical, social and character development of all participants (p.5). Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) have also indicated that involvement in a school and/or community based physical activity program with an outdoor experiential component can improve students’ academic performance, as well as improve their sense of connectedness to both the school and community. Although all participants can benefit from an involvement in physical activity and more specifically in outdoor education programs, several researchers claim that “at-risk” youth have the greatest potential to be positively affected through participation in specialized programming directed towards their needs (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Collingwood, 1997; Linney, 2004; Sibthorp, 2003).

Physical activity and outdoor education are two powerful resources that the province has underutilized in educating and mentoring its “at-risk” youth population. Although there are many high schools across the province that offer students an opportunity to participate in a school-based outdoor education experience, most of these programs are directed toward the “affluent” student population (because of the high program fee to participate), and subsequently exclude “at-risk” youth from participating.
Outdoor education research has typically been limited to (a) school-based programming and (b) commercial or therapeutic programming. Subsequently, information about school-based intervention programs using outdoor education to work with “at-risk” youth is also limited. The MWLESP program is one of the few school-based intervention programs using outdoor education as a means to work with “at-risk” students. By undertaking a case study analysis of the MWLESP program, my thesis addresses a gap in the literature by examining if outdoor education can be used as a school-based intervention for “at-risk” youth, and exploring its relevance to student success from the point of view of its participants. To place the “students of promise” at the centre of this analysis, an approach drawing on Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984) and the Strengths Perspective (Saleebey, 1996) will be used. This research will benefit the academic community by extending information pertaining to outdoor education beyond its traditional use in school-based and commercial/therapeutic programming, and by creating a theoretical framework for this program which ensures that the “students of promise” and their strengths are the focus for all activities.

Theoretical Framework

Duality of Structure

Duality of Structure assumes that social construction exists – taking the position that nothing just “is” and/or just “happens” (Giddens, 1984). Rather, individuals (agents) act and make decisions within existing social structures (e.g., formal/informal rules and resources). Duality of Structure involves an interaction between structures and agency.

---

6 Participants of the MWLESP program include “students of promise” in year one of the program (i.e., SP1’s), student leaders (i.e., University of Windsor students and “students of promise” in year two of the program – SP2’s), teachers (i.e., student success teachers – SST’s, and support staff), and facilitation team members.
According to Giddens (1984), agency is the ability of a person to act or refrain from acting within a situation, while structures are the boundaries (Metcalf, 1993), created through rules (informal and formal) and resources, which shape how people act (Giddens, 1984). An individual’s actions are thus influenced by the perceived possibilities that exist within the structural boundaries in which he or she lives. Structures are not fixed – and are both constraining and enabling at the same time. Ponic (1994, 2000) explains that structures can facilitate or inhibit agent’s actions; however, the actions of agents also maintain or transform structures. Thus, agents are simultaneously being shaped by and shaping the social structures in which he or she lives.

**Social Maintenance**

Structures are socially maintained by a person’s active consent to act within the boundaries. Boundaries are both self-imposed and influenced by others and typically reflect dominant social values. Although dominant practices can be resisted, an individual’s practical consciousness7 may not facilitate the understanding/belief that different possibilities exist – thereby making change (i.e., other possibilities) seemingly impossible to imagine.

**Social Change**

Ponic (1994, 2000) argues that the alternative to social maintenance is social change, which can only occur through the act of resisting dominant structures. Social change works towards transforming and/or expanding the structural boundaries in which individuals live, thus leading to the creation of new possibilities. Theoretically, intervention strategies are designed to expand the structural boundaries in which “at-risk”

---
7 Giddens (1984) states that: “practical consciousness consists of all the things which actors [agents] know tacitly about how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life without being able to give the direct discursive expression” (p. xxiii).
youth live, by changing the rules and/or providing them with resources that lead to the creation of new possibilities that expand their naturalized beliefs about what is "possible." Although social change can be achieved, it is a difficult process; too often, change only occurs at the surface level, where the formal rules exist. Consequently, there is an impression of change, when in reality many of the informal rules shaping an individual's actions still exist.

**Difficulties of Social Change**

For social change to fully occur, both the informal and formal structures must be expanded – which can be difficult to achieve, in part because the informal structures (i.e., dominant social values and practices) often tend to be deeply embedded in an individual's practical consciousness and then actively reproduced by his or her actions. Moreover, there is a sense of comfort and safety that is associated with maintaining and living within familiar and dominant social boundaries. Social change can be an isolating experience, as it requires people to step out of their comfort zones to expand the boundaries in which they live. The difficulties (i.e., discomfort) associated with leaving this comfort zone, is why many choose to act within the dominant boundaries, thus reproducing the dominant values and beliefs, versus trying to transform them.

Along with having the support of a like-minded community, social change needs to be supported and valued by individuals in positions of power. Without support from those individuals in positions of power, the underlying structures shaping individuals' actions and decisions will continue to be maintained, resulting in social change only occurring at the surface level where the formal rules abide. This will create an appearance

---

8 To be in a position of power means to possess the ability to use rules and resources to shape the context by which others live in order to achieve desired outcomes (Gruneau, 1988).
of change, when in reality the dominant structures underlying an individual’s actions and decisions are still in existence and thus being socially maintained.

*The Strengths Perspective*

Conceptually, the MWLESP program is drawing from the WECDSB’s grade eight outdoor education program\(^9\) as the main resource to establish a framework for its own program. Decision makers from the MWLESP program are also drawing from other outdoor education programs and intervention strategies as a resource to help in the creation and implementation process. One area being explored as a source of information has been the field of social work – where the Strengths Perspective framework (Saleebey, 1996) has been identified as a *promising practice* used in working with “at-risk” youth.

The Strengths Perspective challenges common youth care practices and provides practitioners (e.g., social workers, teachers) with a different way to work with “at-risk” youth. According to Saleebey (1996), individuals working with “at-risk” youth have a naturalized tendency to focus on and emphasize the “victimhood” of the individual, rather than to promote the inherent strengths within the individual (p.297). The Strengths Perspective challenges this practice by encouraging practitioners to focus on what “at-risk” youth are capable of *doing* and *being* (i.e., strengths), rather than emphasizing what he or she cannot accomplish due to circumstances (i.e., lack of resources) and/or trauma that he or she may have experienced. Saleebey (1996) states that the Strengths Perspective “is not denying the verdict [conditions facing these youth] but it does defy and challenge the sentence these individuals face as the only possible outcome” (p.303).

---

\(^9\) The Muskoka Woods Leadership Experience (MWLE) is an intensive outdoor education program that targets grade eight students from the WECDSB. The MWLE program was developed in 1992 by Greg Peck, Jim McMahon, and Steve Freeman, with the intent of promoting leadership and healthy active living. In the program’s 15 year existence, over 17,000 grade 8 students have participated (Greg Peck, personal communications, December 3, 2006).
In keeping with Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984), this approach challenges the boundaries in which "at-risk" youth are accustomed to living - which have caused them to believe that only one possibility exists for his/her life - by helping him/her see that other possibilities exist. MacFarlane (2006) states that "there is a great deal of dignity and power in believing that we can have goals and that we have the strengths to reach them" (p.176). This statement supports my belief that the inherent strengths of individuals who previously may have only experienced or been associated with "what they are not" (i.e., a deficit approach), may allow new beliefs (i.e., self-worth) to be formed and subsequently new possibilities to be imagined.

Assumptions

1. One of the fundamental assumptions of this study is derived from the Canadian Sport Policy (2002), which states that participating in physical activity can contribute to the positive physical, social and character development of all participants (p.5). Moreover, because outdoor education is a specific type of physical activity, I believe that participating in an outdoor education program can have lasting and long-term physical, emotional, social and academic benefits for "at-risk" youth participants (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

2. Secondly, I am operating from the assumption that physical activity and outdoor education are two powerful resources that the Ontario Ministry of Education has underutilized in educating and mentoring its "at-risk" student population. Although there are a number of schools throughout Ontario that do recognize and value the importance of outdoor education programming (e.g., WECDSB’s grade eight Muskoka Woods leadership excursion), these programs predominantly target the affluent student
population and are used as enriching educational opportunities rather than protective intervention strategies. Consequently, the way that many of the current school-based outdoor education programs are constructed tends to informally and formally exclude "at-risk" youth from accessing and participating in them. This is because the boundaries within which school-based outdoor education programs operate are designed to privilege students who have the resources (financial, human and material) to participate while limiting or hindering the "at-risk" student population from accessing these enriching academic experiences. Traditionally, within school-based outdoor education programs affluent students are selected because they have the following resources and capabilities: a high physical fitness level (human); in good academic standing (human); the financial means to pay the compulsory program fees and the subsequent equipment needed for the excursion (financial and material). "At-risk" students, who do not have the same access to these resources, are therefore discouraged and/or excluded from participating.

3. Building upon the aforementioned assumptions, it is my belief that outdoor education can be used as a protective school-based intervention strategy for working with "at-risk" youth to help them experience success in high school and more broadly.

Outdoor education programs (both school-based and commercially-based) are designed to provide a hands-on and enriching learning experience, and to promote leadership development, interpersonal and intrapersonal growth, and character development in its participants (Wurdinger, 1997). Therefore, by modifying current outdoor education programs to meet the needs of "at-risk" students, and expanding the boundaries and naturalized beliefs that many school officials/educators hold towards what school "has to be" and what "at-risk" youth are "capable of doing," I believe that outdoor education can
effectively be used as a protective-intervention strategy to work with their "at-risk" students.

4. Another fundamental assumption that is critical both to this study and more importantly to the MWLESP program, is that in order for "at-risk" students to experience success within a school-based intervention strategy (i.e., MWLESP program), the underlying value shaping the program should be one that is participant-centered. The intent of a participant-centered intervention program is to work with and empower "at-risk" participants to achieve success (in high school and more broadly) rather than to deal with them or distract them from engaging in disruptive or destructive activities (Johnston Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004).

5. Both the MWLESP program and this study are operating from the shared assumption that outdoor education as a protective intervention for "at-risk" youth is an on-going process and not a single learning experience. Distinguishing the outdoor education intervention as a process, rather than as a single experience, acknowledges that enhancing "at-risk" students' quality of life is an on-going effort that requires a series of intentional interactions between teachers and students, and not a simple quick-fix solution (Ungar, 2003). To support the belief that this type of outdoor education programming is an on-going process, the three phase outdoor education delivery model will be applied in the structuring of the MWLESP program. The delivery model recognizes that an outdoor education program should have three distinct phases built into the experience, which includes: (a) a pre-outdoor experience, (b) the outdoor experience, and (c) follow-up (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Johnston Nicholson et al., 2004; McKenzie, 2000; Pricola, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003; Ungar, 2003). I fundamentally believe that unless the three phase
delivery model is built into a school-based outdoor education program (i.e., MWLESP program) the experience merely becomes one that is fun but temporary, and no sustainable or long-term benefits for the participants are possible.

6. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) has indicated that grade nine students are at the highest risk of dropping out of high school because the transition from grade eight (elementary school) to grade nine (high school) is very difficult. I thus believe that implementing an outdoor education program that is a protective intervention strategy designed to work with “at-risk” youth early in their high school experience (i.e., as grade nine students) is critical as it will help ease some of the difficulties students experience during this transition period. In addition, an early intervention program, such as the MWLESP program, will help instill a greater sense of connectedness (i.e., to the school, with teachers, and to peers) for students who are “at-risk” of becoming early leavers. As Ferguson et al. (2005) have suggested, “at-risk” students who feel a greater sense of connectedness to their schools, peers, and most importantly a positive adult figure (i.e., teacher) are more likely to experience success in high school early on, which will later lead to success more broadly, and ultimately reduce the number of students who choose to become early leavers.

7. Additional assumptions that are integral to the MWLESP program and were adopted by the research team include the following:

   “Youth of promise” are provided with a guided opportunity to identify their leadership strengths and challenges, and to progressively develop their leadership skills by building on their strengths (e.g., leadership roles in MWLESP), by extending their leadership skills to new environments (e.g., school, community), and by receiving training/assistance as needed to reduce barriers (e.g., anger management sessions, interpersonal communication development).
University student leaders are an important component of this project. They will always be involved as tribe co-leaders in order to serve as potential mentors to high school students. They will also serve in various roles (e.g., high ropes activity leaders) as needed until high school students can fill these positions.

The SST at each school is the key contact for the “youth of promise”. They will be involved in every aspect of this program because they are the individuals most familiar with these students. Other teachers also play an important role in the lives of these students, shaping their potential for success. They will thus be involved as co-participants in MWLESP.

In keeping with duality of structure, this program is intended to be flexible, drawing on the insights of all stakeholders. Students, teachers and research team members will thus all be involved in key decisions concerning the structure of the guided leadership development process throughout the research project (From Salinitri, Paraschak, Menna, Smith & Forsyth, 2006, p.3).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sub-Problem 1

How is a protective intervention strategy created and evaluated using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation?

“Everyone has the right to an education”

- Article 26: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

School programming for “at-risk” youth has historically been constructed using a “one-size-fits-all” approach (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Wynne, 2005). Thus a program such as the MWLESP, which is attempting to use Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation, is moving beyond the scope of what has “always” been done in terms of school-based intervention programming. This sub-problem aims to identify how a program such as the MWLESP program is created and evaluated using both of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. This section begins by examining the program structures that have historically been used within the education system and intervention programming for “at-risk” youth, followed by a detailed description of two frameworks that program planners may wish to consider when structuring intervention programs similar to the MWLESP program.

School Structures

Schools are institutions where the formative learning of most children and youth takes place. Teachers are agents working within school structures (i.e., involving rules
and resources) who are charged with the responsibility of educating every student. Therefore, educators have a responsibility to provide every student with educational opportunities that maximize his or her learning experience and minimize the conditions (i.e., barriers) that may interfere with his or her learning (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2000). This approach suggests that schools should be structured in a manner that is conducive to the individual needs of its students and that provisions should be made (i.e., allocating resources) for students who are “at-risk” of experiencing (or are already experiencing) learning barriers (e.g., learning disability, family crisis). However, according to McWhirter et al. (2000), historically schools have not been constructed in a manner that reflects the interests and needs of all its students. Instead, schools have been operating within structures that reflect the needs and interests of “middle-class white children...[and not of] those who struggle with poverty, learning problems and other issues” (McWhirter et al., 2000, p.4). Barr and Parrett (1995) add that provisions are made to provide educational assistance to “at-risk” students (i.e., creation of intervention strategies); however, with the exception of “specialized at-risk programming,” most school programs are structured in a manner that privileges the “affluent” student population. Metcalfe (1993) explains that:

Structures are the boundaries within which individuals/groups/societies construct their lives. They can be visible or invisible, conscious or unconscious, tangible or intangible. Structures are, literally, the prison bars within which we live our lives...they serve both to constrain and enable individuals and groups to construct their own lives. (p. 2)

---

10 Barr and Parrett (1995) have identified seven negative assumptions that educators and school officials commonly hold towards and about “at-risk” students. Some of these beliefs include: 1) “at-risk” youth are slow learners, 2) they should be retained in school until they are ready to move forward, 3) “at-risk” school programming does not require additional resources, and 4) “some students can’t learn.”
School structures (i.e., rules and resources) act as the boundaries within which students, teachers and administrators negotiate. These boundaries shape the beliefs each person holds about self and towards the other, as well as shaping how he or she acts in relation to the other (i.e., power relations). Barr and Parrett (1995) argue that there are a "set of behavioural regularities of students, teachers, and administrators that create an eerie sameness of all schools" (p. 31). In other words, within schools there are a variety of institutionalized practices (i.e., naturalized beliefs) that are used by administrators, educators and students to shape and define his or her role within the school.

Theoretically, Ponic (1994) argues that because structures are not fixed, an individual’s assigned or perceived role within that structure is not definite. However, an individual’s naturalized beliefs about what it means to be that role (i.e., to be a teacher, to be an "at-risk" youth) becomes deeply embedded in his or her practical consciousness and makes it difficult to imagine any other way of being. Those naturalized beliefs are further reinforced when there are a number of structures aligning with them, and/or individuals active consent to act within these dominant structures, thereby facilitating the impression that it is the only possibility.

School structures (i.e., institutionalized practices) shape how school programs are created and to whom (i.e., which students) they are directed. Attached to school programs are a variety of naturalized beliefs and informal rules that are held and reinforced by students, teachers and administrators. These beliefs and rules act to create both formal and informal school program designations (i.e., enriching programming vs. intervention programming), which shape whether a program is intended for the "affluent" or "at-risk" student population. Formal and informal rules thus distinguish school programs.
designated for “affluent” students from those intended for “at-risk” students. According to Barr and Parrett (1995), most schools commonly employ this practice of informally “streaming” students in co-curricular programming. Consequently, some programs become informally known (i.e., by teachers and students) or become formally designated for a specific group and/or “type” of students.

School programs offering enriching learning opportunities (i.e., co-curricular programs) are commonly directed towards the “affluent” student population; programs that are intervention-based (i.e., life skill or work skill development programming) and/or that are remedial in any form (i.e., credit recovery) are directed towards the “at-risk” student population (Barr & Parrett, 1995). The informal use of “streaming” students is one of the institutional practices that exist within schools that neither teachers nor students tend to question - thus accepting the practice as the “way it is”. This illustrates how school programs (i.e., co-curricular programs) are currently structured in a manner that informally accentuates and reinforces existing differences (i.e., socioeconomic, academic) between “at-risk” and “affluent” students (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997).

Mahoney and Cairns (1997) have argued that co-curricular programs are beneficial for “at-risk” students because they render “school a more meaningful and attractive experience for students who have experienced few successes” (p. 241). Yet, despite the potential benefits that “at-risk” youth could derive from an involvement in co-curricular programming, current school structures do not facilitate these students’ inclusion into this type of enriching learning experience. Briefly, this is because the

---

1 Streaming refers to the educational practice of grouping students by similar academic ability.
2 Co-curricular programs include: sports teams, curricular enriching programming, and intervention strategies. These are all programs that schools do not consider as core courses (i.e., mathematics, English language arts); rather they are considered as “extra” or “optional” programs/courses that students can choose to participate in.
participant selection processes used by school programs do not necessarily consider the needs of "at-risk" students. Formal selection processes are socially constructed (i.e., by program decision makers) and are used by decision makers to determine which students can and cannot participate. The type of program and its intended purpose will shape who the program is directed towards, thus influencing which type of selection criteria is created and used to select participants (i.e., user fees, certain academic standard and athletic skill). Although establishing a participant selection system with corresponding criteria is needed to create boundaries for a program and to offset incurred costs, these structures also act as barriers preventing some students (i.e., "at-risk") from participating. Barr and Parrett (1995) propose that programs should adopt contingency structures to help accommodate students lacking the necessary resources (i.e., finances or academic achievement) needed to participate in a program. Moreover, once contingency structures are adopted, it is imperative that school officials inform teachers and students that these structures exist; otherwise they become an unused resource. Without establishing contingency structures (and communicating that contingency structures exist), selection criteria (i.e., user fees, high academic standards, and others) become barriers for "at-risk" youth, resulting in his or her exclusion from participating in programs that other "affluent" students can normally access with relative ease. School structures are thus designed to privilege students who have the resources (i.e., "affluent" student population) to participate in school related programs while disadvantaging students who have limited and/or no access to those necessary resources (i.e., "at-risk" student population).
School-Based Intervention Strategies

Barr and Parrett (1995) explain that most educational or community programs designed for “at-risk” youth are intervention strategies and are commonly implemented “at the high-school level” (p.47). According to Green, Kleiber, and Tarrant (2000) all intervention strategies are designed to provide “at-risk” youth/students with alternative choices to the otherwise destructive and unhealthy actions and decisions that they are making or considering. Protective intervention strategies are intended to be interjected into the lives of “at-risk” youth before they become involved in problematic activities and before unhealthy behaviours emerge (Barr & Parrett, 1995). In contrast to this, interventions are strategies interjected into students’/youth’s lives once problematic, destructive, and/or unhealthy behaviours and attitudes arise. Activities built into intervention strategies are intended to challenge students either mentally, socially, or physically. Moreover, activities provide students with resources that help to develop academic and life skills that “at-risk” youth need to overcome obstacles that he or she may encounter in his or her everyday life. In keeping with Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984), intervention strategies are theoretically designed to expand and/or transform the boundaries for “at-risk” youth by providing them with resources needed so that they can imagine new possibilities for their lives.

Barr and Parrett (1995) have indicated that there are a vast number of school and community based intervention strategies currently in place for “at-risk” youth. Yet, despite the high volume of existing intervention programming, the number of “at-risk” students choosing to become early leavers is still on the rise. According to Johnston
Nicholson et al. (2004), many intervention strategies\textsuperscript{13} are ineffective in their attempt to reach “at-risk” youth because they reinforce the dominant social values and beliefs held about these youth – which are both unhealthy and limiting. This is because intervention programs (i.e., both community-based and school-based) have traditionally been constructed to deal with rather than to work with or alongside “at-risk” youth. Formally, the intent of intervention programs is to provide “at-risk” youth with alternative choices and healthier skill sets needed to become proactive, contributing members of society.

However, Green, Kleiber, and Tarrant (200) explain that an informal value shaping many intervention programs is to provide “at-risk” youth with diversionary activities that distract them from being unruly or acting out destructively (e.g., Midnight Basketball\textsuperscript{14}). Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004) suggest that for intervention programs to effectively work with “at-risk” youth, they must be driven by a youth-centred focus. Therefore, the structures and activities that are implemented into a program must reflect the needs of the youth whom they intend to serve.

Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004) explain that intervention programs adopting a youth-centered approach are most effective in working with “at-risk” youth. Yet, according to McWhirter et al. (2000), many schools still use “universal practices” or programs that adopt a “one-size-fits-all” approach to “at-risk” student programming.

\textsuperscript{13} In their discussion of intervention strategies, Johnston Nicholson et al. (2000) were referring to community-based programs; however, parallels to school-based programs can be drawn.

\textsuperscript{14} At face value, Midnight Basketball was a proactive initiative strategy (implemented in the United States), that was directed towards urban “at-risk” males to help change their lives by providing them with a healthy alternative to their destructive and anti-social behaviour. However, upon further examination of the program, it was revealed that the intent of Midnight Basketball was not to help these youth, but to safeguard the surrounding communities from these youth. According to Hartmann (2001), Midnight basketball was viewed as “the best way to deal with the problem of at-risk, inner-city youth...” because it removed them from the streets and put “them under strict social control” (p.357). For further information, see Hartmann, D. (2001). Notes on midnight basketball and the cultural practices of recreation, race, and at-risk urban youth. \textit{Journal of Sport and Social Issues}, 25, 339-371.
Consequently, many school-based intervention strategies are not student-centred\(^{15}\) (Wynne, 2005). Generically constructed programs do not take into account students’ individual learning differences, needs, and/or “type” of “risk” – factors that have been identified as having an effect on students’ level of responsiveness to the strategy (Kagan, 1991). Consequently, these programs cannot be tailored to meet the needs of the students they are intended to serve, thus limiting their effectiveness as an intervention strategy. In her address to the Ontario Ministry of Education, Wynne (2005) advocated for a student-centered focus to intervention programming, stating that:

> For too long, high schools have struggled to help students reach their potential through a one-size-fits-all model... Student success is personalizing high school for every student to help them reach their destination of choice. (December 8\(^{th}\), 2005 address to the Ontario Ministry of Education: Retrieved Sept. 18, 2006 from: http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp)

However, advocating for change and actually adopting structures that will lead to change are two separate actions. Presently, within the Ontario Ministry of Education, there is widespread support for changes in educational programming and a strong consensus for the use of student-centred programming practices (e.g., implementation of student success strategies). However, there are very few accompanying solutions for how these educational changes can be effected or how student-centered intervention programs can be created.

Barr and Parrett (1995) explain that the institutionalized practices found within schools make it difficult for large-scale educational reforms (i.e., program changes) to successfully be implemented. Barr and Parrett (1995) state:

\(^{15}\) The Ontario Ministry of Education has also indicated that its schools have been using "one-size-fits-all" approaches to working with students. However, the government’s current focus on student success and its desire to raise the province’s graduation rates have led school officials to adopt and emphasize a student-centered programming focus (Wynne, 2005).
It is all but impossible to impose change on teachers unless they support the change. If teachers oppose an educational movement, a new rule, or even a new curriculum requirement, they will find ways to resist or undermine the reform...historically schools have been very difficult to change, and to restructure them to address the needs of at-risk youth may be even more difficult. (p. 31)

Having a theoretical understanding of the difficulties accompanying social change helps to explain why social maintenance is commonly practiced by agents (i.e., educators and school officials) and their affiliated institutions (i.e., schools). Moreover, this understanding provides valuable insights for individuals seeking to effect change, as it establishes the necessary framework through which change can be made possible.

Drawing from the Duality of Structure framework (Giddens, 1984; Ponic, 1994, 2000), large scale education changes, such as the Ontario Ministry of Education’s proposal to create student-centered programming for “at-risk” students, can be achieved by expanding the formal and informal structures through which schools have always operated. Thus, school officials16 (i.e., school superintendents) and educators need to collaboratively work together to create new school programs that are conducive to the needs of all students, and subsequently move away from the standard “one-size-fits-all” approach. Expanding the structures through which school programs for “at-risk” youth are constructed and operate (e.g., moving towards a student-centred focus), will improve their ability to effect change in the lives of “at-risk” students. Barr and Parrett (1995) explain that without restructuring school in “dramatic ways,” school programs will continue to inadequately address the needs of “at-risk” students (p.59), and the dominant practices in which schools have always operated will continue to be maintained.

---

16 School officials are in positions of power, consequently, they have the ability (i.e., rules and resources) to support the need for educational reform. Having the support of school officials improves the likeliness that others (i.e., teachers) will see the need for social change and offer his or her support – thus leading to the creation of social change.
The MWLESP Program

The proposed MWLESP program is an example of a current school-based protective intervention strategy that is attempting to challenge the way that schools and their programs (i.e., intervention programs) have “normally” been constructed and operate. Challenging these dominant structures involves creating a new way for a school to be and new structures by which its programs can operate. Doing so allows structures to become more conducive to the needs of the “at-risk” students and consequently more likely to affect change in students’ lives. Conceptually, the MWLESP program is attempting to use outdoor education as a means to expand two sets of structural boundaries. One set of boundaries is linked to how the school and its associated programs (i.e., co-curricular, enriching, and intervention programming) operate and the second set of boundaries are linked to how participants of the MWLESP program are living. The MWLESP program intends to shift the naturalized beliefs\textsuperscript{17} that each participant holds towards what he or she has “traditionally” thought to be possible - for himself or herself, towards “the Other”,\textsuperscript{18} and towards school. Decision makers involved in the MWLESP program believe that expanding the boundaries of all participants will increase the likeliness that the participating “students of promise” will experience success in high school and more broadly.

\textsuperscript{17} Transforming participants’ naturalized beliefs towards self and other, involves expanding the possibilities that each individual (or group of individuals) imagines to be possible for “at-risk” youth. Therefore, by participating in the MWLESP program students who are “at-risk” will be able to personally see different possibilities for his or her life. Teachers and student-leaders, through interacting with “at-risk” students in a new environment, will ideally come to see these students differently and imagine new possibilities for them. Moreover, transforming participants’ naturalized beliefs towards what and how school is “supposed to be” will be facilitated through the Muskoka Woods excursion. During this experience participants have an opportunity to see that school does not always have to be a negative experience and that other possibilities for their school experience can be and are possible.

\textsuperscript{18} The “Other” refers to “those who are different from us” (Paraschak, 2000, p.153).
Creating a Protective Intervention Strategy

Creating a school-based intervention strategy that challenges traditional school practices and structures requires that program planners (i.e., decision makers) adopt new strategies. Decision makers need to look beyond what has always been done and begin to explore other areas (i.e., programs, youth care professions) as possible sources of information (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Research suggests that creating a school-based protective intervention strategy involving outdoor education (i.e., the proposed MWLESP program) is a two-part process that combines two separate programming frameworks and strategies previously used in (a) school-based intervention strategy development and (b) outdoor education program planning and evaluation (Eilish, 2002; Chen, Cato and Rainford, 1999). Creating a program first involves a conceptualization phase, where program planners (i.e., decision makers) sort through previously used intervention strategies (both within education and other areas) and highlight the promising practices that would be beneficial to include in a new strategy. Once that process is completed, decision makers can move into phase two, where program planning can begin. It is during the second phase that a program's structure actually begins to take shape, leading to its eventual implementation and later evaluation.

The Eilish Model

According to Eilish (2002), conceptualizing a student-centered intervention strategy, such as the proposed MWLESP program, involves a four-step process. The first step is to "examine the seams." Here program planners examine current school-based intervention strategies that have successfully worked with "at-risk" youth, identifying and
setting aside promising practices\textsuperscript{19} to be incorporated into a new intervention strategy. Program planners then move into a process where they “locate the threads,” thus identifying areas of need in the current interventions being employed to work with “at-risk” youth. The third step is to “bridge the gap.” Here, program planners examine programs from areas outside of education (i.e., social work) and identify strategies that have shown promise or that have been effective in working with any type of marginalized youth. Promising practices identified during this stage are set aside for future consideration (i.e., during fourth stage of process) and possibly incorporated into the new intervention strategy. In the last stage, program planners take the compiled information and “seam the threads together.” Here, current and newly acquired strategies (i.e., promising practices) are combined to create one new intervention designed to work with “at-risk” youth.

Eilish’s (2002) four-step model provides a framework which decision makers from the MWLESP program can draw from to create a new school-based intervention strategy involving outdoor education. Using the framework as a guide, decision makers can begin to sort through various intervention strategies working with “at-risk” youth that are both related and unrelated to outdoor education and/or being used within and/or outside the field of education. The most effective intervention strategies, that align with the program’s desire to operate theoretically from a Duality of Structure and Strengths Perspective, can be identified, examined for content, and possibly incorporated into the structuring of a new intervention program. Once the program is conceptually established

\textsuperscript{19} Promising practices are practices, activities, or methods used by an institution that are found to be useful and can serve as a model for others (i.e., professionals and/or institutions).
(i.e., informal and formal structures in place), decision makers can move into the program planning stage.

*Program Planning and Evaluation Using the Logic Model*

Witt and Crompton (1996) suggest that the complex nature of attributing meaning to an outdoor experience makes the planning and evaluation process of an outdoor education program difficult. Often outdoor education programs have objectives that are too broad and thus are not measurable. Baldwin (2000) argues that the credibility of "at-risk" youth programming is dependent on the ability of programmers to establish a link between the underlying values shaping the program and the structures (e.g., framework, activities) built into the program. Aligning a program's values and structures helps programmers establish measurable outcomes, which must then be used during the evaluation process to assess if participants are experiencing what the program set out to achieve (i.e., behavioural and attitudinal changes). According to Chen et al. (1999), the Logic Model is one of the most effective tools that program planners can use in outdoor education programming, as it is designed to make the planning and evaluation process more manageable. Chen et al. (1999) state that the Logic Model "emphasizes the importance of organizing short and long term goals, as well as the underlying assumptions of intervention activities (p. 450). In addition, the Logic Model is a complementary framework to Eilish's four-step model, enabling program planners to incorporate concepts that emerged and/or were developed during the conceptualization phase and import them directly into the Logic Model's framework.

The Logic Model consists of five inter-connected components and uses "a logic flow from program activities to the anticipated short- and long-term impacts of an
intervention program (Chen et al., 1999, p.450). Using a logically flowing framework allows program planners to lay out a program’s entire structure during the planning stage. The five framework components of the Logic Model are: (a) program assumptions, (b) program activities, (c) immediate/activity objectives, (d) intermediate objectives, and (e) final outcome. Because components of the model are inter-connected, decision makers are required to be intentional in how they structure a program. This framework necessitates that program planners give intentional consideration to every program related detail by logically revealing how seemingly small or “unimportant” details can affect other program objectives. For example, the decisions that are made in one area of a program (e.g., decision to amend underlying program values) can and will affect other areas of the program. Understanding that an interconnected relationship exists between program components increases the likeliness that program planners will act in a way (i.e., make decisions) that aligns with the program’s stated values and objectives (Goldman & Schmalz, 2006). This ensures that the structures (i.e., activities) built into the program not only align with the stated program values, but that they serve an intentional purpose that helps to realize the program’s objectives. Goldman and Schmalz (2006) explain that: “In terms of program planning, [the logic model helps] you know exactly where you’re going because you know precisely where you’ve been and what’s coming up next on the horizon” (p.8). Chen et al. (1999) add that establishing and outlining a clear framework from which a program is operating shows transparency and thus a commitment towards accountability. This minimizes the possibility for discrepancies to arise between what decision makers said they and the program would do and what actually occurs (i.e., what
decisions and actions were done to realize objectives). A detailed description of the five structural components of the Logic Model follows (Chen et al., 1999).

1. Assumptions: Identify the values underlying the program that are shaping and that will continue to shape the decisions and actions taken by decision makers.

2. Program Activities: Using already established values (i.e., assumptions) from which decision makers are operating, activities aligning with core-values are identified, selected and intentionally structured into the program. Decision makers need to be intentional about which activities are structured into the program, thus ensuring that selected activities correspond with an immediate learning objective (i.e., identified in third component of the model).

3. Immediate Outcomes: Decision makers establish tangible (i.e., measurable) learning objectives that correspond with the structures from which the program is operating (i.e., assumptions) and the activities built into the program. The immediate learning objectives will be used later as a short-term assessment tool to help decision makers evaluate whether the program's activities were effective in achieving what they set out to accomplish.

4. Intermediate Objectives: Decision makers establish tangible long-term goals related to the behavioural changes that the program is attempting to facilitate in participants.

5. Final Outcome: Decision makers identify the overall purpose of the program and what they hope to accomplish by implementing this program. The stated purpose of the program will affect all other areas related to the program (i.e., assumptions, activities, learning outcomes/objectives), therefore it is imperative that every decision and action taken by decision makers aligns with the stated purpose. A program's final
outcome, along with its intermediate and immediate objectives, should be used by program planners as assessment tools throughout the program (Chen et al., 1999).

The Logic Model provides a framework that decision makers from the MWLESP program can use to create, implement and later evaluate their school-based intervention. The Logic Model's framework requires that decision makers be intentional in how they make decisions and what structures they build into the program. Decision makers are thus required to formally adopt and implement a program philosophy that is reflective of its stated purpose. Once adopted, the beliefs must be formally structured into the program and each of its activities, as well as informally incorporated into the decision making process that programmers undertake throughout the intervention process. For the MWLESP program to *successfully transform and expand* the structures within which schools, its programs and agents (i.e., administrators, teachers, and students) "normally" operate, it is imperative that the program philosophy and the individual roles that each person is asked to assume are clearly communicated to and adopted by all stakeholders involved in the program. A community of like-minded individuals can then be formed, with members collectively working together towards a common goal (i.e., program objectives) in a manner that is reflective of the same underlying values. Once the planning of the MWLESP program has taken place and its structures have been created and communicated, decision makers can implement the program. Logic Model supporters (Chen et al., 1999; Goldman & Schmalz, 2006) suggest that decision makers frequently return to the program objectives that they established in the Logic Model as a way to

---

20 Evaluation of student-centered programming should be an on-going process to ensure that the needs of the students are being properly addressed.

21 Program planning for outdoor education and youth-based services (i.e., intervention programming) is an on-going process and thus is never complete.
assess the program’s effectiveness. This will assist decision makers in being accountable
to acting in ways (i.e., making decisions) that align with the program’s stated values and
objectives, ultimately improving the quality of the program and their effectiveness to
work with “at-risk” students towards experiencing success in high school and more
broadly.
Sub-Problem 2

Does using a three phase Outdoor Education Model (pre-experience, outdoor experience, and follow-up activities) in the structuring of the MWLESP program enhance the ability of “at-risk” students to experience “success” in the program and in high school?

“Ensuring every young person has the opportunity to succeed, to reach his or her full potential, is vital to building a stronger society.”

-Premier McGuinty, 2005

Research pertaining to the use of outdoor education as a protective school-based intervention strategy to work with “at-risk” youth is limited. Thus, there is a scarce amount of information pertaining to the structuring of a school-based outdoor education intervention program and/or what programming components need to be included to provide an opportunity for students to experience success. What I have identified as critical structural components of an effective outdoor education intervention, including the proposed Outdoor Education Model, has been compiled from an extensive literature review of various outdoor education programs and school-based intervention strategies that have been used to work with “at-risk” youth (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Johnston Nicholson et al., 2004; McKenzie, 2000; Pricola, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003; Ungar, 2003). Results from the literature review suggest that because “at-risk” students have specialized needs, interventions using outdoor education should be structured differently than mainstream programs (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Consequently, unlike in traditional school-based programs, intervention strategies that use outdoor education programming to work
with “at-risk” students should be structured as an on-going process and not as a single learning experience. Distinguishing an outdoor education intervention as a process, rather than as a single experience, acknowledges that expanding participants’ structural boundaries and providing an opportunity for “at-risk” students to experience success is an on-going process that requires a series of intentional interactions between teachers and students, and not a simple quick-fix solution (Ungar, 2003). The proposed Outdoor Education Model is a way for a school-based outdoor education intervention program to provide participants with an opportunity to not only build meaningful relationships with one another, but to also maintain those relationships through on-going interactions. The model suggests that an outdoor education intervention program should have three distinct phases structured into the experience, with each phase building on the other while making its own unique contribution towards achieving the final outcome. The three phases include: (a) a pre-outdoor experience, (b) the outdoor experience, and (c) follow-up (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Johnston Nicholson et al., 2004; McKenzie, 2000; Pricola, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003; Ungar, 2003). A detailed description of each of these phases, along with the structural elements that should be included within each phase, follows.

Pre-Outdoor Experience

The pre-outdoor experience is an important component of the outdoor education process because it is the foundation upon which a transformational experience is made possible. Barr and Parrett (1995) explain that it is during the pre-outdoor experience phase that initial relationships between a caring adult and students can and should be developed. Ferguson et al. (2005) have indicated that meaningful relationships between

---

22 Caring adult refers to a positive, supportive and encouraging person in an “at-risk” youth’s life, which could include a teacher, coach, and/or other adult figure (e.g. University of Windsor student-leader).
“at-risk” students and a caring adult is critical to the effectiveness of a protective intervention, as these relations are believed to help students feel supported and encouraged, while also creating a greater sense of connectedness to the school. Barr and Parrett (1995) also explain that initiating the relationship building process prior to the outdoor experience can enhance students’ experience and increase the likelihood that relationships between students and a caring adult can be maintained upon returning from the outdoor excursion.

The pre-outdoor experience is also an opportunity for educators to empower and affirm the worth and strengths of their “at-risk” students, which is achieved by building on the existing abilities that these students have and emphasizing the promise or potential that they have demonstrated in other areas (i.e., leadership), rather than focusing on the skill sets that these students do not have or have yet to develop (Saleebey, 1996; Sibthorp, 2003). One way that educators can empower and promote the strengths of his or her “at-risk” student is to include students in the program’s planning process, thereby providing students with a voice to provide input into the structuring of the outdoor experience. By doing so, the program and its outdoor experience component becomes more tailored to the individual needs of the participating students rather than being structured in a manner that is based upon the teachers’ assumptions about what these students need. According to Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004), working with “at-risk” students to plan an outdoor education experience rather than planning for these students is what distinguishes effective interventions from ineffective ones. As Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004) explain;
The best programs help young people become competent, confident, caring, and connected citizens who contribute to the community and demonstrate responsibility and strong character. The best programs take into account the particular challenges young people face and engage with them as change agents – designing and implementing solutions for themselves and their communities. (p. 67)

Thus, in order for an outdoor education intervention to effectively empower “at-risk” students and expand the structural boundaries in which they live, it is imperative that these students be empowered and be given an opportunity to assume ownership of the program; only then can these individuals begin imagining new and different possibilities for their lives. Incorporating “at-risk” students into the planning process thus becomes a way of enhancing the outdoor experience while also increasing the likeliness that long term benefits and meaningful relationships can be fostered and maintained throughout the entire intervention process.

The Outdoor Experience

The outdoor experience is the central element of a school-based outdoor education intervention strategy. Luckner and Nadler (1995) have suggested that the outdoor experience is the “catalyst” or starting point in the process of working with “at-risk” youth to experience success, because “at-risk” youth have an opportunity to spend time away from being the “Other” (Johnston Nicholson et al., 2004). During the outdoor experience, participants can develop skills and form meaningful relationships with peers and caring adult figures, both of which are central to the transformation process of enabling students to experience success. However, as noted by Green, Kleiber and Tarrant (2000), although researchers are quick to praise outdoor education programs as being an effective strategy for empowering “at-risk” youth and aiding them in developing positive social, academic and relational skills (e.g., self-esteem, improved school
performance, and communication skills), it remains unclear why that relationship (between the outdoor experience and corresponding benefits) exists. There is no definite explanation for why participants experience behavioural and/or attitude changes during the outdoor experience, or for identifying the moment when those changes occur. Gass (1993) and Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004) have both speculated that the progressive changes can be attributed to a combination of factors and not a single reason. Thus, “at-risk” youth may experience change not simply because of spending time away from being the “Other,” but rather because of a combination of factors that are intentionally built into the outdoor experience. In separate studies, both McKenzie (2000) and Sibthorp (2003) have indicated that the following components should be given serious consideration and structured into an outdoor education program, since interplay between various structural components can affect what benefits participants derive from their outdoor experience. The structural components include: the physical environment, type of activities, the leader, and group dynamics (McKenzie, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003). Each of these elements of an outdoor experience are integral to the intervention process, since they contribute to the ability of the outdoor experience to expand participants’ boundaries, thereby affecting the possibility that a participant will experience change in his or her life. Subsequently, when structuring the outdoor experience of the intervention process, decision makers should be sure to include the aforementioned components in the experience. A detailed examination of each component and its ability to expand participants’ structural boundaries is addressed in the following section.
Physical Environment

According to McKenzie (2003), there is a naturalized tendency to associate peace and serenity with an outdoor environment. The association may explain why, when in an outdoor setting, most people experience a heightened sense of comfort, openness, and safety. The outdoor environment is an ideal setting for working with “at-risk” youth because it can increase their sense of security while limiting their natural tendency to behave defensively or guarded and subsequently become disengaged from the learning experience (Sibthorp, 2003). Additionally, because most “at-risk” youth have had limited or no exposure to a wilderness environment, there is an element of excitement and newness that is built into the experience. Typically, “at-risk” youth do not associate feelings of excitement and anticipation, along with a sense of “security,” with his or her school experience. Providing these students with an opportunity to participate in a “school-related” program that is fun (i.e., an outdoor experience) allows them to imagine different possibilities for what their school experience “has to be.” Subsequently, students may become more open and receptive to the possibility that positive outcomes can be derived from their school experience (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

The outdoor environment also teaches participants about rules, boundaries, and consequences in a direct and non-threatening manner (McKenzie, 2000). Many “at-risk” youth tend to have unhealthy or non-existent personal boundaries and pay little attention to rules. A wilderness setting can facilitate an understanding about the need for personal boundaries, as well as help students develop and establish healthy personal boundaries. The wilderness setting is governed by natural rules and consequences, which
subsequently affect how people should and should not behave; these lessons can be adopted and applied in other life situations (McKenzie, 2000).

*Types of Activities*

Activities that are offered during the outdoor experience should be designed to challenge “at-risk” youth to move beyond their comfort zone and to learn new, healthier ways of behaving (Ungar, 2003). Ungar (2003) explains that most “at-risk” youth have their own set of “survival or coping skills” (i.e., naturalized beliefs) that they use when operating within their communities, schools and other lived experiences. These skills tend to be both unhealthy and destructive. However, for many “at-risk” youth these are the only behaviours and coping skills that they know how to use, as they are deeply embedded in their practical consciousness (Ungar, 2003). Therefore, it is imperative that the activities built into the outdoor experience not only teach students new and healthy social skills, but also show participants how these skills can be applied upon returning to the school and home environment (Ungar, 2003). According to McKenzie (2000), activities should allow students to draw parallels to “real life” situations that they will encounter on a daily basis. Parallels between the outdoor activities and students’ “real life” experiences must be made if transference of learning is to occur. As explained by Bacon and Kimball (1989), “without it [transference of learning] the experience only becomes a powerful peak experience....a temporary high that has few lasting benefits” (p.28). This belief is also supported by Ungar (2003), who argued that unless transference of learning takes place, any benefits that participants may have derived from the outdoor experience cannot and most likely will not be maintained.
There are a range of activities employed throughout the outdoor education experience that are used to challenge participants beyond their comfort zone. Participating in the activities allows skills such as leadership, confidence, empathy, communication and problem-solving to emerge from the students (McKenzie, 2000, 2003). As suggested by McKenzie (2000, 2003) and Sibthorp (2003), a combination of both physically demanding and reflective activities should be used to challenge participants, including group activities, personal reflection and/or solo time, and healthy risk-taking/adventurous activities (i.e., wall climbing, high ropes course, mountain biking). McKenzie (2000) notes that reflective activities directed towards participants’ cognitive and affective domains are what allows the benefits derived from the experience to be sustained. Furthermore, McKenzie (2000) explains that it is during reflective activities, such as engaging in a group debriefing session following an activity and/or personal reflection time (i.e., journaling), that the application and relevance of the experience becomes evident to the participants. Luckner and Nadler (1995) have argued that the debriefing or reflecting type activities should be considered as the “most essential” component of the outdoor experience and should subsequently be structured into every program. Without these reflective activities (i.e., group debriefing session), parallels from the outdoor experience to participants’ “every day” lives cannot be formed, thus preventing transference of learning from taking place and limiting the effectiveness of the experience to affect change.

Regardless of the type of activity, students should be presented with an attainable challenge that requires them to overcome barriers to experience a sense of accomplishment (McKenzie, 2000). Completing a variety of challenging activities
provides “at-risk” students with an opportunity to experience success in a school initiative, a feeling that few will have ever experienced (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Activities should not be too difficult, as this may cause students to become discouraged and to disengage from the experience. However, activities which are too simple are also not desirable because they can lead to a loss of interest. Therefore, McKenzie (2000) suggests that activities should be designed to incrementally increase in their degree of difficulty. Students can then move through and master a series of challenges within the same activity before boredom can set in.

The Leaders

The physical environment and activities that are built into the outdoor experience are critical to the intervention process. However, it is the actions of the leaders involved in the process that make change in the lives of “at-risk” youth possible. The effectiveness of any protective intervention is made possible through the guidance, mentoring and willingness of caring adults who invest in the lives of “at-risk” youth (Sibthorp, 2003). As such, it is imperative that leaders involved in the outdoor experience recognize and understand the importance of their role during the intervention process. According to Pricola (2003), the leader’s role in an outdoor education intervention is to teach “students as much about surviving life as they do about surviving in the wild” (p.72). Leaders should view the outdoor experience as one opportunity to connect with “at-risk” students, and recognize that to truly affect change in their lives requires on-going interactions

---

23 Leaders in the MWLESP program included: 1) student-leaders – made up of University of Windsor students and senior high school students who were returning for a second year of the MWLESP program as SP2’s, 2) SST’s – the key contact for the students of promise at each school because they are the individuals that are most familiar with these students. While on the 3 day excursion, the SST’s will serve in a leadership capacity as a member of the facilitation team. 3) Teachers – although teachers have are assuming a co-participant role during the outdoor experience, because of pre-existing power relations between teachers and students, teachers will inevitably be viewed (by students) as being in positions of power and thus program leaders during every phase of the MWLESP program.
between the leader and student prior to, during and following the outdoor experience (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Facilitating an on-going relationship requires that the leader make himself or herself available to the student to provide unconditional and non-judgmental support (Barr & Parrett, 1995, McKenzie, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003). Additionally, throughout the intervention process, leaders need to believe in the inherent abilities of each student, and that he or she has the ability to be transformed and positively affected by his or her experience within the program. Barr and Parrett (1995) explain that the expectations held by teachers (or leaders) can have a direct effect on participants and what benefits they can derive from the experience – a phenomena referred to as the self-fulfilling prophecy effect. The self-fulfilling prophecy effect is when an individual (i.e., a student) responds in a manner that corresponds with the type of feedback he or she received from an individual in a position of power (i.e., teacher). For example, students who receive positive support and affirmations from their teacher are more likely to perform well and experience success and thus fulfill the high expectations that were placed upon them. However, students who do not feel supported or encouraged from their teacher are less likely to perform well and consequently less likely to experience success, results that correspond with the low expectations placed upon them (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Working with “at-risk” youth can be a difficult yet rewarding experience. Sibthorp (2003) cautions leaders working with “at-risk” youth not to become discouraged or to give up on youth who appear unwilling or remain detached throughout the course of the intervention process. Sibthorp (2003) explains that because many “at-risk” youth have experienced unhealthy and/or negative relationships with adult figures in their past, 

---

24 This is especially true for “at-risk” youth who have experienced some form of abuse in their lives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
it is not uncommon for them to be hesitant about opening up and connecting with caring leaders. Many “at-risk” students may deliberately try to disengage themselves from the outdoor experience in an attempt to sabotage any potential teacher-student relationship from forming. In these situations, it is important that leaders remain committed to the students by continuing to be available to offer their support and encouragement (Sibthorp, 2003).

**Group dynamics**

According to McKenzie (2000), group dynamics, along with the size of a group, can affect participants’ outdoor experience and its overall effectiveness as an intervention strategy. McKenzie (2000) suggests that an ideal group size for working with “at-risk” youth is eight to ten participants per group leader. Exceeding this group size limits the amount of individual attention leaders can provide participants, as well as affecting the relationship building process between students, and between the leader and the student. A loss of connectedness can compromise the effectiveness of the experience for the participants. McKenzie (2000) emphasizes that the group needs to be a supportive environment where students feel safe to authentically express themselves. According to McKenzie (2000), the activities offered during the outdoor experience play an important role in causing group dynamics to emerge. Activities can bring participants together, allowing a cohesive group to be formed, or they can cause group members to become divided. Leaders should collaboratively work with students to create guidelines that define behavioural expectations the group will commit to follow; this will minimize the possibility that group conflict or divisiveness will occur (McKenzie, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003).
Theoretical Applications

Providing “at-risk” students with an opportunity to spend time in an outdoor environment and to participate in a variety of healthy risk-taking activities where they could experience success, while building meaningful relationships with his or her peers and caring adult figures (i.e., group leader/teacher), allows these students to begin to imagine different and/or new possibilities for what their life and school experience “has to be.” Each of these structural components of an outdoor experience (i.e., the physical environment, the activities, the leaders, and group dynamics) work together to allow the formal structural boundaries in which “at-risk” students live, to be reshaped and expanded to a point where in their practical consciousness, different possibilities can begin to emerge. However, as Luckner and Nadler (1995) have suggested, the outdoor experience is only the starting point in the process of working with “at-risk” youth to experience success. The outdoor experience only has the ability to address the formal structures shaping students’ actions and beliefs, thereby leaving the underlying structures untouched.

Follow-Up

Recognizing that the outdoor experience is only the starting point in the process of working with “at-risk” youth, the challenge then becomes sustaining the benefits participants received from their experience in all aspects of their life (Allison, 1996). Intervention strategies often have limited follow-up structures in place to support “at-risk” youth following an experience, which limits the ability of an intervention to effect long-term change in the lives of participants (Ungar, 2003). According to Ungar (2003), it is naïve to believe that a single experience in an outdoor environment will produce long
term benefits in the lives of “at-risk” youth. The inability of a single outdoor experience to produce sustainable long term benefits in the lives of “at-risk” youth can be explained using Duality of Structure’s explanation for why social change is difficult to achieve (Giddens, 1984; Ponic, 1994). Social change involves individuals working together to transform structures to create new possibilities. Social change is difficult because often change only occurs at the surface level where the formal rules (i.e., structures) exist. Consequently, there is an impression of change, when in reality many of the informal rules that shape individual actions remain in place. During the outdoor experience, participants may have a transformational experience; however, it is probable that the experience will only address the formal structures in which youth live, leaving the informal structures and the deeply embedded naturalized beliefs untouched. Therefore, at a formal level the outdoor experience provides “at-risk” youth with an opportunity to experience a new way of being; to have the boundaries in which they live be temporarily expanded. However, on its own, the single outdoor experience cannot address the informal structures and beliefs that are essentially the foundation of an individual’s actions (Ponic, 1994). The possibility for long term change (i.e., social change) in the lives of these youth is unlikely unless follow-up structures are put in place to support and work with these youth following their return from the outdoor experience that reinforce desired values in their practical consciousness. The combination of providing “at-risk” youth with an opportunity to participate in an outdoor experience, along with on-going follow-up and support upon returning from their experience, is what will facilitate long-term change (Ungar, 2003). To support the need for ongoing follow-up initiatives, Ungar (2003) offers the following recommendation:
Outdoor education programs’ purpose must be to better integrate what is learned from experience in one environment (outdoors) to another...[because] the young person who experiences the self-efficacy and positive identity that come from using a chainsaw and making a hiking trail, often finds no place for that identity back in the suburbs. (p. 8)

Given that the outdoor experience has been identified as the starting point of the transformational process, the follow-up experience should be viewed as the place where personal growth and development occurs. Essentially, it is during the follow-up process that transferability of the learning experience can occur and be applied to “real life” situations. During the follow-up process, “at-risk” youth can use the skills they developed during the outdoor experience. This will allow “at-risk” youth to become successful in high school as well as in other areas of their life.

The interactions that occur between leaders (i.e., teachers) and students following the outdoor experience become instrumental in enabling “at-risk” youth to be transformed. Green et al. (2000) have argued that the follow-up process is the most essential component of the intervention process, because it plays an instrumental role in facilitating the possibility of long term change occurring in the lives of “at-risk” youth. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few researchers (e.g., Green et al., 2000; Ungar, 2003), there is a limited amount of information on the follow-up process. Although the literature does indicate that follow-up is an important component of the outdoor education experience, it fails to explain why it is important or how to develop a follow-up program. Despite limited research, there are suggestions for what is needed in a follow-up program, including an opportunity to transfer lessons learned from outdoor experience to “real life” situations, on-going interactions between leaders and students, an opportunity to use skills and knowledge gained from the outdoor experience in school,
community and/or home environment; and an opportunity to be further exposed to outdoor activities (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Ungar, 2003).

Sub-Problem 3

Which “type” of “at-risk” student derives the most benefits from the outdoor education intervention strategy examined?

What makes some young people resolute and sturdy enough to chip away at the ore, locate the diamond, and polish it...while others weakly and feebly patter in the soil, haphazardly searching for a gem, finding only dirt?

- J.J. McWhirter, 2004

In general, the term “at-risk” has been generically used within the literature to describe a variety of youth who are “at-risk” of, or already experiencing varying “types” and degrees of either behavioural, academic and/or emotional difficulties. The aim of this sub-problem is to deconstruct the term “at-risk” and illustrate that there are both different “types” and varying degrees of risk. By doing so, this sub-problem will also examine current literature pertaining to “at-risk” youth and their responsiveness to intervention programming, thus exploring whether different “types” of “at-risk” youth are more likely to benefit from a school-based outdoor education intervention strategy than others.

Difficulties of Adolescence

Adolescence has been identified as one of most difficult transition periods, where youth experience a series of psychological, social and biological changes that move them...
away from childhood and into adulthood (Kruczek, Alexander, & Harris, 2005).

According to Child & Family Canada (2006), the combination of transitions that adolescents experience during this period creates a "scary time, full of angst and new emotions" (Child and Family Canada, 2006). Recognizing that adolescence is generally a difficult period, researchers have argued that all youth are "at-risk" of experiencing some type of academic, behavioural, and/or emotional difficulties during this period (Côté & Allahar, 1994; McWhirter et al., 2004). As McWhirter et al. (2004) explain:

"At risk denotes a set of presumed cause-effect dynamics that place an individual child or adolescent in danger of future negative outcomes. At risk designates a situation that is not necessarily current (although we sometimes use it in that sense, too) but that can be anticipated in the absence of intervention." (p.6)

How Youth Become "At-Risk"

The extent to which a youth becomes more "at-risk" and/or the severity that behaviours and attitudes associated with "risk" manifest themselves, correlates with the type of support systems (i.e., family, community and/or school) and the resources (i.e., financial, material, human) that youth have in place (McWhirter et al., 2004). In general, youth that have greater access to protective factors (i.e., resources and support systems), such as family support, positive peer support, and a sense of connection to his or her school, are more likely to experience success in high school and possibly more broadly (Ferguson et al., 2005, p.21). Additionally, these youth are less likely to engage in chronic deviant behaviour and subsequently are not in a considerable amount of danger.

---

25 Child & Family Canada belongs to the Canadian Child Care Federation. The organization is a collaborative effort between approximately fifty Canadian non-profit organizations, who have come together to provide quality, credible resources on child and family issues.

26 Ferguson et al (2005) identify 18 key protective factors that relate to school and that are not school related. For more details see: Early school leavers: understanding the lived reality of student disengagement from secondary school, 2005, p. 21.
of becoming *early leavers*. This is not to imply that they are immune to either of these possibilities; however, in general youth who have more access to protective factors (i.e., family support) can negotiate through the difficulties associated with adolescence with relatively more *ease* than youth who cannot or do not have access to those same protective factors. Youth who have less protective factors in their lives are more likely to become disengaged from school and engage in unhealthy, risk-taking activities. Increased exposure to “risk factors” results in youth engaging in more destructive and unhealthy behaviours - thus placing that youth at greater risk of entering into adulthood with chronic difficulties.

McWhirter et al. (2004) have suggested that there are different levels of “risk” - some youth are more “at-risk” than others. Youth considered to be at the greatest risk are subsequently in need of more intervention support than youth who are at low risk levels. In a report prepared for The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (2001), youth are described as belonging to a “continuum ranging from low risk to chronic deviance,” adding that “the continuum resembles a funnel with all youth being at-risk, albeit very low risk. Youth drop further and further into the funnel as they demonstrate more risk” (McKay, Reid, Tremblay, & Pelletier, 1996, p.284). Again, adolescents who have more access to protective factors (i.e., support and resources) are not immune from being “at-risk;” they are, however, less likely to engage in chronic deviant behaviour because of their access to protective resources and supports (Ferguson et al., 2005).

McWhirter et al. (2004) also agree that a continuum of “risk” exists. They suggest that there are varying levels of risk that youth can experience throughout their lives –
ranging from minimal risk to engaging in high risk-taking activities. McWhirter et al. (2004) explain that risk taking behaviours and activities progressively build; certain behaviours and activities act as a “gateway” leading youth into progressively more dangerous and/or risky behaviours. For example, a youth may first experiment with smoking, which later can act as a “gateway” to drugs that leads to alcohol and other types of illegal drug use (McWhirter et al., 2004, p.9). Depending on what supports and resources are in place to work with “at-risk” youth, they are in danger of moving farther along the continuum, which can lead to problematic adulthoods. McWhirter et al.’s (2004) proposed “at-risk continuum” (see Figure 1) illustrates the progressive nature of risk; however, it does not clearly explain the pathways whereby youth become “at-risk,” and/or enter into different levels of risk. The continuum does, however, provide a brief description of both the protective and risk factors that are typically responsible for a youth being considered to be at that level of risk, along with the behaviours and activities that are also associated with that risk level.

---

27 McWhirter et al (2004) call the last level of the continuum the “At-risk category activity.” The authors acknowledge that once youth attain this level they have already passed beyond risk, because they have frequently been engaging in the problematic activities that define the category. Thus once youth reach this category, they are perceived as being “at-risk for more intense maladaptive behaviour” (p.7).
In their report on *early school leavers*, Ferguson et al. (2005) suggest that there are three pathways through which students can become “at-risk” of disengaging from school (p.18). A brief description of these three pathways follows.

1. **Starting from scratch** – these are youth who have experienced a multitude of school related (i.e., learning difficulties) and non-school related (i.e., abuse) risk factors for most of their lives. Subsequently, according to Ferguson et al. (2005), these are youth for whom school provides “a further risk to an already difficult
pathway” (p.18). These are typically youth who have limited access to supports and resources, which places them at greater risk of becoming early school leavers.

2. The in-between – these are youth who have experienced a combination of protective and risk factors. Although these youth have faced some challenges in their lives, they have access to some resources and supports that provide the possibility that they can experience success in high school and more broadly (Ferguson et al., 2005, p.19).

3. Mostly protected – these are youth who, for the most part, have been surrounded by protective supports (i.e., family, school and communities) and have had the resources that can enable them to experience success in school and more broadly. Typically, these youth are considered to be at a low risk level but, for a variety of reasons (i.e., unhealthy choices), they become “at-risk” of becoming early school leavers. Despite being “at-risk,” these youth have access to resources that give them more opportunities than other students (i.e., those without same access to resources) to negotiate back into lower risk levels (Ferguson et al., 2005, p.19).

Ferguson et al.’s (2005) proposed pathways to disengagement are complimentary to McWhirter et al.’s (2004) “at-risk continuum,” because it provides a plausible explanation for how youth enter into risk and how they can progressively become more “at-risk.”

Deconstructing the Meaning of the Term “At-Risk”

Within the literature, there is no concise definition for the term “at-risk” youth and no consensus on what factors specifically cause or place a youth “at-risk” (McWhirter et al., 2004; Wortherspoon & Schissel, 2001). Consequently, how youth
come to be considered “at-risk” and which measurements (i.e., risk indicators) are used to identify youth as being “at-risk” varies, depending on the context in which the term is used. Wortherspoon and Schissel (2001) deconstruct the term “at-risk” youth and explain that various institutions (i.e., social work, education) use the term differently to represent a diverse group of youth “at-risk” of experiencing or already experiencing a variety of difficulties. The authors also explain that each institution has its own set of naturalized beliefs and stigmas attached to what it means to be an “at-risk” youth. For example, McWhirter et al. (2004, p.6) explain that in social work an “at-risk” youth is someone who is experiencing emotional and adjustment problems, often caused by family-environmental (i.e., abuse) and/or social-environmental (i.e., socio-economic status) difficulties. In education, “at-risk” youth refers to students who, for whatever reason(s) (i.e., behavioural or academic), are in jeopardy of not graduating from high school and consequently are likely to experience “problematic” future career or life paths.

According to Ferguson et al. (2005), there are a variety of school related and non-school related antecedents (i.e., risk factors) that academically place youth “at-risk” of becoming an early leaver. In their report on early school leavers, Ferguson et al. (2005) identify a series of macro, meso and micro level variables that effectively place some youth more “at-risk” than others (Table 2).

---

28 In their article, Wortherspoon and Schissel (2001) specifically refer to how the term is used within education.
29 Baldwin (2000) explains that antecedents are “conditions such as personal characteristics, demographics, social status, and community quality that based on research are associated with risk behaviour” (p.23).
Table 2: Key Risk Factors Associated with *Early School Leaving* (From Ferguson et al., 2005, p.14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-School Related Factor</th>
<th>Macro</th>
<th>Meso</th>
<th>Micro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Low socio-economic status/social class</td>
<td>-Household stress</td>
<td>-Problematic student involvement with education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-minority group status</td>
<td>-Family dynamics</td>
<td>-Physical, mental and/or cognitive disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-gender</td>
<td>-Limited social support for remaining in school</td>
<td>-Youth with high degrees of autonomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Community characteristics (social environmental factors)</td>
<td>-Youth assuming “adult role” (i.e., teenage pregnancy)</td>
<td>-Youth experimenting with risk-taking activities (i.e., drugs, alcohol)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Discrimination and identity issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Related Factors</th>
<th>Macro</th>
<th>Meso</th>
<th>Micro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Ineffective discipline</td>
<td>-Negative teacher-student relations</td>
<td>-Disregard of students’ learning styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Lack of academic resources</td>
<td>-Curriculum</td>
<td>-“Streaming” practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Negative school culture</td>
<td>-Passive instruction</td>
<td>-Lack of assessment and support for students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Negative administration relations</td>
<td>-School structuring flaws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

McWhirter et al. (2004) stress that these risk factors should not be seen as independent causes of the problematic behaviours engaged in by “at-risk” youth. These risk factors should be viewed as interactive clusters that reinforce and progressively build on one another. The more youth are exposed to risk factors without protective supports (i.e., family, community and/or school) in place to work with them, the farther along the “risk continuum” they will move, resulting in a progressive increase in their degree of problematic behaviours and risk-taking activities involvement.

---

30 Ferguson et al (2005) identify three protective factors that are linked to preventing *early school leaving*: 1) high levels of school engagement, 2) high levels of parental involvement and 3) moderate levels of part-time employment (p.14).
Kagan’s Taxonomy of Risk

Building on the assumption that there are varying levels of risk, Kagan (1991) suggests that there are also different “types” of risk. In Kagan’s (1991) original taxonomy of risk, he proposes that there are five existing categories of risk to which youth belong:\footnote{Found in Kagan (1991), p.593 and later interpreted by Baldwin (2000), p.23.}

1. *Academic risk* – experienced by youth who repeatedly experience chronic school failure. Youth belonging to this category lack the academic resources and skills needed to experience *success* in school.

2. *Family-environmental risk* – experienced by youth who grow up in a stressful, hostile and possibly abusive (i.e., physical, neglect, emotional, sexual) family environment. Youth belonging to this category do not have the family support (i.e., protective resource) that can help them negotiate through the difficulties associated with adolescence.

3. *Peer group risk* – experienced by youth who are susceptible to peer pressure. Youth belonging to this category have a strong desire to be accepted by their peer group and are thus willing to do whatever it takes to achieve that level of acceptance.

4. *Behavioural risk* – experienced by youth who engage in unhealthy risk-taking behaviours (i.e., experimenting with drugs and alcohol). Youth belonging to this category feel as though they are invincible and subsequently are not fearful of the possible consequences of their actions.

5. *Social-environmental risk* – experienced by youth who live in low-income communities. Youth belonging to this category live in communities where they
are exposed to negative conditions and behaviours that they come to believe are normative.

Contrary to McWhirter et al. (2004), who have suggested that there is an interaction between risk factors, Kagan’s (1991) taxonomy is fixed and thus does not recognize the connectedness of those factors. Therefore, in Kagan’s (1991) model, where youth can only be considered as being at one type of risk, limited consideration is given to the possibility that there may be multiple factors from more than one category placing a youth “at-risk.”

For educators to effectively use this type of categorization system, it has to be representative of the types of risk exhibited by their students. With regards to the MWLESP program, Kagan’s (1991) original taxonomy did not provide an accurate representation of the type of risk and its associated factors that students from both participating WECDSB high schools experience. However, recognizing the potential value (i.e., creating student-centered programming) in adopting a classification system that recognizes that there are different “types” of risk, a modified version of Kagan’s taxonomy was created and is currently being used by the SST’s at both participating high schools (see Appendix A). The modified classification system uses four risk categories (academic risk, family-environmental, social-environmental, and behavioural risk) rather than Kagan’s (1991) original five categories. A variety of critical antecedent factors were identified for each category; these will be used to identify which “type” of risk students are most demonstrating. In keeping with McWhirter et al.’s (2004) suggestion that risk variables interact and progressively build on one another, the modified risk categories have been designed to be flexible rather than fixed. Recognizing that students may have a
multitude of variables placing him or her “at-risk,” risk categories are intended to be used to help educators identify the “source” from which a student’s problematic attitudes and behaviours are emerging. These risk categories are representative of the primary root cause for why a student is considered to be “at-risk,” but not necessarily the only cause of the ensuing problematic behaviours (i.e., effect). For example, a student who is considered to be “academically at-risk” may not actually belong to the “academic risk category.” Rather, experiencing academic difficulties (i.e., an outcome) may be caused by “family-environmental” risk factors (i.e., abuse). However, without a system in place to help educators identify the cause of the academic difficulties (i.e., the type of risk), students are simply considered “academically at-risk” and thus are unable to receive the appropriate support needed to address the underlying conditions placing them “at-risk.” Sadly, according to McWhirter et al. (2004), this is far too often what happens in schools. As McWhirter et al. (2004) explain:

At-risk actually means much more than flunking reading or math, or even dropping out of school. And yet, from an educator’s perspective, educational concerns define at-risk issues. School problems and dropout are linked to many other problems expressed by young people. (p.58)

By identifying the type of risk students are experiencing, educators can increase their ability to provide students with the most appropriate support, which will enable students to not only experience success in high school but also more broadly in their life.

*Responsiveness to Intervention Programming*

Kagan (1991) proposes that intervention strategies will achieve different degrees of success depending on the “type” of risk the student is exhibiting (p. 593). This offers an explanation for why some students will show more responsiveness than others in the same intervention strategy. Subsequently, depending on the “type” of “at-risk” student,
some students may be more positively affected in some programs than in others. Both Kagan (1991) and later McWhirter et al. (2000) suggest that a correlation may exist between a student’s responsiveness to an intervention strategy and the “type” and possibly the degree of risk he or she is exhibiting. Educators should not be surprised by Kagan’s (1991) suggestion that “at-risk” students may respond differently to intervention programming, as most teachers already apply this differentiated learning concept32 as a mainstream teaching practice. Teachers commonly use differentiated teaching styles to accommodate for the existing relationship between a student’s learning style (e.g., audio-learner, visual learner) and his or her ability to learn the material. Applying differentiated teaching practices to “at-risk” youth programming would allow educators to diversify the type of intervention programs being offered. This will allow teachers to tailor programs in a way that is reflective and specific to the needs of the students they are targeting (i.e., student-centered focus). However, as previously mentioned (see sub-problem 1), differentiated instructional practices have not been fully adopted in “at-risk” youth programming – instead educators have predominantly relied on “one-size-fits-all” practices (Wynne, 2005). This occurs, in part, because educators have not given enough individualized consideration to the possibility that being “at-risk” is not simply a “unitary diagnostic category,” but rather “a series of steps along a continuum” (McWhirter et al., 2004, p.7).

In general, then, the term “at-risk” is used as a blanket term to describe a diverse group of youth who are experiencing different types and levels of “risk,” stemming from

32 Differentiated teaching is defined in the Success for All learners: a handbook on differentiated instruction (1996) as: “Offering students multiple options at each stage of the learning process. Recognizing that there are many avenues to reach student learning outcomes and that each student needs a complex and unique mix of basic instruction and practices to reach his or her potential” (p.1.5).
a multitude of variables (i.e., risk factors). Despite evidence (i.e., “at-risk continuum”) supporting the notion that there are varying degrees of risk caused by a variety of factors (e.g., see Wortherspoon & Schissel, 2001; McWhirter et al., 2004), limited individual consideration is given to the “type” of risk factors placing the youth “at-risk” and/or causing him or her to act-out in an unhealthy and/or destructive manner (McWhirter et al., 2004). Instead, the term is used as a generic label; anyone who is even remotely considered to be “at-risk” is lumped together into one category. The effectiveness and ability of youth care workers and/or educators to provide youth-centered intervention programming is thus limited, which results in the continued use of “one-size-fits-all” programming.

**Sibthorp’s Outdoor Education Framework**

Kagan’s (1991) notion that “at-risk” students may respond differently to intervention programming depending upon his or her associated risk factors and/or “risk category,” is complementary to Sibthorp’s work (2000, 2003), which examined how antecedent factors (i.e., age, socio-demographics, family background) affected participants’ experiences within adventure programming. In his studies, Sibthorp (2000, 2003) concluded that a participant’s outdoor education experience is affected (i.e., shaped) by what he or she brings into the program (i.e., past experiences, antecedent factors). According to Sibthorp (2003), each participant will bring a unique set of characteristics and experiences into the adventure program, which will play a critical role in framing the participant’s outdoor experience (p.82). Ultimately, these characteristics affect the benefits a participant can derive from his or her involvement in the program. Sibthorp’s (2000, 2003) findings are thus similar to earlier results proposed by Kagan’s

---

33 Commercial outdoor education programs are sometimes referred to as adventure programs.
(1991), in that both suggest that the characteristics participants bring into an experience will result in participants realizing different outcomes and experiences from the same program.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

In this thesis, I completed a comprehensive case study of the MWLESP program. Specifically, I examined each aspect (i.e., phase) of the program and explored what contribution it made towards the goal of enabling "at-risk" youth to have a successful high school experience. One of the primary objectives of this study was to engage in a research process that I would not only find meaningful, but that would have a direct and immediate impact on the MWLESP program and its participants. Thus, it was imperative that I choose research methods that were action-based and conscious of the sensitivity that is needed when conducting research involving marginalized people (i.e., "at-risk" youth). After reviewing various research frameworks, I selected Kirby and McKenna’s (1989) suggested framework, which also aligned with Participant Action Research (PAR). According to Frisby, Reid, Millar and Hoeber (2005) “a participatory approach is appropriate when researchers seek to understand the lived experience of those involved in, affected by, or excluded from various forms of sport and physical activity” (p. 367). Because “at-risk” youth have historically been excluded from outdoor education programming, but are intentionally being involved in the MWLESP program, using methods that aligned with PAR to gain the student perspective of the program appeared to be the most appropriate research framework to adopt for this study.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) explain that PAR’s primary purpose is to produce knowledge that is useful to people in their everyday lives (p.2). Within the context of education research, Noffke (1995) adds that PAR helps to affect change by actively
enabling pre-service and in-service teachers to seek alternatives to current teaching practices, thus helping educators move beyond the “one-size-fits-all” program planning approach towards more student-centred practices (Noffke, 1995, p.7). Despite some of the challenges associated with conducting PAR that have been noted by Frisby et al. (2005), and that I subsequently experienced during this research process, my desire to engage in a research process that would be meaningful and have a direct and immediate impact on the MWLESP program and its participants made PAR the most appropriate research method for the my study. As suggested by Gardner (2004):

PAR removes the distance between the objective observer [me] and subjective subject and includes the community being studied as an active participant in the research, with an end goal of empowering the community to create change. (p.52)

In keeping with my intent to conduct a study that uses PAR and reflects research methods from the margins, I adopted the belief that “researching from the margins is a continuous process...[that] consists of planning to gather information, actually gathering it and [then] making sense of it” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p.44). As such, I completed this study in two on-going phases, using three different methodological approaches. Phase one of my study involved participant-observation where, as a facilitation team member, I examined each of the three phases of the MWLESP program in their entirety. During phase two of my study, I continued participant-observation data collection, and conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in the MWLESP program. In addition, I completed a systematic analysis of pertinent documents related to the creation, implementation, and assessment of the MWLESP program, and made a

34 Challenges identified in conducting Participant Action Research include: (a) ensuring active participation during all of the phases of the research process from all stakeholders involved in the study, (b) incorporating participants’ input into the data analysis portion of the study, and (c) negotiating various participants’ schedules (Frisby et al., 2005, p.369-370).
concerted effort to access information related to SP1’s academic and behavioural responsiveness/progress (e.g., credit accumulation reports, progress reports, attendance records). These three methods were selected for my study not only because they provided triangulated data for my analysis, but because they allowed me to be sensitive to the needs of my “at-risk” student subjects. More importantly, using these three methods to collect data provided these students, who have predominantly lived within “the margins,” an opportunity for their voices to be heard and valued throughout the entire research process.

Selecting Participants

The MWLESP program is a school-based intervention strategy currently being offered to nine high schools belonging to the WECDSB. However, for the purpose of this master’s thesis and a larger four year longitudinal study of the MWLESP program, only two of the nine participating high schools are involved in the research portion of the program. The two high schools participating in the studies are considered “core area” schools by the WECDSB, and were selected by senior administrators of the board to be involved in the MWLESP pilot program and subsequently to become the sample group for this and the larger research studies for the following reasons:  

- The geographical location of the schools (i.e., “core-area”) and their high “at-risk” student populations - many are from low socio-economic backgrounds.

35 Kirby and McKenna (1989) explain that “the margins” refers to people who “suffer injustice, inequity, and exploitation of their lives” (p.33). Within the “traditional” school setting, “at-risk” youth find themselves in “the margin” because school and its programming is not structured in a way that is conducive or sensitive to their needs – which offers one possible explanation for why some choose to become early leavers.

36 This information was made available to me via personal communications (April 24, 2007) with a senior member of the facilitation team who was involved in both the 2005-06 pilot program and 2006-07 MWLESP program.
• Low credit accumulation rates. In general, students from both of these schools have academic difficulties; with many students not receiving the Ministry's recommended "16 by 16"—sixteen earned high school credits by the age of sixteen.

• Low student test scores on both the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test and the Grade 9 EQAO37 Numeracy Assessment

Prior to the beginning of the 2006-07 academic year, grade 9 students entering both high schools, who were considered to be "at-risk" of becoming early leavers by their grade eight teachers and their new student success teacher (SST), were selected as the student participants for this study. Students who were in their second year of high school, who should technically be in their grade ten year, but failed to accumulate enough credits, thus belonging to either the "credit recovery" and/or "15 year old" programs were also selected as participants for this study.

In late September (2006), the grade nine and ten students identified as being "at-risk" were asked by their SST to participate in the MWLESP program. In total, thirty-five SP1's from both participating WECDSB high schools (totalling 70 participants) were invited to participate in the three day outdoor excursion at Muskoka Woods Sports Resort.38 Prior to leaving for the outdoor excursion, I, along with the SST's, reviewed each SP1's history and using a modified version of Kagan's (1991) "at-risk" taxonomy, placed students in one of four "risk" categories (academic, behavioural, family-

37 The EQAO - Education Quality and Accountability Office - is responsible for administering standardized provincial tests that assess students in the following four areas: (a) grade 3 and grade 6 students are tested in reading, writing, and mathematics, (b) grade 9 students are tested in numeracy, and (c) grade 10 students must successfully complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (Retrieved April 24, 2007 from: http://www.eqao.com/).
38 In total 46 SP1's participated in the three day Muskoka Woods excursion (28 SP1's from high school #1 and 18 SP1's from high school #2).
environmental, and social-environmental). The intent of placing students in these “risk” categories was to allow me to monitor student responsiveness throughout the outdoor education intervention process (sub-problem 3), and explore whether some “at-risk” students are more responsive than others to the outdoor education intervention strategy (see Appendix A). The SST’s also identified and invited eight SP2’s (who attended the 2005 pilot program) to return as leaders to the MWLESP program.

University student leaders for the MWLESP program were selected from two sources (a) former students from 95-477 - Outdoor Recreation and (b) Faculty of Education students. These students were asked to be involved in the MWLESP program by a faculty member from the Department of Kinesiology and from the Faculty of Education. Teachers that had either (a) a strong rapport with the participating SP1’s and SP2’s or (b) were in need of professional development with regards to the sensitivity needed to work with “at-risk” youth, were invited to participate in the MWLESP program as co-participants.

Methodology

*Participant-Observation*

Participant-observation was the first method used to investigate this research topic. The data collected through this method was an important element of this research process because, as Kirby and McKenna (1989) explain, "Direct participation and observation by the researcher is thought to provide meaning for the behaviours and attitudes expressed by individuals being researched" (p.76). During this research process, I participated as a member of the MWLESP facilitation team. This unique position allowed me to become fully immersed in every aspect related to the program, including
its creation, implementation and the assessment of its effectiveness as an intervention strategy.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) note that the researcher’s record of events (i.e., observations) and thoughts about that event (i.e., reflections) are two types of data that can be collected through participant-observation research. During each of the three phases of the MWLESP program, I used two separate notebooks to record my observations and reflections about my experience within the program. The first notebook was strictly used to record observations made while participating in the program. This notebook was divided into five categories that I used to document my observations from the various experiences within and related to the MWLESP program: (a) the program, (b) “Students of Promise” Year 1 (SP1’s) experience, (c) Student Leaders’ contribution (both SP2’s and university leaders), (d) Teacher’s contribution and (e) Emerging Category (see Appendix B). The last category was only used as a temporary storage place for significant observations that I was initially unsure how to categorize. I frequently returned to those “emerging” observations, in order to review them and find the most appropriate category to place them in. When a previously unidentified pattern of observations related to activities offered at Muskoka Woods emerged, this last category was subsequently renamed “activity-related observations.”

Categorizing observations in this manner helped to simplify the organization and management of the data collection throughout this process. Moreover, it helped clarify the relationship that my observations had to each of my research sub-problems. Observations were recorded at different times during the program’s scheduled activities, including a lull in or between activities or at the end of an activity. Flexibility was needed
for recording my observations, because many of the activities took place in highly active environments (e.g., during the three day outdoor excursion, planning meetings for follow-up programming), which required my active participation. Observations were recorded in their appropriate category and included a brief description of who was involved in the incident or observation\textsuperscript{39}, and an indication of when, where, and during which program phase this observation occurred (e.g., during the closing affirmation activity at Muskoka Woods Sport Resort – outdoor experience phase). This information helped make more apparent which question(s) the observations most addressed during the data analysis portion of my study.

A second notebook was used as a daily journal where I was able to summarize and reflect on my experience within the activity and/or program. Journaling took place throughout my experience in the MWLESP program, typically following an activity or series of activities. During the follow-up process, journaling became an important tool for me, providing me an avenue to vent some of my frustrations with the lack of progress that was taken place with regards to the implementation of follow-up programming. Examples of situations where I recorded reflections included the conclusion of a planning meeting (e.g., during the pre-outdoor experience phase), prior to going to bed throughout the 3 day excursion, and after follow-up activities (i.e., Celebration dinner). These journal reflections, along with my recorded observations, helped me process and understand the data collected throughout my experiences within the MWLESP program, and how those experiences relate to and address my research sub-problems.

\textsuperscript{39} For ethical reasons pseudonyms and/or the person’s role in the MWLESP program, rather than a name, were used when describing program participants.
Interviewing

Interviewing was the second research method that I used to collect data throughout my study, a method that was chosen because it is considered to be “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (Jonlana & Frey, 2003, p.61). In total, I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews that were on average between 25-45 minutes in length, with key stakeholders of the MWLESP program. These key stakeholders included: SP1’s (8), SP2’s (2), university student leaders (2), and the student success teacher (SST’s) from both high schools (2). During the three day excursion at Muskoka Woods Sport Resort, I had an opportunity to interact and build relationships with various participants involved in the MWLESP program. It is during this time that I identified potential interview subjects from each of the aforementioned stakeholder categories. I formally obtained written consent from each potential interview subject to participate in the semi-structured interview process. Following consent to participate in the interviews, I worked with each subject to determine a suitable time and location to conduct a face to face interview. Criteria used to identify and select interview subjects was as follows:

1. SP1’s (8) – SST’s from both schools were asked to help me identity one SP1 from each of the “risk” categories per school to be interviewed.

2. SP2’s (2) and University Students (2) – SST’s from both schools were asked to help me identify two SP2’s, one from each school to interview. During the three day excursion, I identified and asked two university students, one who had previously attended both the 2005 pilot and 2006 MWLESP program, and one...

40 In keeping with ethical considerations, prior to conducting SP1 interviews consent to participate was received from parents/guardians of participating SP1’s.
who had been a leader for both groups of this year's program, to participate in the interviews. Both the SP2’s and university student leaders had valuable insights to offer this study (and more importantly the program), and were able to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the three phase model in comparison to their pilot program experience or group 1 experience. In addition, student-leaders offered insights into SP1 responsiveness during the three day excursion, with the SP2’s offering insider information, because of their on-going interactions with students at their respective schools, pertaining to the sustainability of SP1 responsiveness since returning from Muskoka Woods.

3. SST’s (2) – The SST from both high schools participated in an interview, as they were the individuals most familiar with the participating students of promise and were able to speak to SP1 responsiveness during and following their return from the outdoor experience. Moreover, the SST’s were able to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the three phase model in comparison to their 2005 pilot program experience.

Interviews with SP2’s, university student-leaders and SST’s

These interviews began with me introducing myself and my study, and asking each subject to sign an informed consent form after explaining their rights as an interviewee. I also asked each interviewee for permission to audio-tape the interview, and received consent from all of the participants to audio-tape record the interviews. Participants were asked a series of detailed questions as they appear in my interview guide (see Appendix C). Throughout the interviews, I took notes in my interview guide as a precautionary measure, to ensure that a written record of the interview was available in

41 The 2005 pilot MWLESP program was not formally structured using the Outdoor Education Model.
case a problem with the audio-recording occurred (i.e., tape recorder malfunction). At the end of the interview, there was an opportunity for subjects to add comments or ask questions pertaining to any of the information discussed throughout the interview. Immediately following each interview, I transcribed the interview and reviewed it for thematic content during my data analysis. All interview subjects were given the option to review their interview transcriptions to ensure its accuracy, however all 14 subjects declined this offer, explaining that they were either (a) uninterested in reviewing the transcript or (b) did not have the time to review transcript.

*Interviews with SP1’s*

Interviews conducted with SP1’s were structured differently than the other interviews because (a) interviews with SP1’s were designed to help students debrief and process their outdoor experience and (b) I incorporated photo elicitation into the interview process. Research suggests that the experiences derived from outdoor education programming are difficult to assess because participants have trouble accurately articulating meaning to their experience (Loeffler, 2004). Difficulties verbally communicating emotions may be even more prevalent in SP1’s returning from the three day excursion, because, for a variety of reasons (i.e., emotional, social, psychological and physical), many “at-risk” youth have neither had the resources nor been encouraged to develop their communication skills, thus causing some to disengage from conveying their emotions as a defensive coping skill (Barr & Parrett, 1995). To address this

---

42 In order for students to take what they have learned during their outdoor experience and use these skills in their everyday lives, they must think about and interpret its meaning for themselves. Without an opportunity to process and debrief, the experience only becomes a “temporary high” that has few lasting benefits. Debriefing allows the participants to integrate what they learned from the Muskoka Woods experience into their daily lives, while gaining a sense of closure or completeness to their outdoor experience (Brackenreg, Luckner, & Pinch, 1994).
communication barrier and to assess what meaning and benefits (if any) participants derived from the MWLESP program (sub-problem 3), photo elicitation was used during all 8 semi-structured qualitative interviews with SP1’s. Loeffler (2004) indicated that photo elicitation can be an effective method to assess and evaluate participants’ experience in outdoor education programming because it provides the participant with an opportunity to debrief while visually reminding them, and enhancing emotional recall of the experience. This method thus improves the participants’ ability to articulate their emotions. Harper (2002) also justifies the use of photo elicitation in the interview process because the visual representations of the participants’ experience can evoke deeper meaning than words can offer. Loeffler (2004) explains that photo elicitation can be incorporated into the interview process by structuring questions in a way that requires the students to consciously refer to the picture in their responses.

Once SP1’s indicated to me that they were “ready” to begin the interview we began the interview process. Each interview began with me asking students to look through (with me) the pictures that he/she took during the excursion. The student was then asked to pick out 3-5 pictures that represent highlights or lowlights of their outdoor experience, memorable moments, and significant relations formed during the excursion. Students were asked to explain the pictures and comment about the significance of those pictures with regards to their experience in the MWLESP program. In addition to questions involving photo elicitation, SP1’s were asked a series of detailed questions as they appear in my interview guide pertaining to the entire MWLESP program (see Appendix C). The same concluding procedures that will be used during interviews with

43 During the 3 day excursion to Muskoka Woods Sports Resort, participating SP1’s were given a disposable camera and asked to take “appropriate” pictures that represented their experience and/or memories that they would like to take with them.
SP2's, university student leaders, and SST's were also employed at the conclusion of my interviews involving SP1's (see p.79).

**Document Analysis**

The systematic review of pertinent documents related to the MWLESP program and its participants was conducted throughout my entire study. Kirby and McKenna (1989) suggest that bringing together different sources of information and accounts of experiences allows the researcher to “make sense” of what it is he/she is studying (p.82). Therefore, to “make sense” and familiarize myself with all aspects related to the MWLESP program, I obtained various types of documents (e.g., planning minutes, school policies, Ontario Ministry of Education discussion papers) and reviewed each document in the same systematical manner. The documents that were reviewed include the following:

1. MWLESP program planning minutes
2. Ministry of Education documents
3. Student Leader Evaluation Questionnaires (see Appendix D).
4. SP1 Photo-Collages Written Responses

Document analysis was an on-going process. Engaging in this process allowed me to bring together the available data and familiarize myself with and stay informed about all aspects related to the MWLESP program and its participants (i.e., what has already been “done”, what is currently being “done”, and what still needs to be “done”).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

1. *This study will only examine student participants (SP1's and SP2's) involved in the MWLESP program from two high schools within the WECDSB.*
Although nine high schools from the WECDSB participated in the MWLESP program, I delimited the scope of my study to SP1 and SP2 student participants from two WECDSB high schools identified as belonging to the "core area". As a result, my ability to generalize the findings from my study to other students within high schools belonging to the WECDSB and/or other school boards was limited. However, as this was a master's thesis that I was trying to complete in a reasonable amount of time; delimiting my study to the aforementioned schools allowed me to explore the intervention process in an in-depth fashion. Moreover, I believe that delimiting this study to participants from these two school sites still enabled me to adequately address my stated research question and each of its three sub-problems.

2. **Exploring outdoor education as a protective school-based intervention strategy will be delimited to a single in-depth case study examination of the MWLESP program.**

Examining a single school-based program (the MWLESP program), which uses outdoor education as its primary intervention tactic, limited my ability to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of this program as a protective intervention strategy with other similar school-based programs. However, this delimitation was implemented not only because of time constraints to finish the master’s thesis by spring (May 2007), but because of the limited amount of literature addressing the topic of outdoor education as a protective school-based intervention strategy. The MWLESP program is an innovative and unique initiative of the WECDSB, as there are very few school-based programs that
are attempting to use outdoor education as a means of working with its “at-risk” student population.

3. *This study will be delimited to an eight month (Sept 2006 – May 2007) time period.*

I only collected data during an eight month time period; thus, the long term sustainable effects on participants (students, teachers, student-leaders) involved in MWLESP program are unknown. However, this delimitation needed to be implemented to complete my master’s thesis in a timely fashion.

4. *This study will be delimited by the number of interview subjects (8 SP1’s, 2 SP2’s, 2 SST’s, and 2 university Student-Leaders) used to share his/her opinions and perspectives about the MWLESP program and its “successfulness” as a protective intervention strategy.*

There were a number of stakeholders involved in the MWLESP program who made the experience possible and who shaped how the program was being executed. Although one of the goals of the MWLESP program is to involve stakeholders in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the program, there were approximately one hundred participants (SP1’s, SP2’s, Student-Leaders, SST’s, teacher participants, facilitation team members and administration) involved in the MWLESP program, which made it difficult to involve every participant in this research process. Therefore, I delimited the number of subjects that I interviewed for feedback on the program and on
recommendations to improve the program for future participants. Choosing to only
class, the number and type of participants who had an active
say in the delivery of the MWLESP program. However, due to the scope of the study and
the time limitations to complete this thesis by June 2007, this delimitation was required.

5. A final delimitation of this study is that I will assume an active role in the MWLESP
program and use participant-observation as one of the primary means of data
collection. My active role in the program, along with past experiences that I bring
into this study (i.e., conceptual baggage), will inevitably have an affect on the study
and on the data that I collect.

I recognize and acknowledge that data collected during my study was influenced
by the conceptual baggage that I brought into this study, which ultimately influenced my
decision to take an active and direct involvement in the MWLESP program. As suggested
by Kirby and McKenna (1989), conceptual baggage is “a record of your [the
researcher’s] thoughts at the beginning and throughout the research process” (p.32).
These thoughts stem from past and present personal experiences and can both impact and
shape the nature and type of research questions asked. Recognizing the influence that my
conceptual baggage has had on my study, I acknowledge that my past experiences as an
“at-risk” youth influenced my interest and desire to work with this group of students (see
Appendix E). Moreover, my conceptual baggage has influenced the nature of this study,
specifically in terms of the research question selected, the assumptions underlying the
study, and the ways that data was collected and interpreted. By acknowledging my
conceptual baggage and involving myself directly in the study as a participant-observer, I was able to compare my own experiences within and perspective about the MWLESP program with the perspectives and experiences of those that I researched.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Introduction

Results presented in this chapter have been collected throughout each phase of the MWLESP program (i.e., pre-outdoor experience, outdoor experience, and follow-up) and triangulated for validity using three methodological sources – document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant-observations. To give the reader an accurate description of the MWLESP program, participants’ experiences within the program, and an understanding of the processes used to collect these results, I have divided this chapter into three parts. I begin the chapter by providing a reflection on the data collection process, followed by an annotated timeline of events that took place during each of the three phases of the MWLESP program. Lastly, I present a detailed account of participants’ perspectives and experiences within the MWLESP program. These results are used in the next chapter to answer my three sub-problems, and, to reflect on their insights relative to my main research question.

Reflection on Data Collection

Participant-Observation

Participant-observation was an important element of this research process, because it provided me with a unique understanding the MWLESP program not only from my own perspective as a participant, but also from the perspectives of the other stakeholders involved in the program. During this research process, I have been a member of the MWLESP facilitation team. This unique position has given me an opportunity to observe these people "where they normally are and doing what they
normally do" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p.77). From my position as a facilitation team member, I have been able to observe aspects related to the creation and implementation of the MWLESP program during various phases of the outdoor education process (pre-experience, outdoor experience and follow-up). For example, during my involvement prior to and during the outdoor experience I was able to observe, reflect upon and note observable changes (e.g., changes in attitude) in students' responses, program involvement, and what relationships were formed with leaders (i.e., SP2's, university students, and teachers). I was able to build on these observations throughout the entire intervention process. Furthermore, my involvement in the MWLESP program has given me unique insights about and knowledge of the program that I would otherwise not have had access to, had I simply relied on document analysis and participants' interview responses as a means of data collection.

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis yielded varied results. Some documents, such as MWLESP program planning minutes, were more relevant than others, such as official Ontario Ministry of Education documents. Student-specific documents (i.e., SP1 progress reports, attendance records and credit accumulation reports) that I had previously been promised access to, were not, in the end, accessible, consequently limiting my ability to effectively analyze results and answer sub-problem #3. Moreover, while government documents pertaining to the Ministry of Education's Student Success/Learning to 18 initiatives offered rationale for why the WECDSB has decided to explore the option of a school-based intervention program involving outdoor education, the documents offered limited information that will help me address this study's stated research problems. In general,
the information gathered through my review of program planning minutes was the most relevant to this particular study. When combined with my insider-knowledge gained through participant-observations, these minutes provided insights that allowed me to address my research question and its sub-problems.

Ontario Ministry of Education Documents

Information gathered through the systematic analysis of documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education was beneficial in terms of providing practical justification for why school boards, such as the WECDSB, have made a deliberate effort to address student success with their “at-risk” student population. Specifically, these documents provided a detailed explanation of the Student Success/Learning to 18 initiatives currently being undertaken by the Ontario Ministry of Education as a means of increasing graduation rates to 85% by 2010. Moreover, these documents revealed that as part of the Student Success/Learning to 18 campaign, the government of Ontario has allotted more financial resources towards creating student-centered programming, so that every student’s high school experience is more tailored to his/her individual learning needs (i.e., 6 Ways Transforming High Schools in Ontario44). In addition, the documents reveal that since 2003, the Ministry of Education has created 1,100 new teaching positions specifically for these six Student Success programs, so that every school in Ontario has at minimum one full-time student success teacher (Student Success Teams: Retrieved April 14, 2007 from: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/6ways/teams.html; Student Success Commission Report on Student Success Teachers, 2006).

44 For more information about these six Student Success Initiatives please see: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/6ways/
In addition to providing practical justification for why and how the MWLESP program was made possible, the Ministry of Education documents have led me to begin asking future possible research questions related to these Student Success Initiatives and the sustainability of intervention programming for "at-risk" students, such as the MWLESP program, beyond 2010 – the year that the Ontario Ministry of Education hopes to achieve its 85% graduation rate for all students. A similar concern regarding the sustainability of the MWLESP program and the WECDSB’s decision to financially fund this initiative beyond 2010 was also raised in one SST interview.45

**Program Planning Minutes**

The systematic analysis of MWLESP program planning minutes revealed that at no time did decision makers involved in the program planning and implementation of this intervention program clearly establish program objectives, communicate a purpose, or create evaluation criteria to determine the *successfulness* of the program. Since no short or long term outcomes were ever formally established, it was impossible to implement program structures, such as follow-up programming, that would *successfully* facilitate the long-term sustainability of the MWLESP program.

**Student-leader Questionnaires**

Following the three day Muskoka Woods outdoor excursion, participating University of Windsor student-leaders were asked to complete a 12-item questionnaire related to the MWLESP program and his/her experience as a leader within the program.

---

45 Financial resource [Fr] – Throughout the results chapter, whenever a result is given that is directly related to either Duality of Structure or the Strengths Perspective, a footnote reference will be made as a way of identifying how the result is linked to either or both of these theoretical concepts. These concepts will be used to help analyze results linked to sub-problem 1. The following is a list of terms and their abbreviated forms: Duality of Structure [DS], Rules – informal rule [IR], formal rule [FR], Resources – financial [Fr], material [Mr], human [Hr], Strengths Perspective [SP].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Responses from the questionnaires were only reviewed by the researcher, but a summary of the responses was presented to the MWLESP facilitation team at a program planning meeting. The intent of the questionnaires was to provide student-leaders with an opportunity to debrief from their experience, to offer their valuable insights about the program from the viewpoint of a student-leader, and finally to evaluate the effectiveness of the MWLESP program as a protective intervention strategy for “at-risk” students. Information gathered from the questionnaires provides data that relate to all three sub-problems, and provides program recommendations that seek to improve the MWLESP program for future participants. In total, 40 Student Leader Questionnaires were distributed via email to each of the University of Windsor student leaders. Although I would have liked the SP2’s to complete a Student Leader Questionnaire, logistically it was not feasible as I had limited communication with the SP2’s prior to and following the Muskoka Woods excursion. It is for that reason that SP2’s were not included in the questionnaire process, despite being student leaders in the MWLESP program. Immediately following the three day Muskoka Woods excursion, the University of Windsor student-leaders were given a three week time period to complete the questionnaires. In total, 22 Student Leader Questionnaires were completed and returned to me, yielding a 55% response rate. Each of the completed questionnaires were carefully reviewed by the researcher and then coded for thematic content. Common themes emerging from the Student Leader Questionnaire responses include: (a) training, (b) overall experience, (c) SP1 responsiveness, (d) program related concerns, and (e) program recommendations. Each of the aforementioned themes will be presented in the results section that follows.
Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with representatives of each of the various participants involved in the MWLESP program. The aim of interviewing these four different groups of participants was to support, expand or challenge the participant-observations that I had collected throughout the various phases of the MWLESP program, by soliciting different perspectives from participants involved in the program. Despite my efforts to conduct these interviews as close to the three day Muskoka Woods excursion as possible, all interviews were completed during the months of February and March, 2007, which is approximately four months after the outdoor experience.

Following the completion of the interview process of data collection, the transcriptions of all fourteen interviews were reviewed and coded for thematic content by the researcher. As four different groups of participants from the MWLESP program were interviewed—all of which had different roles within the program and thus offer unique perspectives on the program from that particular vantage point—three separate interview guides were used to tailor the interview to the specific role that the participant had in the MWLESP program (see Appendix C).

General impressions of the Interview Process

In general, interviews proved to be a valuable source of information and in many instances have corroborated results derived from my participant-observations, as well as provided new insights that would have otherwise remained unknown to me. Although the interviews with MWLESP program participants have been immensely invaluable in helping me address and answer my research question and each of the sub-problems, the

---

46 Participant groups include: (1) SP1’s, (2) SP2’s, (3) University of Windsor Student-Leaders, (4) SST’s/Teachers.
process did present a number of challenges. For instance, negotiating and coordinating
fourteen different schedules was a challenge, especially with regards to the participants
from the high schools (e.g., SP1’s, SP2’s, and SST’s), as there appeared to be less
flexibility in their schedules as compared with the university student leaders. The SP1’s
that participated in the interviews were initially surprised that I had asked them to take
part in the interviews and that their feedback and input about the MWLESP program was
going to be seriously considered. None of the eight SP1’s hesitated to participate in the
interviews, and all of the students returned their signed consent forms with only a
minimal amount of chasing\textsuperscript{47} on my part. It appeared as though SP1’s felt a sense of
pride about their involvement in the interview process, an insight that was also observed
and shared with me by both SST’s with regards to the students who they see frequently.
For example, SP1’s demonstrated a lot of responsibility and interest in being part of the
interview process by returning their signed consent forms, as well as by showing up to
their scheduled interview appointment on time. Throughout the entire interview process
there was only one SP1 who missed her scheduled interview time, and she was sincerely
apologetic the next day and showed initiative by contacting her SST in order to
reschedule the interview with me.

Despite the initial interest that SP1’s showed regarding the interviews, the quality
of the SP1 interviews, in terms of their responsiveness, varied and as such presented
some challenges. Drawing from my past experiences working with youth and specifically
interviewing “at-risk” youth, I was not surprised by the differing levels of responsiveness
from the student participants. Some of the SP1’s were actively engaged during the

\textsuperscript{47} Chasing is a term often used by educators to describe the process of tracking and collecting signed parent
consent forms from students, a process that is particularly challenging with “at-risk” students.
interview, requiring very little prompting and responding with more than yes and no answers. Other SP1's were less responsive, requiring much more prompting and they relied almost exclusively on yes and no responses to questions that did not involve photo-elicitation. The exact reasons for the varying levels of responsiveness from SP1's during the interview process are unknown; however, it appears that its cause is likely a combination of factors. In general, SP1's were much more responsive during the first part of the interviews, when photo elicitation was being used and they had the opportunity to look through their pictures and freely share memories from the Muskoka Woods excursion that were captured on film. In addition, SP1's were also more responsive during the interviews when they were not distracted with other commitments and social engagements (e.g., lunch hour commitments and/or leaving school early48), because when they had other commitments the SP1 were generally restless throughout the interview, gave yes or no responses, and gave the general impression that they did not want to be there.

Interviews with SP1's were approached much more like an informal conversation between myself and the student, in order to make them feel more at ease. Prior to starting the interview, the student and I would enter into an informal conversation about how he/she was personally doing, how he/she was performing in school and any other topic that arose. For each of the SP1 interviews, I would bring in a beverage of the student’s choice (i.e., hot chocolate, ice cappuccino, juice) along with an edible treat, again in an attempt to make the student feel more at ease. Only once the SP1 told me that he/she felt “ready” to begin the interview would I formally begin the interview process by informing

48 During the exam period (January 29 to February 2, 2007), students were allowed to leave school following the completion of their exam, which typically meant they could leave school for the day at approximately 10 am.
the student of his/her rights as an interview subject, receive his/her consent to begin audio-taping the interview, and then begin asking questions. My intent with the SP1 interviews was not just to generate information that would be useful to my master’s thesis, but to provide these students with an opportunity to process and debrief their Muskoka Woods experience. I intentionally chose to use instances where SP1’s were struggling to give examples of how they may have demonstrated leadership at Muskoka Woods as “teachable moments,” to explain to students when and how I saw them demonstrate leadership, therefore affirming the growth that I saw in them, so that they would not leave the interview feeling inadequate or as though they did not successfully answer my questions.49

Recall Difficulties

Due to the time lapse that occurred between the time of the outdoor experience and the interviews, nearly every SP1 experienced some type of recall difficulties when answering interview questions. Questions asking for name recall (e.g., name of tribe, names of university student-leaders) caused SP1’s the most recall difficulties [8]50. Recall difficulties experienced by SP1’s is not uncommon and was a legitimate concern of mine prior to beginning the data collection process, which is why Brackenreg et al. (1994) emphasize that debriefing and processing activities for youth participants occur as soon as possible following the outdoor experience. In some instances, when SP1’s were struggling to recall program details, they became apologetic and disappointed in themselves that they could not remember. When this would occur it was important for me

49 [SP] – Intentionally choosing to focus on what SP1’s were capable of doing, rather than allowing them to believe that they either answered the question incorrectly or did not show leadership while at Muskoka Woods.
50 [#] - Denotes the number of participants who gave the same and/or similar response, a practice that will be used throughout the entire results section.
to affirm the effort that students were making throughout the interview, remind them that there are no right or wrong answers, and reassure them that recall difficulties are natural considering the amount of time that had passed since the Muskoka Woods excursion.

Comparatively, interviews with the student leaders (SP2’s and University of Windsor students) and the SST’s were much more formal and followed the more traditional interview format, with prompting used much more sporadically and on an only-as-needed basis. There were no recall difficulties in either the student-leader or the SST interviews, with both groups of participants answering all the interview questions with relative ease. The aim of conducting interviews with the student-leaders and the SST’s from both participating schools was to: (a) evaluate the effectiveness of the MWLESP program as a protective school-based intervention strategy, (b) determine how the program was created (i.e., how decisions were made) and then later evaluated, (c) evaluate SP1 responsiveness throughout each of the three phases of the MWLESP program, (d) evaluate the Outdoor Education Model in the structuring of the MWLESP program, and (e) provide participants with an opportunity to debrief and reflect upon their experience within the MWLESP program.

**MWLESP Program Timeline**

By design, the MWLESP program was intentionally structured as a three phase process as per the suggested structuring format of the proposed Outdoor Education Model previously outlined in the review of literature (See Sub-problem 2). In keeping with the model’s suggestion that an outdoor education protective intervention program consists of three distinct, yet interconnected phases, results will be presented in relation to one of the three programming phases and then later analyzed as a whole to answer my research
question and its three sub-problems. There were a number of components and events that were both formally and informally structured into each of the three phases of the MWLESP program – which inevitably shaped the program and the participants’ experiences within the program. To contextualize results gathered from participants’ experiences within the MWLESP program, a detailed timeline of the MWLESP program has been compiled from document analysis, participants’ accounts of their program experiences (i.e., interviews) and participant-observations. The timeline includes a detailed description of key events, decisions, and components that comprised each of the three phases of the MWLESP program.

_Pre-outdoor Experience_

**May 2006 – September 2006**

- Program planning meetings involving members of the MWLESP program research team. Minutes from research team planning meetings reveal that it was during these meetings where most of the major program related decisions were taken including:

  - Four year commitment to engage in a collaborative research process involving the MWLESP program
  - Decision to use three phase Outdoor Education Model in the structuring of the MWLESP program
  - Defined the underlying values and theoretical framework shaping the program - Duality of Structure and Strengths Perspective
  - Defined the program’s philosophy underlying all decisions taken and to be taken throughout the four-year research commitment
  - Defined various program roles (i.e., SP1, SP2, co-leader, co-participant)
  - Defined the general format and programming components to be built into the three day Muskoka Woods excursion (i.e., use of photo elicitation)
Decision taken to offer follow-up programming - but no discussion as to how and when to implement the follow-up program.

September 25, 2006

- MWLESP program logistical planning meeting
  - Facilitation team selected - team members’ roles and responsibilities identified
  - Logistical details related to the three day Muskoka Woods excursion planned

- **Decisions taken include:**
  - Cabin assignments, table assignments, bussing information, program schedule, identify teachers attending excursion, and assign any outstanding duties to facilitation team members.

- **Omitted Consideration:**
  - No discussion given to student-related pre-experience preparations (despite being on the day’s agenda) and no discussion given to follow-up programming.

September 25, 2007-October 25, 2006

- MWLESP Program general planning
  - Program planning minutes, along with participant-observations reveal that in the weeks leading up to the three day excursion, the focus of research team meetings centered on the SSRCH research grant application process and securing funding for the appreciation gifts (toques) for participants.
  - During the weeks leading up to the outdoor experience, the facilitation team was in constant communication with one another via e-mail, phone and face-
to-face planning meetings. The primary focus for the facilitation team was the logistical planning of the three day Muskoka Woods excursion.

- **Omitted Consideration:**
  - In the weeks leading up to the Muskoka Woods excursion, neither the research team nor the facilitation team formally discussed or strategically planned how to implement follow-up programming for participants following the three day excursion. Both teams also did not formally create short or long term learning objectives and assessment criteria to be used to evaluate the MWLESP program and SP1 responsiveness throughout the intervention process.

- MWLESP Program-related preparations at individual schools
  - SST’s were responsible for identifying and selecting potential *students of promise* to participate in the MWLESP program – student selection was to be completed by October 12, 2007.
  - Distribution and collection of MWLESP program consent forms and accompanying $60 program fee.
  - SST’s were also responsible for identifying and asking SP2’s to return to the MWLESP program in a leadership capacity.
  - SST’s were responsible for securing funding and purchasing disposable cameras for each of their students to use while at Muskoka Woods.
  - Logistical program planning for the three day excursion

- MWLESP Student-related preparations at individual schools
• SST's, SPI's and SST's all reported that little to no student-related preparations were offered during the pre-outdoor experience.

**Omitted Consideration:**

• Student-related preparations that should have been given consideration include: relationship building opportunities with tribe members, lessons on leadership, and/or journaling about experience

**MWLESP Student-leader related preparations**

• Student-leader identification and preparations for the MWLESP program was primarily my responsibility. With the assistance of two faculty members from the Department of Kinesiology and from the Faculty of Education, university students who were either (a) former students from 95-477 – Outdoor Recreation or (b) Pre-service teacher candidates, were asked and selected to be student leaders of the program.

• Three separate indoor wall climbing certification courses, paid for by the WECDSB, were held in August, September and October for 24 University of Windsor student-leaders who were selected as *activity leaders* for the MWLESP program.

**MWLESP Teacher-related preparations**

• SST's were responsible for inviting teachers from their respective schools to participate in the MWLESP program as *co-participants*.

• Formally two selection criteria for teacher selection were identified by the facilitation team, these were: (a) select teachers who had a strong rapport with participating SP1's and SP2's and (b) select teachers who were in need of
professional development with regards to sensitivity training for working with “at-risk” youth.

- A third selection criterion pertaining to supply coverage was also informally used by SST’s to identify teachers to participate in the three day excursion. One facilitation team member notes that, when selecting teacher participants, preference was given to teachers who did not require supply coverage for their classes when absent (facilitation team member, personal communications, March 6, 2007).

October 24, 2006

- A one hour in-service training session was held for teachers participating in the MWLESP program. At this meeting the program’s philosophy was discussed, a detailed description of the three day schedule was given, and each participant’s role in the program was briefly defined.

- **Omitted Consideration:**
  - From the training session was any discussion or structuring of follow-up programming, how to address behavioural concerns, and an opportunity to meet the student-leaders responsible for teacher’s respective tribes.

October 25, 2006

- A forty-five minute training session was held for student-leaders (SP2’s and University of Windsor students) participating in the MWLESP program. At this meeting the program’s philosophy was discussed, a brief description of the three day schedule was given, and each participant’s role in the program was briefly defined.
Omitted Consideration:

- From the training session was any discussion or structuring of follow-up programming, discussion on student behavioural guidelines and corresponding responses should students choose to behave disruptively, a question and answer period, and finally more time to interact with their co-tribe leaders (i.e., SP2’s), beyond introductions and contact information exchanges.

Outdoor Experience – Three Day Muskoka Woods Excursion

October 30-November 3, 2006

- Nine high schools from the WECDSB participated in the MWLESP program, however the outdoor excursion was divided into two three day experiences. Group 1, which involved the two schools from my study, attended the excursion during the first part of the week (October 30-November 1) while the six other schools made up Group 2 and attended the second half of the week (November 1-3).

October 29, 2006

- Facilitation team arrived at Muskoka Woods Sport Resort to become familiar with the camp, its facilities and take care of any outstanding program preparations that needed to be addressed prior to participants’ arrival.

Decision Taken:

- Initially the facilitation team wanted some of the student-leaders to also arrive at the Muskoka Woods Sport Resort a day early to help with the onsite program preparations. Two University of Windsor student-leaders, along with three SP2’s volunteered to arrive a day early and assist with these
preparations. However, for logistical reasons (i.e., WECDSB consent forms), the SP2’s were not allowed to come up early. Because SP2’s were not allowed to participate in the onsite preparations, myself, along with a member of the research team made the decision that no student-leaders would go up and help with onsite preparations. A decision that was made to reflect the underlying values from which the MWLESP program is operating, that the SP2’s and University of Windsor student-leaders are co-leaders and thus need to be treated as equals.

**Group 1: October 30-November 1, 2006**

*Day 1*

- Participants arrived around 11 am, just prior to lunch. Once busses were unloaded, SP1’s and student-leaders were informed of their tribe and cabin assignments.

- Immediately following lunch, participants took part in an afternoon of tribe building activities - e.g., flag making, amazing Muskoka challenge, and shelter building. These activities were designed to foster relationship building between tribe members.

- Immediately following supper, participants also took part in evening activities - i.e., night hike and guest speaker presentation – both of which were designed to emphasize teamwork and leadership development.

- Prior to lights out, each cabin participated in a reflective cabin activity – designed to promote cabin unity and provide participants with an opportunity to reflect about the day.
Program concerns:

- SP1's who smoke were misinformed prior to arriving at Muskoka Woods about the smoking policy that would be in place during the three day excursion. Consequently, many SP1's who smoke did not bring their cigarettes and began to exhibit physiological and psychological withdrawal symptoms.

- Teachers and facilitation team members were concerned about SP1 responsiveness and the inappropriate behaviours and attitudes being displayed by some students. An "emergency" meeting for teachers was called. At this time, teachers were informed that because SP1's were getting out of control, they (the teachers) needed to re-take control of their tribe, which could include threatening SP1's with removal from an activity as a possible consequence for misbehavior.

Day 2

- Immediately following breakfast participants began their full day of "challenge by choice" activities. In the morning, participants took part in a four activity rotation, while in the afternoon there were three "challenge by choice" activities, followed by a tribe initiative task and debriefing session. The "challenge by choice" activities offered during the three day excursion include:
  - The giant swing
  - Zipline
  - All aboard
  - Dangle maze

---

51 "Challenge by choice" was how Muskoka Woods staff referred to and introduced each of the camps' activities. The phrase is intended to remind participants that he/she has a choice in how involved or how "challenged" he/she wants to be in the activity – and that "trying" the activity does not always mean completing the task.
• Low ropes initiatives
• Gym activities
• Bracelet making/cordage

• The afternoon activity rotation concluded with tribes completing an initiative task, followed by a debriefing session.

• Similar to Day 1, evening activities were planned for all participants, which included:
  • Evening Mass
  • Evening Entertainment
  • Slide show presentation

• Prior to lights out, each cabin participated in a reflective cabin activity – designed to promote cabin unity and provide participants with an opportunity to reflect about the day.

• **Decisions taken:**
  • At a pre-breakfast facilitation team meeting, senior officials from the WECDSB, a member of the research team, and members of the facilitation team discussed the role teachers would assume during Day 2. The decision was made that teachers would continue to assume co-participants role and still only interject when needed and were highly encouraged to allow the student-leaders to assume leadership roles within the tribe.
  • The facilitation team decided that in order to minimize Day 1 challenges during the group 2, we would change the originally planned schedule and adopt the schedule used during the grade eight MWLE program.

• **Omitted Consideration:**
  • When changing the schedule the facilitation team only consulted the scheduling format used by the grade eight MWLE program. The facilitation
team did not consider asking Muskoka Woods staff if there was a way to offer participants an opportunity to move right into the risk-taking elements while still maintaining our tribe building (i.e., relationship building) focus for Day 1.

Day 3

- Teachers, SP2's and University of Windsor student-leaders participated in an "affirmation activity" for SP1's.

- Following the "affirmation activity," SP1's had an opportunity to choose an activity to participate in prior to the next group's arrival. The activity choices included:
  - Hike
  - Basketball
  - B4 (In-line skate park)
  - Gym activities
  - Archery

- Group 2 participants arrived shortly after 11 am, just prior to lunch. Once busses were unloaded, SP1's and student-leaders were informed of their tribe and cabin assignments. Busses were then reloaded with the group 1 participants, who returned to their home schools.

Group 2: November 1-3

Day 1

- Immediately following lunch, participants began their "challenge by choice" activity rotation, taking part in three activities that afternoon.

- Immediately following supper, participants also took part in evening activities - i.e., night hike and guest speaker presentation – both of which were designed to emphasis teamwork and leadership development.
• Prior to lights out, each cabin participated in a reflective cabin activity – designed to promote cabin unity and provide participants with an opportunity to reflect about the day.

Day 2

• Immediately following breakfast, participants continued their “challenge by choice” activity rotation, taking part in four activities in the morning followed by three more activities in the afternoon. Following the afternoon activity rotation, tribes took part in tribe building activities, where they created a flag, then completed an initiative task, followed by a debriefing session.

• The afternoon activity rotation concluded with tribes completing an initiative task, followed by a debriefing session.

• Similar to Day 1, evening activities were planned for all participants, which included:

  ■ Evening Mass
  ■ Evening Entertainment
  ■ Slide show presentation

• Prior to lights out, each cabin participated in a reflective cabin activity – designed to promote cabin unity and provide participants with an opportunity to reflect about the day.

Day 3

• Immediately following breakfast, participants departed

• Decision Taken:

  ■ Although an “affirmation” activity was planned for group 2, a decision was taken by a senior member of the facilitation team to forgo the activity and have participants depart immediately.
**Follow-up Programming**

**November 15, 2006**

- Debriefing meeting involving both facilitation and research team members. At this meeting the first formal discussion and planning of follow-up programming was discussed.

- **Decisions Taken:**
  - First follow-up activity would be a Celebration Dinner to be held December 13, 2006
  - SP1’s would use the pictures they took at Muskoka Woods to create a photo-collage and a brief written summary about what the experience had meant to them.
  - Invite two SP1’s (one from each school) to briefly share at the Celebration Dinner about their experience at Muskoka Woods

**December 4-8, 2007**

- Three collage-making sessions for SP1’s were held at WECDSB – high school #1.
  All the SP1’s completed a collage and answered three questions that explained their Muskoka Woods experience.

**December 13, 2006**

- Celebration Dinner
  - Event was attended by four senior administrators from the WECDSB and from both participating high schools, both SST’s, a number of teachers from both schools who attended the three day excursion, twelve University of
Windsor student-leaders, three SP2’s, two members of the research team, and 16 SP1’s along with their invited guests.

- During the Celebration Dinner, two SP1’s briefly shared in front of the group about their MWLESSP program experience. A twenty minute DVD highlighting the three day Muskoka Woods excursion was also presented during the dinner, and made available to participants for purchase at a cost of $5.

- At the end of the Celebration Dinner SP1’s were informed about the upcoming Take the L.E.A.P. follow-up program that would be starting in January. All 16 SP1’s who attended the Celebration Dinner signed up for the follow-up program.

**January, 2007**

- Weekly meetings at WECDSB – high school #1 to formally discuss follow-up programming with the SST and informally maintain ongoing interactions with some of the SP1’s who attended the Muskoka Woods excursion. A six week in-school mentorship program was also discussed.

- **Decision Taken:**
  - At high school #1 it was decided that the “Take the L.E.A.P.” follow-up initiative would begin in February, 2007. It was also decided that a six-week in-school mentorship program would begin in March 2007, which would involve four University of Windsor student-leaders and two groups of 6-8 SP1’s.
January 11, 2007

• Mission statement for the MWLESP program was created and presented by myself along with two senior members of the facilitation team, at the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Symposium (January 16, 2007).

• According to the WECDSB the aim of the MWLESP program is to:
  ▪ Make our grade 9 students feel welcomed, valued and have a sense of belonging, which is achieved by accelerating the development of the caring adult relationships early in student’s high school experience. We also want our students to experience “success” that is associated with school, which for so many of our students has been unheard of up until now in their academic careers.

February 1, 2007

• The four University of Windsor student-leaders for the in-school mentorship program at WECDSB – high school #1 were identified and informed that an information meeting would be taking place on February 14, 2007.

February 14, 2007

• At WECDSB – high school #1, an in-school mentorship program information meeting was held with University of Windsor student-leaders and the SST. The aim of this meeting was to inform student-leaders about the purpose of the program, define the role of the student-leader in the program, and establish a weekly meeting time for the next six weeks.

• Decisions Taken:
  ▪ Beginning February 22, 2007, every Thursday morning for six weeks, during third period (10:15-11 am), two student-leaders would meet with a group of 6-8 SP1’s to formally work on their Physical Education major project (portfolio...
project), and informally work with students on developing their academic skills (i.e., time management, organization).

- Beginning February 23, 2007, every Friday morning for six weeks, during third period (10:15-11 am), two student-leaders would meet with a group of 6-8 SP1’s to formally work on their Religion major project (portfolio project), and informally work with students on developing their academic skills (i.e., time management, organization).

February 20, 2007

- First “Take the L.E.A.P.” meeting was announced at high school #1

February 21, 2007

- Brief meeting with SP1’s from high school #1 to personally inform and invite them to the first L.E.A.P. planning meeting that would be taking place the next day - varied SP1 interest.

February 22, 2007

- First “Take the L.E.A.P” planning meeting at high school #1 was cancelled by the SST, due to mitigating circumstances\(^5\) - no alternate date scheduled.

February 23, 2007

- First discussion held with the SST about planning follow-up programming at high school #2. A second meeting to discuss beginning the “Take the L.E.A.P.” program was scheduled for March 6, 2007.

March 6, 2007

- Facilitation team meeting to plan 2007-08 MWLESP program

---

\(^5\) An accident had taken place within the community resulting in a loss of power to the school, which caused school officials to cancel afternoon classes.
• Informal meeting with SST to discuss follow-up programming at high school #2

• **Decisions Taken:**

  - School-wide announcements for the “Take the L.E.A.P.” program would begin and SP1’s from high school #2 would be formally informed and invited to participate in the program on March 7, 2007 — with the first official L.E.A.P. meeting to be held March 8, 2007.

  - Facilitation team decided to offer the 2007-08 MWLESP program to grade 11 students and no longer involve the grade 9 students. Two arguments were presented by members of the facilitation for this decision:

    1. Concern about grade 9 student’s ability to process the learning objectives of the MWLES program (i.e., leadership concept)

    2. Many grade 9 students have already attended Muskoka Woods in grade 8 as part of the MWLE program, thus the experiences are thought to be too close together and possibly too similar.\(^{53}\)

**March 7, 2007**

• First “Take the L.E.A.P.” meeting was announced and a brief meeting with SP1’s from high school #2 was held to personally inform and invite students to the first L.E.A.P. planning meeting that would be taking place the next day - SP1 interest varied.

**March 8, 2007**

• First “Take the L.E.A.P” planning meeting at high school #2 – a committee of 8 student participants was formed to plan L.E.A.P. activities.

\(^{53}\) I have attempted to identify the number of SP1’s who attended both the MWLE and MWLESP programs, presently, at the time of print, this information still remains unknown (May 7, 2007).
March 21, 2007

- L.E.A.P. planning meeting with students from high school #2

- **Decisions Taken:**
  - First L.E.A.P. activity to be a Gym Blast, held April 12, 2007.
  - Students were responsible for identifying potential teacher supervisors, booking the gymnasium and equipment for the event, and informing their peers about the event (i.e., creating school announcements and sign-up sheets).

March 28, 2007

- L.E.A.P. planning meeting with students from high school #2

- **Actions Taken:**
  - Students prepared an information letter to be given to teachers asking them to participate in the event.
  - Students prepared the announcement to begin being read the week of the event (April 9-12, 2007).

April 3, 2007

- L.E.A.P. planning meeting with students from high school #2

- **Actions Taken:**
  - Confirmed teacher supervisors
  - Confirmed gymnasium’s availability
  - Confirmed student sign-up procedure

April 10, 2007

- Gym blast activity cancelled by myself along with the SST- due to a lack of teacher supervision
April 11, 2007

- At the L.E.A.P meeting, students were informed that the Gym Blast event was cancelled.

Decisions Taken:
- Reschedule the event for May 3, 2007.

May 3, 2007

- Gym blast activity cancelled, because of a number of mitigating circumstances\textsuperscript{54} that limited my ability to meet and plan the activity with students from the L.E.A.P. program – no alternate date scheduled.

Participants’ MWLESP Program Perspectives

Results presented in this section are a detailed account of the MWLESP program as experienced from the perspectives of each of the program’s different participants (e.g., SP1’s, SP2’s, University of Windsor student-leaders, and SST’s). Results have been collected and triangulated using document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant-observations. After reviewing the data collected in each of the three methodological sources, I identified common thematic patterns that emerged from all three data sources. Responses typically pertained to one of the program’s three phases (i.e., pre-outdoor experience, outdoor experience, and follow-up), and/or key elements from one of the phases that directly shaped participants’ program experiences (i.e., student-leader involvement). Themes emerging from each of the three data sources were

\textsuperscript{54} Mitigating circumstances contributing to the inability of L.E.A.P. planning meetings from occurring include: (a) Provincial Literacy Test, (b) school in-service, (c) student schedules, and (d) miscommunication between me and the SST.
then grouped together to form seven thematic categories, which include: (a) overall experience, (b) SP1 responsiveness, (c) relationship building, (d) activities, (e) student-leader involvement, (f) program structure and (g) suitability of grade 9 student involvement (see Appendix F for organization chart). A number of program recommendations also emerged from each of the interviews, which would have created an eighth category. However, since there were a high number of recommendations, these have been included as an appendix and will be forwarded onto the program’s facilitation team (see Appendix G). With the exception of program recommendations, each of the aforementioned categories and accompanying sub-topics are presented in detail in the sections that follow.

1. Overall Experience

Results presented in this section did not necessarily pertain to one specific phase of the MWLESP program. Rather, results were general statements and/or perspectives given by participants about the program and/or about their general experience within the MWLESP program.

1.1. SP1 Perspective

Results gathered from SP1 interviews and written photo-collaged responses show that, in general, SP1’s found the three day Muskoka Woods excursion to be a positive and meaningful experience. Variance, however, did occur in terms of the level of responsiveness between students, with some SP1’s demonstrating more responsiveness than others. Through the use of photo-elicitation, each of the eight SP1’s interviewed identified three structural components of the outdoor experience that they believe make the experience one that is both meaningful and transformational. The three structural
components include: (a) relationship building, (b) the environment – specifically spending time in nature, and (c) participating in the healthy risk-taking activities.

1.2. Student-Leader and SP2 Perspective

Student-leaders also reported that they had a positive experience during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion and expressed an interest in remaining involved in any follow-up activities. With the exception of one student-leader, all indicated a desire to return to the MWLESP program next year, schedules permitting. One student-leader expressed that he believed so much in what the MWLESP program is trying to accomplish that he would return at any time and fulfill any role that needed to be done, stating that:

I am willing to participate in the MWLESP program next year or in years to come at any level, a leader, cook or even the janitor. (Jeff, University Student-Leader, 2006)

Aspects related to the program that were repeatedly highlighted by student-leaders as being memorable and contributing to the enjoyment of the outdoor experience include the following:

- Hearing the SP2 leadership stories [6]
- Witnessing the progressive attitude and behavioural changes in SP1’s [6]
- Watching SP1’s take leadership steps and move beyond their comfort zone by participating in the various “challenge by choice” activities [12]
- Relationship building with the SP1’s and the unique dynamic of those relationships, which differ from the student – teacher relationships because they are more friendship rather than hierarchically based [4].
- Reflective activities (i.e., cabin time, evening cabin activities, debriefing sessions), explaining that it was during these times many insightful conversations with SP1’s occurred [5].

1.3. SST Perspective

Unlike the SP1’s, SP2’s and university student leaders, who were unanimously able to indicate personal highlights and memorable moments from their Muskoka Woods
experience – identified either in their interview responses, photo collage write-ups, and/or questionnaire responses – only one SST was able and willing to offer program highlights from this year’s Muskoka Woods experience. However, these highlights were made in comparison to the responsiveness noted in the senior students that attended last year’s pilot program. For example, the following is an SST interview response to the question regarding program highlights from this year’s experience:

I don’t know if the grade nines are the best group to go. I’ve seen both groups. I’ve seen taking kids who have shown turnaround…oh I’ve seen it, and it’s so good. Grade nines, well they just went in grade eight. Most of them have just gone in grade eight, so it’s like, “oh we’re going on a field trip again!” It just doesn’t have the same impact…But, based on what I saw, I’m not convinced that grade nine is the best year… I don’t know. I liked it with the older kids, I think we got more, I don’t know, you hate to say “bang for your buck!” (SST [a], interview, 2007)

When asked the same question, the other SST was unable to offer program highlights and/or memorable moments from the 2006-07 MWLESP program, explaining that because of the demands of the SST role in this year’s experience (i.e., as facilitation team member) combined with the age group of this year’s participating students, it was difficult to have any true highlights from the excursion, stating instead that: “this year it felt like work” (SST [b], 2007)55.

2. SP1 Responsiveness

Results presented in this section pertain to SP1 responsiveness during the MWLESP program and the elements of the program that participants identified as contributing to SP1 responsiveness.

55 [Hr] – SST’s pre-outdoor experience workload had adverse effects on one SST’s three day Muskoka Woods excursion.
Varied SP1 Responsiveness

Varying levels of student responsiveness to the intervention program was reported unanimously by each group of interview participants. Results from participants’ interview responses suggest that some SP1’s responded more immediately than others, while other SP1’s showed little to no notable attitude or behavioural changes throughout the excursion. Both the student-leaders and the SST’s indicated that SP1 responsiveness during the outdoor experience was progressive and that gradually over the course of the three day excursion, notable behavioural and attitude changes could be seen in the majority of students. Again, the type and degree of change that was noted in SP1’s varied for each student, but nonetheless, student-leaders and SSTs unanimously reported observing distinctive shifts in some of the SP1’s attitudes and behaviours during the outdoor experience. Student-leaders noted that it became apparent that SP1’s were progressively responding to the outdoor experience when students began taking on leadership responsibilities without being prompted to do so. Other actions taken by SP1’s that demonstrate their responsiveness and leadership initiative, which were highlighted by student leaders, include encouraging one another to participate and/or complete the activity [24], verbally and at times physically guiding tribe members through an activity [4], and resolving conflict without teacher or student-leader interjection [2].

2.1. SP1 Perspective

Results gathered from the SP1 interviews that were used to determine student responsiveness to the interventions strategy examined, relied primarily on the students’ self-reported skills and improvements that they have (or have not) experienced since returning from Muskoka Woods. SP1’s were asked questions related to the naturalized
views they held regarding leadership and school pre-Muskoka Woods and their views towards both since returning. SP1's were also asked to describe the relationships they had with teachers both prior to and since returning from Muskoka Woods. Responses to these questions were used to determine student responsiveness to their MWLESP program involvement. Additional criteria used to evaluate SP1 responsiveness included if students could draw parallels between lessons learned during their outdoor experience and their daily lives (i.e., transference of learning), along with self-reported skill development and/or improvements in any of the following areas: (a) peer or teacher relationships, (b) attendance, and/or (c) academic achievement. Although no quantitative data was used to verify SP1's self-disclosed claims, other qualitative methods (i.e., participant-observations, document analysis, and personal communications with SST's) were used to corroborate student's claims.

At some point during every SP1 interview, students were able to make a transference of learning comment from the outdoor experience to their current daily lives. This was demonstrated by students applying a lesson (or multiples lessons) learned during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion to their daily lives, and make notable connections/parallels between the two experiences. For example, Erin explains that since returning from Muskoka Woods, she has become a better leader to the younger players on her basketball team, stating that:

Like at basketball practice if someone doesn't get something, like I try and help them out. Or, like say a rookie don't know any of the plays, like I'll talk to them and try to help them get it. (Erin, SP1 interview, 2007)

Every SP1 that participated in the interview was also able to identify a skill and/or multiple skills that he/she needed to further develop in order to return to Muskoka Woods.
as a leader (i.e., SP2), and indicated that they would at the very least consider participating in the “Take the L.E.A.P” initiative. Although some SP1’s [3] required prompting in the form of a practical example (i.e., sport example), most could identify ways that he/she demonstrated leadership at Muskoka Woods. At minimum, they could all identify characteristics of leadership, which most indicated they were unable to do prior to the MWLESP program.

I use to think a leader was someone everyone just looks up to, like someone who’s the coolest person. After [Muskoka Woods], I realize that’s not what a leader is. A leader is someone who does the right thing, thinks of someone else before he thinks of himself, and tries to help someone or people work together. And that’s what I learned at Muskoka. It’s probably one of the most important things we did, besides all the activities and all the fun we had. (Joe, SP1 interview, 2007)

Results from SP1’s interview responses [4] also show evidence that through the Muskoka Woods experience, some type of self-discovery was made. In some cases, SP1’s [4] discovered new found abilities that they previously thought were non-existent. For example, through his involvement in the three day excursion, Ray revealed that he learned the following:

I learned that I could be a better leader and that I am a leader. I learned that I could be more successful and that I could help out a lot more. (Ray, SP1 interview, 2007)

In nearly every SP1 interview [6-8 instances], students disclosed that by participating in the MWLESP program, some of the thoughts that they previously held about self [8], and towards school [6], teachers [6], and leadership [8] have changed. Some of these same SP1’s [3] added that since returning from the three day excursion, they have been making a concerted effort to do better in school, and according their own self-evaluation, have experienced both academic and attendance improvements.
About school, I thought it really wasn't that important and that we didn't really need to go. So, I usually didn't come. But now, I come a lot more, cause at Muskoka we learned about how important it [school] really was. Like that we need our education...[Since starting the second semester] I've only skipped two periods, which is good considering that I used to skip every single day. (Steven, SP1 interview, 2007)

*Photo-Elicitation Responses*

Pictures selected by SP1’s for their collages to represent why Muskoka Woods was a meaningful experience typically belonged to one of three categories. A brief summary of these categories follows.

i. Nature pictures – includes pictures of the lakefront, open-field areas, trees and other scenery type pictures. Three references were made by SP1’s to associating nature with feelings of peace and serenity.

ii. Relationship pictures – includes group pictures (i.e., peers), tribes, student-leader pictures, as well as pictures of teachers. One noteworthy observation with regards to the collages is that collage pictures involving adult figures predominantly displayed student-leaders and while teachers, with the exception of the SST’s and administrative staff of both schools, were notably absent from students' photo-collages. However, while conducting the SP1 interviews in January and February (approximately 3 to 4 months following the Muskoka Woods experience), SP1’s no longer had that same affiliation with the university student-leaders and all eight SP1’s had recall difficulties trying to remember the names of the university student-leaders. SP1’s, however, did appear to still value the relationships formed with SP2’s, demonstrated by their frequent reference to the SP2 involvement during the SP1 interviews. Moreover, during the SP1 interviews, students talked
more about the relationships that they either formed or improved upon with the teachers that had attended the experience, which did not occur during the photo-collage making session.

iii. Activity pictures – includes action-based pictures of participants (e.g., SP1’s, SP2’s, student-leaders, and/or teachers) engaged in the activity and/or pictures of the various apparatuses (i.e., high ropes, giant swing).

Along with the photo collages, SP1’s were asked to provide a brief write-up of their Muskoka Woods experience. The following is a summary of the themes that emerged from SP1 responses from the written portion of this follow-up activity, which can be categorized as belonging to either: (a) self-identified learned skills SP1’s acquired at Muskoka Woods, or (b) self-identified leadership skills that SP1’s wish to further develop.

*Self-identified learned skills SP1’s acquired at Muskoka Woods*

- **Perseverance [11]** – overcoming obstacles, conquering fears, “sticking with it,” trying new activities, choosing not to give up.
- **Teamwork [7]** – working together to accomplish tasks/goals, encouraging one another, helping each other finish the activities.
- **Leadership [7]** – different types of leaders who show leadership in different ways, “don’t have to be the best – just have to do your best,” helping others, putting others before yourself, doing the right thing. Verbs that SP1’s listed to describe

---

56 All 46 SP1’s who attended the Muskoka Woods excursion completed the photo-collage activity – 28 SP1’s from high school #1 and 18 SP1’s from high school #2. The SP1 written responses varied, with some SP1’s identifying more than one leadership skill, while other collages either did not have an accompanying written responses and/or the write-up did not contain usable information. For these reasons, the amount of responses given do not match the number of students who participated in the activity.
leaders [leadership] included: honest, respect, responsible, truthful, loyal, and encouraging.

- Relationship building [8] – developing new relationships and/or improving existing relationships with other SP1’s, SP2’s, university student-leaders, and teachers, gaining a new understanding of teachers (i.e., expanding and in some instances transforming pre-existing naturalized beliefs regarding teachers).

- Self-discovery [11] – Muskoka Woods identified as a “life changing experience.” Many SP1’s revealed that they came to the realization that they are more capable than they previously thought possible, noting discovery of leadership abilities, stepping out of personal comfort zone and creating new (or expanding existing) structural boundaries.

Self-identified leadership skills that SP1’s wish to further develop

- Responsibility [4]
- Communication [5]
- Patience [3]
- Problem solving skills [4]
- Conflict resolution skills (i.e., peacekeeping skills and helping out those in conflict) [2]
- Respect [4]
- Teaching skills [3]

2.2. Student-leader and SST Perspective

Student-leaders and SST’s also spoke to the progressive attitude and behavioural changes that occurred in SP1’s over the course of the three day outdoor experience, specifically highlighting that it was on Day 2 (during the “challenge by choice” activities)
when these changes in students began to emerge. According to Alex, a returning university student-leader, the gradual behavioural and attitude changes that can be observed in SP1’s can be described as follows;

The change you see in the students [starts on] the bus ride up, it’s [student responses], “I don’t know about this. I don’t know if I really want to be here. I’m just coming cause my friends are coming” [students are apprehensive]. To the second day, they’re [students] thrilled to be there. They’re not really worried, they’re all “gung-ho” in their group. The third day [it’s], “I can’t believe it’s over. I want to come back. I don’t want to leave.” So, for some and not all, but for some students, it’s a complete 180. (Alex, student leader interview, 2007)

This description of the turnaround noted in SP1’s over the course of the three day excursion indicates that SP1 attitude and behavioural changes emerged as a gradual process.

2.3. SST Perspectives

Participant-observations in conjunction with SST interview responses indicate that SST’s were continually evaluating SP1’s program responsiveness in comparison to the responsiveness noted in the senior students that participated in the 2005-06 pilot program. Because SP1’s are differently responsive, in that their responsiveness is less immediate than it was with the senior students, the ability of SST’s to note the growth and responsiveness demonstrated by this year’s group of students was skewed and thus unappreciated. Both SST’s stated that the “pay off” was not as great with the younger grade nine students, explaining that with the senior students there appears to be “more bang for their buck.”

Despite their belief that grade nines are not suitable for the MWLESP program, both SST’s did, nonetheless, report that they noted some, albeit small, behavioural and attitude changes in some of the SP1 participants. Specifically, SST’s indicated that the
SP1 responsiveness throughout the intervention process varied, explaining that some SP1’s were more responsive to the program objectives than others. One SST offers these observations regarding SP1 responsiveness during the MWLESP program.

I saw some good things that happened and I saw some negatives. I mean, I saw the students who were helpful and the students who were encouraging. I saw ones that were always pulling and everything [referring to participating in the activities]. I saw them start to work together a little bit better...But, I also saw students who, especially the grade tens, who I had hoped would step-up, I saw a couple of them step-down. And, now by that I mean they weren’t taking the lead, they were following the lead of [some] of the grade nines. And, I wish, they, they, well, that it wouldn’t have happened. That was disappointing. I thought. (SST [a], interview, 2007)

Both SSTs reported during their interviews that while at Muskoka Woods and since returning from the excursion, they have observed some behavioural and attitude changes progressively emerging from SP1’s. The following is a list of the sustainable benefits and changes that SST’s have reported observing in some of the SP1’s since returning from the three day excursion: (a) improved relationships between teacher-students, (b) improved teacher-parent/guardian relationship, (c) improved attendance, (d) improved academic performance.

Results from SST interviews indicate that the criteria used by SST’s to assess SP1 responsiveness to the MWLESP program was based primarily on whether or not students were actively participating and engaged in the program. The following is a list of criteria identified by the SST’s that was used to determine if their students were positively responding to and/or being positively affected by their involvement in the MWLESP program: (a) engaging in the activities with a positive attitude, (b) attending the follow-up initiatives (i.e., Celebration dinner) and (c) purchasing or keeping memorabilia from the experience (i.e., photo-collages and the DVD).
Program Elements Facilitating SP1 Responsiveness

2.4. Group Perspective

Everyone agreed on the identifiable components of the MWLESP program that facilitated SP1 responsiveness. All fourteen interview participants attributed SP1’s progressive behavioural and attitude changes over the course of the three day outdoor education experience to the following structural components facilitated by the outdoor experience:

- The hands-on, experiential-learning approach adopted by the MWPLESP program [14]
- Providing participants with an opportunity to spend time in a new outdoor environment which differs from the “traditional” school environment [14]
- Providing participants with an opportunity to try new healthy risk-taking activities, that they may “normally” not have an opportunity to try [14]
- The relationship building that takes place between students (i.e., between SP1’s and SP1’s-SP2’s), and between students and caring adult figures (i.e., teachers and the university student-leaders) [14].
- Students having an opportunity to experience success, which is not something these students “normally” experience [3]

Expanded Naturalized Beliefs

2.5. SP1 and Student-Leader Perspectives

Results gathered from SP1 and student-leader interview responses, along with document analysis of the questionnaire responses (i.e., University of Windsor student-leaders) and written experience summaries (i.e., SP1’s), suggest that the boundaries in which SP1’s live and the naturalized beliefs that they hold about teachers and in some cases adults were challenged and possibly transformed by their MWLESP program experience. For example, one of the university student-leader’s description of her then seemingly unimportant action of honouring a commitment that she made to an SP1,
illustrates how the naturalized beliefs held by some SP1's were challenged and possibly even transformed through their three day outdoor experience. According to Baltimore;

I had spoke to one student and I had agreed to do something with them, then a situation had occurred and it was in the air if I was actually going to be able to follow through on my word of saying, “ya I’ll do this with you.” I did in the end get to do it [the commitment] with them, like we had spoke about and the student off the cuff said, “oh, you didn’t lie to me...” And, that realization of what it [that action] meant to that kid was really cool...I think they teach us [SP1’s]. I think they taught me a few things about myself. (Baltimore, student leader interview, 2007)

In their interview responses, some SP1’s [6] also gave an indication that their naturalized beliefs and perceptions about teachers had been expanded because of their involvement in the MWLESP program. According to Joe, an SP1 from school #1, the MWLESP program had the following effect on his relationships with teachers from his school:

Well, I met a lot of teachers [that] I haven’t met before...and, I think it really helped me, because now one of the teachers that was in our tribe, I never liked him. Like, he’d walk by [at school] and he wouldn’t even look at me. Now, every time he walks by it’s “hey what’s going on?” I don’t know, I guess it gave me a better relationship with my teachers. (Joe, SP1 interview, 2007)

3. Relationship building

Relationship building was identified by all three groups of participants as being an integral component of the MWLESP program. Results in this section address three types of relationships that were identified as being formed during the MWLESP program: (a) Peer relationships, (b) SP1-SP2 relationships, and (c) SP1-teacher relationships.

57 [DS] – Student-leaders involvement in the MWLESP program played a role in helping to expand and/or transform some SP1’s pre-existing naturalized beliefs and impacted back on the student-leaders naturalized beliefs.
Peer Relationships

Results from the data analysis suggest that the relationship building that occurs between participants is an integral component of the MWLESP program. Participants repeatedly disclosed that the new relationships they formed while at Muskoka Woods were with people that they would normally not choose to interact or associate with – for example teachers and other students that are outside of their “normal” peer group.

According to Xon, one of the SP2’s interviewed, the MWLESP program provides participants an opportunity to meet and interact with new people that they otherwise would never consider approaching, explaining that,

Like they meet people [at Muskoka Woods] that if they’d meet them on the streets they wouldn’t talk to them, but because they meet at Muskoka Wood they’ll become friends and like...ya it helps. Cause like to be honest, I never like actually talked to most of the teachers in this school. And, when we went up there last year [2005-06 pilot program], then like I seen them in the halls [after returning] and I say like “hi” [to them now] and all that. (Xon, SP2 interview, 2007)

This statement once again supports that the MWLESP program facilitated an opportunity for participants to have the structural boundaries in which they live, and the beliefs that they have naturalized, expanded and possibly transformed, thereby allowing for new possibilities to be imagined and experienced.58

SP1-SP2 Relationships

3.1. SP1 & SP2 Perspectives

During both the SP1 and SP2 interviews, it was revealed that the relationships that students formed with one another have been one of the sustainable outcomes of the MWLESP program. Both SP1’s [6] and SP2’s [2] described similar interactions that have

58[DS] – Relationship building with people outside “normal” peer group helped to expand and transform SP1 structural boundaries and naturalized beliefs towards how they view “the Other.”
occurred in the hallways of their respective high schools since returning from Muskoka Woods. These interactions were between students who were in tribes together at Muskoka Woods but had no prior relationship with one another, between SP1’s and SP2’s, and/or between teachers and students. For example, Cherry explains that at his school:

Instead of just putting their heads down [SP1’s] and walking through the halls, now I actually, every time I see them I get a high five or they get a “what’s going on?” [So] We ask how’s it going and keep in touch. (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

Another SP2 explains that since returning from the Muskoka Woods excursion he still feels a sense of responsibility for the SP1’s and for being a positive example to them, explaining that:

Whenever I walk down the halls, I’ll see [some of] the students [SP1’s] like acting all hard and tough headed, and I try to make them straighten up, ‘cause I know that I kind of changed. (Xon, SP2 interview, 2007)

Both statements provide evidence that one of the sustainable benefits from the outdoor experience has been the relationships formed between participants and the new found understanding and appreciation that they have for one another. This again supports the notion that the boundaries in which some participants live and the beliefs that they had previously naturalized have in some instances been transformed or at minimum expanded so as to be able to imagine new possibilities and to hold different beliefs about others.59

During SP1 interviews [6], frequent references were made to the SP2 involvement, with SP1’s having little to no difficulties recalling the names of the SP2’s and of their tribes as compared to name recall of the teacher and university student-leaders that participated in their tribes.

59 [DS] – SP1 expanded naturalized beliefs about “the Other,” created by the relationship building that took place at Muskoka Woods.
I had “Cherry” and my cousin’s friend “Anthony” [as student-leaders]. And, I’ve known them for a few years, so it kinda made me, you know, kinda gave me security...Like, not like if anyone messes with me he’s gonna talk to them or anything like that, he’d [SP2] just say to them “hey man, you better watch it…” But then I can’t just go say something to him either, cause then he’d tell me, “hey you better watch it.” (Joe, SP1 interview, 2007)

The importance of the SP2 involvement in the MWLESP program was further highlighted in six of the SP1 interviews, where students made reference to the ongoing interaction that they have with SP2’s either at their schools or in their communities. According to one SP1, since returning from Muskoka Woods, “I talk to him [SP2] all the time” (Erin, SP1 interview, 2007), a statement indicating that one of the sustainable benefits that has resulted from the MWLESP program is the students-mentoring-students aspects, which directly resulted from involving the SP2’s in the program.

There is a strong indication from SP1 interview responses, that because of their involvement in the MWLESP program, SP2’s are no longer simply “senior students” of the school. For some of the SP1’s these SP2’s are role models whom they look up to and admire. Marissa explained that involving the senior students in the MWLESP program is important because:

They can talk about their past experience and inspire kids to do better in school.
(Marissa, SP1 interview, 2007)

Anne adds that:

When I seen them [SP2’s], I was thinking, well if they can do that, well maybe when I get to grade 12 or another time, I can try going there and being a leader.
(Anne, SP1 interview, 2007)

When asked what it was like to have senior high school students be tribe leaders, another SP1 explained;

I didn’t think that they’d be able to be leaders because they’re not a teacher and they’re students at school that I see everyday at Pizza Pizza...I liked hearing them
[SP2's] say that they had fun here and that they wanted to come back because it was a fun experience and everything. (Ray, SP1, 2007)

Similar to the relationships that have been maintained since returning from Muskoka Woods, the students-mentoring-students component also appears to be one of the sustainable effects that the SP2 involvement has had on the SP1’s since returning from the excursion. Evidence of this finding can be seen in the SP1’s interview responses, with five of the eight SP1’s reporting that they want to be a leader next year in the program and that they have been making a concerted effort to make “good decisions” in order to be given the opportunity to return to the program next year (i.e., improved academic performance, improved attendance60).

SP1-Teacher Relationships

3.2. SP1 Perspective

There is a shared belief amongst program participants that involving teachers as active co-participants in the MWLESP program has helped to improve and accelerate the teacher-student relationships, by shifting the pre-existing naturalized beliefs that each held about and towards “the other.”61 In every SP1 interview, students revealed that they were surprised that their teachers actually took part in the various activities and that in some instances their teachers experienced some of the same fears and anxieties about participating that students were also experiencing. In her response to the question “what it was like having teachers participate in the tribe and in the activities,” Erin explained that:

---

60 Improved academic performance and attendance was self-reported by 3 SP1’s from both schools, however no quantitative data was made available to corroborate these claims. However, personal communications with the SST’s and a senior administration official does suggest that since returning from Muskoka Woods some academic and attendance improvements have been noted in some SP1’s.

61 [DS, SP] — Involving teachers as co-participants was a strength of this program because it helped to accelerate relationships between SP1’s and teachers, as well as transformed or expanded the beliefs each held about each “the Other.”
I think Miss was scared [and] I didn’t think she would do that [try the Giant Swing activity]. It was funny and worth watching. (Erin, SP1 interview, 2007)

Other SP1 interview responses [6] indicated that students enjoyed seeing their teachers participate and that it helped students come to see their teachers differently. Marissa explains that her views about teachers have shifted after seeing them try the activities, stating that:

I used to think they [teachers] were boring and [that] all they did was work and teach...and now, well, they know how to have fun. (Marissa, SP1 interview, 2007)

3.3. SP1 and Student-Leader Perspective

Both SP1’s [8] and student-leaders [22] report that teachers’ active involvement in the tribe and participation at activities had an impact on SP1 participation within the tribe. There was a modeling relationship component that was built into the tribe experience, where tribes that had active teacher participants repeatedly had more SP1’s actively taking part in the Muskoka Woods activities; while tribes with inactive teacher participants typically experienced resistance from SP1’s to participating in the activities. Jake’s response to the question about what it was like to have teachers participate in the tribe activities articulates the impact of their involvement on student responses. According to Jake:

I liked [seeing] “Mr. G” going on the zipline...cause it show me that if he can do it I can do it...it was fun to have them [teachers] participate, because, well you’d [SP1’s] want to participate if they participated. (Jake, SP1 interview, 2007)

3.4. Teacher Perspective

As a follow-up activity, a group of teachers from high school #2 completed a photo-collage and write-up regarding their experience at Muskoka Woods. Similar to SP1
responses indicating expanded naturalized beliefs, results from high school #2 teachers' written summary of the outdoor experience revealed that initially following the outdoor experience, the naturalized beliefs and boundaries pertaining to how they viewed and interacted with their “at-risk” students had been challenged by the experience and expanded, because of the shared interactions that they had with SP1’s while at Muskoka Woods. As such, teachers were now able to see new possibilities for their “at-risk” students, which they previously did not imagine. However, as I did not interview any of the teacher participants (with the exception of the SST’s from both participating schools), it is unclear whether teachers have maintained these new views towards their “at-risk” students or if, as time has elapsed since returning from the Muskoka Woods excursion, teachers have simply reverted back to their pre-existing ways and beliefs.\textsuperscript{62}

4. Activities

Results suggest that the activities offered during the outdoor experience were a major component of the MWLESP program and were identified by all three groups of participants as one of the elements that contributes to making the three day excursion meaningful and transformational. Results presented in this section will address participant responsiveness to both the “challenge by choice” physical activities as well as to the reflective activities offered during the three day excursion.

"Challenge by Choice" Activities

4.1. SP1 Perspective

The healthy risk-taking activities that SP1’s participated in while at Muskoka Woods were another important component of the outdoor experience. Questions asked

\textsuperscript{62} [DS] – Teachers from high school #2 reported having expanded naturalized beliefs about their students following the Muskoka Woods excursion.
during the SP1 interviews referring to the activities typically generated the greatest SP1 responses. When SP1’s were asked to select pictures that represented highlights and/or memorable components of their Muskoka Woods experience for their photo collage-making process and later during the photo-elicitation portion of the SP1 interviews, students repeatedly selected activity related pictures – either an action-shot of the student participating in the activity or a picture of the apparatus. SP1 responses to questions regarding the activities and/or their description of the activities suggest that their involvement in the activities played a critical role in facilitating the learning opportunities that took place during the outdoor experience and enabled transference of learning to occur, whereby SP1’s could draw parallels from what occurred during the activity to their daily lives. In addition, the “challenge by choice” activities at Muskoka Woods are designed to emphasize teamwork, and trust building, as well as provide opportunities for participants to make self-discoveries about what they are capable of doing – outcomes that were realized by the SP1’s while at Muskoka Woods and discussed during the interviews. Interviews with SP1’s revealed that participating in the activities at Muskoka Woods created relationship building opportunities between tribe members. According to one SP1, participating in the various “challenge by choice” activities on Day 2 is what led to improved tribe dynamics. She explained that:

A few people didn’t want to go at all [on the activities] but eventually went...they were proud and thanked us and they said that it was something that they’d never forget. (Anne, SP1 interview, 2007)
Joe describes the progressive relationship building that took place within his tribe over the course of the three day excursion, highlighting that on the second day of the excursion, relationships between tribe members began to improve:

The first day we’re all kind of like, oh pushing each other away. It’s like we weren’t sure of each other, we didn’t know [each other]...The second day, we kinda got a little bit closer, and then by the third day we were like that [crosses fingers]...we were tight. Like we’ve been with each other for three days, we’ve gotten to know each other and we’re ‘aight [all right with each other]. (Joe, SP1 interview, 2007)

SP1 interview responses [8] also suggested that students felt a sense of personal accomplishment after participating in the various activities at Muskoka Woods and that by completing these activities to the best of their abilities it possibly helped them to experience a *success* that can be associated with school. When asked if he was proud of anything that he had tried while at Muskoka Woods, Jake stated:

I was proud for trying stuff...[It taught me] that I can do anything that I put my mind to. (Jake, SP1 interview, 2007)

Both the relationship building that took place between tribe members and the self-discoveries that SP1’s made about themselves through their participation in the various activities suggest that some of the structural boundaries in which these students live and some of the naturalized beliefs that they hold have been challenged and possibly expanded and/or transformed. Because of their involvement in these activities, some SP1s can now see different possibilities, especially in terms of how they come to view “the Other” (i.e., teachers or other SP1’s that they previous did not know), but also in terms of how they have come to view themselves.64

---

63 On Day 1 tribes participated in tribe building/relationship building activities, while on Day 2 they took part in the “challenge by choice” activities.
64 [DS] - Participating in the activities has helped to transform or expand the naturalized beliefs held by SP1’s about self and towards “the Other.”
SP1 responsiveness to reflective activities

Results from the student-leader questionnaires [5] revealed that student-leaders were surprised by the level of responsiveness SP1’s demonstrated during the reflective activities, including the debriefing session and cabin activities. According to one student-leader:

[The] debriefing session seemed at first as an impossible concept, but all the students surprisingly participated and they wanted to talk about their experience. (Avery, University student-leader, 2007)

According to student-leader questionnaires [5] and interview responses [2], the reflective-type activities appeared to offer student leaders (university and SP2’s) and SP1’s an opportunity to connect in a way that differs from the relationship building that takes place between participants during the “challenge by choice,” more physically active activities.

While the debriefing session and cabin activities appeared to offer relationship building opportunities between student leaders and SP1’s, as well as provide SP1’s with an opportunity to process and reflect upon the experience, it was the affirmation activity that teachers (along with student leaders) participated in on the third day that appeared to be the reflective activity that had the most impact on SP1’s expanding, and possibly even transforming, pre-existing naturalized beliefs they held about and towards teachers.65 All eight SP1’s interviewed indicated that they appreciated hearing teachers share their thoughts about the Muskoka Woods experience, with one SP1 adding that it would have been beneficial for students to have been given that same type of open-forum sharing time to be able share their thoughts about the experience (Steven, SP1 interview, 2007).

In response to my question about what it was like to hear teachers share their thoughts

65 [DS] – Affirmation activity possibly playing a role in transforming naturalized beliefs held by SP1s about teachers.
and feelings about the Muskoka Woods experience and the effect it may have had on
their perception of teachers, Anne shared the following:

It felt unusual ‘cause normally you don’t hear teachers explain their feelings to us
like that. And, it showed me that I can do the same thing like they do...normally
you think teachers are all “boo” and I don’t want to go to their class, but [this
showed me] that they have feelings too. (Anne, SP1 interview, 2007)

The Day 3 affirmation activity had a similar affect on Joe, who during his interview
shared that he was surprised that each of the teachers and leaders could come up with so
many positive comments to share and that the experience had challenged how he had
previously viewed teachers. According to Joe:

I don’t know how the teachers all came up with a different experience...There
were so many, there was like at least forty or fifty teachers [and] helpers [student-
leaders], you know what I mean, including yourself. I was surprised and I enjoyed
it...There was some teachers that I couldn’t believe, like before, I looked at them
and I was like really how could she know [what I’m going through]? You know
what I mean, like you haven’t done it. But then I gotta think to myself, these
people [teachers and leaders] have been working, they’ve seen all these kids,
they’ve done it over and over again, they must know. (Joe, SP1 interview, 2007)

Both statements provide evidence that the naturalized beliefs held by participants and the
boundaries in which they have always lived can be expanded and even transformed for
some participants through their involvement in the MWLESP program.66

5. Student-Leader Program Involvement

Results in this section address student-leaders’ role within the program and what
affect their involvement had on participants’ experiences within the program. Results are
presented regarding what affect the experience of being a leader within the MWLESP
program had on the student-leaders.

66 [DS] – Affirmation activity possibly playing a role in transforming naturalized beliefs held by SP1s about
teachers.
Student-Leaders' Role within the MWLESPP

In general, student-leaders appeared to have had a good understanding of what their role was in the MWLESPP program. Moreover, student-leaders unanimously pointed out the need to receive more training prior to the outdoor experience, emphasizing that clearer behavioural guidelines for SP1's and identified consequences for misbehaviour needed to be established and communicated to the leaders in order for them to effectively perform their role. Although interview responses indicated that student-leaders had a general understanding of the aim of the MWLESPP program, there was no consistent response given that offered a clear explanation as to what role student-leaders were to play during this intervention process. Despite not being able to reach a consistent definition of the student-leader in the MWLESPP program, student-leaders unanimously agreed that their role in the program was different than that of the teachers. They all agreed that although they were at Muskoka Woods to facilitate the experience and to be examples to the students, they were able to perform their roles in a way that differed from teachers. All four student-leaders gave responses indicating that their role at Muskoka Woods was that of a guide, mentor and friend rather than a teacher – a distinction that may explain why SP1's were more responsive to, or rather differently responsive (i.e., less defensive) to the guidance, direction and instruction from student-leaders then what they generally received from their teachers. One example of SP1 responsiveness to SP2's program involvement came during one of the activity sessions on Day 2, an incident that was later retold by Xon, during his interview. A summary of this incident follows.

During the group's "biking activity", one male SP1 student, who was in need of constant supervision and encouragement to participate, decided to separate from the group. At first the teacher followed the student back to the bike shop – demanding that he return to the group immediately. The SP1 repeatedly and
stubbornly refused. Minutes later, the “bikes” actively leader, along with the tribe’s SP2 leader, joined in the effort of helping the student rejoin the activity. Immediately Xon, the SP2 leader, said to the uncooperative student “Big man, stop playing around so we can all get back to biking.” The student then responded that he was tired and needed a break. Recognizing that the activity may have been too challenging for this student, the student-leaders were able to come to a compromise with the SP1, and cooperatively decided that he would rejoin that activity; however, he and the SP2 could take a slower pace than the rest of the group. The interjection of the student-leaders prevented a more uncomfortable situation between the teacher and SP1 from occurring. Moreover, it appears as though it was through the student-leaders coaxing and decision to work with the SP1 that a solution was reached. This example illustrates both the influential and instrumental role student-leaders played throughout the outdoor experience. (Authors observations, October 31, 2006 and retold by Xon, SP2 interview, 2007)

Program Experience

In the interviews, all the student-leaders indicated that they had a positive experience during their involvement in the MWLESP program, with each leader sharing a memorable moment and/or a highlight from the experience. Similar to some of the SP1’s who had demonstrated some personal growth and self-discovery from their involvement in the MWLESP program, student-leaders also revealed that they experienced some self-revelations and personal growth from their involvement as leaders in the program.67 For one SP2, his experience as a student-leader has been so meaningful that he has already offered to return to the MWLESP program next year. This decision to remain involved in the MWLESP program stems from his realization that by making different and healthier life decisions he has become a role model and an example to younger students, and that by returning to the MWLESP program he can help guide younger students away from making similar poor choices that he made early in his high school experience. Cherry explains:

---

67This was stated in 3 student-leader interviews and 3 questionnaire responses and is also an example of DS, demonstrating the impact the experience had on student-leaders.
That's the whole goal, not to just please Miss and to say that you went on this trip... but [it's] to better yourself and like these kids [SP1's] they look up to me. That's something big to know that you're someone's hero in some way. And that [during] their high school careers they're going to try and do what you did and turn it around. (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

Both the SP2 and university student-leader responses indicated that they were appreciative of having the opportunity to participate in the program, and that as leaders they were positively affected by their experience. When asked to share any thoughts regarding the MWLESP program, one university student-leader shared the following:

It was a life changing experience for me. The manner in which the kids responded to me was truly remarkable. I wish I would have begun exercising my abilities as a positive role model years ago. As a former troubled youth, the experience had a therapeutic effect on me personally. This program is invaluable for all involved. (Emily, University student-leader, 2006)

**SP2 involvement**

5.1. SP2 Perspective

Results from the SP2 interview responses suggest that the significance of the student-leader involvement was even greater for the SP2's, because it was an affirmation and recognition from their teachers of the growth and development that they have been demonstrating since returning from last year’s Muskoka Woods excursion. As one SP2 explains:

It was a big confidence boost to know that like the kids, the bad, not the bad kids, but the kids that not everyone perceives too high on in life, have respect for you, so you can’t just throw that away, 'cause now there’s this respect from people that don’t even know you, but they respect you.” (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

Another SP2 adds that being invited to return to the MWLESP program as a leader was one of the accomplishments he was most proud of in his life and that it was also a sign

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
that his teachers were proud of him for the effort that he has been making to better himself since returning from last year's Muskoka Woods excursion. Xon explains:

I was so proud to be given the opportunity to become a leader. And like, they [the teachers] were proud of me too I guess. Now they [teachers] show me more respect and I show them more respect. (Xon, SP2 interview, 2007)

Both SP2 statements support the fact that it was not just SP1’s who benefited from their involvement in the MWLESP program, but that student-leaders were also positively affected through their program involvement – especially the SP2’s who may have previously not seen or considered themselves to be leaders or even capable of performing the role that they assumed while at Muskoka Woods.

5.2. SST Perspectives

Participants agreed that involving the SP2 in the MWLESP program was a highlight and strength of the program, with results indicating that their [SP2] contribution to the program has been one of the sustainable effects still visible from the outdoor experience [6 references made by SP1’s]. Results gathered from the SST interview responses indicated that just as SP1 responsiveness to the outdoor intervention strategy varied amongst students, so too did the involvement of SP2’s and their ability to effectively perform their role in the MWLESP program. The SST interview responses suggested that some of the SP2’s were more suited for the student-leader role and its associated responsibilities than other students, thus performing better in that role than others. Nonetheless, the general consensus amongst both SST’s and the University of Windsor student-leaders was that the SP2’s showed tremendous leadership by attending the excursion and stepping out of their comfort zones to be leaders in the program. Moreover, the SP2’s modeled to the younger students (SP1’s) that leadership comes in
many different ways, because some of the SP2's were more vocal leaders than others, while other SP2's demonstrated their leadership abilities by actively leading by example and participating with a positive attitude in every activity.

I had one in my group and I saw him trying so hard. He did such a good job of stepping up and in different ways. If things needed to be read, he’s not a strong reader, but he’d be in there reading away and he’d be trying to “what do you think...” and “da, da, da.” And, I saw others doing things that really would have been hard, that I hadn’t seen them do before...And then I saw another one, he was always on the rope pulling, he was always there, like you know that was his very silent ...[leadership style]. But, like a silent leader, but always there doing his job. (SST [a], interview, 2007)

\textit{SP2 Leadership Stories}\textsuperscript{68}

The SP2 leadership stories were referred to by each of the three groups of interview participants (i.e., SP1’s [8], student-leaders [2], and SST’s [2]) as being powerful and important components of the MWLESP program. An SST shared that the impact of those personalized stories was notably missing in the second half of the week, when there were no personal SP2 stories to be heard. As noted by an SST:

The stories that they heard, I think that there was a bigger connection with the kids from “the first half of the week”, because there were personal leadership examples with them as opposed to with the group that came second, who were hearing about leaders that tended to be big figures, like Martin Luther King Jr. That’s not realistic for our students. None of our kids see themselves as doing that... [But in group 1] they were able to hear personal stories. I felt that was something that was really good. They were able to connect far more personally. (SST [b], interview, 2007)

There is also an indication from both the SST and SP2 interviews that the leadership stories told by the SP2’s were not just powerful for the staff and students that heard them, but that they were equally powerful for the students who told them. This happens because telling those stories was another step out of their comfort zone, thereby helping to further

\textsuperscript{68} [SP] – Leadership stories highlighted the inherent leadership abilities of the senior students.
expand the boundaries in which SP2’s live and the possibilities that they imagine exist for their lives and what they are capable of both being and doing.\textsuperscript{69}

Oh, those leadership [stories], ya I think they were extremely powerful, especially for the, I’m going to say, especially for the students who told the leadership [stories]. They were way out of their comfort zones, some of them, and I think it was big for them. To the point where one student, I said, “if I need you to talk in front of the staff later on would you do it?” [He said] “I might…” That would never have happened. And, really when you look from the first part of the week to the second part of the week where we didn’t have them, and they told the stories of the leaders from our world, you know not the same impact at all. (SST [a], 2007)

6. Program Structure

Results in this section pertain specifically to one of the three phases (pre-outdoor experience, outdoor experience, and follow-up) that were used to structure the MWLESP program. Therefore, results in each of the three structural phases have been thematically grouped according to key components that have previously been identified in the literature as either belonging to or important within one of the three phases.

General Impressions

In general, participants that attended both the 2005-06 pilot program and this year’s MWLESP program agreed that this year’s experience, although requiring more work on the part of program planners and decision makers, was far more organized than last year’s program. One returning university student-leader noted that the structures put in place this year (i.e., three phase outdoor education model) helped to better prepare student-leaders for their role within the experience. When asked to comment on notable differences between this year’s and last year’s MWLESP program, Alex explained that:

The organization was different, [this year] it was far more organized. Whether it be in the handouts the leaders received. The manner in which we’re off the bus

\textsuperscript{69} [DS] – Leadership stories played a role in helping to expand or transform the boundaries in which some SP1’s live. These stories were equally important for the SP2’s who told them.
and straight into the cabins, there was no confusion in where people were going. When things were changed, albeit the schedule of events or things like that, times and everything, leaders, students, everybody was made aware of it. It wasn’t a run around, [of] where are we going? Where are we suppose to be? It was very well planned out. From a student-leader [perspective] it was much appreciated. We wanted our job to lead and help facilitate the experience, rather than run around trying to figure out where we’re going next. (Alex, student leader interview, 2007)

This response emphasizes the improved organization to the program, which will inevitably continue to improve as the MWLESP program becomes more established and decision makers implement structures that are distinct to this program.

*Pre-Outdoor Experience*

*Preparations*

6.1. Program Planning Minutes

Program minutes related to decisions taken in the structuring of the MWLESP program reveal that during the planning meetings, many ideas pertaining to pre-experience preparations, the three day excursion and the follow-up process (limited) were discussed in detail, however decisions related to the follow-up process and how to implement ideas emerging from these discussions was limited. Consequently, many of these ideas simply remained ideas and thus were never carried out. Moreover, program planning minutes reveal that at no time did either the facilitation team or research team establish short or long term program goals, objectives and/or assessment criteria to evaluate either the program or SP1 responsiveness.

The only time a clear program goal and objectives were established was prior to a conference presentation that I, along with other senior WECDSB administration, attended. As part of the presentation, we were required to communicate a vision statement for the program. Thus, in preparation for the Ontario Ministry of Education
The following goal was created and adopted for the 2006-07 MWLESP program. The official aim of the 2006-07 MWLESP program, according to the WECDSB, is to:

Make our grade 9 students feel welcomed, valued and have a sense of belonging, which is achieved by accelerating the development of the caring adult relationships early in student’s high school experience. We also want our students to experience “success” that is associated with school which for so many of our students has been unheard of up until now in their academic careers. (MWLESP program mission statement, 2007)

6.2. SP1 Perspective

Results from the SP1 interviews suggest a possible relationship between the lack of student-related preparations that went into the pre-outdoor experience phase of the MWLESP program and some of the challenges that arose on the first day of the outdoor experience. For example, SP1 responses, with regards to the information communicated to “the smokers,” revealed that there was a lot of discrepancies and miscommunications between what decision makers had agreed would happen and what information was actually communicated through the teachers and SST’s to the SP1’s who smoked. Three of the eight SP1’s that were interviewed were and still are smokers. In these three interviews, the SP1’s provided three similar responses regarding what they were told about smoking while at Muskoka Woods and the subsequent consequence that would occur if they were caught smoking during the three days. For instance, Marissa from high school #1 stated:

They [teachers] said we weren’t allowed to bring any cigarettes or anything. (Marissa, SP1 interview, 2007)
Ray, another SP1 from high school #1, explained that he was told similar information regarding the MWLESP program's smoking policy, stating:

I was told [by one of the teachers] that if you got caught bringing cigarettes there [at Muskoka Woods] that you'd be sent back. (Ray, SP1 interview, 2007)

According to the only SP1 who smoked from the students interviewed at high school #2, similar information regarding the smoking policy was told to high school #2 students participating in the MWLESP program. As Steven explains:

[I was told] that I couldn't smoke. Like at first, what I heard was that there wasn't going to be smoking. So, I was like okay, then I won't bring my smokes. And then, we go, and there's a smoking area. So, I was pretty pissed about that. (Steven, SP1 interview, 2007)

Although the details of the information received about smoking slightly varied from student to student, the general message was the same, which was that smoking would not be permitted while at Muskoka Woods. Yet that was not the policy that decision makers had agreed upon. Smoking was permitted, however it was to occur for all participants in a controlled manner, with specific smoking times and a central designated location.

Although the intent of the miscommunicated information given by teachers may have been intended to discourage students from smoking, it was actually the cause of some of the challenges and difficulties that arose on Day 1 at Muskoka Woods, acting as a barrier (i.e., physiological and psychological) for some students, possibly affecting and/or impeding their initial responsiveness to the experience.

Each of the SP1's interviewed indicated that they did not feel prepared sufficiently enough for the Muskoka Woods excursion, explaining that they experienced a mix of emotions prior to arriving at Muskoka Woods. Emotions they mentioned
included: excitement, anticipation, hesitation, anxiousness, nervous, fear, and an unwillingness to be there because they feared that it was going to be a boring experience.

6.3. SST Perspective

Interview responses concerning the pre-outdoor experience preparations from the SST’s align with interview responses from other MWLESP program participants, indicating that the majority of preparations that occurred prior to the three day outdoor excursion were program-related, with only minimal attention given to student-related preparations. Evidence gathered from each of the three aforementioned data collection sources indicated that facilitation team members did not intentionally mean to neglect student-related preparations (i.e., relationship building opportunities), but that their neglect resulted from the amount of time and energy that they needed to devote toward the logistical planning and implementation of the MWLESP program.70

In my interview with SST [b], it was revealed that student-related preparations were an integral component of the pre-outdoor experience of the 2005-06 MWLESP program. The SST indicated that the preparations that took place last year helped students to better understand the leadership component of the program and helped to put them in the right mind-frame so as to be able to better understand the reason for their program involvement. As one SST explains:

The preparations that we did with them [students] was different the first time...[last year] we had a big journaling-thing built into it and I think the pre-journaling part was probably very worthwhile...I think the real value of the journaling was [for students] to identify what their expectations were and maybe what their reasons for going were. (SST [b], interview 2007)

70 [Hr] – SST’s facilitation team responsibilities contributed to their lack of time and thus inability to provide student-related preparations.
As this statement indicates, the student-related preparations that went into the MWLESP pilot program did not occur during this year’s program. A possible correlation can be made between the lack of student-related preparations that took place and the nearly unanimous disclosure from SP1’s (6 of 8 interview responses), that they did not know what to expect heading into the three day Muskoka Woods excursion. They felt that they possessed even little to no knowledge about and/or related to leadership before participating in the program. When SP1’s were asked what they thought about leadership or who a leader was prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion, only two participants indicated that they had ever thought about leadership or had an understanding of what leadership and/or who a leader was. None of the eight SP1’s that participated in the interviews considered themselves to be a leader prior to the MWLESP program. However, since returning from the three day excursion, SP1 interview responses indicate that students did retain information regarding leadership from the three day excursion – a result demonstrated by SP1’s ability to identify qualities of a leader (e.g., interview responses), as well as self-identify leadership qualities that they themselves possess or need to develop to be a more effective leader (e.g., in photo-collage written summaries), and/or ways that they did, or continue to demonstrate leadership (e.g., in interview responses).

SST interview responses confirm that the time commitment required from them to run the MWLESP program, specifically the logistical planning and program related preparations that needed to occur prior to the three day excursion, was “too much,” and
felt all consuming. This suggests that the lack of student-related preparations was not an intentional action but rather an unfortunate consequence. Both SST’s also shared that because of the commitment required of them for the MWLESP program, their ability to perform other assigned duties and more importantly connect and relationship build with other “at-risk” students who were not involved in the MWLESP program was limited.

The following are accounts from both SST’s as to how their involvement in the planning and implementation of the MWLESP program affected their roles as SST’s.

It cut into what it is that I’m suppose to be doing [as an SST]...I had a hard time justifying the balance in my brain some days, saying I feel like I’m only working for this one particular project for these or for this one rather small group of kids. Is this the best allocation of my resource? I do think that that is an issue that needs to be addressed. The kids in credit recovery, I feel like I have a tremendous obligation or responsibility to them and I should be able to name those 16 kids that are in that class and I can’t. So that for me was a marker. It was like, okay, hang-on there’s got to be some balance. (SST [b], interview, 2007)

SST [a] describes similar adverse effects resulting from the time requirement that organizing the MWLESP program required of facilitation team members, stating that:

It felt like it was a consuming thing. And, it did, it just felt like it was like, for a while we were just, like, my job wasn’t SST, it was Muskoka ...And, I felt a lot of things got neglected. I mean, life is just kinda hectic for a while...[And] if I hadn’t spent all that time with Muskoka, like I mean, there’s students in credit recovery that I hadn’t even known and I couldn’t even put a name and a face together. By that point in time, usually, I can tell the students...I mean did I catch up? Yes, but I just think, that there were a few gaps that wouldn’t have been there otherwise. It’s just one more thing that was taken because of the time. (SST [a], interview, 2007)

During the SST interviews, it was revealed that because of the time commitment that the MWLESP program required of them, both SST’s felt as though they had only enough time to devote to the logistical aspects related to the program that needed to occur for

71 [Hr] – Time commitment required of SST’s was too much and affected their ability to effectively perform their SST role and limited the amount of student-related preparations that occurred prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion.
students to be able to participate in the excursion. This included: SP1 and SP2 selection, consent form distribution and collection (including the *chasing*), and assigned facilitation team responsibilities. Consequently, the relationship building and student-related preparations, which have been identified in the literature as critical components of the pre-outdoor experience, was not a priority for the SST's, and thus only occurred minimally, if at all. SST [b] explains that at high school #2, the student selection process used to identify participants was designed to allow for relationship building and student-related preparations to occur. As such, the SST was then able to delegate some of the pre-experience preparations and follow-up responsibilities to the three teachers who were attending the Muskoka Woods excursion. However, when the four SP1’s from high school #2 were asked about pre-experience preparations that occurred prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion, all four could only recollect program-type preparations, such as consent form distribution and explanations of behavioural guidelines, with very little attention given to the leadership component of the program – which the SST’s both revealed was a major component of the student related preparations that occurred during the 2005-06 MWLESP pilot program.

*Pre-experience Relationship Building*

There are mixed results about providing participants with relationship building opportunities prior to their three day Muskoka Woods excursion, as there is division between the different participant groups and, also, amongst members of those groups.

6.4. SP1 Perspective

Some of the SP1’s indicated [4], for example, that it would be beneficial to meet prior to arriving at Muskoka Woods and that had that occurred this year, that they may
have felt less anxious and apprehensive prior to arriving. Steven’s response to my question about his “readiness” to participate in the MWLESP program suggested that decision makers need to give more consideration to offering SP1’s student-related preparation activities prior to the three day excursion to address some of their questions, which will ultimately make for a better outdoor experience. According to Steven:

Well, I would have liked to have known more about it [the MWLESP program], like some of the activities, what time we’d be getting there and everything. Like, I hear about it, but like, having a schedule would have been good... so that you can stick it on the wall [in the cabin]. Knowing exactly who’d be there... ya that would have been nice... it would have made things a bit more comfortable before going up. It would have been better. (Steven, SP1 interview, 2007)

Although four SP1’s felt meeting tribes beforehand would have made for a better outdoor experience, other SP1’s [2] reported that not knowing who is in the tribe and who the leaders will be is part of the excitement associated with the Muskoka Woods experience, as explained by Anne:

You’re looking forward to wondering what’s going on. (Anne, SP1 interview, 2007)

6.5. Student-Leader Perspective

There were also mixed responses amongst the four student leaders as to whether it would be beneficial for tribes to meet up and participate in relationship building activities prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion. University student-leaders suggested that they would be more inclined to only meet with the teachers and their co-leaders (i.e., the SP2’s), prior to the trip and then meet the SP1’s once arriving at Muskoka Woods, because as explained by one of the returning student-leader with a long history of
involvement in the MWLE program, the anticipation of guessing who may or may not be in your tribe is part of the Muskoka Woods experience. As Alex explains:

I actually prefer to meet the students once we get there. I think that’s part of the trip [and for] providing a really cool experience. [For students] getting off the bus and “hey, here’s my leader and we’re ready to go!” Rather than, “I already know you… I know where I’m going. Don’t worry about it!” I think it’s a good thing to get off the bus, [present] here’s the leader, [and then] we’re off and running. I just think that it’s a dynamic of the trip, that it’s part of the great experience element of it. (Alex, student-leader interview, 2007)

Another student-leader explained that although meeting SP1’s beforehand may be beneficial, it also increases the likeliness that naturalized beliefs or judgments about those students may be formed by leaders beforehand, which ultimately may limit student’s experience. According to Baltimore:

If the student leaders met the students before the trip that may have beneficial effects, but then again, [it] is not a guarantee, in the sense that as soon as you have that interaction between the student-leaders and the students those biases are already being formed in an environment that they’re used to. Because [if] they meet on the first day when they got off or on the bus, it’s a whole new environment, so people, students and leaders alike, have a tendency to withhold judgments for a while, and give people a little slack before they reserve any judgments on them. Which I think is a neat thing that people do when put in a new environment. So, that’s always a toss up of what will work better, I don’t know? (Baltimore, Student-leader interview, 2007)

6.6. SP2 Perspective

In contrast to these perspectives, both SP2’s that were interviewed suggested that they would have preferred to have met their entire tribe prior to leaving for Muskoka Woods and have participated in some type of relationship building activity. One possible explanation for their desire to meet beforehand may have been to legitimize their role prior to leaving, rather than having to negotiate those respect issues with tribe members on Day 1 of the Muskoka Woods excursion. Although SP2’s felt that their tribe members
respected their role and authority within the program, they shared that this was a progressive response on the part of tribe members and that because they [the SP2’s] are still senior students, respecting their authority and seeing them as legitimate *co-tribe leaders* was not necessarily tribe members’ initial response. Perhaps, had tribes had an opportunity to meet and interact in a tribe building activity, the SP2’s would feel legitimized early on in the experience.

6.7. SST Perspective

SSTs revelation that extensive student-related preparations went into the 2005-06 MWLESP pilot program that allowed for relationship building between participants to occur, indicates that they value and see the importance of preparing students for their outdoor experience. In regard to providing participants with pre-experience relationship building opportunities, one SST explained that:

> I think it would be better for them [SP1’s] and for us [teachers]. But I think it would be really good for them. I think when you’re talking about really preparing people, well I think we could do a lot better there. So that they [SP1’s] know what they’re getting into [before arriving], and that they know there’s boundaries, that they’ve got a relationship with some of the teachers so that they feel they can ask questions, if they have any. (SST [a], interview 2007)

Unfortunately, student-related preparations did not formally occur during this year’s program, not because these types of preparations are not valued, but rather there was simply not enough time for SST’s to do everything.72

One SST highlighted a notable difference that occurred during this year’s program, which may have affected student responsiveness and certainly limited the opportunity for pre-experience relationship building to occur, concerning the teacher and

---

72 [Hr] – Student-related preparations did not occur during the 2006-07 MWLESP program because SST’s lacked the time to offer SP1’s these types of preparations, focusing their attention instead on program-related preparations.
student selection process at both participating schools. One of the SST's explained that
during the pilot program, students were selected from pre-existing groupings and/or
courses, such as workplace co-op, which was the format that was re-used at high school
#2 this year. However, this was not the student selection process selected at high school
#1 for the 2006-07 MWLESP program. Instead, SP1's from high school #1 were
randomly selected, with the exception of the small group of students selected\textsuperscript{73} from the
school's "15 year old" program. A grouping format allows pre-experience relationships
to be formed between participants in a natural non-contrived manner, because the teacher
and students have already been working together before participating in the three day
excursion. While randomly selecting students may provide SST's with more autonomy in
identifying and selecting which students will attend the experience, it also requires more
of a time commitment on the part of the SST to organize relationship building
opportunities between participants, which did not occur at high school #1 prior to the
outdoor experience – possibly providing an explanation for some of the behavioural
difficulties that presented themselves with that group and not the group from high school
#2 during the three day excursion. The use of the grouping selection format at high
school #2 suggests that it was an effective strategy used during the pilot program, and
may be one of the reasons that, in general, high school #2 had less behavioural concerns
throughout the three day excursion.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73} The exact number of students from the "15 year old" program was not confirmed by the SST from high
school #1.
\textsuperscript{74} [SP] – SP1 selection process use at high school #1 versus high school #2
Outdoor Experience

6.8. Group Consensus

Participants unanimously agreed that the outdoor component of the MWLESP program is what distinguishes this intervention program from other school-based intervention programming, and is one of the strengths of the program. Specifically, participants made reference to the hands-on approach to teambuilding, problem solving, and relationship building between staff and students that the MWLESP program facilitates. Participants’ interview responses indicate that it is these structural components of the outdoor experience that make a program such as the MWLESP an attractive option to “at-risk” students, because in many instances they do not even realize the amount of learning that is taking place over the course of the three days until after the fact, when they have the opportunity to process the experience. According to one of the SP2’s, his favourite experience during the Muskoka Woods excursion came during the debriefing activity, when students began to recognize how the lessons and skills that they were learning could be related back to their daily lives. As Cherry explains:

I’d have to say, when all the kids, when we went to the basement to have our discussion on being with that group for those couple of days [debriefing session], at first they [SP1’s] didn’t want to say anything, but as soon as the older leaders started sharing their stories and what they felt on it, they kind of opened up. You could tell that their opinions were different from when they got on the bus. It was good to see those kids change that much. They didn’t even realize that they were going to have that [debriefing session], so it was just sort of unexpected and out of nowhere, so without planning they had those feelings inside. (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

---

75 [SP] – Outdoor experience is one of the strengths of the MWLESP program as a protective school-based intervention program.
Debriefing Session

While at Muskoka Woods, the debriefing session provided an opportunity for SP1’s to reflect and share about how they were (or were not) being affected by their Muskoka Woods experience. As indicated in both student-leader questionnaire responses and in three of the interview responses, many SP1’s took advantage of the debriefing session and openly shared about their experience. However, not every SP1 shared the effect that the Muskoka Woods experience was having on him/her during the debriefing session. Some students felt more comfortable sharing in a more informal and relaxed environment – e.g. the “smoke break.”76 – choosing to share with me in that setting how they were being positively impacted by their experience at Muskoka Woods. For example, two students from high school #1, who were relatively quiet during the debriefing session, came separately on Day 3 to the morning “smoke break” to share with me their desire to return to the program next year as student-leaders. The first example involves a male SP1, who although removed by his teacher once during a day 2 activity, for an “inappropriate and aggressive” outburst (Day 2 high-ropes observation), showed throughout the three days a tremendous amount of leadership potential (i.e., helpfulness, encouraging and patient behaviour with co-tribe members). The second example involves a female SP1 also from high school #1, who earlier in the excursion was acting out and needed several reminders from teachers to act “appropriately.” As noted in my observation journal:

76 Although formally “smoke breaks” were not supposed to be a time for socializing, they informally became an opportunity for intentional relationship building between me and the students. There was mutual trust and respect between me and “the smokers,” and once we became more comfortable with one another, the “smoke breaks” became more than just a time to feed a physiological craving, they became an opportunity to debrief about the experience.
Observation 1: When I arrived at the smoking bench “Ray” was already waiting for me – I was surprised to see him this morning because he was out of smokes – but right away he said he just wanted to ask me a question. Ray asked, “Miss, if I work on not getting so mad at people, try to quit smoking, and get better marks, do you think I could maybe come back and help you out next year?” (Ray: November 1, 2006). I was surprisingly shocked that not only did he want to come back but that he could identify areas that he would have to improve on in order to come back as a SP2. I thanked him for his interest and said that once we got back to school we could work on those things together so that coming back could really be an option. He looked shocked that I didn’t flat out reject or dismiss his request. (Author, 2006)

Observation 2: “Marissa” was unusually quiet this morning at smoke break and even stayed back once her friends went up for breakfast. We were the last two people left at the benches and as we were walking up to the lodge for breakfast Marissa pointed at my new, bright orange toque and said: “next year Miss, I’m going to get an orange toque!” (Marissa: November 1, 2006). This comment implies that she is interested and wanting to come back next year as an SP2 in the MWLESP program. (Author, 2006)

Follow-up Programming

Follow-up initiatives

6.10. SP1 Perspectives

While at Muskoka Woods and during the photo-collage making sessions, SP1’s appeared to be very interested in participating in some type of follow-up programming; an observation that was confirmed first during the Celebration dinner when every SP1 that attended the event signed-up to take part in the “Take the L.E.A.P.” initiative and then again during my multiple visits to the participating schools, when SP1’s would stop me in the halls and ask, “when is that [follow-up] program you’re always talking about going to start?” (SP1, personal communication, December 2006-April 2007). Interview results show that interest levels towards participating in follow-up programming varied amongst the eight SP1 interview participants, with five SP1 students stating that they were very interested, and three students stating that they were either unsure and/or
hesitant. However, all eight SP1’s unanimously committed to attending a “Take the L.E.A.P.” event before finalizing their decision about follow-up programming.

6.11. Student-Leader’s Perspective

Results from all three methodological data sources have simultaneously indicated that decision makers and leaders (i.e., student-leaders) involved in the MWLESP program believe that follow-up is critical to this outdoor education intervention process, while also confirming that it is the stage of the process has been neglected and pushed aside throughout this process. One SP2 commented on the importance of follow-up, explaining that he would have liked to have been offered some follow-up support upon returning from his Muskoka Woods experience last year:

It probably would have helped to have had a couple of follow-up activities, just so that the kids can remember what it’s all about and so they don’t forget it. (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

Later in the interview, he adds that by providing students with follow-up opportunities, the benefits they gain during the three day excursion are more likely to be sustained once students return to their daily lives, explaining that:

If you don’t talk about it, then the kids will just see it [the outdoor experience] as one where they had three days that were fun and that was it. They didn’t learn anything from it. But, if you follow-up with it, and talk about it after, then they’ll stop and they’ll think about what actually happened up there, and analyze it. They’ll actually change themselves to become better than that person [that first went up there]. (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

6.12. SST Perspective

SST’s both agreed that follow-up is an important component of intervention programming, explaining however that it is often talked about, but that very little is ever done in terms of providing students with on-going support following their return from an experience such as Muskoka Woods. Sadly, this has been the result of our efforts in terms
of offering follow-up programming thus far in the MWLESP program. However, according to one of the SST’s, the fact that the facilitation team is even considering follow-up programming options is new this year to the MWLESP program, as it was not given any consideration in last year’s program. Both SST’s value the importance of offering SP1’s follow-up support immediately following their return from Muskoka Woods, suggesting that it is during the follow-up phase that “you’re going to earn your money” (SST [b], SST interview, 2007). However, in each of their interviews, SST’s expressed concerns about the time commitment that would be required of them to introduce such initiatives, with one of the SST’s explaining that the planning that is involved with the Muskoka Woods excursion already takes up so much time that the last thing an SST wants to do upon returning is devote more time to this one group of students, when there are other “at-risk” students in need.77

[Follow-up programming] it’s really important. It’s where you get your pay-off. If all you do is take them [students] to Muskoka and then don’t do anything after, the gains that you’re hoping for are not likely to materialize on their own...[But] how do you make it happen? I don’t see how I have anymore minutes in my day already to facilitate something like that. And yet, at the same time I’m saying it’s important...We need to find a way to start [follow-up programming] when we get back. But, I don’t know how. I just don’t know how, because coming back from Muskoka Woods, the last thing I feel that I have is more time to devote just to the kids from Muskoka Woods. (SST [b], interview, 2007)

When asked about their thoughts regarding the proposed follow-up initiatives that would accompanying the MWLESP program (e.g., “Take the L.E.A.P.” and the in-school mentorship programs) both SSTs indicated that it was their sincere hope that these

77 [Hr] – The program-related preparations took up so much of the SST’s time that they were not able to tend to the needs of their other “at-risk” students. Upon returning from Muskoka Woods the SST’s did not have the energy or time to devote to follow-up programming as they needed to direct their attention to the other “at-risk” students not connected to the MWLESP program. Although both SST’s would have liked to offer their students follow-up programming, neither feels they have the time to initiate such programming.
initiatives would instil a sense of connectedness and belonging in students, help to develop their leadership and academic skills, as well as help students become physically active and build ties to the community – all of which would transform the boundaries in which these “at-risk” students typically live by presenting them with new possibilities of being and experiencing school.\textsuperscript{78} However, neither SST had suggestions on how to implement follow-up programming in their schools, nor did they appear to (i.e., through participant-observations) or indicate that they had the time to implement follow-up programming for their students of promise who either had or had not participated in the MWLESP program.

\textit{Decision Making}

6.13. SST Perspectives

During their interviews, both SST’s explained that the MWLESP program decisions are made by committee members belonging to one or both of the following two teams: (a) the research team and/or (b) the facilitation team. Program planning minutes, along with the SST’s interviews and participant-observations from my involvement as a facilitation team member, reveal that decision makers of the MWLESP program relied heavily on the past history of the grade eight MWLE program and the expertise of that program’s facilitators in the shaping of the MWLESP program, rather than making decisions that were driven by the MWLESP program’s own unique goals and objectives.\textsuperscript{79} According to one of the SST’s interviewed for this study, the way in which MWLESP program decisions were made and the rationale for why they were made was

\textsuperscript{78} [DS] – Offering SP1’s follow-up programming opportunities would continue to build on the skills students developed while at Muskoka Woods, as well as promote physical activity, create a sense of connectedness to the school, and build ties to the community.

\textsuperscript{79} [DS] – The decision to rely on past history of MWLE program is an example of socially maintaining what has “always” been done.
heavily influenced by: (a) existing power relations, found within the hierarchy of the 
education system and (b) the grade eight MWLE program. The SST explains:

The “V.P” made a few [decisions]. A lot of them [decisions] were made in 
consultation with the team from the grade eight program...we relied on the 
wisdom of what has happened [in the past]...I mean it’s always good to go to the 
wisdom. I mean, why reinvent the wheel? They’ve done it so many times...I 
mean we would be foolish not to listen to them and ask for their opinion. (SST 
[a], interview, 2007)

Interview results from six participants80 who had previously attended the MWLE 
program, suggest that as of yet, the MWLESP program has been unable to fully 
differentiate itself from the grade eight outdoor education program. This results from the 
MWLESP facilitation team’s heavy reliance on the past history of the MWLE program 
and the “wisdom” of its program organizers.81 Although the past history of the MWLE 
program has helped the facilitation team create the MWLESP program, interview 
responses from participants who have attended both program suggest that relying on the 
past history of the MWLE program has also limited the facilitation team’s ability to fully 
differentiate from and create a unique program of its own.

Both SST’s indicated in their interview responses that, in general, they had more 
input (i.e., power) in the decision making process once becoming members of the 
facilitation team and that, subsequently, they were able to have a more direct impact on 
program planning related decisions (i.e., logistics). Previous to that, they felt they had 
very little input in the pre-experience planning decision making process (i.e., which 
students, program objectives, program structure). Both the program planning minutes and

80 The participants that previously attended the grade eight MWLE program include: two SST’s, three 
SPI’s, and one University of Windsor student-leader.
81 [DS] – Relying on past history of the MWLE program to shape decisions that the facilitation team made 
when planning and organizing the MWLESP program is an example of decision makers involved engaging 
in social maintenance rather then entering into a process of social change.
participant-observations from my own involvement in the program’s creation process indicate that decisions related to the general structure of the 2006-07 MWLESP program were primarily the responsibility of the research team, with the logistical and specific program-related details being primarily the responsibility of the facilitation team.

**Decision Making Concerns**

6.14. Student-Leader Perspective

Decision making concerns related to why some decisions were made during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion were raised by one student leader. This leader indicated that decisions taken by the facilitation team during the outdoor experience had a direct effect on the program and the experience had by SP1’s, as well as on the student-leaders - who were the ones primarily responsible for carrying out these decisions. The aforementioned effects were especially evident following the program/schedule changes that occurred between the first and second group.

Stuff I saw in the first [part] of the week that I really liked, would have been at the beginning how these students were put into activities that made them interact with each other, and get to know each other [which] are conducive to that environment - in the, kind of a safe way. As opposed to the second [part of] week, it was more, they [tribes] jumped straight into high ropes activities, possibly without the chance of getting to know each other. That may have changed the interaction between students first half of the week compared with second half of the week. (Baltimore, student leader interview, 2007)

6.15. SST Perspectives

Similar concerns related to why and how some decisions were taken while at Muskoka Woods were raised during the SST interviews. In both cases, SST’s suggested
that decisions, such as the group 2 schedule change, may have had an adverse effect on
the program and participant’s overall experience.\cite{footnote:2} As one SST explains:

I thought one of the strengths of the program was our willingness to adapt. You
know, we were changing things on the fly, but I also thought that was a problem.
That maybe we adapted too much and it was almost like we didn’t have a control
or something to compare it to. [Up at Muskoka Woods] It was like, “maybe we
should try this instead…” Maybe we should have or maybe we shouldn’t, but
really I don’t know, but, you know, it was just let’s change it, let’s change it, let’s
change it…but it was like, there must have been a reason that we came up with a
plan initially… We spent an awful lot of time planning this; there might have
been a good reason that we planned it initially. Where does that balance come in?
I don’t know, I don’t know where that balance comes in. But, I think that it still is
a strength of this program, that willingness that things aren’t cast in stone…But
you know, at what point does that flexibility then become a hindrance instead of
an asset? (SST [b], interview, 2007)

Program Strengths\cite{footnote:3}

Similar responses were given by all three participant groups in terms of
identifying the strengths of the MWLESP program. Similar to SP1 and student-leader
interview responses, both SST’s indicated that the benefits that participants derive from
the MWLESP program cannot be attributed to just one program component, but rather it
is a combination of programming structures that facilitate an opportunity for students to
experience change. According to both SST’s, the strengths of the MWLESP program are:
(a) it caters to SP1’s strengths, which is what enables them to experience success, and (b)
it provides relationship building opportunities – which then helps to expand their
boundaries and the naturalized beliefs they hold about others and towards school. These

\footnote{\textit{[SP]} – The decision to change the schedule during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion was a move
away from the Strengths Perspective framework upon which the MWLESP program was operating. The
revised schedule limited the opportunity for SP1’s to optimally grow from their experience, as well as
shortened scheduled “downtime” and reflective-type activities, so as to allot more time to the physically
active activities.}

\footnote{\textit{[SP]} – Operating from a Strengths Perspective, it is important to focus on elements of the MWLESP
program that contributed to the positive outcomes participants derived from the experience and to continue
to build on those strengths when planning the 2007-08 MWLESP program.}
program related strengths are made possible through the intensity of the experience, through having an opportunity to spend time away from school in a new and outdoor environment, and by participating in various healthy risk-taking activities offered at Muskoka Woods. As one of the SST’s explains:

I think there’s a lot of [program] strengths. There’s outdoor ed. and just that physical component that I think students need. And, it just opens up doors and allows students to be successful in an arena where they might now be successful in, but some kids just excel there so we’re just playing to their strengths, which we don’t always do with students [“at-risk” students]. It builds relationships, it really does. And, it empowers teachers and students. It, it opens doors for all of us...You’re in nature, which I think is like a tremendous healer. And, it just offers so much. You’re out of the building, which I think is important too, because we get stuck in buildings and education, and education is what happens in a building. It happens to be called a school, it’s not limited [learning], right. It’s just a really good program. It builds self-esteem and, because they accomplish things. Not just because we say you’re “good.” I mean, they see themselves doing it, they rise, they’re challenged and they rise to the challenges. There’s leadership, they’re given a sense that leadership can be pulling a rope and not just because you did some of it. You pulled the rope, you were involved as part of it. It builds community. It puts a team together. It’s just a really good program. (SST [a], interview, 2007)

Program Concerns

6.16. Student-Leader Perspective

Although the general consensus among the university student-leaders was that the Muskoka Woods experience was positive, there still were some program related concerns that student leaders felt need to be addressed to better the program for future years and participants. As student-leaders had the most direct contact with the SP1’s and the greatest involvement in the activities offered throughout the three day outdoor experience, their feedback and assessment of the overall experience, the structuring of the program (i.e., activities and schedule), and any other programming components are an invaluable resource, as they can be used by decision makers to make changes and thus...
improve the program and experience for future participants. The following concerns were repeatedly noted by student leaders in their questionnaire responses: (a) teacher involvement [5], (b) activity leader role [10], and (c) tribe dynamics [7]. A brief description of each of these three concerns follows below.

*Teacher involvement.*

Student-leader questionnaire responses [5] indicate that student-leaders’ concerns did not pertain to teacher’s involvement in the MWLESP program, but rather to the lack of teacher participation during the three day outdoor experience. One of the fundamental objectives of the MWLESP program was to accelerate the caring, meaningful relationship between teachers and students, which can only happen if the two have an opportunity to see each other different – an opportunity that the outdoor experience facilitates by having teachers and SP1’s participate as co-participants in the experience. By placing both parties in a tribe together and asking them to go through the experience together as co-participants, the aim is to minimize existing power imbalances between the two, which can then allow new beliefs about “the Other” to be formed. At the in-service training session, which occurred prior to the excursion, teachers were informed that their involvement in the outdoor experience would be that of a co-participant rather than as the teacher or facilitator of the experience. Still, it was reported by five student-leaders that in their tribes, many of the teachers were simply “pylons” or glorified “cheerleaders,” choosing to be disengaged from the experience rather than become active co-participants. Just as SP1 responsiveness and engagement during the three day excursion varied, so too did the participation, responsiveness and engagement level of the teacher participants.

---

[SP] – Soliciting the input of stakeholders of the MWLESP program to assess the program is an example of a student-centered program approach – which aligns with the Strength Perspective.
Student-leader questionnaire and interview responses suggested that teachers who were actively involved in the outdoor experience – i.e., choosing to embrace and thrive in the role of co-participant - had a positive affect on their tribe dynamics. In general, tribes with active teacher participants tended to have more SP1’s actively involved in the activities and more willing to step out of their comfort zones. Consequently, tribes that had teacher participants who were disengaged and more intent on supervising rather than participating, typically had more difficulties within their tribes, with some SP1’s refusing to become fully engaged in the activities because of the example that his/her teacher was setting. One SP1 explains how the teacher’s involvement in the tribe and at activities affects SP1 participating levels, stating that:

It was fun to have them [teachers] participate, because well, you’d want to participate if they participated. (Jake, SP1 interview, 2007)

Another concern raised by student-leaders was the miscommunication between them and the teachers regarding student behaviour, what constituted “misbehaviours,” and how those concerns should be addressed. Student-leaders suggested that teachers interjected “too much” in the tribes to address “inappropriate” student behaviour, which, according to the student-leaders, were at times behaviours that they did not believe necessarily needed to be addressed. The following are excerpts from two student-leader questionnaire responses related to teacher involvement:

Teachers were too outspoken. I felt they took control of too many situations when their role was to let the students lead [student-leaders]. It is good to have them participating alongside to show that everyone is equal...but the teachers also have to know that the student-leaders will get things done without them doing it for them. (Beth, University of Windsor student-leader, 2007)
Riley adds:

I did not like having the teachers there. It’s a very uncomfortable dynamic and confusing for the students. It’s hard [for teachers] to be just a participant. Sometimes teachers would take charge when it wasn’t their place. (Riley, University of Windsor student-leader, 2007)

Activity leaders

Many of the activity leaders disclosed via their questionnaire responses [10] or through personal communications while at Muskoka Woods and since returning from the excursion, that they felt relatively detached during the experience and felt as though they were of little use at the activity sites. Because they were at their activity site all day, they felt they had limited time to interact with SP1’s and get to know the students in their cabin, which in some instances presented challenges in the evenings, as neither the SP1 nor the student-leaders really knew one another. According to one activity leader’s questionnaire response:

As an activity leader I felt redundant. The Muskoka Woods Leaders were more than capable to run the activities. And I wasn’t able to develop meaningful relationships with the students in my cabin. Most of the students in my cabin saw me as nothing more than a stickler...It would have made more sense for me to spend time with the tribe all day long and in the cabin, rather than spending no time with them at all [because of being at the activity site]. (Colby, University student-leader, 2006)

A common response, unique to activity leader questionnaire responses [10], which emerged from the questionnaires, is that activity leaders felt that they would benefit from having on-site training along with a detailed description of each of the activities offered during the three day excursion. Activity leader responses suggest that both on-site training and a description of the various activities would have helped familiarize leaders with the camp and thus help them become better prepared for their
role in the program. One activity leader also indicated that informing about and familiarizing activity leaders with the various activities would help match activity leaders to activities that were reflective of their strengths, rather than the semi-random activity assignment method that was used this year.

*Tribe dynamics*

Student-leader questionnaire responses [7], along with participant-observations indicate that during the outdoor experience, it was difficult for student-leaders to negotiate tribe dynamics and interact with SP1’s and teachers if they had never met before or, in the case of cabin leaders, if they had only had limited interactions with one another. Teachers also echoed this concern, with one SST suggesting that she was hesitant to relinquish power to her tribe leaders out of fear they would not know what to do or how to interact with her students (SST, personal communications, March 6, 2007).

6.17. SST Perspectives

As results have repeatedly suggested, program-related concerns raised by SST’s primarily focused on the time-commitment required of them during the pre-outdoor experience phase of the MWLESP program and its effect on their ability to effectively perform their SST role and responsibilities. SST’s and other facilitation team members also repeatedly shared with me a second program-related concern about the suitability of the grade nine students as the target age group of the MWLESP program. Questioning the suitability of grade nine student involvement has been a major theme that has emerged in all three data collection methods. As such, results pertaining to the suitability of the grade nine students for the MWLESP program will be presented in the following section.

---

85 [Hr] – SST program concern relates to a lack of time to effectively perform both their role as SST while also being a member of the facilitation team.
7. Suitability of the Grade 9 Students for the MWLESP Program

Since the three day Muskoka Woods excursion, there has been concern expressed amongst facilitation team members about the suitability of the grade nine student target group for the MWLESP program. Facilitation members have expressed concerns over this particular age group’s ability to “process” the meaning underlying the experience, consequently questioning whether the grade nines are capable of benefiting from an involvement in the MWLESP program (facilitation team meeting, personal communication, March 6, 2007). Yet, despite decision makers’ claims that grade nines are not the appropriate age group for what the MWLESP program aims to accomplish, results from my study indicate that these concerns about the suitability of grade nine student involvement are not shared by the SP1’s or the student-leaders. Results in this section pertain to each group of participants’ perspectives about the suitability of the grade nines as the target group for the MWLESP program. Results also address the criteria used by the SSTs (and facilitation team) to determine SP1 program “suitability.”

Evaluation Criteria for MWLESP Program

The precise criteria that the facilitation team and its senior administrators are using to evaluate the MWLESP program remain unknown. However, SST interview responses suggest that one of the main evaluation criteria being used specifically by members of the facilitation team is a comparison of student responsiveness from this year’s program to the 2005-06 pilot program – a comparison that involves two separate age groups of students (i.e., grade nine students versus grade eleven students).
7.1. SP1 Perspectives

When SP1’s were asked for their input about the suitability of grade nine involvement in the MWLESP program, the unanimous response [6 SP1’s86] was that grade nine was the right age group to offer this program, in part because of the relationship building that occurs between students and also between teachers and students while at Muskoka Woods. SP1 responses suggest that the MWLESP program helps with the grade 8 to 9 transition by accelerating the relationship building process between teachers and students, as well as between students, consequently helping these “at-risk” students feel less isolated in their new school environment. Reasons given by the SP1’s in support of grade nine student involvement (current and future) within the MWLESP program include:

Relationship building

When you go to Muskoka Woods you didn’t know nobody there and so you try [meeting] new people. And then, like when you go to high school, you try doing the same thing. [By participating in this program] You’re getting to know more people. (Anne, SP1 interview, 2007)

Accelerating the grade 8 to 9 transition process

I think it is a good year [grade 9 participation], because you’re just getting into school and you don’t know many people. But then, you go there [to Muskoka Woods] and you meet a whole bunch of people... Like it helps you get to know people, so you’ll know more people when you come back. You’ll be more talkative and have better friends. (Steven, SP1 interview, 2007).

Expanding personal boundaries and naturalized beliefs held by grade nine students

I think it helps grade nines get in the right set [of] mind for high school [like] helping out and teamwork and having a positive attitude. (Jake, SP1 interview, 2007)

---

86 Only six of the eight SP1’s were asked to comment on the suitability of grade nine involvement. This interview question was added after I was made aware that the involvement of the grade nine students was in grave jeopardy of being terminated. Two SP1 interviews had already been conducted at that point.
Accelerating the caring adult relationship between teachers and students

Cause you just get to high school and then you get to have fun...and you get to experience and learn how to be a leader and all of that...[and] you get to spend more time with the teacher and see who they're really like. (Ray, SP1 interview, 2007)

Second-chance opportunity to attend a Muskoka Woods excursion

According to two SP1’s from high school #1, who were previously excluded from participating in the grade 8 MWLE program (e.g., financial reasons, behaviour reasons), grade nine is a good year to offer the MWLESP program because: “People that couldn’t go in grade eight could go in grade nine...[and] it helps you like meet other people.” (Marissa, SP1 interview, 2007)

7.2. University of Windsor Student-Leader Perspective

When the University of Windsor student-leaders were asked about the suitability of the grade 9 age group for the MWLESP program, Baltimore offered this statement:

I don’t know. I think, only time will tell with that question. I don’t think one year will be better than another. Theoretically, if you could start them in grade nine to respect each other, that sounds great. Would it actually happen or is it better to wait until the student’s a bit older and probably have made some more life decisions and they’re in grade eleven or even ten, or even grade twelve and then giving them this opportunity...or giving it to them again...I don’t know if there’s only one way for this to work. (Baltimore, student leader interview, 2007)

7.3. SP2 Perspective

As previously mentioned, SP2 interview responses indicate that the relationships that were formed at Muskoka Woods appeared to have challenged some of the pre-existing naturalized beliefs that participants had towards or about “the Other,” such as the beliefs some teachers and many senior students (i.e., SP2’s) hold about grade nine students, as well as beliefs held by students about teachers.87 According to the SP2’s, having those naturalized beliefs about grade 9 students challenged and placing a greater

87 [DS] – Participating in the MWLESP program has challenged pre-existing naturalized beliefs held by participants about or toward “the Other.”
emphasis and value on these new members of their respective high schools are good reasons to justify why the MWLESP program should continue to target the grade 9 students. Cherry, an SP2 who participated the 2005-06 MWLESP program as a senior student, argues in favour of the grade nine age group, explaining that:

[This year] it was the first time taking the grade nines, [students] that no one ever really acknowledges at the school... It’s good cause like, well everyone perceives them [the grade 9 students] as just beginning, [that] they don’t need to [go], like [that] they’ll shape themselves throughout high school But, going to the Muskoka Woods experience [early on] could really help shape their high school careers. ‘Cause if they have that leadership in grade 9, then they’ll maybe follow through for the rest of the four years or whatever. (Cherry, SP2 interview, 2007)

7.4. SST Perspective

A major concern held by members of the facilitation team is the suitability of the grade 9 involvement in the MWLESP program and whether they are the group that will most benefit from the outdoor education intervention strategy and give the WECDSB the most “bang for their buck.” As such, SST’s interview responses differed from the other two groups of participants. Results from SST interview responses, program planning minutes and participant-observations all suggest that facilitation team members (i.e., SST’s) hold views that are dismissive of the grade 9 experience and subsequently minimize the benefits that SP1’s did derive from this year’s program, views that have been displayed by facilitation team members’ continual comparison of SP1 responsiveness during the 2006-07 MWLESP program to the senior students’ responsiveness during last year’s pilot program. The following are two excerpts from both SST interviews, which indicate both the comparison between the two program experiences and the dismissive attitude towards grade nine student involvement.
I think it [the MWLESP program] was more effective with the kids that we brought in the first year than the kids we brought this year. [Last year] There was a realization that “wow, these people [teachers] are invested in me!” And, I didn’t see that this year... I think the kids that came in grade nine, they didn’t get the sense that this was that big of a deal. Maybe because they had just gone so recently and maybe because they hadn’t figured out where they fit in the big picture, or maybe it’s all of the above... You know everyone talks about the transition from grade school to high school is difficult. I don’t know that I fully buy that. We’ve had a lot of kids making that transition for a lot of years and most of them are not traumatized by it. (SST [b], interview, 2007)

SST [a] adds:

I don’t know about the grade nines. I think it’s really too hard to tell. I mean we’re dealing with grade nine students, you know, and with the older group you saw the growth so fast. Last year we saw the leaps and bounds, and I don’t know that I saw that with the grade nines and grade tens that were there. Actually, I didn’t see it. And, I know I’m comparing it to what I saw before but I guess only time will tell. Did I, or have I seen a bit [of growth]? Yes. Have I seen it as much as I had hoped for? No. So, did we accomplish what we set out to do? I don’t know... we’ll have to wait and see what happens at the end of the year. (SST [a], interview, 2007)

While facilitation team members have argued that SP1’s were unresponsive or showed limited responsiveness to the leadership component of the program, all of the student-leaders who completed the questionnaires, and who had the most interaction with SP1’s during the experience, indicated at least one and in six instances, two or three SP1’s who had demonstrated qualities that they thought merited consideration for their possible return to the MWLESP program in a SP2 co-tribe leader role. Unfortunately, the validity of these recommendations are in question because no prior evaluation criteria was established for identifying or selecting potential SP2’s to return to the MWLESP program.

The written portions of the SP1 photo-collages, along with the eight interview responses, all provided an indication that SP1’s did learn about leadership through their...
participation in the MWLESP program, with the depth and retention of that learned information varying between students. Nonetheless, all the SP1's who participated in these two activities (i.e., photo-collages and interviews) were able to identify skills associated with leaderships, leadership skills that they need to further develop, and for interview participants, ways that they demonstrated leadership while at and/or since returning from Muskoka Woods.

Future of the MWLESP program - 2007-08 MWLESP Planning Meeting

Program planning minutes revealed that at the most recent facilitation meeting (March 6, 2007), it was decided that grade nines would no longer be the target student group for the MWLESP program. This decision was taken by the facilitation team because it was believed that the grade nine students gained very little from the experience due to a lack of maturity on their part. The group suggested instead that the senior students would be better candidates, in part because they are more mature and thus more able to fully appreciate the experience. As well, comparatively, they felt the senior students are more likely to benefit most from the experience, and would offer the WECDSB more "bang for their buck." Having attended this facilitation team meeting and upon reviewing the program planning minutes, it is clear that at no time prior to or during this meeting did decision makers refer to the stated mission statement of the 2006-07 MWLESP program while evaluating its effectiveness as an intervention strategy, student responsiveness, and/or the suitability of the target age group (grade nine students). Program planning minutes also indicate that there was no discussion or consideration given to the possibility of once again involving the grade nine students.
Conclusion

Results presented in this chapter were collected from document analysis of program planning minutes and participants' responses collected either through semi-structured interviews (SP1’s, SP2’s, university student-leaders, and SST’s) and/or Student-Leader Questionnaire responses. These results will be triangulated with my participant-observations and analyzed in the next chapter, examine my research question and each of its sub-problems.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Sub-Problem 1

How is a protective intervention strategy created and evaluated using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation?

I began this research process with a clear understanding that affecting large-scale social change is difficult. Nonetheless, I wanted to pursue a study that would allow me to collaborate with other individuals in an attempt to affect social change. Subsequently, one of the aims of this study was to create a school-based intervention program that would work with “at-risk” youth, in a manner that placed their needs at the centre of all decisions – despite knowing that this would not be an easy process. The challenge with creating such a program is that it entails challenging the social structures found within the current education system, and the institutionalized practices within which educators have traditionally operated.

Barr and Parrett (1995) explain that there are embedded naturalized beliefs and practices held by many educators about what it means to teach different groups of students, and how programs “should be” structured for each of those groups of students. Typically, enriching learning opportunities are afforded to the affluent student populations, because they have access to the resources, which afford them the ability to participate in such learning opportunities. The limiting views held by educators towards “at-risk” youth and the exclusionary practices (both formal and informal) found within school programming, clearly demonstrates a need for educational reform.
This need has been echoed by Kathleen Wynne, Ontario’s Minister of Education, who has admitted that for too long, Ontario schools have not operated in a manner that is conducive to all students’ needs. Yet, as suggested by Barr and Parrett (1995), moving towards an inclusive student-centered programming system for all students, like the programs currently being introduced by Ontario’s Ministry of Education as part of their Student Success/Learning to 18 campaign, is not an easy feat. This is difficult because it requires widespread support from stakeholders in various positions of power (i.e., school officials, educators, parents, students) who may or may not be willing to move beyond the boundaries in which they currently live. As the thesis results have shown, this was the challenge that I experienced throughout my involvement in the MWLESP program.

Duality of Structure, however, suggests that the structures in which we live are not fixed and can be expanded and/or transformed so that agents can begin to see and imagine new possibilities for being and acting. Individuals can resist dominant social practices and self-define their own boundaries. However, to be able to affect social change, Duality of Structure makes clear that certain structures must be in place. First, the desire for change must be supported by individuals in positions of power, who have the rules and resources to alter and/or transform both the formal and informal boundaries shaping individual’s actions and decisions (Ponic, 1994, p. 25). Second, the desire for change must then be supported by a community of like-minded people, who work together to show others that new possibilities can and do exist. Without either of these components, large scale social change is difficult to achieve (see Ponic, 2000).
Social Change within the Education System

According to Barr and Parrett (1995), the difficulties of social change (i.e., educational reform) within an educational context is that there are a number of institutionalized practices and naturalized beliefs that are deeply embedded in the education system, which limit the ability of “at-risk” students to fully experience success in school. To affect change within the education system, top-down support from senior officials and administration (i.e., decision makers in positions of power) is essential, because it allows the possibility for change to be introduced. However, to implement the proposed changes widespread support and teacher buy-in at both an informal and formal level is also a must; otherwise the opportunity for change is unlikely to occur (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 31).

The education system is structured in a hierarchical manner, with senior school officials and administrators in positions of power, who thus have the ability to make decisions that shape the structures through which schools operate. However, within this system, educators also hold power, not necessarily a power that always affords them decision making abilities, but a power that according to Barr and Parrett (1995) enables them to support, resist and/or undermine new reforms introduced in the school system. In keeping with Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984), how teachers choose to act will be in relation to what they perceive to be possible. Therefore, just because the possibility for social change exists does not mean that change will actually occur – a reality that is consistent with results from this study. Although decisions makers involved in the MWLESP program were afforded resources that provided them with an opportunity to create and implement a protective intervention program that challenged the conventional
structures of school-based intervention programs for “at-risk” students, they were unable to achieve the kinds of changes to these structures that they had originally envisioned.

Briefly, what follows in this section is an examination of the challenges that decision makers’ faced during the creation, implementation and evaluation process of the MWLESP program, which has limited their ability to fully operate the program as originally planned. Despite the challenges that decision makers faced throughout this process, a number of strengths did emerge that can be built upon in future years of the MWLESP program. Strengths of the program include: (a) the WECDSB’s commitment to the MWLESP program and allocation of resources towards its creation, implementation and sustainability, (b) the collaborative planning process – drawing on the insights and expertise of various individuals, (c) the use of outdoor education programming and providing participants an opportunity to spend time in an outdoor environment, and (d) creating tangible objectives that the MWLESP program hopes its participants’ will achieve (i.e., mission statement). Some of these program strengths will be presented in this section; however a more detailed examination of the programs’ strengths and their effect on participants follows in my analysis of sub-problem #2. A table summarizing key strengths, ongoing challenges and recommendations has been included as the end of this section.

MWLESP Program

Conceptually, decision makers involved in the MWLESP program used outdoor education as a means to expand two sets of structural boundaries. One set of boundaries is linked to how the school and its associated programs (i.e., co-curricular programming) operate. The other set of boundaries challenged the naturalized beliefs that participants
within the MWLESP program believed to be possible – for themselves, towards “the Other,” and about school. The MWLESP program’s use of outdoor education programming to develop protective factors (i.e., caring adult relationships) as a way of minimizing student disengagement makes it an innovative initiative (i.e., program strength). What decision makers were trying to do through the MWLESP program goes beyond the scope of what has always been done in terms of school-based intervention programming.

In planning the MWLESP program, decision makers intentionally tried to break away from the “one-size-fits-all” model by incorporating promising practices from other fields into the program structuring. For example, decision makers used outdoor education as its primary intervention method, which has not been commonly used in intervention programming, as well as photo-elicitation made possible by providing each student with his/her own disposable cameras to capture the experience on film. Both are strengths of the program that exemplify how decision makers intentionally attempted to differentiate the MWLESP program from conventional intervention programs.

As Duality of Structure suggests, social change requires the support of individuals in positions of power, who have the ability (i.e., rules and resources) to alter and/or transform social boundaries. The creation and implementation of the MWLESP program was made possible through resources (i.e., financial, human and material) allocated by the officials from the WECDSB. These resources were made available to the Board because of the Student Success/Learning to 18 campaign that the Ontario Ministry of Education is currently undertaking to boost graduation rates to 85% by 2010.88 Results

88 The 2005-06 MWLESP pilot program was made possible using resources that the Board received through a provincial Lighthouse Grant; financial resources that are tied to the Student Success/Learning to
from this study suggest that although the MWLESP program was supported by the WECDSB (i.e., individuals in positions of power), what decision makers conceptually set out to accomplish, in terms of creating and implementing a school-based outdoor education intervention program that used Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation, and what actually occurred, did not always align. This is because moving away from the dominant “one-size-fits-all” program planning approach to an inclusive student-centered focus (i.e., grounded in the Strengths Perspective) requires that a number of structures (i.e., rules and resources) be in place to achieve the proposed changes.

Although the WECDSB allotted resources to the creation of the MWLESP program, and decisions makers attempted to create structures (i.e., informal and formal rules) that would allow them to make decisions that were theoretically grounded, results from this study suggest that there simply was not enough of either to sustain the program in the way that decision makers had hoped. Upon reviewing the results collected during this study and reflecting upon my own experience within the MWLESP program, I would argue that prior to the three day excursion, decision makers firmly believed in and were committed to the vision of the MWLESP program and the way that they hoped to achieve that vision. However, decision makers had difficulties implementing the MWLESP program as planned, not because of a lack of interest, but rather because of limited human resources. The lack of resources in turn limited decision makers’ ability to implement all the necessary structures (i.e., rules) needed to run the program according to its intended framework.

18 initiative. The 2006-07 MWLESP program was once again made possible through financial resources allocated by the WECDSB, however these resources came from the Board’s general Student Success/Learning to 18 programming fund.
These outcomes are consistent with Barr and Parrett’s (1995) explanations of the difficulties associated with social change within the education system. Moreover, many of the strengths and limitations that presented themselves throughout the creation, implementation and evaluation process of the MWLESP program are consistent with the described outcomes of what could occur if certain programming structures were (or were not) put into place (i.e., Chen et al., 1999; Eilish, 2002). An interconnected relationship clearly exists between each of the steps involved in the creation, implementation and evaluation process of school-based intervention program planning, as was previously suggested in Chen et al.’s (1999) research.

Conceptualization Process

Results from this study suggest that decision makers of the MWLESP program were able to effectively conceptualize a structural framework and a set of assumptions that were grounded in the theoretical frameworks of both Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective. Moreover, as revealed by the program planning minutes, decisions taken prior to the three day outdoor experience were shaped by the desire to try to operate from both of these aforementioned theoretical frameworks. In an attempt to create an intervention program that moved away from the “one-size-fits-all” approach generally used in the school setting, decision makers made an effort to explore other fields for promising practices that could be adapted and incorporated into the proposed MWLESP program. For example, the research teams’ decision to use photo-elicitation (i.e., promising practice from outdoor education literature), and provide every student with a

---

89 Members from both the research and facilitation teams formally committed to operating from a Duality of Structure and Strengths Perspective framework. However, in keeping with my participant-observations, I question if individuals fully understood these concepts and what it means to make decisions grounded in these two theoretical concepts. I would propose that members of both teams committed to operate from these two frameworks with a very limited understanding of what that entailed.
Disposable camera was a major strength of the MWLESP program. Photo-elicitation not only allowed students to capture their outdoor experience on film, but it also provided them with a creative outlet for self-expression and reflection through the creation of their photo-collages.

A major strength of the conceptualization process was decision makers' commitment to engage in a collaborative planning process. As such, two committees were formed (i.e., research team and facilitation team), and an agreement was made to collaboratively share the decision making responsibilities throughout the entire creation, implementation and evaluation process. Working as committees allowed decision makers to pool their resources, experience and expertise, thus drawing on one another's strengths to create the best possible student-centered program. For example, the SST's who made up the majority of the facilitation team were an invaluable resource in actually planning the three day Muskoka Woods excursion (i.e., the September 2006 planning meeting), as they are the individuals who have the most direct contact with the "students of promise" and thus have an idea of their individual needs. Drawing on their insights allowed decision makers to structure the three day excursion in a way that placed students' needs at the centre of decisions taken (i.e., placing debriefing opportunities into the schedule).

The theoretical understandings and insights provided by members of the research team ensured that global decisions related to the overall structuring of the MWLESP program were grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective (i.e., decision to offer follow-up programming).

Program planning minutes reveal that decisions taken and ideas presented prior to September, 2006 were primarily student-centered. The underlying value shaping
decisions was to create a program that would allow the inherent ability of every student of promise to behave as a leader to emerge, which would in turn enable students to experience success in high school and more broadly. It was during these early planning meetings that decision makers decided to involve the SP2’s in a leadership capacity for the 2006-07 MWLESP program.

A decision made during this time that reflects operating from a student-centered focus was the decision to formally establish a smoking policy. Although smoking is not a healthy practice that decision makers want to reinforce, the reality is that some of the participating “students of promise” smoke. As decision makers, we had the power to ban students from smoking while at Muskoka Woods; however, this decision would not have been student-centered. Banning smoking would have acted as both a psychological and physiological barrier for students who smoked, thereby limiting their ability to have an optimal outdoor education experience. Instead, decision makers chose to regulate smoking by implementing a formal rule designed with students needs in mind, outlining how, when, and where smoking would take place while at Muskoka Woods.

Implementation Process

Challenges first arose as planning for the MWLESP program moved out of the conceptualization phase and into the implementation process. Results suggest that there was a shift in the decision makers’ focus, whereby they moved from a student-centered focus to a program/logistical focus. Presumably the imminent nature of the three day Muskoka Woods excursion, combined with the amount of logistical programming that the outdoor experience required, played a role in decision makers’ move towards a more program-centered focus in the weeks leading up to excursion. According to both SST’s,
in the weeks prior to the three day excursion planning and preparing the MWLESP program became an all consuming task and in the end all they had time for were program-related preparations specific to the outdoor experience. Therefore, details that did not specifically relate to the three day excursion, such as follow-up programming, program evaluation, and measuring SP1 responsiveness to the intervention strategy – details that are all tied to sustainability – were not able to be addressed.

Effectively, the limited amount of human resources, combined with the “newness” of the MWLESP program, created a less than ideal situation for implementing a program that deviated from “normal” intervention programming. As results have suggested, in the weeks prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion, members of the facilitation team were overworked. Consequently, decisions that the facilitation team were making were informally being guided by what needed to be done for the program to run smoothly, rather than what participants (i.e., students) needed to benefit most from their program involvement – a decision making approach that does not align with a student-centered focus (i.e., Strengths Perspective).

Program-Related Preparations

The time commitment required of facilitation team members and the amount of logistical preparations that go into creating an intervention program, such as the MWLESP, was never emphasized in the literature and was largely underestimated on the part of the facilitation team. Thus, one of the likely causes of the facilitation team’s heavy workload was an underestimate of how many people would realistically be needed to run the MWLESP program as planned. This resulted in an unmanageable workload for facilitation team members, who were left trying to fulfill two major responsibilities –
preparing participants for the three day excursion and planning the MWLESP program—in addition to their normal SST responsibilities. A limited amount of human resources consequently resulted in the facilitation team not giving much (or any) consideration to a number of decisions and structures (i.e., rules), that were outlined in Chen et al.'s (1999) logic model as being critical to the program planning process in outdoor education.

Results show that little to no consideration was given to the following program details:

1. Short, intermediate and long term objectives and corresponding structures (i.e., activities) to achieve these outcomes.
2. Assessment criteria to evaluate the MWLESP program and SP1 responsiveness.
3. Formal guidelines outlining behavioural expectations and strategies for how to address difficulties at Muskoka Woods, should they arise.
4. Formal rules governing the decision making process during the three day excursion.

Although Chen et al. (1999) identified all of the aforementioned structures as being critical to program planning, at the time when program planning was taking place, no long-term concerns arose about how focusing on only the most immediate and pressing program-related matters would affect either the delivery or the sustainability of the MWLESP program. After reviewing results and reflecting on how the overall MWLESP program has unfolded, a correlation between the difficulties experienced during and since returning from Muskoka Woods can be seen. In addition, a link can be made between the limited resources available to the decision makers and their ability to implement necessary structures (i.e., rules, assessment criteria) needed to offer the MWLESP program as planned.

**Strengths of the Program**

Although limited access to resources may have hindered decision makers’ ability to implement and operate the MWLESP program as planned, a number of strengths did
emerge from this experience that decision makers' can build upon in future years of the MWLESP program. For example, there was a large amount of financial and human resources allocated by the WECDSB, which inevitably made the MWLESP program possible. Without these resources the “students of promise” from the WECDSB would not have been able to take part in a unique outdoor education program experience. Moreover, the Board continues to show its commitment to the MWLESP program and to its “students of promise” by the decision to offer and allocate resources to the program until the 2009-10 academic year.

A second strength of the program was participants’ ability to derive powerful and in some instances transformational benefits from their MWLESP program experience. Results from this study suggest that a number of participants had their boundaries and naturalized beliefs challenged and possibly transformed because of their involvement in the program, outcomes that were achieved even though the structure of the MWLESP program was shifted from its original plan.

Another major strength of the MWLESP program and its ability to be implemented was the SST’s, without whom the experiences had by participants would not have been made possible. The SST’s commitment to and desire for their “students of promise” to have a successful high school experience was evident in the amount of time and energy that they, along with other members of the facilitation team, put into the creation and implementation process of the MWLESP program. The outcomes presented in the results, with regards to the limited participant-related preparations and follow-up programming, do not effectively portray the tremendous amount of work the SST’s and the facilitation team put into the MWLESP program. Had it not been for the SST’s, the
follow-up programming that did occur this year and that has been meaningful for the SP1's would not have been made possible, because prior to the outdoor experience no follow-up structures were in place. Since returning from Muskoka Woods, some follow-up programming has been offered, which has been made possible through the SST's support and planning involvement.

Program Limitations

The general lack of rules and resources did, however, present both immediate and long-term challenges for the MWLESP program, and for the sustainability of decision makers' intention to operate the program using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation. The limited amount of human resources, combined with the large amount of logistical planning (i.e., program-related preparations) that the three day excursion required, limited decision makers' ability to formally implement a number of structures (i.e., rules) that have been identified as critical to effective outdoor education programming. Specifically, limited human resources caused the facilitation team to concentrate primarily on program-related preparations, which in turn affected their ability to prepare participants for the outdoor experience.

Results have shown a correlation between the limited participant-related preparations and students' feelings of anxiety and hesitation prior to arriving at Muskoka Woods. I would argue that same comment could be made for teachers and their "readiness" to assume a role other than that of the "teacher" during the three day excursion. As demonstrated by teachers' varied levels of responsiveness and involvement during the outdoor experience, there was notable resistance and hesitation on the part of some teachers to assume the co-participant roles. This suggests that the lack of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
participant-related preparations that were offered prior to the outdoor experience may have limited the facilitation team’s ability to garner teacher support and create a buy-in system for what they hoped to accomplish and the means through which they hoped to achieve those outcomes.

Recognizing that within the education system there are a number of existing naturalized beliefs held by educators about “at-risk” youth, it is likely the lack of participant-related preparations was not the only factor affecting teacher support for the MWLESP program. Essentially, a lack of resources was a major contributing factor to the facilitation team’s inability to gain the full support of the entire teacher community for the MWLESP program and its unconventional delivery system;\(^9\) which in turn affected their ability to implement the MWLESP program as intended.

*Social Maintenance*

The hesitation shown by some teachers to assume active *co-participant* roles during the Muskoka Woods excursion, along with the facilitation team’s responses to the Day 1 challenges, are a strong indication that the MWLESP program and its philosophy was not fully understood by the entire teacher community. Upon reviewing the results pertaining to varying levels of teacher involvement, it seems that, in general, neither the teacher participants nor the members of the facilitation team were fully able to adopt or commit to the fundamental values underlying the MWLESP program at the level of their practical consciousness. In other words, some teachers were unable to shift their naturalized teaching practices and beliefs about how to *be* a teacher and how to *deal* with behavioural concerns involving “at-risk” youth.

\(^9\) Results from this study suggest that teacher responsiveness and support of the MWLESP program varied. Factors contributing to varied teacher responsiveness will be discussed in my analysis of sub-problem #2.
Subsequently, when behavioural concerns involving students presented themselves on Day 1, both the teachers and the members of the facilitation team, who for the most part only knew one way of being and responding to difficult situations involving students, could only draw from that set of responses (i.e., resources). As such, it was easy and natural for both the teachers and members of the facilitation team to revert back to their "normal" and "natural" teacher role and responses, rather than attempt to put into practice new beliefs that were unfamiliar. This is in part, because no alternative coping strategies for addressing behavioural issues were provided and/or ever established. Therefore, in stressful situations both the facilitation team and teachers only had their past experiences and coping strategies to draw upon. Thus, during the creation process, the facilitation team committed to a set of values, but because there was a limited amount of rules (formal and informal) and resources attached to these values, it was difficult for the facilitation team to practice and maintain these new values once the outdoor experience began.

After reflecting on my experience within the MWLESP program and reviewing results gathered from all three methodological sources, I firmly believe that Day 1 was a decisive marker in the MWLESP program. It was during the "emergency" teachers meeting on Day 1 that a notable shift occurred between what we had set out to do, in terms of creating a student-centered protective intervention program that was theoretically grounded, and what we were going to be able to do. As a result, the two no longer aligned, because of the decisions taken by members of the facilitation team. Results suggest that three informal and formal decisions were taken the evening of Day 1 that caused the entire structure of the MWLESP program to shift. A brief description of
each of these three decisions and their impact on the structuring of the MWLESP program follows.

1. Schedule Change

The facilitation team’s decision to formally limit SP1 “downtime” opportunities and adopt the grade eight MWLE program format and schedule (i.e., drawing on past history), was a clear move away from the Strengths Perspective. By making this decision, the facilitation team was focusing on negative outcomes that could occur by offering “downtime” opportunities rather than considering what benefits students could gain from having time to process their experience. The assumption underlying this shift was that facilitation team members feared that “free time” would provide students with an opportunity to act out inappropriately. Moreover, the facilitation team believed that, if left unchanged, these “downtimes” would be the most problematic activities for students, because they would be bored and thus more inclined to act out. I would argue that, informally, this schedule change brings to light the deeply embedded and shared beliefs held about and towards “at-risk” youth held by many educators – which is that if these students are not distracted and/or kept busy at all times they will inevitably get into trouble.

2. Decision Making Process

Another decision that was taken on Day 1 that has subsequently reshaped the structure of the MWLESP program, was to informally re-implement the hierarchical decision making format typically used within the education system. This decision was a move away from the collaborative process originally agreed upon by all decision makers involved within the MWLESP program. Evidence suggests that unequal power relations
shaped parts of the decision making process while at Muskoka Woods (since Day 1). Instead of decision making being a collaborative process with input from all members of the facilitation team, decisions were made at Muskoka Woods by senior members of the facilitation team with little or no discussion, and then later communicated to the rest of the team.

Consequently, the facilitation team moved away from being a truly collaborative process, adopting instead a semi-collaborative process – a structure that resembles the one typically used within the education system. The semi-collaborative process still draws on the insights and expertise of members of the facilitation team, which is one of the strengths of the program. However, as reported by the SST’s, the final decision ultimately rests with the senior members of the facilitation team (i.e., those in a position of power).

3. Questioning the Suitability of Grade 9 Student Involvement

As results have indicated, since the outdoor experience, concerns regarding the suitability of the grade nine students for the MWLESP program have been raised repeatedly by members of the facilitation team. Results suggest that these concerns first emerged on Day 1, when SP1’s were responding differently than their senior counterparts had responded on Day 1 the year before. Facilitation team members seem to have been drawing on last year’s experience to shape their expectations of this year’s program experience and when the outcomes did not match their expectations, they immediately (and informally) dismissed the grade nines as suitable candidates for the outdoor experience. They choose instead to naturalize the belief that senior students are the most
suitable candidates for the program, a belief that appears to be based on how last year's students responded during the three day excursion.

Evaluation

Program Sustainability

Decisions makers' focus on the logistical and most imminent program-related preparations during the pre-outdoor experience had an immediate and positive affect on the three day outdoor experience and the facilitation team's ability to implement the MWLESP program as planned. However, the lack of long-term strategic planning (i.e., establishing evaluation criteria), combined with a lack of formal rules and resources, has had an affect on the sustainability of the MWLESP program and its likelihood of being delivered and developed as originally planned. According to Chen et al. (1999), had the facilitation team clearly established a framework with tangible objectives and outcomes (i.e., used a logic model framework), the likelihood of discrepancies between what decision makers said they and the program would do and what actually occurred would have been minimized. Thus, had more human resources been available, presumably the facilitation team would have been able to establish clear long-term structures (i.e., rules). In that case, it would have been more difficult for the facilitation team to revert back to "traditional" teacher responses and practices, thereby allowing the MWLESP program to move forward as originally planned.

Program Evaluation

Witt and Crompton (1996) have suggested that attributing meaning to an outdoor experience and authentically assessing the experience had by participants during the program is difficult. Therefore, to be able to evaluate an outdoor education program it is
imperative that program planners align the program’s values with its structures, and then to establish measurable outcomes. Only by creating measurable outcomes will decision makers be able to assess a program’s effectiveness and its participants’ responsiveness. The facilitation team’s inability to establish measurable objectives for the MWLESP program and assessment criteria for determining SP1’s responsiveness prior to the outdoor experience has made the evaluation process for this year’s program virtually impossible.\textsuperscript{91}

As results from this study have revealed, evaluation of the MWLESP program and SP1 responsiveness to this intervention strategy have not been done in a systematic or ongoing manner. Rather, each stakeholder involved in the MWLESP program has been using his or her own evaluation criteria to determine if the program was successful or unsuccessful and to measure SP1 responsiveness – which is an unreliable assessment method. As shown by the varying participant responses, there are divided opinions on whether or not the 2006-07 MWLESP was effective and if the grade 9 students were responsive to the intervention strategy. While both the SP1s’ and student-leaders’ assessment of the MWLESP program are favourable and suggest that it was a positive experience that was beneficial for participants, SST’s and members of the facilitation team’s assessments are less favourable. Instead, they have argued that the SP1’s benefited very little from the experience and that an older age group of students would be more suitable candidates for achieving what the MWLESP program is trying to accomplish. In both of the aforementioned examples of participants’ assessments, neither of the groups used consistent evaluation criteria. Instead, each group used their own set of criteria to

\textsuperscript{91} Program values can be seen embedded within the MWLESP mission statement, created in January 2007. However, this mission statement was created after the outdoor experience and remains unused by the facilitation team in evaluating the 2006-07 MWLESP program.
determine what did or did not constitute "effective" intervention programming and student "responsiveness."

Student-Centered Evaluation Approach

In keeping with a student-centered program focus (i.e., Strengths Perspective), it would be advantageous for decision makers to use an ongoing assessment approach, involving individuals from each of the three participant groups, to evaluate the MWLESP program and each of its three phases. This would allow decision makers to make any necessary adjustments to the program and would have ensured that decisions being taken aligned with the underlying values that were supposed to be shaping the program. Moreover, since the MWLESP program involves a number of different stakeholders, each with his or her own unique perspective and experience within the program, incorporating the input from each of the stakeholder groups would help to identify what each group believed the strengths of the program to be. This would then allow decision makers to build on the strengths identified by participants in their planning of the 2007-08 MWLESP program. Decision makers would then be focusing on what the program did accomplish, rather than assuming a deficit approach by choosing to focus only on what the program did not accomplish.

Although this was the recommended assessment format that the research team had envisioned for the MWLESP program, as it aligned with the underlying values driving this program, results suggest that this year, there were neither the necessary rules nor resources in place to evaluate the program in this manner. As indicated in the SST interview responses, with the busyness of their current workload and responsibilities as
both SST’s and facilitation team members, it was not realistic or conducive to implement all the proposed structures that were originally envisioned for the MWLESP program.

**Evaluation of the 2006-06 MWLESP Program**

Results from this study show that neither this proposed assessment strategy nor a modified version of a participant-centered assessment were used by the facilitation team to evaluate the 2006-07 MWLESP program and SP1 responsiveness to this intervention strategy. Instead, the facilitation team has relied on its own assessment of the experience, which, as results from SST interview responses indicated, is primarily based on a comparative analysis between this year’s and last year’s student responsiveness and demonstrated engagement levels during both experiences. However, since January 2007 a tangible assessment tool framework has been available, in the form of the MWLESP program mission statement. This was established by members of the WECDSB and outlines the stated purpose of the MWLESP program. Yet, with the exception of this study, none of the members of the facilitation team have made reference to these objectives while assessing this year’s program and SP1’s responsiveness.

Presently, the facilitation team is in a situation where they are planning next year’s program based on their own experiences within the program. The facilitation team is making decisions based on what they believed “worked” and “did not” work. As such, the facilitation team is planning the program for students based on what they believe students need, rather than working with students to create a program that meets their needs as identified by them. This approach, according to Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004), is typical in intervention program planning. Relying solely on members of facilitation team and not soliciting any student input to evaluate the MWLESP program.
not only exemplifies a move away from creating a student-centered intervention program, but has also jeopardized the future involvement of grade nine students as the target age group for the MWLESP program.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this sub-problem was to identify how a protective school-based intervention strategy using outdoor education is created and evaluated using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation. Results gathered to answer this sub-problem are consistent with current literature pertaining to both outdoor education programming and school-based intervention programming for “at-risk” youth. The results suggest that the Eilish four-step model (2002) is an effective tool for conceptualizing an intervention strategy that differs from what has “always” been done. It encourages program planners to incorporate promising practices from other fields into the new intervention strategy that they are creating, as was done by decision makers involved in planning this year’s MWLESP program.

The challenges experienced by the facilitation team with regards to implementing and evaluating the MWLESP program also suggest that the Logic Model (Chen et al., 1999) could be an invaluable resource for the strategic planning of an outdoor education intervention program. The model is designed to allow program planners to lay out a program’s entire structure during the planning phase – which did not occur in the MWLESP program. As suggested by Chen et al. (1999), using a logic model helps program planners make decisions that align with their stated values. As such, program planners can minimize the possibility that discrepancies will arise between what they say the program would do and what actually occurs. In the future, decision makers should
consider drawing from both Eilish’s (2002) and the Logic Model (Chen et al., 1999) frameworks when planning and structuring the MWLESP program. Both models would help decision makers be more intentional in the decisions they take concerning what structures and promising practices to draw from and incorporate into the program, so as to align with the program’s underlying values.

Challenges experienced by the facilitation team in implementing a program that conceptually challenges the social structures through which the education system and its agents (i.e., teachers) have normally operated, are consistent with Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984), and more specifically the difficulties of achieving social change highlighted in Ponic’s (2000) research. Results from this study also suggest that the kinds of strategic planning and preparations required to create, implement and evaluate a program such as the MWLESP are not feasible without a substantial amount of structures (i.e., rules) and access to resources to implement those structures.

In the MWLESP program, limited access to resources (i.e., financial and human) had a direct effect on decision makers’ ability to implement and ultimately sustain the program as planned, beyond its conceptualization phase – as they were unable to put all the intended structures (i.e., rules) into place that would allow the program to run as planned. As was experienced by decision makers involved in the MWLESP program, although the possibility for change exists, the difficulties associated with actually creating change, as compared to the relative ease of socially maintaining practices that have “always” been done, contributes to why social change, despite being possible, does not often occur.
Table 3: MWLESP Program Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Continuing Challenges</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td>• The support of the WECDSB &amp; their long-term commitment to the MWLESP program</td>
<td>• Not enough resources to implement all of the necessary structures (i.e., formal &amp; informal rules) which are needed to optimally operate the MWLESP program using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective frameworks</td>
<td>• Continued support from the WECDSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration of the research and facilitation teams</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Both the research and facilitation teams should continue to collaborate &amp; draw from promising practices when structuring the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drawing from promising practices in other fields (i.e., photo-elicitation)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• More resources allocated to program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-outdoor Experience</strong></td>
<td>• The program-related preparations</td>
<td>• Limited resources (i.e., time) for participant-related preparations</td>
<td>• Continue to build on the training sessions that occurred this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The training provided for student-leaders &amp; teachers</td>
<td>• Limited relationship building opportunities between participants</td>
<td>• Provide relationship building opportunities for participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involving both teams in the planning process</td>
<td>• Members of the facilitation team were overworked, especially the SST’s</td>
<td>• More participant-related preparations, for example providing leadership lessons for SP1’s prior to the excursion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Examine the distribution of labour within the facilitation team – possibly add members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Group approach to selecting SP1 participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Outdoor Environment</em></td>
<td><em>SP1 behavioural guidelines not in place</em></td>
<td><em>Build on the program strengths from this year – continue to involve senior students and U of W students as leaders. Supportive teachers should also continue to assume the co-participant role during experience</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Combination of the healthy risk-taking activities</em></td>
<td><em>Miscommunication of smoking policy</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interaction between participants</em></td>
<td><em>Hesitation from some teachers to assume co-participant roles</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gradual SP1 responsiveness during excursion</em></td>
<td><em>Semi-collaborative decision making process</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Involving SP2’s</em></td>
<td><em>Limited understanding of what it means to operate the MWLESP program using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Involving U of W student-leaders</em></td>
<td><em>Limited pre-experience participant preparations</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Willingness of some teachers to assume co-participant roles</em></td>
<td><em>Limited long-term strategic planning</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outdoor Experience**

**Follow-Up Program**

- Photo-collages & written summaries
- Celebration Dinner
- L.E.A.P. planning meetings
- In-school mentorship program
- Sustainable interactions between SP1’s-SP2’s, and teachers

- Limited follow-up structures were in place prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion
- To date, no L.E.A.P. activities have been offered
- No assessment criteria to evaluate the MWLESP program & SP1 responsiveness
- My lack of agency & demands of SST role have limited the amount of follow-up that has happened

- Continue to use photo-elicitation
- Continue to host Celebration Dinner
- Continue the in-school mentorship program & introduce it early in September
- Have structures in place so that L.E.A.P. activities can begin immediately following Muskoka Woods
- Establish assessment criteria (i.e., objectives)
Sub-Problem 2

Does using a three phase Outdoor Education Model in the structuring of the MWLESP program enhance "at-risk" students' ability to experience "success" in the program and in high school?

My analysis of the Outdoor Education Model's effectiveness to enhance "at-risk" students' ability to experience success in the outdoor intervention examined is based on triangulated data gathered through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with program participants, used in conjunction with participant-observations arising from my experience in the MWLESP program. As suggested in the literature review, in order to evaluate an outdoor education program, and what participants gained from the experience, it is essential to evaluate each of the program components (i.e., phases) as separate entities and examine whether or not the learning objectives each phase set out to accomplish were successfully accomplished. This process enables me to assess if the three phase structuring of the MWLESP program, enhanced the ability of students of promise to experience success in high school. In this chapter, I provide a detailed discussion of each of the three phases of the MWLESP program as experienced by participants, in order to analyze each phase’s contribution to participants’ overall experience within the program.

Pre-Outdoor Experience

As previously indicated in the literature review, the pre-outdoor experience is an important component of the outdoor education process because it is the foundation upon which a transformational experience for participants is made possible. Logistically, in
terms of the program, the pre-outdoor experience should occur in the months prior to the commencement of the outdoor experience. It is during the pre-experience phase that those individuals\textsuperscript{92} responsible for the planning and implementation of the outdoor education program are engaged in a detailed planning process, whereby critical program and participant related decisions (i.e., what needs to occur within each phase of the outdoor education process) are made and then later implemented. After completing the pre-outdoor experience phase of the MWLESP program, and debriefing with other members of the facilitation team, it is apparent that there are both program and participant related preparations that need to occur prior to the outdoor experience – this distinction was previously not discussed in the literature review. Although program and participant related preparations are separate components of the pre-experience process, they are also interconnected to one another – and then together they are integral to the outdoor education intervention process. This is because if one of these preparations (program or participant) does not occur then the other will experience an adverse effect. Evidence of this interconnectedness of pre-experience program and participant related preparations can be seen in the challenges that arose on Day 1 of the outdoor experience, which can be directly linked to the imbalance in the amount of program-related to participant-related preparations that occurred prior to the three day Muskoka Woods excursion.

\textsuperscript{92} Decision makers of the MWLESP program include: 1) the University of Windsor research team who are involved in a four year study related to the MWLESP program and 2) the Facilitation Team which is made up of five SST’s from the WECDSB, one administrator and me (a graduate student from the University of Windsor). As decision makers, these individuals are in positions of power (because they have the ability to shape rules and/or benefit from resources). As such, they can structure the program in the way they deem most appropriate. Ideally, the decisions these individuals make will reflect the underlying values and formal learning objectives that are tied to the MWLESP program.
Program-related preparations vs. Participant-related preparations

Results gathered from all three methodological approaches used in this study have helped to differentiate program-related preparations from student-related preparations. Program related preparations involve sorting out and finalizing logistical details related to the running of an outdoor excursion (i.e., number of participants attending, scheduling, types of activities, cabin/tribe assignments, bussing and teacher/supply coverage), as well as the planning of the follow-up program and its activities. For example, by pre-planning MWLESP’s follow-up program, the process could begin immediately after students return from their outdoor experience at Muskoka Woods. However, by delaying the planning of the follow-up program until the return from the outdoor experience, some of the momentum and connectedness that was built and experienced by participants during the three day excursion is lost. Presently, decision makers of the MWLESP program are in a situation where very little attention has been devoted to the follow-up process, which has caused the follow-up process to be delayed until mid-March, 2007 – nearly five months following the outdoor experience. The possible implication negative this has on students illustrates the interconnected relationship between program and participant related preparations and how one will have a positive or adverse affect on the other.

Participant-related Preparations

Participant-related preparations involve all details related to how to best prepare (physically, emotionally, psychologically) participants for the outdoor experience. Thus,

---

93 Literature pertaining to pre-outdoor experience preparations have focused primarily on preparing the youth/student, thus have are commonly referred to as student/youth-related preparations. Results from this study, however, suggest that all participants need to be prepared prior to their outdoor experience – a distinction that was not previously identified in the literature. I am thus intentionally using the term participant-related preparations rather than student-related preparations.

94 Negative implications include my inability to keep my word to the SP1’s that follow-up programming opportunities would be offered and the inability of students to sustain the benefits they derived from their outdoor experience.
details such as what is the most critical information that participants need prior to the excursion and what types of learning activities should be done with students prior to leaving on the outdoor experience, should all be discussed, decided, and communicated to participants early in the pre-outdoor experience. Subsequently, in terms of preparing participants for the MWLESP program, the pre-outdoor experience is a time where participating SP1’s and SP2’s could engage in learning activities designed to familiarize students with concepts related to leadership and its development, which would have better prepared them for what was to come during their outdoor experience. However, as explained in both SST’s interview responses, it is not that SST’s were intentionally trying to hinder participants’ outdoor experience by not offering pre-experience preparation opportunities. Rather, they simply did not have enough time or ability to bring all the participants together and offer some of the same types of preparations that had occurred during the 2005-06 MWLESP pilot program. As both SST’s explained in their interview responses, they are strongly in favour of offering participants’ pre-experience preparations and relationship building opportunities, as they believe that these types of preparations help to positively frame participants outdoor experiences in a way that makes the desired learning outcomes more achievable.

**Relationship Building**

The pre-experience preparations for participants should be viewed as an important time leading up to the actual excursion, where initial relationships between a caring adult (i.e., teachers) and students can and should be developed. Results show that participants had mixed views towards pre-outdoor experience relationship building opportunities, with responses ranging from it could enhance the experience (i.e., SP1 response), to the
suggestion that it could possibly cause leaders to have negative pre-conceived views about students—thus hindering SP1’s program experience (i.e., University of Windsor student-leader response).

Another response that was unique to participants who had previously attended the grade 8 MWLE program and/or the 2005-06 MWLESP program, was that the anticipation of not knowing the members of one’s tribe was actually part of the “Muskoka experience.” This last response regarding the benefits of pre-experience relationship building may be an indication of a socially constructed practice that has been legitimized as the “Muskoka Woods way.” Therefore, participants and decision makers may be assuming that the practice of not knowing who is in your tribe and/or cabin is the way that the experience ought to be structured because that is the way it has always been done with both the MWLE and MWLESP programs. Evidence from this study reveals that not knowing who is in your tribe and/or cabin actually caused stress, anxiety and discomfort in some participants (e.g., SP1’s, SP2’s, and some teachers), which ultimately may have acted as a barrier limiting participants’ experiences within the MWLESP program and possibly contributing to some of the Day 1 challenges (i.e., students acting “inappropriately”).

Despite the varied responses amongst program participants, I still fundamentally believe in Barr and Parrett’s (1995) recommendation that establishing meaningful teacher-student relationships early in the intervention process can enhance participants’ experiences within and throughout the entire MWLESP program (i.e., intervention process). Pre-experience relationship building between participants is likely to minimize feelings of anxiety prior to the outdoor experience and increase the probability of
participants' having a positive experience. Thus, if decision makers involved in the MWLESP program were to engage in both types of pre-experience planning and preparation, and offer relationship building opportunities, the likeliness that participants would have the best possible experience during and beyond their Muskoka Woods excursion increases.

Although both program and participant related pre-experience preparations are integral for creating a successful and meaningful outdoor experience, results conclusively indicate that providing both types of preparations was not feasible for leaders of the MWLESP program to accomplish this year. This was in part because the MWLESP program is still only in its first year; thus those individuals responsible for the planning and implementation of the program are still in the midst of sorting through the logistical aspects and fine details related to the program and each of its three phases. As previously suggested (i.e., see Discussion sub-problem #1), a lack of financial and human resources, such as staffing shortages, the dynamics and “realities” of working with “at-risk” youth, and a general lack of time, also made it difficult to fully and effectively implement every recommended element of the pre-outdoor experience in this, the first year of the MWLESP program. In general, aspects related specifically to the outdoor experience of the MWLESP program, such as the planning and implementation of the three day excursion, were well done as both the members of the facilitation and research teams made them a high and immediate priority. However, both my observations and participants’ interview responses suggest that participant-related preparations, such as intentional relationship building between teachers and participating SP1’s/SP2’s and the

---

95 [Fr]
96 [Hr]
97 [Hr]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
planning of the follow-up program, were not adequately provided at either school. This may or may not have a long-term effect on the effectiveness of this year’s MWLESP program as a protective intervention strategy, but it certainly contributes to the difficulties and confusion that occurred on Day 1 of the Muskoka Woods excursion (e.g., miscommunication of the smoking policy – See p. 145). Below is a detailed description of the structuring of the MWLESP program and the observable effects that decision makers’ actions (i.e., decisions) had on the program’s participants.

MWLESP Program Preparations

Prior to the start of the three day Muskoka Woods excursion, members of the facilitation team directed a lot of time and effort towards the program planning and preparation of the MWLESP program. This, in turn, limited the ability of the SST’s to devote attention towards providing relationship building opportunities between the participating teachers, student-leaders and SP1’s. One of the first major program related tasks of pre-experience preparation was to host a large planning session. In mid-September (2006), a program planning session was held involving all the high school SST’s from the WECDSB. At this time, in-depth discussions were held pertaining to the logistical aspects of the MWLESP program, specifically addressing the program’s intended purpose, assigning roles and responsibilities to specific individuals, and finally determining who would be part of the facilitation team. Individuals who were selected as members of the facilitation team had three major roles and responsibilities to fulfill in their job: (a) general SST responsibilities, (b) SST responsibilities related to MWLESP program, and c) MWLESP program related responsibilities (i.e., the planning, implementing and running of every aspect related to the three day Muskoka Woods
excursion). As there were a number of decisions and details that the facilitation team was responsible for making, it was necessary for the team to be in constant communication with one another to discuss matters related to the program. These discussions happened continuously via e-mail, phone and face-to-face planning meetings in the weeks leading up to the Muskoka Woods excursion.

In addition to the actual planning of the MWLESP program that went on during the pre-outdoor experience, individual members of the facilitation team had the added responsibility of identifying, asking and preparing/training participants (SP1's and teachers) and student-leaders (SP2's and University of Windsor students) prior to departing for the outdoor experience. The SST from each school was responsible for identifying, selecting and preparing the SP1's, SP2's and teacher participants. Identifying and preparing SP1's for the MWLESP program was a challenging process\(^8\), that required the SST's to become familiarized in a short period of time with the needs of their new grade nine students who, prior to arriving in high school, were identified by their grade eight teachers (or earlier teachers) as being "at-risk" of becoming early leavers. Due to time constraints, the SST's from both schools used information gathered from the OSR\(^9\) files and the grade eight teacher reports as the primary means of identifying and selecting potential "students of promise" to participate in the MWLESP program. In late

---

\(^8\) As SP1's are predominantly grade nine students, they are new to their individual high schools. Consequently, the SST's could not begin identifying potential SP1's to invite on the three day excursion until they became familiar with their new students, who were previously identified (i.e., in grade eight or sooner) as being "at-risk." Becoming familiar with the behaviours and needs of the "at-risk" grade nine students required that each SST spend time interacting with the new students, as well as reading through the individual OSR files and grade eight teacher reports of "at-risk" student. This lengthy process was not completed until mid-September, leaving approximately one month for each SST to identify, ask and prepare each SP1 interested in attending the outdoor excursion.

\(^9\) OSR - Ontario School Record which is the student's permanent academic record
September (2006), those students previously identified as being "at-risk" were asked by their SST to participate in the MWLESP program.

It was also the responsibility of the SST's to identify and ask SP2's to return to the MWLESP in a leadership capacity. Because SST's had the most direct contact with returning SP2's, they were initially asked to work with these students to prepare their leadership story, which would be shared at meal times while at Muskoka Woods. However, due to time constraints, SST's were not able to spend much time with the SP2's until just minutes before he or she had to share his or her story in front of the group\textsuperscript{100}. Lastly, it was the responsibility of the SST's to invite teachers from their respective schools to participate in the MWLESP program as co-participants. When selecting participating teachers, SST's were asked to keep in mind the following two criteria: select teachers who had either (a) a strong rapport with the participating SP1's and SP2's and/or b) were in need of professional development with regards to sensitivity training for working with "at-risk" students. Although these were the formal criteria SST's were supposed to use for identifying and selecting teachers to participate in the MWLESP program, members of the facilitation team\textsuperscript{101} recently shared that a third selection criterion existed and that, in many instances, it was the main criteria used in this year's teacher selection process. The third teacher selection criterion pertained to supply coverage,\textsuperscript{102} with selection preference given to teachers who did not require supply coverage for their classes when absent (i.e., guidance counsellors). Presumably, the

\textsuperscript{100} Recognizing that both SST's were unable to work with his/her SP2's on preparing the leadership stories, University of Windsor student leaders that were paired with an SP2 as co-tribe leaders, were asked to work with his/her co-tribe leader to prepare a leadership story. Once at Muskoka Woods, the SST's were able to meet with the SP2 before the designated meal and discuss what he/she was going to share.

\textsuperscript{101} This information was told to me at a recent MWLESP program planning meeting, which was held March 6, 2007.

\textsuperscript{102} Linked to [Fr] and [Hr].
teacher selection process may offer insights into why not every teacher assumed an active co-participant role while at Muskoka Woods. This is because some of the teachers selected to participate in the three day excursion may not have wanted to be there. But, because of a lack of resources, they [teachers] may have been required to be part of the program.

Participant-observations and interviews with the SST’s indicate that the taxing demands of being a facilitation team member made it difficult for the SST’s from both schools to effectively devote time and energy to their school SST responsibilities. The responsibilities of three demanding roles made it nearly impossible for meaningful relationships with the participating SP1’s and SP2’s to be formed. Consequently, due to the high volume of work that both SST’s faced, their primary emphasis in the participant preparation process was ensuring that each student had the most “essential” information (i.e., from an administrative perspective), which included having all the necessary consent forms completed and turned in along with the accompanying program fees. Ensuring that students returned the necessary consent forms was a taxing process that took away from both SST’s ability to psychologically and relationally prepare students for his/her Muskoka Woods experience.

The SST’s genuine concern about how their involvement on the facilitation team was affecting other “at-risk” students from their respective schools suggests that the limited amount of contact time between themselves and the students was not caused by a

---

103 The three day excursion occurring during Halloween may have also been a factor in why some teachers did not want to be part of the MWLESP program.

104 [Hr, Fr]

105 A fee of $60 was required from SP1’s to attend the Muskoka Woods excursion. If the student was unable to pay, a contingency plan was in place that allowed alternative arrangements between the SST and the student to be made.
lack of interest or desire to engage in a relationship building process. Rather, it was an 
unfortunate consequence of many mitigating factors – such as a lack of time, the number 
of student participant spots each SST was asked to fill\textsuperscript{106}, the amount of paper work 
needed to be distributed and returned\textsuperscript{107}, and finally the large commitment required from 
facilitation team members.

As a facilitation team member, my role in the pre-experience involved working 
with and preparing the University of Windsor and SP2’s student leaders. Thus, the 
identification of university student leaders, their training and preparation, along with the 
training of SP2’s became one of my primary pre-experience responsibilities. Working 
with faculty members from the Department of Kinesiology and from the Faculty of 
Education, university students who were either (a) former students from 95-477 - 
Outdoor Recreation and (b) Faculty of Education students, were asked and selected to be 
student leaders for the MWLESP program. Prior to the start of the three day excursion, an 
orientation session was held for both university student leaders and SP2’s. At this time, 
student-leaders received information about the MWLESP program pertaining to the

\textsuperscript{106} The actual three day Muskoka Woods excursion was divided into two groups – group 1 was made up of 
"students of promise" from three WECDSB high schools and group 2 was made up of "students of 
promise" from six other schools belonging to the WECDSB. Both schools involved in this study were 
allotted 35 spots each for SP1’s and returning SP2’s, whereas each of the six schools participating in group 
2 were only allotted a maximum of 16 spots strictly designated for SP1’s.

\textsuperscript{107} The MWLESP program is connected to two major studies – my masters’ thesis as well as a larger four 
year University of Windsor study. Consequently, two separate sets of University of Windsor parent consent 
forms needed to be completed; in addition to the Muskoka Woods parental consent forms, waivers and 
behavioural contracts, and the WECDSB’s consent forms and program fees. Participating SP1’s and SP2’s 
were also asked to sign and have signed consent forms/assent forms related to the two separate studies. 
This created a lot of additional work for both SST’s, as they often had to “chase” students (i.e., phoning 
parents, making additional copies) in order to get all the various consent forms turned in. In addition to 
being a hassle for SST’s, it created confusion for students and their parents because many were under the 
impression that they had already signed “these forms” – referring specifically to the standard University of 
Windsor parent consent form and student letter of assent form, which in both studies mistakenly look 
similar.
philosophy of the program, an overview of what we are trying to accomplish in this program, and what their role throughout this intervention program would be.

Training

In addition to training and preparing the student-leaders, I worked alongside an administrator from the facilitation team to prepare teachers who were participating in the MWLESP program. Similar to the student-leader orientation workshop that took place, we hosted an in-service orientation session for teachers the week prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion. During the in-service workshop, teachers were provided with information about the MWLESP program, its philosophy and goals as a protective intervention strategy, and what their expected role throughout this process would be.

There were mixed reviews from the teachers and student-leaders as to the usefulness of the orientation sessions that both were asked to attend. In both meetings, a lot of important information was presented in a short amount of time, and although there was an accompanying information package, not everyone has the time to diligently read through the booklet. Also, after reflecting upon the three day outdoor excursion, and reviewing the Student-Leader Questionnaire responses, results suggest that there was some information that was never discussed with either the student-leaders or teachers—either because it was forgotten, there was not enough time to discuss it, and/or it was assumed that individuals would just “know” what to do. Consequently, information, such as a description of Muskoka Woods activities (for activity leaders), student behavioural guidelines, and explaining discipline with discipline principles (for addressing behavioural issues), which would have been a beneficial tool for teachers and student-leaders, was never addressed. In the future, allotting more time for the training of
student-leaders and teachers would be beneficial. Had we allotted more time in both orientation sessions, we would have had an opportunity to look through the guides, ask questions, as well as more clearly define the individual roles within the program and clearly establish guidelines\textsuperscript{108} for addressing inappropriate student behaviours while at Muskoka Woods. Doing so, may minimize potential barriers that caused Day 1 to be such a challenge for participants.

Comparatively, I believe that the student-leaders’ orientation session was more effective than the teachers’ in-service, in part because many of the student-leaders expressed how useful they found the session and the information guides to be, even suggesting that they could have used more training. In addition, I felt I had more of an opportunity to facilitate the student-leaders training session. Therefore, I was able to draw from my past outdoor education experiences\textsuperscript{109} and present what I felt was the most pertinent information that leaders in these two positions needed to have prior to going on the three day excursion. Although I did have some input into the teachers’ in-service, I do not feel that my strengths, past experience and knowledge about outdoor education and working with “at-risk” youth were fully valued and/or utilized. Consequently, information that I felt should have been communicated at the teachers’ orientation session was not addressed (i.e., the importance of follow-up activities).

\textsuperscript{108} Behavioural guidelines and expectations were never clearly defined by the facilitation team, and consequently these expectations were never explained to student-leaders. On a number of occasions, student-leaders were told that “if a student is continuing to misbehave, ask a teacher to step in,” but no formal definition of what constituted “misbehaviour” and what the ensuing consequence of this behaviour would be for students was ever communicated to student-leaders or teachers.

\textsuperscript{109} Since the age of 16 I have been employed at 	extit{Camps with Meaning} – a camping organization that operates three year round camps. During this time I have spent eight full-time, two part-time summers, and various inter-session (winter season) contracts working in various roles for this organization. These roles have included: camp counsellor, activity leader (archery instructor, wall climbing instructor, canoe instructor), Integration Coordinator (integrating campers with “special needs” – i.e., ADHD, FAE – into the camp program), Bible instructor, and for 3 summers, Co-Summer Program Director.
In general, student-leaders indicated\footnote{Either via personal communication and/or through their questionnaire responses [14]} that they appreciated the “training” and communication that they received during the pre-experience phase of the MWLESP program. However, student-leaders unanimously agreed that there is still a need for more information, explaining that despite receiving some information, most student-leaders, especially first time leaders \footnote{10}, still did not feel “ready” for the experience nor did they have a clear understanding of exactly what would be expected of them in their roles as either co-tribe leader or activity leader and as cabin leader. Student-leaders also indicated in their questionnaire responses that having more time to meet and interact with their tribe members, especially the teachers and their co-tribe leader, would have helped them to negotiate the tribe dynamics more effectively, which in turn would have made them more effective leaders.

A common response, unique to activity leader questionnaire responses \footnote{10}, which emerged from the questionnaires, is that activity leaders felt that they would benefit from having on-site training along with a detailed description of each of the activities offered during the three day excursion. Activity leader responses suggest that both on-site training and a description of the various activities would have helped familiarize leaders with the camp and thus help them become better prepared for their role in the program. One activity leader also indicated that informing about and familiarizing activity leaders with the various activities would help match activity leaders to activities that were reflective of their strengths rather then the semi-random activity assignment method that was used this year. (see Appendix G).

Feedback received by members of the facilitation team following the teachers’ in-service was not as encouraging, nor as constructive as the student-leaders’ responses.
Contrary to the student-leaders' feedback, some of the teachers' responses (received via personal communications) about the information guides and the orientation session was that neither was very "useful for them" because as teachers they already have a good understanding of how to "handle" "at-risk" students (Author's observations, October 24, 2006).

Coordinating and preparing the student-leaders and the participating teachers was a large responsibility that required a lot of work. Thus, although I would have liked to spend more time working with and building relationships with the SP1's from both schools, it was not feasible. Moreover, because of various time constraints and other commitments, training sessions for student-leaders and teachers did not happen until the week prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion. This meant that there was no opportunity for either student-leaders and/or participating teachers to engage in any pre-experience relationship building activities with the SP1's participating in the excursion. SP1 interview responses [7] suggest that the lack of pre-outdoor experience participant-related preparation and interaction between participants (i.e., SP1's, teachers and student-leaders) affected their three day Muskoka Woods experience, with students describing that they experienced a mix of emotions - ranging from fear to anxiety to anticipation - prior to arriving at Muskoka Woods. As suggested by Barr and Parrett (1995), many of these feelings that SP1's were experiencing prior to the outdoor experience could have been addressed through relationship building opportunities between participants - had they been made available.

The SST's accounts of their experience within the MWLESP program as facilitation team members, confirms my observations regarding the division of labour
amongst facilitation team members. The division of labour within the facilitation team was not ideal, and created heavy work loads for its members – consequently causing team members to feel physically and mentally exhausted prior to the start of the outdoor experience. Although facilitation team members will always face some unavoidable demands associated with preparing for a large scale outdoor education program (such as MWLESP), some of the added stressors and responsibilities that contributed to the exhaustion and lack of time for quality student preparation (i.e. relationship building) are avoidable.

Outdoor Experience

The three day Muskoka Woods excursion (i.e., the outdoor experience) is the central element of the MWLESP program. Luckner and Nadler (1995) explain that, the outdoor experience, in this type of protective intervention strategy (i.e., the MWLESP program), is the “catalyst,” or the starting point in the process of helping “at-risk” youth become successful. Results presented in this section have been grouped together in the following five categories: (a) general program impressions, (b) SP1 responsiveness, (c) student-leader involvement, (d) teacher involvement, and (e) activities.

General Program Impressions

The Muskoka Woods program was not a flawless excursion. However, my general impressions and thoughts of the program were that most participants had a powerful and a transformational experience. Thus, I would suggest that programmers were moderately successful in terms of achieving one of outdoor education’s primary objects, which is to provide participants (i.e., student, student-leaders, and teachers) with “powerful and transformational” experiences (Linney, 2004). Results gathered from all
three methodological sources indicate that for some SP1's, the MWLESP program was a starting point or marker in their high school experience, and that by participating in the experience, students were exposed to protective factors (i.e., caring adult relationships) that are linked to providing for a successful high school experience.

Decision makers (involved in the MWLESP program) believed that by engaging students and teachers (as equal co-participants) in a series of outdoor healthy risk-taking activities (i.e., high ropes activities), meaningful relationships between the two could possibly be formed. Results confirm that these desired relationships between teachers and SP1's were established and in many instances have been sustained and strengthened since returning from the three day excursion (participant-observations, SP1, SP2 and SST interviews). Additionally, decision makers assumed that over the course of the three day experience, leadership skills (i.e., communication skills) and healthy coping skills (i.e., showing respect towards others) could also begin to emerge in students. Results from SP1 interviews, along with SST accounts, reveal that some of the aforementioned skills were acquired by some of the SP1's, but the depth to which they were achieved and put into practice varied amongst students. Program facilitators were ultimately operating from the assumption that by building meaningful teacher-student relationships and developing students’ leadership potential, then the existing and often times limiting possibilities that “at-risk” students imagine to be possible for his or her life will be expanded – allowing for the possibility that he or she may begin to experience success in high school and more broadly. Moreover, the MWLESP program is attempting to expand the structural boundaries of educators in order for them to begin to see “at-risk” youth differently – thereby helping educators imagine new possibilities for what it means to educate and
work with "at-risk" rather than simply dealing with these students. Although conceptually and theoretically this is what the MWLESP program, and its facilitators were hoping to accomplish, what results have indicated, is that what the program had hoped to achieve and what actually did occur at Muskoka Woods did not always align.

Strengths of the Program

In keeping with both the facilitation and research teams’ desire to operate from a Duality of Structure framework (Giddens, 1984), the structure of the overall program, including the three day outdoor excursion, is intended to be flexible. The flexible design allows for the insights of all stakeholders to be drawn upon throughout the process, which may have been both a strength and limitation of the program. Operating a flexible program allowed the facilitation team (i.e., decision makers) to make changes to the program prior to and while the experience was underway. In some instances this allowed the facilitation team to make decisions that enhanced participants’ Muskoka Woods experience, making it more in line with the program’s learning objectives. However, in other instances that same flexibility led to decisions that may have changed the experience that the program was trying to promote, because the decisions may not have reflected the program’s intended values and philosophy (informally). For example, the program’s flexible design allowed the facilitation team to change the type of “affirmation activity” that was used as a closing activity on the last day of the first session. The original activity was supposed to be an “affirmation web,” which would have asked tribe members to spend time affirming one another while simultaneously creating a visual representation (i.e., a “web”) of their Muskoka Woods community. However, after spending time reflecting about the needs of this particular group of students, this activity
did not seem to be the most appropriate fit. Consequently, because programming changes could be made, the facilitation team decided to use a more appropriate and meaningful “affirmation activity,” which has become one of my favourite memories of the Muskoka Woods experience – sentiments which are also shared by some of the SP1’s.\textsuperscript{111}

As already noted, the program’s flexible design helped decision makers enhance participants’ experience, while also allowing for decisions to be made that may have changed and compromised what the experience had intended to provide all participants. For example, on Day 1, when concerns emerged about SP1’s perceived lack of responsiveness and inappropriate behaviours, the facilitation team used the program’s flexible design to make immediate schedule changes. Changes included limiting and/or eliminating any “downtime” that had previously been allotted for students. This decision was made because there was a fear that “free time” would provide students with an opportunity to act out inappropriately. Consequently, both meal times and cabin time/siesta were shortened, and there was a repeated attempt to shorten the debriefing session. The facilitation team believed that, if left unchanged, these times would be the most problematic for students, because they would be bored and thus more inclined to act out. Formally, these decisions limited the amount of time participants had to reflect about his or her experience within the program and/or about the significance of the activities (i.e., impact of leadership stories) that he or she participated in while at Muskoka Woods. However, informally, I would argue that these changes reinforced educator’s deeply embedded and shared beliefs about “at-risk” youth - which is that if these students are not distracted and/or kept busy all the time they will inevitably get into trouble. I do not

\textsuperscript{111} All eight SP1 interview participants commented on the Day 3 affirmation activity, sharing that they enjoyed hearing their teachers share because it is not something they “normally” experience.
subscribe to this shared belief. Subsequently, I am and I became a strong advocate for structuring “downtime” for students into the Muskoka Woods schedule. This is a recommendation that was also shared by many of the student participants (SP1’s, SP2’s, and student-leaders), who on a number of occasions during the outdoor experience revealed to me that they were tired and would have liked some “downtime” (Authors’ observations during “smoke break” discussions). Student-leader questionnaire responses also advocate for offering students “downtime,” suggesting that the schedule was too full and that it did not provide participants with an opportunity to reflect upon or process the experience [6].

Another major decision undertaken by the facilitation team that was made possible because of the intentional flexible design of the MWLESP programs was the schedule changes for the second group. Although there were some benefits that came from changing the schedule112 during group two (i.e., moving into an activity rotation immediately on the first day), results suggest that these changes altered the overall feel of the experience.113 Specifically, it felt as though the relationship and leadership emphasis which was so focal and evident in the first session was no longer as evident during the

---

112 In group two, schedule changes included: removing the Muskoka Challenge Activity (designed to build tribe cohesiveness while familiarizing all participants with the camp), moving Tribe Flags to day 2 (also designed to build tribe cohesiveness), choosing instead to go right into the “challenge by choice” activity rotation. Day one’s activities were mainly high ropes activities (Zipline, Dangle Maze, All Aboard, Arial Trust Dive, and Flying Squire), which according to Muskoka Woods staff are primarily designed to personally challenge individuals while promoting team building. However, because no prior team development activities occurred, the ability of these elements to effectively promote teamwork was limited, because again, according to the Muskoka Woods staff, many participants did not participate in Day 1 activities, with one possibility being that he/she did not feel safe or comfortable trusting the group to support them in these difficult and very personally challenging elements. Muskoka Woods staff members suggest that in the future, if the group will be moving directly into an activity rotation, that consideration be given to the types of activities that we choose to operate on the first day – suggesting that we begin with teambuilding/trust activities (i.e., low ropes initiatives) on Day 1 and personally challenging activities on Day 2 (i.e., Giant Swing).

113 Participant-observations and interview responses from both SST’s and one student-leader who was a leader for both groups of the MWLESP program.
second session, an observation also noted during an interview with a student-leader who stayed at Muskoka Woods for both student groups. Although many factors may have contributed to the different experience (i.e., participants, weather, energy levels), one possible explanation may be that the program’s new schedule was almost identical to the WECDSB grade 8 outdoor education program – a similarity that the facilitation team was deliberately trying to avoid. The striking resemblance of the MWLESP outdoor experience to the grade eight program, which was also noted in eight interviews with participants that have attended both program’s, is something that the facilitation team needs to more diligently and consciously avoid.

Yet, despite the programming changes (i.e., in the schedule) in the second session, anecdotal observations from my experience within the MWLESP program suggest that the pattern of how students responded during the course of the program remained similar in both sessions. This offers the possible suggestion that the challenges which arose during session one may not have needed to be such a major concern for the facilitation team, because even with the program changes, similar student-related challenges emerged on Day 1 during the second group. Based solely on my observations of and experiences in both three day programs, I would suggest that comparatively, Day 1 was the most challenging day of the entire excursion for participants of both sessions. Possible reasons for these challenges include a combination of uncontrollable and controllable factors and barriers that participants bring into and/or are faced with during the outdoor experience. Uncontrollable barriers contributing to Day 1 difficulties would be the combination of students arriving at Muskoka Woods both excited and anxious to be there, as well as tired.

---

114 Eight participants have attended both the grade eight MWLE program and the MWLESP program, this includes 3 SP1’s, 2 SP2’s, 1 U of W student-leader and 2 SST’s.
from the long drive up to the camp from Windsor. Possible controllable or preventable factors include: the limited pre-experience preparation students received prior to arriving (i.e., which contributed to the miscommunication of smoking policy), as well as the busyness of each day (i.e., three full days of activities). Once students arrive at Muskoka Woods, there is a full day of planned activities that begins immediately after they step off the bus, with limited scheduled “downtime” and/or opportunities for students to rest. Knowing that these barriers exist and that they affect students’ outdoor experience, it seems unreasonable that we (educators and decision makers) still expect students to become fully engaged in the experience on the first day. As SST interview responses suggest, teachers have an informal expectation that students demonstrate being “fully engaged” in the experience by acting in a cooperative and positive fashion towards the experience and to their tribe from the start. And yet, despite knowing that there are a number of contributing barriers that prevent/limit students from acting this way, we become surprised and worried when this is not the student’s immediate response (i.e., calling emergency teacher meeting on Day 1).

However, moving into Day 2, it is on this day that a “turn around” in students’ attitudes and behaviours truly begins to emerge. Both my observations and the participants’ accounts of the Muskoka Woods excursion (i.e., SP1, student-leaders, and SST interview responses), reveal that on Day 2, many SP1’s progressively began to feel more comfortable with one another and began to be more willing to become fully immersed in the experience by attempting the various activities. Additionally, on this day it appeared as though participants began to gain some of the benefits programmers hoped they would derive from the excursion. Again, students’ responsiveness was not an
immediate reaction, but rather it was a progressive response that emerged as the day went on. An observable difference could be seen in students’ responsiveness throughout the day’s activity rotations. In the first activity of the day, some students were still hesitant about participating, but by the last task of the activity rotation (i.e., initiative task and debriefing session), students seemed much more comfortable in their tribe and thus more willing to be active participants.

Finally, I would call Day 3 “what happens now?” On this day, many SP1’s expressed sadness about having to return home, as well as a concern about what will happen next. I feel that during the first session, the facilitation team did an excellent job in addressing students’ concerns by reassuring them that follow-up programming would occur. Moreover, the closing “affirmation activity” provided an opportunity to hear from the teachers and student-leaders what this experience had meant to them, which seemed to be both comforting and reassuring for the students. This activity not only brought students assurance that what happened over the three days will not be easily forgotten, but also brought a sense of closure to the experience – something that was notably absent during the second session, because participants immediately boarded buses after breakfast.

Limitations of the Program

Conceptually the MWLESP facilitation team is attempting to expand a number of existing structural boundaries, thereby shifting the naturalized beliefs held by participants

---

115 The “affirmation activity” was a time where facilitation team members, teachers and student-leaders formed a circle around the students, and one by one offered the group either: an encouraging message, an appreciation/affirmation of the group and/or experience, or one hope that he/she had for the group upon returning to their home/school environments. For nearly thirty minutes, the students sat quietly and listened to the words that their teachers and leaders were saying about and to them.

116 During session two all three busses arrived during breakfast. Subsequently, once breakfast was finished, participants immediately boarded the bus, preventing any closing/affirmation activity from taking place.
towards what each has “traditionally” thought to be possible - for themselves, towards others, and towards school. Initially (i.e., during the pre-experience phase) I would argue that in planning the MWLESP program, we (facilitation team) were able to create an opportunity where every participant’s boundaries could be challenged and expanded. Program planning minutes along with my observations indicate that prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion most actions and decisions made by members of the facilitation team were guided by the desire to provide every participant with a powerful and transformational experience. For example, the research team theoretically adopted a Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984) and Strengths’ Perspective (Saleebey, 1997) framework and drew upon its principles while designing the general framework of the MWLESP program and in structuring its outdoor experience component (see sub-problem #1). In keeping with decisions taken by the research team to operate from the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, the facilitation team committed to making decisions that aligned with a student-centered focus (i.e., Strengths Perspective approach) and that would enable students to imagine new possibilities for their high school experiences\textsuperscript{117} (i.e., Duality of Structure). Additionally, through limited pre-experience preparations and training sessions, the facilitation team tried to formally communicate to participants (teachers, student-leaders) the program’s philosophy, and individual roles. Moreover, the facilitation team intentionally tried to schedule the outdoor experience component in a manner that reflected formally and informally these values – as they had originally intended to offer students some “structured downtime” and did schedule

\textsuperscript{117} However, as discussed in sub-problem 1, not enough structures (i.e., rules and resources) were in place to sustain that commitment beyond the conceptualization phase of the MWLESP program. Thus when challenges arose on Day 1, it was easy for the facilitation team to move away from a student-centered, collaborative decision making approach.
processing activities (i.e., debriefing session) into the three day excursion. However, once the outdoor experience began, it appeared as though the informal values shaping actions and decisions of some members of the facilitation teams became less about creating an opportunity and environment for social change and personal/professional growth, and more about maintaining certain dominant practices found within education and amongst educators. As previously suggested, I do not believe that the facilitation team intentionally disregarded the theoretical frameworks that they had committed act within. Rather, it was the consequence of a lack of rules and resources that allowed the facilitation team to revert back to familiar coping and decision making strategies during the outdoor experience.

Decision Making

While at Muskoka Woods, there were a few occasions when members of the facilitation team, along with some teachers, acted and made decisions in a way that did not reflect the stated values and intent of the MWLESP program. Consequently, in moments where concerns arose (i.e., students’ lack of responsiveness to Day 1 activities), some facilitation team members resorted to “traditional” teacher responses and made immediate decisions that were not grounded in group consensus and/or in line with the intended purpose of the program. For example, at the end of the first night an “emergency” meeting was called for teachers. At this time, teachers were informed that because students were getting out of control, they (the teachers) needed to re-take control of their tribe, which could include threatening SP1’s with removal from an activity as a possible consequence for misbehaviour. Presenting this message to the teachers was not only contrary to the philosophy of the MWLESP program, but actually limited the
possibility for teachers to have their naturalized beliefs about and towards “at-risk” students reshaped. Moreover, calling a meeting like this gave teachers permission (if he or she wanted) to revert back to his or her traditional teacher role, rather then assuming a co-participant role during the Muskoka Woods experience.

Consequently, unlike in the pre-outdoor experience phase, where it seemed as though facilitation team members made decisions that were both formally and informally influenced by the values and philosophy of the MWLESP program, some decisions made at Muskoka Woods were no longer being shaped by those same motives. As shown in the aforementioned example, it appeared as though in crisis situations, decisions taken by some members of the facilitation team (and later replicated by some teachers), reverted back to traditional “teacher” ways of responding. This has caused me to question (a) how and why certain decisions were made and (b) are the program’s decision makers (i.e., facilitation team) truly committed to MWLESP program’s values and philosophy and thus committed to social change – or are they simply wanting to give the impression of change while fundamentally and informally still maintaining his/her traditional “ways.”

Theoretical Analysis

Theoretically I would suggest that the actions and responses of some individuals (both facilitation team members and teachers) are in line with Duality of Structure’s (Giddens, 1984; Ponic, 1994) insight that social change is difficult to achieve and that often times it is only the formal structures that are being altered, while the informal structures (i.e., naturalized beliefs) remain intact. Consequently, there is an impression that social change is occurring, while what is taking place is really social maintenance (i.e., reverting back to traditional “teaching” practices). Thus, although prior to the
excursion facilitation team members and teachers were formally acting in a way that was reflective of MWLESP programs’ stated values and philosophy (i.e., by making decisions and agreeing to assume different roles while at Muskoka Woods), at an informal level these individuals may not have truly adopted these beliefs. Consequently, when situations arose during the excursion, it was easy and natural to revert back to “traditional” coping skills and responses (which are embedded in our practical consciousness) as opposed to attempting to put into practice new beliefs that were not fully adopted in the first place.

SP1 Responsiveness

The long term impact that the Muskoka Woods excursion may have on students, and which “type” of “at-risk” student may have most benefited from the experience, is unknown. Nonetheless, results from various sources do suggest that the outdoor experience did have a positive impact on most students. Having had the privilege of observing many students move from being reluctant and unwilling participants during day one activities, to becoming active and willing participants by the third day, is a strong indicator that our (facilitation team’s) intent of providing students of promise with an opportunity to expand the boundaries in which he/she lives was achieved. The specific reasons that caused students’ attitudes and behaviours to shift and the exact moments that this change occurred is unknown. However, results are consistent with Gass (1993) and Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004) who suggestions that the progressive attitude and behavioural change noted in students can be attributed to a combination of factors and not one single reason. Thus, students’ behavioural and attitudinal changes were not simply a result of students spending time away from his or her school or home environment – otherwise these changes would have occurred on Day 1 shortly after students arrived at
Muskoka Woods. Nor were these changes purely a result of participating in a series of healthy risk-taking activities and/or spending time interacting with positive adult figures building meaningful relationships.

After carefully reviewing all of the data collected throughout this process, I propose that the powerful and transformational experiences had by some students while at Muskoka Woods was the result of a gradual combination of factors occurring over the course of the three days and not from a single activity or program element. Participants’ interview responses, along with both document and photo analysis corroborate my observation that it is the interplay between the following components that makes the Muskoka Woods excursion a positive experience for students: (a) the “challenge by choice” activities, (b) the SP2 involvement (i.e., leadership stories), (c) having an opportunity to interact with teachers in an informal outdoor environment, and (d) relationship building (i.e., between students, SP1’s-SP2’s, and SP1’s-teachers).

Prior to the outdoor experience, I fundamentally believed that students could and would experience personal growth while at Muskoka Woods. But to actually have the opportunity to watch that process begin in such a short period of time was profoundly moving. Alongside the many individual memories that I will take from this experience, one memory that summarizes the meaning of this experience is from my first impression, when students arrived on the first day, contrasted with my impression of those same students when they were getting ready to leave on the third day. On the first day, many students from both schools were reluctant to participate in activities and quick to dismiss any possibility that fun and/or personal benefits could be derived from the three day experience. Barriers stemming from the limited pre-outdoor preparation SP1’s received
prior to their arrival (i.e., miscommunication of smoking policy guidelines), combined with being tired from the long bus trip, contributed to students’ unwillingness to become fully and joyfully immersed on day 1 of the program. However, on the final day there was a notable difference in students’ demeanour. While reloading the buses to return to Windsor, SP1’s who were initially annoyed and frustrated about being at Muskoka Woods were now expressing to me how sad they were that the experience was over. Moreover, many SP1’s and SP2’s expressed concern that I would not keep my word and offer them an opportunity to participate in a follow-up program. To me, this visible attitude change in students supports the use of outdoor education programming for working with “at-risk” youth, and more specifically supports the notion that this type of program can be an effective intervention strategy for working with this particular age group of “at-risk” youth.

Yet, despite multiple examples illustrating the positive impact that the experience had on students, there are senior members of the facilitation team who are concerned that grade nine students are not the most suitable candidates for what the MWLES program is trying to accomplish. Consequently, even though there is a consensus amongst the facilitation team that the Muskoka Woods excursion was both a positive and memorable experience for some students, most facilitation team members believe that senior students (i.e., grade 11) are more suitable participants as they would benefit more immediately and greatly from the Muskoka Woods experience. I will agree that the impact of the outdoor experience would likely be more immediate and visible with older students than with grade nine students. However, if we (program facilitators) are operating from the assumption that outdoor education as a protective intervention strategy is a process with
the outdoor experience being one component of that process – then I would argue that
grade nine students are the most appropriate participants for the MWLESP program,
especially since the goal of the program is to minimize student disengagement by
accelerating the relationship between teachers and students, and by fostering a sense of
connectedness and belonging within students early in their high school experience
(MWLESP mission, 2007). Thus, although the impact of the Muskoka Woods experience
on students may not have been as immediate as some teachers and facilitation team
members would have liked, results from this study clearly indicate that a number of
students left with improved life skills (i.e., self-confidence and leadership abilities),
knowing that different possibilities - related to how he/she views him/herself, life, school,
and/or teachers – can and do exist. This outcome, I believe, supports targeting grade nine
students for the MWLESP program, as it aligns with the stated mandate that the program
seeks to achieve.

*Teachers’ Involvement*

In terms of teachers’ involvement in the MWLESP program, results from this
study lead me to believe that the objective of truly expanding and/or *transforming* the
deeply embedded naturalized beliefs (informal) that many educators and facilitation team
members involved in the outdoor experience hold was varied. Similar to SP1
responsiveness during the MWLESP program, teachers’ responsiveness also varied –
with some teachers notably benefitting more than others (i.e., in their teacher-student
relationships).

Throughout this experience, it was however apparent that some teachers and
members of the facilitation team are still holding on (informally) to a limiting belief of
what "at-risk" youth are and are not capable of "doing" and "being", as well as what a
school-based intervention program in an outdoor setting "should be." This is because
many are still having difficulties with trying to imagine different possibilities for their
students, and are subsequently having difficulties moving beyond seeing these students as
"at-risk" to seeing them as being "students of promise." Moreover, results from program
planning minutes and from ongoing communications with facilitation team members
suggest that in most cases these limiting views towards "at-risk" youth, and in particular
the grade nine students, have been present since the early program planning meetings
(i.e., September 2006), and have been the underlying values shaping many of the
decisions taken in the structuring of the MWLESP program (i.e., shortening reflective
activity times).

Not every teacher participating in the Muskoka Woods excursion thought or acted
this way or shared this limiting belief. Nonetheless, it was the dominant social value
practiced by many of the teachers participating in the outdoor experience. There were,
however, some teachers who were very willing to become co-participants in this
experience and allowed themselves to become vulnerable in front of his/her students.
Other teachers could not step out of the traditional "teacher" role and consequently could
not see their students differently or even see the difference that the outdoor experience
was having on their students. Thus, instead of focusing on what benefits students were
gaining from the Muskoka Woods experience, teachers practicing social maintenance
(i.e., remaining in the "teacher" role), emphasized what students were not "getting" out of
the experience. Evidence of illustrating this practice of social maintenance can be seen in
the facilitation team's limited receptiveness to SP1's responsiveness during and since
returning from the three day excursion – which directly correlates with their continuous comparisons of the grade 9 experience to the experience had by the senior students. As SST interview responses suggest, the facilitation team was disappointed that the grade nine SP1’s were not immediately responding during the outdoor experience as their senior counterparts had previously responded the year before (i.e., 2005-06 MWLESP pilot program). As such, facilitation team members deliberately chose to focus on what SP1’s were not getting out of the experience relative to what benefits senior students from the 2005-06 program had derived from the year before - rather than focusing on what benefits SP1’s were gaining from their program involvement.

These responses illustrate that the perspective teachers have and bring into the outdoor experience influences and frames how they choose to perceive the experience (i.e., students’ attitudes and behaviours). Moreover, this revelation extends previous conclusions presented in Sibthorp’s work (2000, 2003), which suggest that the antecedents, or in this case the naturalized beliefs held by teachers towards students, will shape a participant’s outdoor experience. For example, I was consciously trying to look for the positives and benefits during the three day excursion and therefore recognized and valued the attempts students were making, whereas others (i.e., some members of the facilitation team) were choosing to focus on what students were not accomplishing and consequently could not praise and/or value the effort that students were making.

Tribe Dynamics

Participant-observations and both SP1 and student-leader accounts indicated that teachers’ participation or lack of participation in their tribe had an affect on the tribe’s group dynamics and cohesiveness. As previously suggested in the literature review, tribe
(group) dynamics can affect participants' experience within an outdoor experience (McKenzie, 2000). Results from this study show that a teacher's contribution (active and/or passive) to his/her tribe had a direct impact on tribe dynamics and the types of experience participants had at Muskoka Woods. Having an opportunity to observe and interact with each of the seven tribes, I could see a notable difference in SP1's behaviours and responsiveness to the program between the tribes that had a teacher acting as a co-participant versus tribes where the teacher remained separate from the group, maintaining his/her teacher's role. As noted in by all three groups of interview subjects, in general, tribes that had an active teacher participant had less students behaving inappropriately, as well as more students who were willing to actively participate in activities (i.e., make an attempt to try the high risk elements even if feeling scared). In tribes where the teacher was less involved, there were notably more behavioural issues and less students participating in activities. Additionally, in tribes lacking teacher participation it was not uncommon to hear SP1's make comments such as, "if Miss/Sir doesn't have to try it then I don't (Author's observation, October 31, 2006). The opposite is true of tribes with active teacher participation, where it was common to hear SP1's encouraging and praising one another. Thus a possible correlation can be made between teacher participation and/or lack of participation and its influence on the tribe dynamics and in particular student's level of engagement in the activity. This suggests that the level and type of teacher involvement may affect the type of experience students can have in that tribe, facilitating or inhibiting their time at Muskoka Woods.
Student-Leaders' Program Involvement

As previously suggested by Sibthorp (2003), the effectiveness of any protective intervention strategy is made possible through the guidance, mentoring and willingness of caring adults (leaders) who invest in the lives of “at-risk” youth. Barr and Parrett (1995) add that leaders play an integral role within outdoor education programming because their actions have a direct and immediate impact on shaping participants’ outdoor experiences. Results from this study are consistent with both Barr and Parrett’s (1995) as well as Sibthorp’s (2003) conclusions regarding the importance of adult leaders in outdoor education programming. However, results from this study suggest that it is not just adult leaders who have an impact on framing participants’ outdoor education experience. Most of literature pertaining to outdoor education has emphasized the importance of adult leaders and the role they play in working with “at-risk” youth to affect positive life changes (e.g., Barr and Parrett, 1995; McKenzie, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003). This focus on adult leaders arises because many outdoor education programs, particularly those emphasizing therapeutic or rehabilitative outcomes, mainly use adult staff members. My study examined an outdoor education program that involved multiple layers of leadership, which were being modeled to student participants by adults (i.e., University of Windsor student-leaders, teachers) as well as by senior high school students (i.e., peers). Results show that involving both adult and student leaders has added a unique dynamic to the MWLESP program, with both groups of leaders making their own invaluable contribution to shaping participants’ experience.

For example, although teachers were officially assuming co-participant roles during the excursion, they were and still are leaders to their students. As suggested in SP1
interview responses, having an opportunity to interact in an informal environment with teachers has helped to accelerate caring adult relationships between some teachers and SP1’s – which, as suggested by Ferguson et al. (2005), acts a protective factor for minimizing student disengagement. University of Windsor student-leaders also played a vital role during the outdoor experience, as they were the ones who had the most direct contact with the SP1’s and were working alongside students to facilitate a positive and meaningful learning experience. However, results from this study indicate that the involvement of the SP2’s was most instrumental in creating opportunities for some of the SP1’s to begin imagining new possibilities for themselves and about their high school experience. The students-mentoring-students component, established through the relationship building that took place between SP1’s and SP2’s, has been one of the sustainable benefits that students (SP1’s and SP2’s) reported gaining from their MWLESP program. Moreover, SP1 interview responses indicated that having SP2’s involved in the program and knowing that students from this year’s program will be invited to return to the 2007-08 MWLESP program in a leadership capacity next year, motivated for some SP1’s to make a concerted effort to “succeed” in school.

Impact on Student-leaders

Research pertaining to leader’s involvement in outdoor education programming has focused primarily on how their role in the program has a direct impact on participants and in shaping the outdoor experience (Barr and Parrett, 1995; Sibthorp, 2003). Other researchers, such as McKenzie (2000) and Sibthorp (2003), have alluded to possible mutual benefits that both leaders and participants can gain from the outdoor experience, explaining that the outdoor experience may help to develop and/or strengthen
relationships between the two individuals (i.e., teacher-student, leader-participant).
Consistent with current outdoor education literature, results from this study have shown that both of the aforementioned outcomes have been achieved in the MWLESP program. However, results gathered from my study also reveal that leaders in outdoor education programming can also be positively affected and personally grow from their involvement in an outdoor education program experience. Results suggest that a number of leaders involved in the MWLESP program have reported being positively affected from their program experience. Responses about their experience as leaders within the MWLESP program vary amongst participants. One university student-leader reported that the three day excursion was a life changing experience. SP2’s explained that the experience was a confidence booster and that it had given them a sense of pride about what they have accomplished. Finally, a group of teachers revealed that their three day excursion has helped them as professionals, explaining that through the experience they have now come to see their students of promise differently (see p. 132). Despite the differing responses, results clearly show that the outdoor experience was not only beneficial for the student participants, but that the leaders also learned valuable lessons from their involvement in the program. To my knowledge, following an extensive review of the literature pertaining to outdoor education and intervention programming for “at-risk” youth, there has been very little written in terms of the impact that an outdoor education program experience can have on the leaders – with the exception of the mutual benefits that both leaders and participants can derive.
University of Windsor Student-leaders

As suggested in the literature review (see sub-problem #2), student-leaders played a vital role in creating a positive outdoor experience for participants. Initial observations, collected during the outdoor experience and during the period prior to the Winter break at the high schools, suggested that comparatively, the university student-leaders (who served either as a co-tribe leader or an activity leader) initially had more of an opportunity to have a positive influence on students (both SP1’s and SP2’s) than any other adult figure at Muskoka Woods. For the most part, SP1’s listened to and respected both the SP2’s and university student-leaders, which was demonstrated time and again by SP1’s cooperation and positive responses to the requests and suggestions given by the student-leaders.

When I began this research process I fully expected this to be one of the results collected from this study. As suggested in the literature (i.e., adult leader’s role in outdoor education), I firmly believed that involving the University of Windsor student-leaders in the MWLESP program would have the greatest impact on SP1’s willingness to become fully engaged in the intervention process. Results from this study revealed that the university student-leaders were important role models for the students during the outdoor experience; however, their role in the program became less important to the SP1’s and SP2’s as time went on, since there were no structures in place to facilitate ongoing interaction between them and the student participants. Evidence of the university student-leaders’ diminished role in the MWLESP program could be seen in the different SP1’s responses immediately following the three day excursion (i.e., during the collage making
sessions) as compared to their interview responses, given nearly four months following
the outdoor excursion.

In almost every SP1 interview, I appeared to have some type of existing
relationship with students, in the sense that they seemed to feel comfortable sharing
and/or disclosing personal information about themselves beyond the superficial 'small-
talk.' This suggests that because of my on-going involvement and interaction with these
students throughout the MWLESP program, we have managed to forge, to some extent, a
meaningful adult-student relationship that according to Ferguson et al. (2005), is crucial
for student success (p. 21). Similar relationship-building opportunities existed for the
SP1’s and the University of Windsor student-leaders, because initially following
students’ return from Muskoka Woods, the relationships that students forged with the
university leaders appeared to be meaningful – i.e., students included them on the
collages and referred to them or to stories involving them frequently. However, as no
opportunities were provided for those relationships to be maintained, their importance
faded. On the other hand, my continual involvement in the MWLESP allowed for
ongoing interactions between me and the SP1’s, therefore strengthening the relationships
that were initially formed at Muskoka Woods.

SP2 student-leaders

The relationships formed between SP1’s and SP2’s and the student-mentoring-
students dynamic of those relationships, has proven to be one of the sustainable outcomes
of the outdoor experience. The sustainability of both the relationships formed between
SP1’s, SP1’-SP2’s, as well as SP1’s-teachers, correlates directly with the ongoing
interactions that these individuals have with one another within their respective schools
(Barr & Parrett, 1995). The sustainability of the relationships between the university student-leaders and the SP1’s is more difficult without concrete follow-up structures in place, because they do not have the same direct contact with one another in the schools, and thus without follow-up programming cannot have ongoing interaction with one another.

Involving the SP2’s in the MWLESP program has helped to expand the boundaries within which some SP1’s live and the possibilities that they have imagined for themselves and for their high school experience. As indicated in SP1 interview responses [5], seeing fellow students (SP2’s) in leadership roles during the three day excursion encouraged them, and has helped them to begin seeing themselves as possible future leaders in the MWLESP program – an outcome that may otherwise not have been possible had SP2’s not been invited back to the program. Having maintained contact with many of the SP1’s since returning from Muskoka Woods, I have observed students and students have reported to me that they have been making a concerted effort to make “good decisions” in order to be given the opportunity to return to the program next year.

SP1 Responsiveness to the Student-leaders

An observation pertaining to SP1’s responsiveness to student-leaders is that it seemed as though students responded to the university student-leaders at first because they were adults in positions of authority (i.e. power relations), and then later because these leaders were working and living closely alongside the students and thus having an opportunity to form meaningful relationships. However, with regard to students’ responsiveness to SP2’s, who did not hold the same automatic “authority” as the university student-leaders because they are not “adults” and are still high school students
themselves, I would suggest that it was the vulnerability shown by these leaders (i.e.,
during the sharing of the leadership stories) and the possibility that SP1’s could more
easily connect with the SP2’s, that made them effective leaders whom students responded
to and respected.

One example illustrating the SP1’s responsiveness to SP2 involvement is the
“biking activity” story told during one of the SP2’s interview. Briefly, during an SP2
interview, a leader shared about a time at Muskoka Woods when an SP1 was more
responsive to the SP2’s encouragement and urging to return to the biking activity, than to
the prompting being given by a teacher belonging to the same tribe. Furthermore, as the
SP2 revealed, his interjection in the situation prevented a more uncomfortable situation
between the teacher and SP1 from occurring. This example illustrates both the influential
and instrumental role student-leaders played throughout the outdoor experience.

Teacher Responsiveness to Student-leader Involvement

Unlike in the aforementioned example, where the teacher allowed the student-
leaders to perform his or her leadership role, situations arose throughout the outdoor
experience that prevented and/or limited student-leaders from effectively being able to
lead his or her tribe – which was mostly caused by teacher interjections and his/her
refusal to be co-participants during the experience. One of the most frequent complaints
from student-leaders was that teachers in the tribes would pull students aside to address
“behaviours” that did not necessarily warrant addressing. This miscommunication of
what constitutes misbehaving could have been avoided had we (the facilitation team)
more formally established and clearly presented behavioural expectations and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
consequences to the teachers, student-leaders, and students during the pre-outdoor experience preparations.

Activities

During the three days at Muskoka Woods, students participated in a variety of healthy risk-taking activities that were intentionally designed to develop students’ leadership potential, as well as foster meaningful relationships amongst students and between teachers/leaders and students. Results gathered from my observations of the outdoor experience, along with SP1, and student-leader interview responses about the three day experience suggests that the combination of Day 1 tribe building activities (i.e., flag making and tribe cheers) along with various “challenge by choice” activities offered on Day 2 (i.e., high ropes elements, low ropes initiatives, crafts, gym initiatives, and bikes), combined with the reflective activities (i.e., debriefing session, evening cabin activities) facilitated the possibility for students to have a powerful and transformational experience. According to various groups of participants, engaging in these various healthy risk-taking activities during the three day outdoor excursion had and has continued to have a number of sustainable benefits. For example, participants reported that by participating in the various activities they were able to: (a) build relationships with tribe members – some of whom they had previously had not known, (b) gain a sense of personal accomplishment (i.e., experience success), and (c) gain new perspectives about themselves, about leadership, and towards both school, and “Others” (i.e., teachers).
“Challenge by choice” vs. Reflective activities

Findings from this study are consistent with both McKenzie (2000, 2003) and Sibthorp (2003), who have concluded that it is the combination of active and reflective healthy-risk taking activities that provided participants an opportunity to move beyond their comfort zones and experience personal growth during an outdoor experience. Results suggest that participating in both types of activities can produce similar outcomes, such as relationship building opportunities. However, it is the type of activity that will affect the depth and sustainability of those outcomes that participants achieve. Presumably, this is why McKenzie (2000, 2003) advocates for a combination approach of both physically active and reflective activities – suggesting that the combination approach of incorporating both types of activities into an outdoor experience is that it leads to participants gaining more sustainable long-term benefits from their outdoor experience.

Despite the overwhelming evidence supporting the use of reflective and processing activities in outdoor education programming, there was still an informal tendency amongst the facilitation team to heavily favour using physical elements when scheduling the three day excursion, thus allotting less time towards reflective activities. The SST interview results suggest that the imbalanced scheduling of physical to reflective activity opportunities was a decision made because the facilitation team did not believe that grade nine students had the capabilities to process the meaning behind the outdoor experience or the willingness to discuss their experience – and thus were likely to benefit more by taking part in the physical elements offered at Muskoka Woods. However, as results from this study show, SP1’s were both able and willing to process
and discuss the meaning of their outdoor experience. Moreover, as reported by the
student-leaders, it was during the reflective activities, such as the cabin-time activities
and debriefing sessions, that informal relationship-building occurred between
participants, which then provided “teachable moments” for transference of learning
opportunities to take place.

The facilitation team’s decision to cut back the time allotted for reflective
activities, is a common tendency amongst program planners when structuring
intervention programming for “at-risk” youth. According to Johnston Nicholson et al.
(2004), the underlying values shaping many intervention programs is to distract “at-risk”
youth rather than work with them. Therefore it should not be surprising that, when
creating the schedule for the three day excursion, the facilitation team allotted more time
to the physically active-based activities, and then, scheduled reflective activities within
the time remaining. The underlying value that may have been shaping the facilitation
team’s decision to heavily schedule physical elements into the three day experience and
subsequently cut-back on reflective or “downtime” opportunities, would be to keep
students active (i.e., distracted). This fits with Johnston Nicholson et al.’s (2004) finding
that many programs focus on keeping these youth active (i.e., distracted) to minimize the
likeliness of these students becoming disruptive and/or unruly. Yet, according to
McKenzie (2000), more emphasis, and thus time allotment, should be given to the
reflective activities, as it is during those times that participants are given an opportunity
to process the experience, thereby creating transference of learning opportunities.
Without processing opportunities, the outdoor experience simply becomes a powerful but
temporary experience with limited sustainable outcomes (Bacon & Kimball, 1989, p.28).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Based on interview responses and my participant-observations, along with McKenzie's (2000) previous work on the contribution of a combination of active and reflective activities to the participants' outdoor experience, I would argue that the benefits SP1’s gained through their Muskoka Woods experiences were initially developed through participating in the “challenge by choice” activities. The physical activities provided students with a hands-on opportunity to acquire new skills, conquer fears and make self-discoveries about themselves (i.e., what they are capable of doing). However, these skills have been nurtured and thus further developed and sustained through the reflective activities offered during and since returning from the outdoor experience (i.e., debriefing session, collage-making session, participating in the interview). The reflective activities have offered some SP1’s an opportunity to make connections between how lessons learned at Muskoka Woods could be applied to their daily lives (i.e., SP1’s drawing parallels between lessons learned at Muskoka Woods to their sports team involvement).

Activity Rotation Schedule

The literature is very clear that both physically active and reflective activities need to be structured into an outdoor education experience. However, no attention is given to the order in which these activities should be offered. Drawing on the various insights offered by facilitation team members and Muskoka Woods staff members, along with my own experience in outdoor education program planning, I fundamentally believe that to achieve the desired outcomes that the MWLESP program aims to achieve, decision makers need to be intentional in the way activities are scheduled during the three day excursion. Having had an opportunity to observe two different schedules used during
the three day Muskoka Woods experience, I would argue that the order in which activities are offered is perhaps as important as the types of activities offered during the experience – as both seem to play a role in shaping participants’ experiences. Therefore, I would suggest that when structuring an outdoor experience, participants should first take part in relationship/tribe building activities (i.e., flag making, tribe cheers – reflective type activities), followed by “challenge by choice” activities on the second day. This was an observation that I and two senior Muskoka Woods staff members 118 discussed during a conversation at Muskoka Woods, concerning the reconfigured schedule used for the second group’s program. 119

Through my discussions with these two Muskoka Woods staff members, it became apparent that we (the facilitation team) failed to make full use of the knowledge and experience of the Muskoka Woods staff as a valuable resource 120 while planning for the outdoor experience, specifically in terms of deciding which elements to offer during the activity rotation. During discussions with these two staff members, they pointed out that every element at each activity station has a specific purpose that it intends to achieve and/or promote. For example, the “Zipline” is intended to be a personally challenging activity that promotes teamwork. This is because in the first part of the activity every tribe member needs to cooperatively work together on the “belay line” in order for the climber to reach the top of the tower (e.g. promoting teamwork). Then in the second part of the activity, the “climber” needs to personally conquer any possible fear, while

118 While at Muskoka Woods I had the opportunity to enter into discussion with the Director of Operations of the camp as well as the Director of the High Ropes Elements.
119 At a MWLESP program planning meeting, in March 2007, facilitation team members unanimously agreed that this proposed three day structure will be the adopted schedule format for the 2006-07 MWLESP program.
120 [Hr]
simultaneously demonstrating trust, by leaving the platform to “zip” down the long steel cable (e.g. promoting overcoming personal challenges). However, in an activity such as low ropes, the elements are designed to promote trust and the team building process through activities that are less personally challenging but cannot be performed without the collective effort of the group (Muskoka Woods staff, personal communication, November 2, 2006).

Information on what each element/activity intends to promote would have been an invaluable resource\textsuperscript{121} for facilitation team members to have had during the planning process (i.e., during pre-experience and while creating a new schedule for the second group). This information would have allowed the facilitation team to be even more intentional about which activities should be offered and in which order, thereby ensuring that every activity is reflective of leadership development and relationship building. Although we, as a facilitation team, tried to be intentional about the types of non-Muskoka Woods activities (i.e., debriefing session) offered during the excursion, I do not believe that the same intentional attention was (informally or formally) given to the decision about which Muskoka Woods activities should be offered. Instead, I believe that the “challenge by choice” activities were selected based on what has been offered in the past and what are believed to be the activities that students would find most enjoyable\textsuperscript{122}.

Follow-up Process

The 2006-07 MWLESP program officially began in September, with the three day outdoor excursion to Muskoka Woods taking place at the end of October and the start of November. Five months have passed since bringing together our group of students of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Decision makers from the MWLESP program drew on the history of the grade 8 MWLE to decide what activities to offer participants.
\end{itemize}
promise for their three day outdoor education experience and despite our intent to offer follow-up programming, via the “Take the L.E.A.P” initiative, these intentions have failed to materialize into formal structured programming. Instead, there has simply been a lot of talk from facilitation team members about offering some type of follow-up programming and affirming its importance in this intervention process. However, results suggest that due to a lack of resources, combined with limited pre-outdoor experience planning, the follow-up process has been limited in its ability to materialize. Thus, as suggested by Allison (1996), the follow-up process has proven to be the most challenging part of this entire process. In many ways, during the past five months I have experienced first-hand as both a researcher and a member of the facilitation team the challenges alluded to in the literature about the difficulties of sustaining the benefits and momentum gained during the outdoor experience without follow-up programming in place.

In keeping with the lack of available literature on follow-up programming and what has been my experience throughout this process, follow-up programming is often given ‘lip-service’ and referred to as critical to sustainability of intervention programming, and yet rarely are structures put in place to support those claims. To date, the limited attention that the follow-up phase receives has typically not moved beyond discussion. This has ultimately resulted in limited or no formal structures emerging from those discussions, leaving participants with no (or very limited) follow-up supports in place to sustain or further develop the growth they may have experienced during the intervention program. Unfortunately, with regards to follow-up programming, the MWLESP program has yet to differentiate itself from the other youth-care programs.

Instead, the actions taken or rather the lack of actions taken by decision makers to fully

123 [Hr, Fr, Mr]
implement a follow-up program (i.e., the L.E.A.P initiative) has further reproduced what has previously been identified as the norm associated with this particular phase of the intervention process. However, as revealed in the SST's interview responses, the inability of the facilitation team to implement follow-up programming was not an intentional action, but rather an unfortunate outcome caused by a combination of a lack of rules and resources.

For example, although I was personally willing to run the follow-up program, I have no formal role within the school board (i.e., no power) and thus I cannot formally access and/or supervise students without SST (or other teacher) supervision. However, as explained by the SST's, they have very busy schedules and are responsible for the entire "at-risk" student populations at their respective schools, not just the students participating in the MWLESP program. Subsequently, they do not necessarily have the time to devote to planning and then supervising follow-up programming. Ultimately, it has been a lack of resources combined with formal rules that are in place for the safety of both me and the students that have limited the facilitation team's ability to implement a follow-up program.

As was previously proposed in the literature, the Muskoka Woods three day excursion should be viewed as the starting point for working with students of promise to create a successful high school experience. Follow-up programming aims to provide students with on-going opportunities to sustain and further develop skills and relationships that were gained/formed during the outdoor experience. The follow-up process thus becomes the place where these students can experience sustainable personal

---

124 [FR]
125 [HR]
126 That is safety issues pertaining to liability and negligence
and academic growth. It is during the follow-up process that transferability of the learning experience can occur, thereby allowing students to use their newly acquired skills and self-discoveries in their daily lives.

**MWLESP Follow-up Programming**

Recognizing the importance of the follow-up process, decision makers (i.e., facilitation and research team members) agreed that follow-up structures needed to be put into place to offer *students of promise* on-going support following their return from Muskoka Woods, as well as to offer first-time support to those students who did not participate in the MWLESP program. However, program planning minutes from the meetings that took place prior to the three day excursion (May 2006-October 2006) reveal that although the follow-up initiative was unanimously supported, no formal structures, frameworks or timelines for when the follow-up program should begin and who would be responsible for planning and running this initiative, were formally ever established.

Amongst decision makers there was an informal understanding regarding what the aim of the follow-up program should be: the aim of the “club” or “program” should be to provide students with an opportunity to participate in outdoor, community-building activities that would promote students’ leadership development. Beyond those aforementioned criteria, no formal structures were ever discussed or adopted. Upon further review of the program planning minutes, it is apparent that although a critical component of this outdoor education intervention process, decision makers involved in the MWLESP program did not consider the follow-up program to be a pressing issue that required immediate attention.
Instead, planning meetings involving both teams (i.e., the research and facilitation teams) predominantly focused on the pre-experience program related preparations, which included the program logistics (e.g., facilitation team) and the SSRCH research grant proposal (e.g., research team). Consequently, at the time of the outdoor experience, decision makers had yet to formalize any definite structures for the follow-up program, which we subsequently named “Take the L.E.A.P.” Although decision makers were all in agreement that a follow-up program should happen, it was unclear when and how this proposed L.E.A.P. initiative would occur.

The inability to formally plan and structure the follow-up process was not caused by a lack of interest or value on the part of either team, but rather a consequence of a lack of resources on the part of decision makers. Although both SST’s value following programming, their interview responses confirm that a lack of time became a hindrance, as there was simply not enough of it to get “everything done” (SST interview responses, 2007). The end result of this lack of resources has been the MWLESP program’s inability to formally launch the “Take the L.E.A.P.” initiative at both schools until Mid-March of 2007, five months following the three day outdoor excursion - and even then, there has only been limited progress since the initial L.E.A.P. information meetings.

Although it was never formally discussed in a group setting, I proposed to the SST’s and then later to the participating SP1’s that the aim of this particular follow-up initiative was to invite our students to “Take the L.E.A.P.” and participate in activities

---

127 [Hr]
128 In Mid-March, a short meeting was held at both schools with SP1’s that attended the three day Muskoka Woods excursion. At this meeting, SP1’s were asked to participate in the follow-up program called L.E.A.P. At this time they were also informed about the purpose of this initiative, which is to further provide them opportunities to develop and enhance their leadership abilities by planning and participating in a variety of in-school activities planned by and for students.
designed to provide students with an opportunity to transfer lessons learned from outdoor experiences to “real life” situations, to provide on-going interactions between the student leaders, teachers and students, and to further expose these students to outdoor and adventure-based activities. Moreover, the aim of the program was to provide students with an opportunity to participate in a series of in-school and inter-school healthy risk-taking, adventurous and physically active activities that are organized and run by fellow students of promise.

Throughout this follow-up process, I have been frustrated and discouraged of the lack of progress made to implement the L.E.A.P. initiative. I have also felt powerless throughout this process, in that I have been able and willing to do whatever needed to be done concerning the initiation and implementation of this or any of type of follow-up support, and yet because I have no official role (i.e., power) within either of the participating schools, I have been fully dependent on the SST’s to initiate the follow-up process. Consequently, due to the busyness that SST’s face in their daily roles and the uncertainties that arise when working with “at-risk” youth in a school setting, it is not always possible nor is co-curricular programming (i.e., the L.E.A.P. initiative) always a priority amongst staff members.

Throughout this process, I have often needed to remind myself to appreciate the steps that have occurred to date in the follow-up process rather than minimizing their importance and focusing only on what has not happened.\textsuperscript{129} Although the L.E.A.P. program has yet to be fully implemented, that does not mean that no follow-up has occurred. The events and experiences that have transpired to date with regards to the

\textsuperscript{129} [SP] – I am intentionally trying to operate from a Strengths Perspective by not losing sight of what has happened thus far in the follow-up process rather than focusing what has not happened.
follow-up process have served to strengthen my belief that the follow-up process is a critical component of this entire process and that more structures need to be put into place to support these students following their return from the outdoor experience, otherwise the experience is just that - an experience - rather than an opportunity to affect change. Moreover, my experience within the follow-up process has reiterated the importance of the strategic planning and the use of the logic model in the creation, implementation and evaluation of intervention programming for "at-risk" youth, such as the proposed MWLESP program. Through this process, it has become apparent that objectives (short, intermediate and long term) and structures must be clearly established and communicated to all stakeholders prior to the commencement of the program, otherwise less than optimal outcomes, such as the ones that have transpired with the L.E.A.P. initiative and with the MWLESP program, can and will occur.

Follow-Up Initiatives to Date

Celebration Dinner

To date the first and only official L.E.A.P activity was held in December 2006. The event was a Celebration dinner where teachers, student-leaders, and SP1's along with their guests (i.e., friends and/or family members) were invited to reunite for an evening of memory sharing about their Muskoka Woods experience. In preparation for the Celebration dinner, SP1’s from both schools were asked to use the pictures they took with their disposable cameras while at Muskoka Woods and create a photo-collage representing what the experience had meant to them. Accompanying these collages was a brief write-up of the experience, where students were asked to either write a brief free-write paragraph about the MWLESP program (e.g., high school #2 option) or answer
three questions\textsuperscript{130} related to lessons learned through the outdoor experience (e.g., high school \#1 option). Students from WECDSB – high school \#2 completed their photo-collages and summaries in their respective classes, whereas three separate collage-making sessions were planned for SP1’s at WECDSB – high school \#1. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend all three of those collage-making sessions.

\textit{Student Responsiveness}

Student responsiveness and interest during the collage-making process varied as it did throughout this outdoor education intervention process; nonetheless, some commonalities did emerge from this experience. For many SP1’s, the collage-making process appeared to serve two purposes. The first purpose was that it provided SP1’s with a creative outlet for self-expression in that students were presented with an opportunity to use two different mediums (i.e., artistic expression and written expression) to express what the Muskoka Woods experience meant to them. Many students put a lot of thought, effort and creativity into their collages and carefully selected the pictures that accurately captured their experience. The thoughtfulness, effort and creativity that SP1’s put into their collages was repeatedly demonstrated by a number of students. For example, one female student who participated in the first collage-making session asked to return to the second session in order to continue working on her collage. When the student returned on the second day, she had with her a number of art supplies that she had purchased the night before, so that she and her friends could complete the best possible collage.

The second purpose that the collage-making process served was that it provided SP1’s with an informal debriefing opportunity following their return from the Muskoka

\textsuperscript{130} The three questions that SP1’s at WECDSB – high school \#1 were asked to answer are as follows: 1) At Muskoka Woods, what did you learn about yourself?, 2) What did you learn about leadership?, and 3) What leadership skills would you like to learn now?
Woods excursion. During the collage-making process, students appeared to be very excited and proud to showcase the pictures that they had taken during the three day excursion. At high school #1, the collage-making sessions were the first time that the SP1’s had an opportunity to not only see the pictures that they had taken, but it was also the first time these students had come together to recall and discuss their experience. As students received their pictures, there was an excitement in the classroom as students showed one another their pictures and recalled the experience. Not only were students excited to show their peers their pictures, but they were also eager to show those pictures and share the accompanying memories/stories with me and their SST, suggesting that caring and meaningful relationships (i.e., adult-student relationships) between the two of us had been formed over the course of the Muskoka Woods experience. The excitement and pride that SP1’s demonstrated while preparing their collages was further demonstrated by students attending the Celebration dinner, as the works of all students from both schools was showcased during the evenings. Throughout the evening, those SP1’s that attended the event proudly and individually showed their friends, family, and teachers the collage that they had prepared. Moreover, many of the invited guest and program participants took time to walk around the room and honour the creative memories that the SP1’s chose to share.

Photo-collages and Written Summaries

Pictures that SP1’s selected for their collages could be grouped into one of three categories: (a) nature/outdoor environment pictures, (b) relationship pictures, and (c) activity related pictures. According to the responses unanimously given by SP1’s during the photo-elicitation portion of their interviews, it is these three elements that makes
Muskoka Woods such a meaningful experience. These results are consistent with previous research conducted by Loeffler (2004), who also found when using photo-elicitation interview techniques, that nature, relationships and the activities are what participants identify as the most meaningful elements of an outdoor education experience.

Along with the photo-collages, SP1’s were asked to provide a brief write-up of their Muskoka Woods experience. Once again, results from these written summaries suggest that some SP1’s did acquire and/or develop their leadership skills through their involvement in the MWLESP program. Furthermore, the ability of SP1’s to self-identify skills that they need to further develop their leadership skills suggests that transference of learning from the outdoor experience to these students’ every day lives did occur – for some, but not all SP1’s involved in the MWLESP program.

In keeping with the facilitation team’s intent to create a student-centered intervention program that is theoretically grounded in the Strengths Perspective (Saleebey, 1996), the focus of the follow-up program (i.e., “Take the L.E.A.P”) should be to work with SP1’s to develop the leadership skills that they themselves identified in their written responses. This is an outcome which, according to Johnston Nicholson et al. (2004), can be achieved by empowering students to be leaders. Therefore, the L.E.A.P. initiative should facilitating an opportunity for these students to take ownership of the program and through a guided process give them the responsibility for planning, organizing and running follow-up activities for other grade nine and ten students – who may or may not have attended the Muskoka Woods excursion.
At both participating schools, a general meeting informing SP1’s about the pending “Take the L.E.A.P.” follow-up initiative was held in early March 2007. Prior to the general information meeting, SST’s from both schools, along with myself, followed similar preparations to inform new students and remind SP1’s about the “Take the L.E.A.P.” initiative. In the week of the information meeting, a general announcement was made to inform any interested students to about the information meeting. In addition, the day before the meeting was to be held, SP1’s who had attended the Muskoka Woods excursion were excused ten minutes before lunch (at high school #2) or at the end of the day (at high school #1) to meet with me and their SST to receive a personal invitation and reminder about attending the L.E.A.P. meeting that would be happening the following day. At this time, SP1’s were told about the aim of the program and possible activities that could be offered. In addition, SP1’s were informed that the L.E.A.P. would serve as a means of identifying potential leaders for next year’s MWLESP program. As observed throughout this research process, SP1 responsiveness at both schools varied with some students being very excited and eager to help plan, organize and later participate in the program, while other students showed an interest in being participants in the program, and still other SP1’s having no interest in continuing their involvement with any follow-up activities associated with the MWLESP program.

WECDSB – High School #1

Although a planning meeting was planned prior to the school’s March Break, mitigating circumstances arose that led to the meeting being cancelled. Subsequently, at this time, with the exception of the initial briefing meeting with SP1’s, no L.E.A.P.
planning meeting has occurred, nor has an alternative meeting time been set. As a result, the possibility of the L.E.A.P. actually taking place this 2006-07 academic year is in question.

**WECDSB – High School #2**

At this time, a planning committee of eight students who are responsible (with my on-going guiding support and supervision) for planning and organizing three L.E.A.P. activities for their fellow students, has been formed at high school #2. This eight member committee consists of four SP1’s who attended the Muskoka Woods excursion, and four other grade 9 and 10 students from the general student population - two had an interest in participating because of the daily announcements and two students were friends with one of the SP1’s, who subsequently invited them to become involved in this program.

**In-school Mentorship Program**

One follow-up initiative that is currently being piloted at WECDSB high school #1 is a six-week in-school mentorship program involving four university student-leaders and a mix of eight grade nine “at-risk” students\(^\text{131}\) from two separate courses: physical education and religion studies. The idea for the in-school mentorship program emerged at a combined follow-up meeting involving members from both the facilitation and research teams. At this particular meeting, it was proposed that a sustainable means for SP1’s and university student-leaders to connect needed to be devised. From those conversations emerged the possibility of utilizing the informal mentorship that occurs within the relationship between students and student-leaders to develop some of the academic skills that “at-risk” students are often noted as lacking and that teachers typically do not have.

\(^{131}\) Eight “at-risk” grade nine students, 4 of which were SP1’s involved in the MWLESP program, while the other 4 did not attend.
the time or patience to work with these particular students in order to develop. During the outdoor experience, students appeared to respond differently to the student-leaders versus how they responded to similar suggestions and/or feedback from teachers (i.e., Xon’s bike activity example).

I have repeatedly observed this behaviour in my own interactions with SP1’s since returning from Muskoka Woods and throughout my entire involvement in the MWLESP program. Recognizing the difference in this particular relationship dynamic and the generally positive student responsiveness to that relationship, we (i.e., research and facilitation team members) felt it may be beneficial to use student-leaders to work with grade nine students who were experiencing academic difficulties. Formally, the aim of the program would be to work with a group of students to complete their major portfolio assignment for either their Physical Education or Religion course. Informally, the aim of this program is to work with students on developing good academic habits that are necessary to succeed in high school but are no longer taught in high school.

As explained by one SST, there is an informal expectation held by high school teachers that by the time students reach high school, they should have mastered a set of academic skills and habits (i.e., time management, organization, study skills) that would enable them to succeed in school (SST [a], personal communications, March 6, 2007). However, as suggested by Ferguson et al. (2005), for various reasons and through various pathways “at-risk” students do not always have access to protective factors (i.e., good academic skills) that enable them to experience success in school. Subsequently, the aim of the in-school mentorship program is to use pre-existing caring adult relations between students and university student-leaders, which are initially formed through the MWLESP
program, to work with students on developing academic skills (i.e., time management and organization skills) that are essential for succeeding in high school.

The long-term aim of this program is to offer similar opportunities between SP1’s and university student-leaders prior to the three day Muskoka Woods excursion. When used as part of the pre-experience student preparations, in an attempt to accelerate the caring adult-student relationships prior to leaving for the outdoor experience, it could minimize potential barriers that cause some of the challenges that arise on Day one. For example it could ease some of the mixed emotions many SP1’s reported feeling prior to arriving at Muskoka Woods, because some of the pre-outdoor experience relationship building would have already taken place prior to departing.

Student Responsiveness to Follow-up Programming

Unlike during the outdoor experience, where tangible evidence could be seen and was reported about a progressive attitude and behavioural shift in some SP1’s, it is unclear what kind of impact follow-up programming may or may not have had on the effectiveness of the MWLESP program to move “at-risk” students away from disengagement. This is because there were minimal formal follow-up opportunities provided by the facilitation team for students. However, as suggested by one of the student-leaders, even in situations where formal follow-up opportunities were provided (i.e., L.E.A.P. initiative, in-school mentorship program), there are not enough structures in place (i.e., time, ongoing interactions) to create any sort of long-term sustainable changes in these students’ lives – at least not to the degree that teachers are informally expecting. Would students be responsive to follow-up programming? Based on the SP1’s reported interest in participating in a follow-up program, such as the L.E.A.P. initiative,
and through my ongoing interactions with students since returning from the outdoor excursion, I would suspect there would be varying levels of responsiveness – but that it would enhance the opportunity for these students to experience *success* in high school and more broadly.

Evidence of SP1’s responding to follow-up opportunities can be seen in their references to the ongoing interactions they have maintained with teachers and SP2’s since returning from Muskoka Woods. Informally, I would argue that structures are in place that support these ongoing interactions (both formal and informal) between SP1’s, teachers and SP2’s. As reported by both the SP1’s and SP2’s, these interactions, which have taken place in the halls of their respective schools since returning from the excursion, and have been instrumental in maintaining some of the relationships that were initially built at Muskoka Woods. It seems as though these ongoing relationships between SP1’s and teachers, and SP1 interest in returning to the MWLESP program in a leadership capacity, may be acting as protective factors that are helping to move these “at-risk” students away from disengagement. This finding supports the need for ongoing interactions between participating students and leaders in order to affect sustainable long-term change – which can be achieved through follow-up programming (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

**Conclusion**

The aim of this sub-problem was to determine if using the three phase Outdoor Education Model in the structuring of the MWLESP program enhances the program’s effectiveness to enable “at-risk” students to experience a *successful* high school experience. Findings from this study suggest that each of the three phases of the
intervention process makes its own contribution to participants’ overall experience and ability to derive benefits from the program that would enable them to experience success in high school. Although there are three separate phases that make unique contributions to framing participant’s experience, they are also very much interconnected to one another, working together to shape outcomes and the sustainability of those outcomes in participants’ lives. In the case of the MWLESP program, for example, the limited participant-related preparations that took place during the pre-outdoor experience had an effect on students’ “readiness” and also caused miscommunication between participants (i.e., smoking policy) prior to the outdoor experience. Despite the lack of participant-related preparations, those participating in the three day excursion still, for the most part, reported having a positive experience, and students in particular derived a number of benefits from the outdoor experience. However, as previously explained, the outdoor experience was not flawless and many of the challenges that arose on Day 1 can be linked to a lack of pre-outdoor experience preparations (i.e., both participant and program related). Lastly, although some participants have managed to sustain some of the benefits derived through their outdoor experience with minimal formal follow-up opportunities (i.e., relationships with teachers, SP2’s), the lack of follow-up has likely limited other students’ ability to optimally benefit from their program experience. Specifically, the lack of formal follow-up programming has directly affected the sustainability of the relationships between SP1’s and the university student-leaders, which during and immediately following the outdoor experience appeared to be meaningful relationships. The limited follow-up programming opportunities can be linked to a lack of long-term
program planning tied back to the pre-outdoor experience, thus illustrating the interconnectedness of each of the three phases of the Outdoor Education Model.

By providing a detailed description of each of the three phases of the MWLESP program, I have attempted to illustrate that structuring a school-based outdoor education intervention strategy according to the proposed model and including each of its structural components simultaneously enhances the effectiveness of the program and the likeliness that participants will optimally benefit from the experience. Deviating from the recommendations outlined in the three phase Outdoor Education Model, as happened for the MWLESP program in some areas, does not mean that participants will not benefit from their program involvement; our participants clearly demonstrated personal growth. Rather, due to the interconnectedness of each of the model's three phases, deviating from the prescribed format will limit the opportunity that participants have to optimally benefit from their experience in the program. This suggests that using the Outdoor Education Model in the structuring of an outdoor education based intervention program does enhance its ability to enable "at-risk" youth to experience success in the program, which then may extend into their high school experience.
Sub-Problem 3

Which "type" of "at-risk" student derives the most benefits from the outdoor education intervention strategy examined?

Traditionally within youth care professions (i.e., education, social work) the term "at-risk" has been used as a blanket term to describe a group of youth who are experiencing or "at-risk" of experiencing a variety of behavioural, emotional and/or academic difficulties (McWhirter et al., 2004; Wortherspoon & Schissel, 2001).

However, as McWhirter et al. (2004) suggest, being "at-risk" is not simply a unitary diagnosis, but rather "a series of steps along a continuum" (p.7). This continuum of risk suggests that there are varying degrees of risk (McWhirter et al., 2004), caused by a variety of factors (Wortherspoon & Schissel, 2001), and achieved through different pathways (Ferguson et al., 2005), that place some youth more "at-risk" than others. Yet, according to McWhirter et al. (2004), the term "at-risk" continues to be used as a generic label with "at-risk" youth continuing to be lumped together into one category.

Subsequently, the same "one-size-fits-all" intervention programming is being used to deal with "at-risk" youth, rather than work with them towards creating new possibilities. Kagan (1991) challenges the use of "one-size-fits-all" intervention programming for "at-risk" youth, arguing that youth will be more or less responsive to the same intervention strategy depending upon the "type" of risk he/she is exhibiting. Kagan's (1991) suggestion that intervention strategies will achieve different degrees of success depending on the "type" of "at-risk" youth the program is targeting (p.593), aligns with the concept of differentiated learning – a commonly applied teaching strategy used in mainstream
student programming. Sibthorp (2003, 2003) further extends Kagan's (1991) notion of differentiated responsiveness amongst “at-risk” youth by applying the concept to outdoor education programming. As previously suggested in the literature review, Sibthorp (2000, 2003) concluded that participants’ outdoor education experiences are shaped by what they bring with them into the program (i.e., past experiences, antecedent factors). As such, participants taking part in the same outdoor education program will presumably realize different outcomes, benefits and experiences depending on what unique set of characteristics they bring with them into the outdoor experience.

Building on both Kagan (1991) and Sibthorp’s (2000) assumptions that the degree to which an intervention strategy is effective is related to the “type of risk” a youth is experiencing, the aim of this sub-problem was to identify which “type” of “at-risk” student benefited most from their involvement in the MWLESP program. Although I had hoped to identify which “type” of student benefits most from the program examined, my inability to access quantitative data (i.e., SP1 attendance records, credit accumulation results), combined with the scope of this question, have limited my ability to answer this question as part of my master’s thesis. Thus, results gathered pertaining to SP1 responsiveness are inconclusive as to which “type” of “at-risk” student benefited most from their involvement in a protective school-based outdoor education intervention strategy.132 Results related to SP1 responsiveness did, however, reveal that there were

132 A modified version of Kagan’s (1991) taxonomy of risk was used to classify which “risk” category SP1’s belonged, however no qualitative difference was noted in either the interviews or participant-observation pertaining to SP1 responsiveness to the MWLESP program relative to the “risk” category in which they belonged. Quantitative data, such as attendance records and academic performance, may have helped identify notable differences; however that information was not made available to me for this study. Anecdotally, I did observe differences in SP1 responsiveness during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion between students from group 1 and group 2, which may possibly correlate with the risk category to which students belonged. Both participant groups consisted of students who were considered “at-risk,” but observable differences could be seen in behaviours and demeanors of SP1’s from both groups, which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
varying levels of responsiveness to the intervention strategy examined, with some SP1’s benefiting more from their MWLESP program experience than others. These findings are consistent with both Kagan’s (1991) and Sibthorp’s (2000) theories of differentiated participant responsiveness to intervention and outdoor education programming. Both researchers have previously concluded that the characteristics participants bring into an outdoor experience (i.e., intervention program) will result in participants realizing different outcomes and experiences from the same program. In keeping with this notion of differentiated responsiveness to intervention programming, the MWLESP program is presumably more suited to working with some “at-risk” students than others; however which “at-risk” students are most likely to benefit from this outdoor education intervention strategy remains unclear.

_Differentiated SP1 Responsiveness_

Results from this study revealed that SP1’s varied in their responsiveness to the MWLESP program. Some students benefited more immediately and experienced personal growth from the experience, while for other students, the experience within the MWLESP program appeared to have little to no notable attitude or behavioural affects on them. The personal growth incurred by some SP1’s was progressive in nature and for many students, gradually emerged over the course of the three day experience. However, for other SP1’s (i.e., Steven, see p.121), the personal benefits they gained from their involvement in the MWLESP program came after their return from the three day excursion, when they had an opportunity to process lessons learned and see the relevancy of these lessons in their daily lives. Despite differences in the degree that SP1’s benefited presumably correlate with the “types” of “risk” each group of students were experiencing. For example, during group 1 there were a number of SP1’s who smoked, whereas in group 2 no SP1’s smoked.
from and responded to their involvement in the MWLEPS program, most students had a positive outdoor experience and took with them some type of personal benefit. Again, the benefits and sustainability of those benefits gained by SP1’s during their involvement in the MWLESP program varied amongst students. Benefits that SP1’s reported gaining include improved relationships with teachers, as well as improved thoughts and feelings about the importance of school. Other SP1’s attributed academic benefits (i.e., improved attendance and academic achievement) to their involvement in the MWLESP program; explaining that the experience either helped them value education differently or that they wanted to return to the program as a leader next year, and thus were making a concerted effort to make “better” choices (e.g., attend school).

The exact reasons why some SP1’s were more responsive to the MWLESP program than others or why some students benefited more relationally (i.e., improved teacher-student relationships), and others academically is unknown. Presumably it is a combination of factors, rather than a single cause. Members of the facilitation team have attributed varied SP1 responsiveness to the MWLESP, or as they have suggested, a “lack of responsiveness” to the age group of students involved, arguing that grade nines are cognitively and socially not suited for what the MWLESP program hopes to accomplish with its participants. These claims are not consistent with results from this study, nor has any of the previously identified literature pertaining to outdoor education identified the age of participants as adversely affecting their level of responsiveness. Many of the therapeutic outdoor education programs identified in the literature target “at-risk” youth.
who are between the ages of 13-17, which challenges the facilitation team’s claim that the SP1’s, who are between the ages of 13-15, are unable to process the learning outcomes of the MWLESP program.

As previously suggested (see discussion of sub-problem 1), varied SP1’s responsiveness during the outdoor experience may have resulted from a lack of programming structures (i.e., participant-related preparations) in place prior to, during and following this year’s MWLESP program. Consequently, the program was not structured in a manner that fully enabled SP1’s to optimally succeed through their MWLESP program involvement. Although decision makers did not intentionally make decisions that would compromise the grade nine students MWLESP program experience, results do suggest that the facilitation team did not always make decisions that placed the SP1s in positions to optimally succeed and thus fully benefit from the program (i.e., lack of follow-up opportunities).

Drawing on Sibthorp’s (2000) research, the varying levels of SP1 responsiveness during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion and throughout the remainder of the MWLESP program (i.e., during follow-up programming opportunities) may also be attributed to the antecedents that students brought with them into the outdoor experience. For example, the varying levels of SP1 responsiveness may be linked to where along the “at-risk continuum” (McWhirter et al., 2004) students are currently situated and what kinds of protective factors (if any) they have in place to help move them away from progressively becoming more “at-risk.” As suggested by McWhirter et al.’s (2004) “at-risk continuum,” the extent that youth become more or less “at-risk” correlates with the

133 Project D.A.R.E., an intensive wildness therapy program for “at-risk” male adolescents, targets youth between the ages of 14-17. Project Sagewalk, an American based outdoor education program, offers intensive therapeutic programs for “at-risk” youth between the ages of 13-17.
type of support systems and the resources that they have in place. This suggests that the variance in SP1 responsiveness to the MWLESP program cannot simply be attributed to participants’ age and grade level, as argued by members of the facilitation team. Both Sibthorp (2000) and McWhirter et al. (2004) explain that a number of factors besides age and grade level, contribute to framing a student’s experience within and responsiveness to an intervention strategy such as the MWLESP program.

*Grade 9 Student Suitability*

SP1 responsiveness to the MWLESP program has been a major concern amongst members of the facilitation team, which first emerged during the outdoor experience. The progressive nature of SP1 responsiveness during the Muskoka Woods excursion has caused members of the facilitation team to question the suitability of the grade nine students for the MWLESP program. Findings from this study revealed that during and since returning from the Muskoka Woods excursion, the facilitation team has been disappointed with SP1’s responsiveness. Assessments which have been based solely on a comparative assessment, made by members of the facilitation team who attended both MWLESP programs, between the two different age groups of students (i.e., grade nine and grade eleven).

According to members of the facilitation team, they were disappointed that the grade nine student responses to the outdoor experience was neither as “immediate” nor as “profound” as it was with the senior students that participated in the 2005-06 MWLESP pilot program. The facilitation team has argued that unlike the senior students, the grade nine students are unable to process the underlying meaning of the leadership components built into the MWLESP program. Consequently, members of the facilitation team believe
that the grade nine students do not give the WECDSB enough "bang for their buck," because for them the Muskoka Woods excursion was simply a fun event. However, as results from this study have revealed, many SP1's were able to process the experience as well as transfer leadership skills and lessons learned while at Muskoka Woods, or at minimum see how these skills are applicable in their daily lives.

These transference abilities were demonstrated in multiple ways by SP1's, such as in their photo-collage written summaries and in their interview responses. In both instances, SP1's were able to identify leaderships skills they needed to further develop to be more effective leaders and/or apply leadership concepts learned at Muskoka Woods to experiences either in school and/or on a sport team. Thus, the facilitation team's claim that SP1's were unresponsive to the MWLESP program is unsubstantiated, as results from this study have indicated that many SP1's were able to acquire the skills and lessons that decision makers hoped they would achieve. Arguably, it is because the SP1's were not as immediate responsive as the facilitation team was informally expecting, that has resulted in their dismissal of the entire grade nine experience and the move in favour of targeting an older student age group. This outcome arises because some members of the facilitation team are drawing on last year's program experience and student responsiveness to frame and assess this year's program experience.

Thus, in keeping with Duality of Structure, the facilitation team has naturalized the belief that how last year's group of senior students responded to the MWLESP program is how this year's group of SP1's should have responded. Consequently, when students were unable to measure up to that informal expectation, held by the facilitation team, it was easy to dismiss the grade nine students as being suitable candidates for what
the MWLESP program was trying to accomplish. Despite evidence suggesting that many SP1’s from this age group did benefit from their program experience, SST interview responses along with my participant-observations lead me to believe that students did not benefit “enough” or “quick enough” for the facilitation team to appreciate. This suggests that the values shaping the facilitation teams’ decision as to which group of students the MWLESP program should target is less about which students will benefit most from the experience, but rather, which students will benefit most immediately during the experience.

**Comparing MWLESP Program Experiences**

In keeping with both Kagan’s (1991) and Sibthorp’s (2000) conclusions that differing responses are likely to be incurred by participants involved in an outdoor education intervention strategy, comparing student responsiveness and experiences during two separate programs seems to be an invalid assessment measure. Although logistically both the pilot program and this year’s MWLESP program were similar, they involved students from two separate age groups who are functionally at different stages of physical, cognitive and affective stages of development. Each group of students was thus bringing with them different abilities into the outdoor experience, which as Sibthorp (2000) has explained will have shaped how they experienced the MWLESP program. Therefore, as two different groups of students, who functionally brought different abilities into their program experience, were used during both years of the MWLESP program, it is unrealistic for the facilitation team to assume that students would experience and benefit from the program in the same way. Instead, as results from this
study have shown, SP1’s involved in the 2006-07 MWLESP program responded differently than the senior students involved in the pilot program.

Having different experiences with the MWLESP program is not to say that one group of students’ benefits more than the other, because at this time there is no evidence to substantiate that claim. Rather, differentiated responsiveness to intervention programming suggests that each group of students (i.e., grade nines, senior students) have the potential to benefit differently from the same program experience – as was the case for the students involved in the MWLESP program. Findings from this study revealed that SP1’s responsiveness during the three day Muskoka Woods excursion was a gradual progression, but that notable behavioural and attitude changes were incurred by many students (i.e., expanded naturalized beliefs, improved relationships). Based on SST’s comparisons of the two MWLESP programs and student responsiveness, there were also reported behavioural and attitude shifts in the senior students involved in the pilot program, however according to the SST’s these shifts were more immediate than with the younger students.

MWLESP Program Intended Audience

Recognizing that there will be differentiated responsiveness amongst and within various student groups, is one group of “at-risk” students more suited for the MWLESP program than another? As suggested in one of the student-leader interview responses (see p.171), it is not that one group of students is necessarily more suited for the MWLESP program than others, as each group will have their own unique program experience and benefit accordingly. Rather, it seems to me that the intended purpose of the MWLESP program will make one group of students better suited for the program than another.
Thus, if the WECDSB wants to continue to use the MWLESP program as a protective intervention strategy, designed to ease the high school transition process for its “at-risk” student population, as well as accelerate the development of the caring adult relationships and enable students to experience success that is associated with school early in their high school experience, then results from this study suggest that grade nine students are the most suited candidates for this intervention program – based on its stated purpose and the reported benefits incurred by participants. This is because the desired outcomes that the WECDSB hoped their students would achieve through their involvement in the MWLESP program were realized by many (not all) of the students who participated in the program. As indicated in some of the SP1 responses, the Muskoka Woods experience helped to ease the high school transition process for some students, by improving teacher-student relationships and helping to expand their naturalized beliefs about self, school and “Others” - benefits which, in many cases, SP1’s have managed to sustain since returning from the outdoor experience.

Through my ongoing interaction with many of the SP1’s, I would argue that some of these sustainable benefits that students reported gaining from the MWLESP program align with what Ferguson et al. (2005) calls protective factors. According to students’ own self-admission, these benefits have, in some cases, helped move some students away from choosing a path of disengagement, opting instead to try making “better life choices” by attending school.

Conclusion

The varied responsiveness displayed by SP1’s through the MWLESP program aligns with previous educational research pertaining to differentiated learning and
Kagan's (1991) suggestion that intervention programming directed towards “at-risk” youth will have varying levels of success depending on the “type” of risk a youth is displaying. Although I had previously hoped to identify which type of “at-risk” youth most benefits from a school-based outdoor intervention strategy, the scope of that question appears to have been too big for a Master’s thesis. A more extensive longitudinal study is needed to effectively address this question. Results from my study do, however, suggest that differences exist in “at-risk” student responsiveness to school-based outdoor education intervention programming, with some SP1’s notably benefiting more from the MWLESP program than others. Although the suitability of grade nine student involvement, and more specifically the progressive nature of their responsiveness, has been a concern amongst members of the facilitation team, results from this study do suggest that many SP1s gained sustainable benefits from their outdoor experience. The grade nine responsiveness to the MWLESP program was, however, different than what the facilitation team had experienced with the senior students during the 2005-06 pilot program.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY

Outdoor education is a form of experiential-learning that has historically been used to foster positive personal growth and character development in participants, by engaging them in healthy risk-taking activities. Researchers have identified that benefits such as leadership development, improved communication skills, and improved feelings of self-worth and self-confidence can all be gained through involvement in an outdoor education program. Although every participant can potentially benefit from an outdoor education experience, there is a strong consensus in the literature that it is “at-risk” youth who have the greatest potential to be positively affected by an involvement in outdoor education programming. However, limited research pertaining to outdoor education beyond its traditional uses in mainstream school programming and/or commercial/therapeutic programming, combined with the “one-size-fits-all” structuring of intervention programming for “at-risk” youth, has resulted in outdoor education being underutilized in school-based intervention programming.

Recognizing a practical need to move beyond the scope of what has “always” been done in terms of school-based intervention programming for “at-risk” youth, as well as a theoretical need to address a gap in the literature pertaining to outdoor education and its two traditional uses, this study examined the following general research problem: “is outdoor education effective as a protective school-based intervention strategy when designed to provide “at-risk” students with an opportunity for a successful high school experience.” A case study analysis of the Muskoka Woods Leadership Experience for
"Students of Promise" program was conducted to examine this research question. To help answer this general research problem, the following three sub-problems were identified:

1. How is a protective intervention strategy created and evaluated using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation?
2. Does using a three phase Outdoor Education Model in the structuring of the MWLESP program enhance the ability of "at-risk" students to experience "success" in the program and in high school?
3. Which "type" of "at-risk" student benefits most from the outdoor education intervention examined?

The case study analysis of the MWLESP program was conducted in two on-going phases, using three different methodological approaches – all within the larger framework of Participant Action Research (PAR). Phase one of the study involved participant-observation. As a member of the program's facilitation team, I observed every aspect of the creation, implementation and subsequent follow-up process of the MWLESP program. In conjunction with participant-observation data collection, which continued during phase two of the study, 14 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in the MWLESP program were conducted. Interviews with the program participants provided unique insights regarding the MWLESP program as experienced by each one of the participant groups. Lastly, a systematic analysis of pertinent documents related to the creation, implementation and subsequent evaluation of the MWLESP program was used to further substantiate results gather from the other two methodological sources. Results gather from each of these three methodological sources were triangulated and analyzed for thematic content. Common themes were grouped together and categorized to analyze the content in relation to current literature pertaining to outdoor education and intervention programming for "at-risk" youth. This approach
allowed me to examine my general research question and address each of its three sub-problems.

**CONCLUSION**

Findings from this study suggest that there is an interconnection between the creation, implementation and evaluation processes of school-based intervention programming. As such, actions and decisions taken or not taken during one of the programming stages will shape how the proceedings of the next stage unfold. Results also suggest that creating and implementing a program such as the MWLESP program - that challenges dominant teaching practices related to programming for “at-risk” youth - is not feasible without access to a number of structures (i.e., rules and resources). As was the experience of decision makers within the MWLESP program, a lack of human, financial and material resources severely limits decision makers’ ability to implement the necessary structures (i.e., rules) needed to effect sustainable change to the current dominant practices found within the education system. Thus, what decision maker’s hoped to accomplish in terms of operating the MWLESP program from the theoretical frameworks of Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective (i.e., student-centered focus) and what actually occurred did not always align, as there were not enough necessary structures in place to implement and sustain this type of programming focus. As findings from this study revealed, the difficulties associated with challenging dominant social practices is why social maintenance is most commonly practiced. This is because it is much easier to act within the dominant boundaries and reproduce the practices that have “always” been done, rather than trying to transform them.
With regards to the structuring of school-based intervention programs using outdoor education, results from this study suggest that the three phase Outdoor Education Model is an effective framework, as it appears to enhance the ability of participants to optimally benefit from their program experience. Deviating from the three phase model and its recommended elements, as seen in the MWLESP program, did not inhibit participants from benefiting from their program involvement. However, it did limit participants' ability to optimally benefit and/or sustain the benefits derived from their outdoor education program experience.

Lastly, results from this study indicate that student responsiveness to the MWLESP program varied, as it does in most school-based intervention programs. Findings also revealed that some students benefited more from their program experience than others. In most instances, student responsiveness during the MWLESP was progressive in nature and was attributed to a combination of factors rather than a single program component. Reported benefits incurred by students include improved peer and teacher relationships; expanded naturalized beliefs about self, school, leadership and “Others,” and experiencing a sense of pride, accomplishment and success associated with school – feelings that students did not previously associate with their school experience. The exact reasons for students’ varied responses, and which “type” of “at-risk” student benefits most from his/her program involvement, remains unknown. Nonetheless, findings from this study suggest that many students were positively affected by their MWLESP program experience, with some students deriving sustainable benefits, despite minimal follow-up opportunities, throughout the academic year.
In light of these findings, it appears that outdoor education is an effective protective school-based intervention strategy, as its use in the MWLESP program provided “at-risk” students from the WECDSB with an opportunity for a “successful” high school experience. More specifically, the benefits incurred by students suggest that the MWLESP program can effectively be used as a grade 8 to 9 transition strategy, to help minimize the difficulties experienced by “at-risk” students when they begin their high school experience. However, students’ varied responses to this intervention strategy suggest that on its own, the MWLESP program and in general, outdoor education programming in general is not a cure-all solution for the problem of student disengagement. Rather, it is one strategy belonging to a much larger process of moving students away from paths of disengagement. Despite the intervention’s ability to provide “at-risk’ students with sustainable benefits that enhanced their likelihood of experiencing a successful high school experience, results from this program suggest that the greatest strength of this type of intervention program is its ability to act as a gateway to new possibilities previously unimagined by “at-risk” students. As results have indicated, through an involvement in the MWLESP program some students have begun seeing themselves differently – with some students now seeing themselves as leaders, while others now see themselves successfully completing school – possibilities which were previously unimaginable. Through their involvement in the MWLESP program, participants were also able to form meaningful and sustainable relations. Arguably, these relationships, formed between students and between teachers and students, along with the expanded naturalized beliefs, can act as protective factors that work towards moving students away from school disengagement. Again, this is because both help to expand the
boundaries within which “at-risk” students “normally” operate, thus presenting new and
different possibilities for what their high school experience “has to be.”

Drawing from Ferguson et al. (2005), these protective factors enhance the
likeness of students becoming more receptive and willing to access resources (i.e., other
types of intervention strategies) designed to work with them towards achieving a
successful high school experience and success more broadly. It would be naïve to assume
that, on its own, participating in a school-based outdoor education intervention program
such as the MWLESP will produce an immediate and automatic turnaround in all
students. Rather, as results from this study have indicated, participating in an outdoor
education intervention strategy can provide students with sustainable benefits (i.e., caring
adult relationships) that facilitate the opportunity of having a successful high school
experience. Presumably not every “at-risk” student will benefit in the same manner from
their involvement in a school-based outdoor education intervention strategy, as some will
inevitably gain more from their program experience than others. These findings suggest
that more resources need to be allocated for the development of student-centered
intervention programming designed to work with “at-risk” youth, so that those students
who benefit most from an outdoor education strategy can access such programs while
other “at-risk” students can access programming more suited to their needs. Regardless of
the type of intervention strategy, results from this study have clearly indicated a need to
move away from the “one-size-fits-all” structuring approaches commonly used in the
school-based programming for “at-risk” youth; moving instead towards a student-
centered approach that places students’ needs at the centre of all programming decisions.

Until a serious effort is made to work with “at-risk” students in a way that addresses their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
needs, educators and school officials will not be fulfilling their responsibilities to mentor and guide all students towards experiencing a successful high school experience – and ultimately becoming productive members of society, thus contributing to the problem of school disengagement rather than creating sustainable solutions that will address the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the completion of an extensive analysis of the MWLESP program, a number of theoretical and practical recommendations specific to the program and related to school-based outdoor education intervention programming became apparent. As such, recommendations presented in this chapter will be divided accordingly. I begin this section by presenting future research recommendations (i.e., theoretical) related to school-based outdoor education intervention programming, followed by general practical recommendations specific to the MWLESP program. More detailed MWLESP program recommendations, offered by the program’s participants, are also available as an appendix (see Appendix G) that will be forwarded to the WECDSB and members of the facilitation team.

Theoretical Recommendations

Prior to this study, research pertaining to the use and effectiveness of outdoor education as a protective school-based intervention strategy was limited. There was subsequently a gap in the literature as to whether outdoor education programming could be used beyond its two traditional uses in school-based and commercial /therapeutic programming. Results from this study have suggested that the MWLESP program was able to effectively use outdoor education programming to work with “at-risk” students
and help them experience success in their high school experience. However, as this was a case study analysis only of the MWLESP program, results are specific to this particular program and thus not generalizable to other similar school-based outdoor education intervention programs. In the future, a wider comparative study of the MWLESP program to other similar school-based outdoor education intervention programs could be conducted. This would allow researchers to examine whether the strengths, challenges and results gathered from the MWLESP program are case-specific to that program, or if they are generalizable outcomes applicable to school-based intervention programming involving outdoor education.

Another possible area for future research could be an in-depth exploratory study of the three phase Outdoor Education Model, used in the structuring of the MWLESP program. Results from this study have only confirmed that using the three phase model is an effective way to structure a school-based outdoor education intervention program. However, the contributions each phase and its structural components (i.e., participant-related preparations) make to framing participants’ program experiences remains unknown. Therefore, a study looking specifically at the three phase Outdoor Education Model and its wider contribution to outdoor education programming, not simply to the MWLESP program, could be an area of research deserving of future consideration.

A third recommendation for future research tied to the MWLESP program is to use the modified version of Kagan’s (1991) original taxonomy of risk and conduct a longitudinal study of student responsiveness throughout their four year involvement in the MWLESP program (i.e., SP1 to SP4). This would potentially allow researchers to identify which “type” of “at-risk” youth benefits most from a school-based outdoor
education intervention program. This would in turn allow facilitation team members to tailor the MWLESP program in ways that addresses the needs of those students most likely to benefit from their program involvement and then to develop other types of intervention programming (e.g., music-based programming) to address the needs of students from other “risk” categories.

One final area of future research is not specific to the MWLESP program but rather to the Student Success/Learning to 18 campaign undertaken by the Ontario Ministry of Education to increase graduation rates to 85% by 2010. Possible research topics related to this campaign include an examination of the sustainability of the resources (i.e., human – SST positions, financial – program funding, and material – teacher resource publications) that have been allocated since the creation of this campaign, beyond 2010. In addition, the future sustainability of student-centered intervention programming within the Ontario education system, specifically targeting the “at-risk” student population, needs to be evaluated if the 85% graduation rate is (or is not) achieved. Considering that the current literature related to the Student Success/Learning to 18 campaign does not address the sustainability of its programming beyond 2010, both of the aforementioned questions are relevant to the field of education and to those researchers interested in programming for “at-risk” youth.

Practical Recommendations

Practical recommendations for improving the MWLESP program, related to each of the three sub-problems, can be made based on the findings collected from this study.
Sub-ProBLEM #1

Results from this study have revealed that there are a number of strengths related to the MWLESP program that decision makers can continue to build on when planning for future years of the program. I recommend that prior to planning the 2007-08 MWLESP program members from the research and facilitation team meet and identify the strengths of the 2006-07 MWLESP program and incorporate those strengths into the structuring of next year’s program. At this time decision makers’ could also identify some of the challenges that limited their ability to operate the 2006-07 MWLESP program as planned. Collaboratively troubleshooting some of the program limitations may help new possibilities previously unimagined to emerge.

Strengths of the program that decision makers’ should consider building upon for future years include: (a) students-mentoring-students component (i.e., SP2 involvement), (b) relationship building between SP1’s and teachers, which was made possible because of teachers’ role as co-participants, (c) the Muskoka Woods excursion (i.e., outdoor experience), and (c) continue to expand follow-up programming opportunities (i.e., Take the L.E.A.P, in-school mentorship program). Time and human resources permitting, decision makers’ may also wish to consider actively seeking ways to involve students in the planning process, thus allowing students to gain ownership of the program, as well as working on their leadership development.

To optimally create, implement and evaluate the MWLESP program using Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective as its foundation, results from this study suggest that the WECDSB needs to allocate more human resources (i.e., tied to financial resources) to the program. Otherwise, a program such as the MWLESP
program, which challenges how school-based intervention programming has “always” been offered, is not feasible; because all of the necessary structures needed to affect large-scale change cannot be implemented. Having more access to resources would allow the facilitation team to re-evaluate their current division of labour, thereby making it more equal. Changes that could be made possible if more resources were available include: (a) adding additional facilitation team members, (b) re-assigning SST program-related responsibilities so that they become shared responsibilities amongst current team members and/or other teachers attending the excursion, and (c) modifying the teacher selection process - choosing teachers that want to be there and have a rapport with students, rather than teachers that have to be there because of financial limitations related to teacher supply coverage. Although preparing participants for their outdoor experience needs to be a bigger priority, so too does preserving the mental and physical well-being of the facilitation team members – none of which are possible without access to more resources from the WECDSB. More access to resources would help minimize the SST’s feelings of being overworked prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion, and may help team members perform their school and MWLESP program related roles and responsibilities more effectively. More resources would also help the facilitation team give more consideration to follow-up programming and put structures in place prior to the outdoor experience. In general, having more access to resources would help the facilitation team not only improve the MWLESP program, but also help them to carryout the program according to its intended structure – one that is theoretically grounded in both Duality of Structure and the Strengths Perspective.
Sub-Problem #2

In keeping with the assumption that outdoor education as a protective intervention for “at-risk” youth is an on-going process, rather than a single experience, along with results indicating that the three phase structuring of the MWLESP program was a contributing factor in framing participants’ program experience, it is my recommendation that the Outdoor Education Model continue being used in the structuring of future MWLESP programs. Moreover, it is my belief that the facilitation team needs to continue building on the existing strengths and programming elements that contributed towards SP1’s experiencing success through their involvement in this year’s program (i.e., students-mentoring-students via SP2 involvement). The facilitation team should also continue to work to improve the program by implementing programming structures that were not included in this year’s experience (i.e., evaluation criteria and formal follow-up opportunities).

With regards to the outdoor experience, it is my recommendations that the facilitation team become even more intentional in how they structure the three day excursion, ensuring that every activity structured into the experience serves a purpose that aligns with the program’s underlying values. Moreover, the facilitation team needs to continue to differentiate the MWLESP program from the grade eight program. As such, decision makers need to act in a way (i.e., make decisions) that reflect the program’s goals, rather than making decisions based on what has “always” been done in the past (i.e., with the MWLE program).

Finally, to maintain the momentum, excitement and benefits experienced by participants during the Muskoka Woods excursion, it is important to have follow-up
structures in place prior to departing. This will ensure that follow-up programming can be offered to participants almost immediately following their return from the experience. This will help to minimize students losing interest in remaining actively involved in the program, caused by a time lapse that occurs between the outdoor experience and the commencement of the follow-up program.

Sub-Problem #3

The variance in responsiveness between the senior (2005) and younger (2006) students raised concerns amongst the facilitation team about the suitability of the grade nine students for the MWLESP program, concerns which stemmed from the facilitation team’s comparison of students and program experiences from two separate years of the program. Comparing program experiences adversely affected the facilitation team’s ability to appreciate the personal benefits incurred by some SPI’s during this year’s MWLESP program, because they were focused on how the grade 9’s were not benefiting as much from the experience. I recommend that the facilitation team no longer compare students’ program experiences as it skewed their ability to appreciate the ways that current students are benefiting from the MWLESP program. The facilitation team also needs to develop clear program objectives and measurable evaluation criteria to be able to assess students’ program experiences and their responsiveness to the intervention strategy. To establish measurable criteria and objectives, decision makers’ should give consideration to the learning outcomes and benefits previously associated with outdoor education programming (see p. 10) and structure the MWLESP program accordingly.

I disagree with the facilitation team’s decision to stop involving the grade nine students in the MWLESP program, as I feel they were too quickly dismissed. By
changing the age group of the 2007-08 MWLESP program, the facilitation team will not have an opportunity to build upon this year’s experience to make the program better for future participants. Moote and Woodarski (1997) have suggested that “no two adventure [outdoor education] programs appear to be the same in their manner of implementation” (p.154). An outdoor education program should be structured in a way that promotes learning outcomes specific to the participants’ targeted. Targeting “at-risk” students early in their high school experience is what makes the MWLESP program a protective intervention strategy, as it interjects into grade nine students’ lives before they become disengaged (Barr & Parrett, 1995). In contrast, targeting senior students would make the MWLESP program an intervention strategy rather than a protective intervention, as it would interject into students’ lives once problematic, destructive, and/or unhealthy behaviours and attitudes have already emerged.

To prevent future student experiences from being dismissed, the facilitation team needs to clearly define the aim of the MWLESP program and use that stated purpose to determine which students they will target for this particular intervention. If the facilitation team continues to call the MWLESP program a protective intervention, designed to ease the high school transition process, then the grade nine students are the most suitable candidates. However, if the facilitation team decides that the aim of the MWLESP program is to assist students in the credit recovery program, then targeting an older age group is an appropriate decision; however the program would need to be referred to as an intervention strategy rather than a protective intervention.
References


22, 2007 from, the Ontario Ministry of Education web site:


Appendix A

Risk Classification

In a meeting held with the SST's from two WECDSB high schools (September 28, 2006), we discussed how their schools identify students as “at-risk.” Together we identified approximately 15 antecedent factors that are used to determine if a student is “at-risk.” Using Kagan’s (1991) Taxonomy of Risk as a guide, we grouped the various risk factors into 4 categories. These 4 categories are:

1. Academic risk
2. Family-environmental risk
3. Social-environmental risk
4. Behavioural risk

These categories are flexible, as we recognize that inter-play exists between the various risk factors – meaning that a multitude of variables may be placing a student at different types of risk (McWhirter et al, 2004). These “risk categories” are representative of the primary root cause of why a student is considered to be “at-risk,” but are not the only cause - thus students can belong to more than one risk category.

Risk Classification

1. Academic Risk
   - Attendance problems
   - Suspensions
   - Learning Difficulties
     - ADHD
     - Literacy
     - Innumeralcy
     - FAE/FASD
   - Disruptive classroom behaviour
   - Chronic school-related problems
     - Flagged OSR file
     - Student continuously being moved/passed through the school system
   - Developmentally/socially delayed

2. Family-Environmental Risk
   - Abuse issues
     - Physical
     - Emotional
     - Neglect
     - Sexual
     - Substance abuse
   - CAS involvement (foster child, social worker)
3. Social-Environmental Risk
   - Socio-economic status
     - Poverty issues
     - Working to support self
     - Working to support family
   - Social demographics
     - Where they live
     - Transient behaviour
   - Peer group
     - Gang activity
     - Involved in illegal activity
     - Socialization issues (isolates self from others)

4. Behavioural Risk
   - Engages in attention seeking activities
     - Oppositional defiant disorder
     - “Class clown”
     - Inappropriate comments
   - Engages in high risk activities
     - Sexually active
     - Pregnancy
     - Drugs
     - Alcohol
   - Unhealthy coping skills
     - Self-harm / Self-mutilation
     - Threats / thoughts of suicide
     - Suicide attempts
   - Boundary issues
   - Self-esteem issues
Appendix B
MWLESP Participant-Observation Guide

1. Program Related Observations - Related to: major problem, Sub-p #1 & #2
   a. Is the program running "smoothly?"
      i. Schedule – too busy, not enough activities, is it reflective of the program objectives and philosophy?
      ii. Are we achieving the six learning objectives?
      iii. Participation rate & student response? Are they actively engaging in the activity, number of participants (*during follow-up activities)
   b. Are the activities promoting: healthy risk-taking, fostering leadership development, healthy relationship development, transference of learning to home/school communities?
   c. Program highlights: Identify the activities that received positive student response
   d. Areas of concern related to the program
   e. How are programming decisions made and implemented (by facilitation & research team meetings), and what is the rationale behind these decisions?

2. SP1 Related Observations - Related to: major problem, Sub-p #2 & #3
   a. Student Biography (pseudonym, risk “type,” school affiliation)
   b. Identify preferred and less preferred activities
   c. Identify the various responses to different activities (i.e., participant withdraws from the activity, participant activity engaged in activity, participant assumed a leadership role for the first time)
   d. Identify problematic behaviours (i.e. confrontational, sneaking out of cabins after lights out, drug/alcohol use, violence) that occurred during the excursion (*follow-up activity)
   e. Attitude towards excursion/event: prior to, during, and following
   f. Participation in the program and activities: engaged, withdrawn, attendance
   g. Interaction with others
      i. Peers: attentive to, confrontational, co-operative, encouraging to, respectful of personal boundaries, enters into positive & healthy discussions with peers
      ii. Teachers / Student-Leaders: engaged/disengaged, co-operative, confrontational, encouraging to, respectful towards, enters into positive & healthy discussions with teacher, trusting of – can be demonstrated by students willingness to communicate or discuss thoughts/feelings related to experience, activity, or other personal matters

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
3. Student Leaders Related Observation- **Related to: major problem, Sub-p #2 & #3**
   a. **“Students of Promise” Year 2 (SP2’s) Leaders**
      i. Student biography
      ii. Leadership ability: what kind of leader are they? Are they comfortable in a leadership role? Do they become more comfortable in their role from the start of the excursion to its completion? Do they show an interest to become involved in the follow-up planning council?
      iii. Interactions with:
          1. **SP1’s**: are they being good examples? Mentors? Are the SP1’s being respectful of the SP2’s role? If not how are the SP2’s coping & addressing that concern?
          2. **University of Windsor students**: are they sharing the responsibilities? Are they being treated and seeing themselves in a co-leadership position with the U of W students? Are they actively engaging in conversations with the U of W students?
          3. **Teachers**: are teachers being respectful of SP2’s role? If not how are the SP2’s coping & addressing that concern? Do they demonstrate leadership (i.e., give explanations, address disruptive group members, facilitate discussions) even when teachers are around or do they sit back?

   b. **University Student Leaders**
      i. Student biography
      ii. Leadership abilities: are they sharing the responsibilities? Are they treating and seeing the SP2’s as co-leaders? Are they actively engaging the SP2’s in leadership opportunities? Are they connecting with the SP2’s (i.e., building friendships/mentorship relationships)? Do they want to be involved in the follow-up activities? If so, are they sustaining the relationships made during the 3 day excursion? Or are the follow-up interactions awkward (not engaging in conversations, stay & interact only with other U of W students – “cliquish”).
      iii. Number of University co-student leaders: is the excursion (*follow-up activities) adequately staffed? Do we need more or less?
4. Teacher Related Observations: **Related to: major problem & Sub-p #2**
   a. Biography
   b. MWLESP program involvement: Are they actively engaged in all activities related to the program (as co-participants? Facilitating debriefing discussion returning from excursion?)
   c. As co-participants are they: being respectful of SP2’s role? Do they try and “take charge” of situation? Do they correct or undermine SP2’s role in front of group? Are they affirming and encouraging towards SP1’s and SP2’s?

5. Emerging Category
   a. Any significant observation that at first does not appear to fall into one of the four major categories. These observations will be reviewed for content to determine the appropriate category where they should be placed.
Appendix C
Interview Guides

SP1 Interview Guide

General Impressions of the MWLESP program: photo elicitation
Relates to main problem, sub-problem #2 and #3 – Will help to determine if the outdoor experience was meaningful and what about the experience made it (or did not make it) meaningful (e.g., activities, relationships, outdoor environment).

Before I begin asking you questions, I would like us to take a couple of minutes to look through the pictures you took at Muskoka Woods. Once completed: This time on your own, please look through your pictures again and select 3-5 pictures that represent your Muskoka Woods experience. You can select pictures that represent:

- Highlight(s) or memorable moment(s) from the experience
- Least favourite moment(s) from the experience
- Favourite activity/activities
- Leadership

1. Using each of your selected pictures – Please share with me what is happening in the picture?
   - Why did you choose that picture?
   - What does this picture represent about your experience at Muskoka Woods? Please explain.

Pre-outdoor experience
(Relates to sub-problem #1 and #2)
Now that you have shared a bit about your Muskoka Woods experience I would like to ask you a few questions about your thoughts and experiences before the trip.

2. Tell me what are some of the thoughts, opinions or feelings that you had about (fill in blank) before you went to Muskoka Woods? How have these thoughts changed since your experience?
   a) School
   b) Leadership
   c) The Muskoka Woods Students of Promise Program

To determine what naturalized beliefs students had before his/her Muskoka Woods experience and examine if those beliefs were affected by the outdoor experience.

3. How did you hear about the Muskoka Woods program? What were you told about the program (e.g., what you would be doing while there)? Why or what made you choose to come?

4. What types of preparations went on before you left for Muskoka Woods? For example: What information did you receive about the trip? About leadership? What were you told to bring or not to bring? *If a smoker* What were you told about smoking while at Muskoka Woods?
5. Did you feel “ready” for your experience at Muskoka Woods? How could you have been better prepared? What would you recommend we do differently next year to prepare students for their Muskoka Woods experience?

Questions 3-5 explore what kinds of pre-outdoor experience preparations/activities occurred before students went to Muskoka Woods.

Outdoor Experience
Relates to sub-problem #2 and #3 – Questions 6-11 are designed to evaluate the outdoor experience phase of the MWLESP program and determine what affect each component (i.e., activities, group dynamics) had on student’s overall outdoor experience.

As soon as you arrived at Muskoka Woods there were three full days of activities planned. On the first day we did a lot of tribe building activities (e.g., the Amazing Muskoka Challenge, Night Hike), every meal there were stories, the second day it was all the “challenge by choice” activities (e.g., zipline), and then we ended the last day with two activities – one where you just listened to your teachers and leaders share and the other was an active activity of your choice.

Activity Related Questions134

6. What was your favourite activity? Please explain why?

7. What was the most challenging activity that you did while at Muskoka Woods? What about the activity made it “challenging?” How did it feel to “meet” that challenge – by either trying the activity or accomplishing the task?

8. By participating in these various activities what did you learn about yourself? What are some of the skills you discovered that you had? What were some of the new skills that you learned? – Transference of experience debriefing question

9. Did the teachers in your tribes participate? Were any of them afraid to try an activity? Explain what it was like to have your teachers participate alongside you in the tribe? How in anyway has that experience changed your opinion about teachers? – To examine what naturalized beliefs students held about teachers before the Muskoka Woods experience and if/how those beliefs may have changed afterwards.

While at Muskoka Woods you went around trying these different activities in your tribes – can you please tell me a bit about your tribe?

134 The answer to these questions may have already emerged during the first part of the interview with the photos. Questions may need to be reworded depending on student’s responses – for example: “You mentioned earlier that the “Giant Swing” was your favorite activity, can you explain why?”
**Group Dynamic Questions**

10. Do remember the name of your tribe? Who were your tribe leaders? - **Prompting question**

11. What was it like to have high school student-leaders (SP2’s) in your tribe\(^{135}\)? How did you get along with your tribe leaders? Were you able to get to know one another? What made it “easy” or “challenging” for you to get to know one another? - **A question designed to evaluate the program and to examine student-leaders role in the MWLESP program**

12. Did you know all your tribe members? *If applicable* What was it like to spend time with people you did not know? Was it “easy” or “challenging”? Did your opinion change about your tribe or about the program [MWLESP] in any way over the three days? - **Examine what affect group dynamics may have on student’s experience**

_The focus of the Muskoka Woods experience was to develop our leadership skills. I would now like to ask you a few questions about Leadership._

**Leadership Questions**

13. What kind of leader are you\(^{136}\)? (e.g., do you lead by example? Are you an honest leader?) – **Transference of experience question designed to emphasize the student’s inherent strengths**

14. How did you show leadership at Muskoka Woods? - **Processing/debriefing question**

15. What did you learn about leadership because of your Muskoka Woods experience? – **Transference of experience question**

16. How are you a leader or how can you be a leader in your school? In your community? – **Transference of experience question designed to expand the student’s boundaries of what he/she imagines to be possible for his/her school experience**

17. Are you interested in returning to Muskoka Woods next year as a student-leader? Why/Why not? - **Question designed to expand the student’s boundaries of what he/she imagines to be possible for his/her school experience**

18. What skills would you need to either improve or develop in order to become a student-leader? – **Question is designed to identify the resources (i.e., human,**

\(^{135}\) Not every tribe had an SP2 student-leader therefore this question may not be applicable for every SP1 interview.

\(^{136}\) The activities that students participated in at Muskoka Woods were designed to promote his/her leadership development. One activity in particular was called “Leadership is...” in that activity there were different words representing “leadership,” students were asked to select words that represented his/her leadership style (or thoughts about leadership).
financial, material) that the student needs in order to develop the leadership skills necessary to return next year to Muskoka Woods

**Overall Muskoka Woods Experience questions**  
(Relates to sub-problem #1, #2, and #3)

19. What did you do at Muskoka Woods that you are most proud of? — **Processing question**

20. If you could change anything about your Muskoka Woods Experience what would it be? Explain. — **Question designed to give the student an active say in the shaping of the MWLESP program**

**Follow-up program questions**  
(Relates to sub-problem #2)

At Muskoka Woods and the other night at the Celebration Dinner your teachers and I mentioned **Take the L.E.A.P.** which is a leadership program that we would like start at your high school. Briefly I would like to ask what some of your thoughts are about this program and what kind of activities you think we should include in it.

21. First are you interested in being a part of Take the L.E.A.P? Why/Why not?

22. What activities do you think we should include in this program? — **Question designed to give the student an active say in the shaping of the MWLESP program**

---

137 Depending on when the interview takes place I may mention the Celebration dinner reminder — some interviews may take place prior to the dinner, while others will happen following the dinner.

138 Take the L.E.A.P (Leadership Experiences through Adventure Programming) is the name of the follow-up program that will be open to all students from both participating high schools — including those students that did not attend Muskoka Woods. The program will offer a variety of in-school and inter-school activities that promote leadership development through the use of outdoor and/or adventure type activities.
General Impressions of the MWLESP program
(Relates to main problem, sub-problem #1, #2 and #3)

1. In your opinion, what is the purpose of the MWLESP program? For example, what is the program hoping to accomplish? —To evaluate if the program’s philosophy and learning objectives were communicated to key stakeholders (i.e., student-leaders)

1. How is the MWLESP program different from other school programs? Explain.

2. Having been involved in both years of the MWLESP program\(^{139}\), can you explain how this year’s program is different than last year? What affect have these changes had on the program? —To evaluate the effectiveness of the three phase Outdoor Education Model

3. In your opinion, what was your role at Muskoka Woods? For example, did you see yourself as a facilitator, a mentor, a friend to these youth? Explain. —To evaluate if the program’s philosophy and learning objectives were communicated to key stakeholders (i.e., student-leaders)

Pre-outdoor experience
(Relates to sub-problem #1 and #2)

4. How prepared did you feel for your role in the MWLESP program prior to arriving? Was the informational material you received beneficial? Explain. —To evaluate the MWLESP program (specifically the pre-outdoor experience phase)

5. Comment on how you could have been better prepared for your role in the MWLESP program and what to expect while there? —To evaluate the MWLESP program (specifically the pre-outdoor experience phase)

6. Please share highlights and/or memorable moments from the Muskoka Woods experience. What is the significance of these memories/highlights? - Debriefing question that may also provide insight into student responsiveness to the outdoor experience

7. What were the strengths of the program? What are areas of concern and/or areas needing improvement related to the MWLESP program? Explain. —Evaluate the outdoor experience

\(^{139}\) In 2005 the MWLESP program was piloted by two “core city” high schools belonging to the WECDSB. This question will only be asked of subjects were involved in the program for 2 years.
8. What were some of the challenges of being a student-leader? Do you feel that students respected you? Do you feel that teachers respected you? Explain.

- Evaluate the outdoor experience and examine potential barriers for expanding participant’s pre-existing naturalized beliefs

9. What changes did you see in the students at Muskoka Woods? When did you see these changes start to emerge? In your opinion, what led to these changes? Explain. -- To examine student responsiveness to the intervention strategy

10. Please share any recommendations that can help to improve the MWLESP program for future participants. Please explain the rationale for these recommendations. -- To provide an active say in the shaping of the MWLESP program to key stakeholders

**SST SPECIFIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Pre-outdoor Experience**

1. What role did you have in how program-related decisions were made prior to the Muskoka Woods experience? Comment on how decisions were made? Did you feel included in the decision making process? Explain. -- To examine how a school-based protective intervention strategy is created

2. Describe the student-related preparations that went into preparing for the MWLESP program? Describe the program-related preparations that went into preparing for the MWLESP program?

3. Looking back to all the preparations that went into the MWLESP program, how much of a time commitment did the program require of you?

4. Having devoted _____ amount of time to the MWLESP program, comment on how that affected your ability to effectively do your SST role? For example, were you able to fulfill your responsibilities to other students who were not connected to the MWLESP program? Explain

5. How can the pre-outdoor experience be improved to find a better balance between program/student related preparations for the MWLESP program that need to occur and the regular day to day responsibilities of your SST role?

**Outdoor Experience**

( Relates to sub-problem #2 and #3)

1. Comment on how and why decisions were made during the Muskoka Woods experience. What affect did some of the Facilitation Team’s decisions have on the program and students’ experiences within the program? For example: the
schedule change from group 1 to group 2 – what were some of the benefits and limitations of that schedule change? What information can be taken from that schedule change to improve future years of the program? – Question relates to the underlying values shaping the MWLESP program and to examine how those values shaped decision makers’ actions during the three day excursion.

2. What changes did you see in your students at Muskoka Woods? When did you see these changes start to emerge? In your opinion, what led to these changes? – To examine students’ responsiveness to the outdoor experience.

3. Comment on the SP2’s role at Muskoka Woods? Did their involvement in the program enhance or have a negative affect the Muskoka Woods experience? In your opinion, what affect do you think the Muskoka Woods experience had on them? Explain. – To examine student responsiveness to the outdoor experience.

Follow-up program questions
(Relates to sub-problem #1, #2 and #3)

1. What kinds of follow-up supports (i.e., resources) do your students need? – Examine the three phase Outdoor Education Model.

2. What are your hopes for Take the L.E.A.P? What activities would you like to see built into this program? Explain – To examine how an intervention strategy is created.
Appendix D  
Student-Leader Questionnaires

Name:_____________  Role: Tribe Leader/Activity Leader  Group: 1 / 2

I understand that the information provided from the MWLESP Student Leader Evaluation Form will be used to improve future years of the MWLESP program as well as in the study: Outdoor Education as Protective School-based Intervention for "At-Risk" Youth: A Case Study Examining the Muskoka Woods Leadership Experience for "Students of Promise." My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of a form outlining the aforementioned information.

Signature of Subject  ____________________________  Date  ____________________________

Pre-Muskoka Woods Experience

1. How prepared did you feel for your role in the MWLESP program prior to arriving? Was the informational material you received beneficial? Explain.
   ____________________________  Relates to sub-problem #1 and #2

2. Comment on how we (the Facilitation Team) could have better prepared you for your role in the MWLESP program and what to expect while there?
   ____________________________  Relates to Sub-problem #1 and #2

Muskoka Woods Experience

3. Please share highlights and/or memorable moments from your involvement in the MWLESP program. If possible explain the significance of these memories/highlights for you.
   ____________________________  Relates to main problem, sub-problem #2

4. Please share areas of concern and/or areas needing improvement related to the MWLESP program. Explain.
   ____________________________  Relates to sub-problem #1

5. How could this experience have been improved for participating Students of Promise (SP1’s)? For participating Student Leaders? Explain.
   ____________________________  Relates to sub-problem #1 and #2

6. If applicable, comment on your experience as a “co-tribe” leader – what were some of the benefits and challenges of sharing the leadership responsibilities with a High School Student Leader (SP2)?
   ____________________________  Relates to sub-problem #1, #2 and #3

7. Please comment on the teachers’ role and participation in your tribe – how did he/she contribute to the tribe? Affect tribe dynamics? Participate in the tribe? Other comments.
   ____________________________  Relates to sub-problem #1 and #2
8. Which participating students (SP1's) showed leadership potential during the three
day excursion and should be approached about returning next year to the
MWLESP program as “co-tribe leaders” (SP2’s)? Explain
Relates to sub-problem #3

9. Please share any thoughts you have about or towards the MWLESP program.
Relates to main problem

Follow-up Involvement
10. Are you interested in continuing your involvement in the MWLESP program and
participating in its follow up activities?

11. Would you be available to participate in a focus group meeting (at a later time) to
discuss how to improve the MWLESP program for future participants?

12. Are you interested in possibly returning to the MWLESP program next year as a
Student Leader? Can we contact you at a later time to discuss this opportunity
with you?
Appendix E
Conceptual Baggage

In their book, Kirby and McKenna (1989) suggest that when doing research from the margins, the researcher should examine his or her own assumptions and personal experiences and bring them into the research process. The authors suggest that the researcher explore his or her “conceptual baggage” in order to understand how his or her life experiences have led to interest in a particular research area. I find writing this “conceptual baggage” section extremely difficult and it is the part of this writing process that I have been most dreading. I find it very uncomfortable to write about my life experiences, mainly because it requires me to become vulnerable and own experiences that I have avoided for most of my adult life.

As was suggested by Kirby and McKenna (1989), through this self-exploration process I have begun to recognize how my personal experiences have shaped my interest in and desire to work with “at-risk” and disadvantaged youth. In many ways, the youth that I am passionate about working with are mirror images of my own experience as an “at-risk” youth. Looking back, I realize that my parents were not ready for the responsibility of being parents because they did not know how to care for or provide for themselves. It has taken me many years to realize that my parents were really just “kids” who were trying to raise their own kids; this is what caused them to struggle in their effort to raise me and my brother. Our home was filled with fighting and violence. As a result, I spent a lot of time moving between my parent’s home and that of my grandparents or other temporary families. Growing up, I was embarrassed and ashamed of my family situation and the fact that I knew my grandparents better than my own
parents. However, now as an adult I feel incredibly blessed to have such a special relationship with my grandparents and feel honoured to have had the opportunity to be raised by them.

My family and I lived in what we (friends and I) referred to as the “ghetto,” which was a low-income/subsidized housing complex. In and around our community, there were very few opportunities for change and/or personal advancement, as most people were unemployed and had some type of dependency on social assistance, drugs and/or alcohol. Our community was fairly hopeless. Many of the families that lived in the community had been there most of their lives and now, when I return to the neighbourhood to visit friends, many of the faces are the same.

Most of us kids from the neighbourhood did not have much supervision or rules, and therefore we were free to do what we wanted, when we wanted. Unfortunately, there were very few structured activities for us to do – our community did not have a playground, the community sport leagues were too expensive, and participating in the after-school programs was not a popular choice amongst our peer group. The lack of structured activities and supervision created an ideal situation for us to become involved in delinquent activities. One of the few “luxuries” that our community did have was a basketball court in the middle of our courtyard, where we would play “pick-up” (basketball) for hours. When I was not out causing or getting into trouble, I could usually be found out on the basketball court working on my skills for the next game of pick-up. I was also secretly hoping that one day basketball would give me the opportunity to move out of my neighbourhood and experience a life different from, or rather better than, the one I was living.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
I often question how and why my life became so different from that of my childhood friends. My only explanation is that by the grace of God I was blessed with an opportunity to play basketball. This gift provided me with new and different choices than the ones my friends were given. I am in no way smarter, better or more deserving than my friends but rather had an opportunity, at an early age, to be exposed to different possibilities. For many years I resisted and rebelled against these different opportunities because I feared becoming a “sell out.” However, I now recognize the incredible privilege that I have been given and the responsibility that I have to give back to my community and provide others with the same opportunity that I was given.

These different opportunities began in elementary school, where instead of attending the under-funded and under-staffed local community school, I had the opportunity to bus forty-five minutes to a French-immersion school located in an affluent community. Unlike the school my friends were attending, I was able to participate in intramural and school teams, as well as attend field-trips and cultural programs. The junior high and high school feeder schools were also located within affluent communities that had highly successful sport programs, which further exposed me to organized basketball opportunities.

Throughout my elementary and junior high school experience, I was constantly getting into trouble at school. I spent more time in the principal’s office than I did attending class. It was only during basketball season that I was on my “best behaviour,” as I knew that I would otherwise not be permitted to play on the team. By grade 9, I was on the verge of becoming a high school dropout and fulfilling the “high expectations” that many people (i.e., teachers) had for me. Most of my friends had already left school...
and I was constantly in need of money to support the lifestyle I was living. As I was
preparing to drop out of school, the varsity basketball coach approached me with an
invitation to play on his team as a freshman (in grade 10). However, my invitation to this
team was conditional on my agreeing to abide by certain expectations. In order to play I
needed to: 1) attend all classes, 2) meet with Coach Brown regularly to discuss my
progress and 3) make an effort to become positively involved in the school and
surrounding community. Looking back, I realize that Coach Brown was the first person
in my life to explicitly tell me that my life mattered and to create rules and boundaries
that I was accountable to uphold. If I did not comply with the rules that Coach Brown had
established, then I would not be allowed to participate in the one thing that truly brought
me sincere joy.

I decided that I would give school another try and began playing varsity
basketball for Coach Brown. During that first year, fulfilling my responsibilities was very
difficult and I spent more time breaking the rules than I did following them; and yet,
despite my efforts to disappoint Coach Brown, he patiently continued to walk alongside
me, guiding and mentoring my actions and decisions. It is because of the guidance of
Coach Brown and friendships with teammates, that following the team rules and making
healthy lifestyle choices eventually became natural and something that I wanted to do
rather than something I had to do. Playing on the varsity basketball team was a significant
turning point in my life and has been instrumental is helping me become who I am today.

The positive changes that were occurring in my life as a result of my involvement
with basketball led me to start working at a Christian summer camp (Camp Koinonia). As
with basketball, my involvement with camp has also been one of the most significant
influences in my life, as the people and experiences have profoundly shaped my life. I was first drawn to camp because it was a safe place to stay during the summer and allowed me to interact with positive influences, rather than my regular peer group. Working at camp eventually led me to make a commitment to become a Christian and subsequently I have spent the last ten summers serving there in various roles. Camp Koinonia was the first place that I called home and was one of the few places I felt safe – the other place was on the basketball court. To this day I am still actively involved at camp, thereby ensuring that other staff/campers have an opportunity to get away to a safe nurturing environment and to be cared for in the same way I was.

It was through my involvement at camp that I discovered my passion for teaching and working with “at-risk” youth. However, it was because of my participation in basketball that I was able to pursue post-secondary education. Growing up, I did not expect to even complete high school let alone believe that university was a realistic option. However, through basketball and the athletic scholarships that I had received, I was able turn the passion I gained from camp for working with kids and my interest in sport into a teaching degree. I am deeply committed to using my own experiences and to return to my community (and similar communities) in order to care for and provide other “at-risk” youth with an opportunity to experience life differently than the way they currently imagine for themselves.

The Next Chapter...

Writing this thesis has truly been a journey of self-discovery. I began this journey with the intent of expanding the boundaries in which others live, but somewhere during
this process my own boundaries gradually began to shift, expand and be transformed to the point where possibilities that I had never previously imagined, now do not seem so unimaginable. I’ve spent a large part of my life angry and believing that my past defined me, which is why I was so terrified of writing this conceptual baggage chapter – because I’d be laying it out there for everyone to read. Now as this journey is coming to an end, it’s still uncomfortable being vulnerable, but having an understanding of Duality of Structure, I am now able to see that my past does not define me. Rather, it has shaped me into who I am, what I believe, my interests, my passions and ultimately what I want to do with my life. At some point during this journey I discovered that I am more than a basketball player with a troubled past and a passion for working with “at-risk” youth.

And, despite how incredibly challenging and exhausting this thesis writing process and grad school in general has been, I’ve actually come to realize that I like school – and for the first time - I’m able to admit that I’m choosing to be in school because I wanted to be here, not because I have to be here to play basketball. So, as I prepare to close this chapter of my life and move into the next one, I truly don’t know what lies ahead or even which part of this beautiful country I will call home. But, I do know that I am leaving Windsor a better person, who has more understanding, compassion and empathy towards people rather than anger and bitter judgments. The possibilities seem endless and I’m excited for the unknown that lies ahead – wherever and whatever that may be!
Appendix F
Results Organization Chart

Participants' Perspectives

1. Overall Experience

2. SP1 Responsiveness
   i) Varied Responsiveness
   ii) Photo Elicitation
   iii) Program Elements
   iv) Expanded Naturalized Beliefs

3. Relationship Building
   i) Peer Relationships
   ii) SP1-SP2 Relationships
   iii) SP1-Teacher Relationships

4. Activities
   i) “Challenge by Choice” Activities
   ii) SP1 Responsiveness to reflective activities

5. Student-Leader Program Involvement
   i) Student-Leaders' Role within the MWLESP program
   ii) Program Experience
   iii) SP2 Involvement
   iv) SP2 Leadership Stories
6. Program Structure
i) General Impressions

ii) Pre-Outdoor Experience
Preparations
Pre-experience Relationship Building

iii) Outdoor Experience
Debriefing Session

iv) Follow-Up Programming
Follow-up initiatives

v) Decision Making
Concerns

vi) Program Strengths

vii) Program Concerns
Teacher Involvement
Activity Leaders
Tribe Dynamics

7. Suitability of Grade 9 Students
i) Evaluation Criteria for MWLESP program

ii) Future of the MWLESP program

8. MWLESP Program Recommendations
Appendix G

Practical Recommendations for the MWLESP Program

Following the completion of an extensive analysis, in which I reviewed information stemming from a number of different sources and solicited the input of various stakeholders involved in the MWLESP program, a number of practical program recommendations emerged that the WECDSB and its decisions makers may wish to consider for the 2007-08 MWLESP program. What follows in this section is a detailed description of these program recommendations as offered by the 2006-07 MWLESP program participants, including suggestions by SP1’s, SP2’s, University of Windsor student-leaders, SST’s, and myself (a current member of the MWLESP facilitation team). In keeping with the three phase structural framework applied by the MWLESP program (pre-outdoor experience, outdoor experience, and follow-up), the recommendations presented in this section have been classified according to those three phases to maintain consistency and to be more “reader-friendly” for those individuals considering possibly implementing these recommendations. Recommendations that did not specifically pertain to one of the three phases were placed in a separate category called “general program recommendations.”

Pre-outdoor Experience Recommendations

1. When possible, SST’s should select SP1’s to participate in the MWLESP program using a grouping system (i.e., system used at high school #2). This would allow for relationships between participants to be established prior to the three day excursion and maintained following the outdoor experience. The grouping selection format also allows SST’s to delegate some of the program-related
responsibilities to the teachers of these students, who will likely also be attending
the excursion, thereby allowing the SST’s more time to fulfill their
responsibilities with the other students who are not part of the MWLESP
program.

2. More pre-outdoor experience training and preparations are needed for student-leaders, which would include providing student-leaders an opportunity to meet
and interact with their co-tribe leaders and participating teachers. During the
training sessions, each participant’s role in the program should be clearly defined
so that each person has an understanding of the roles and responsibilities others
have in the program. In addition, student-leaders and teachers should both be
provided with clearly established SP1 behavioural expectations with suggested
strategies for how to implement these expectations and how to address
inappropriate student behaviour. It is equally imperative that SP1’s be explained
these behavioural expectations and have an understanding of the possible
consequences of their actions, should they deliberately choose to act
inappropriately at any time throughout their involvement in the MWLESP
program.

3. Re-evaluate the teacher selection process currently being used by the MWLESP
program to select teachers as co-participants for the three day excursions.
Teachers who are invited to participate in the MWLESP program should have a
pre-existing rapport with the SP1’s and should be willing to be active participants
in the experience, rather than selecting teachers to participate in the program
because they are in need of “professional development” or because they teach subjects that require no supply teacher coverage.

4. Provide on-site training opportunities for activity-leaders to familiarize them with the Muskoka Woods Sport Resort facilities, the various activities and what their roles will be in those various activities. Consideration should also be given by decision makers concerning how to better utilize the activity leaders, as many of them reported that they felt disengaged from the experience and that at some activities they believed that their presence was not needed. One possible suggestion would be to provide on-site training to activity-leaders and familiarize them with how to assist the Muskoka Woods staff in each of the activities that will be offered over the course of the three day excursion. This would then allow activity-leaders to be placed in a tribe, where they would rotate through the different activities with their tribe throughout the day, and at each activity site assist in the activity, rather than staying fixed at one activity site each day. Logistically, this would require that 12 university students, preferably an even male/female split-ratio, are available to stay the entire week to receive the necessary on-site training and provide the activities.

5. Meet tribe members before the Muskoka Woods excursion and participate in a tribe-building activity together (i.e., initiative task, tribal flags and/or cheer). No consensus amongst participants in the MWLESP program was reached as to whether the whole tribe should meet beforehand or simply hold a meeting between the teachers, SP2’s and university student leaders. However, drawing on my past camp experience along with the literature pertaining to outdoor education
programs, I strongly believe that it would be extremely beneficial for all tribe members to meet and engage in some type of activity prior to leaving for their three day Muskoka Woods excursion. Barr and Parrett (1995) also explain that initiating the relationship building process prior to the outdoor experience can enhance students’ experience and increase the likelihood that relationships between the student and a caring adult can be maintained upon returning from the outdoor excursion.

6. More information about SP1’s should be provided to student leaders prior to arriving to Muskoka Woods, especially pertinent health and behavioural information. For example, awareness of medical concerns enables student-leaders to be better prepared to address the needs of the students. However, as noted by one of the university student-leaders, only the most pertinent SP1 information should be provided (i.e., medical and/or behavioural concerns). Otherwise, the risk of student-leaders forming negative pre-existing beliefs and/or judgments of the SP1’s increases, which may adversely affect the student’s Muskoka Woods experience.

7. The SP2’s need more training and prior interaction with university student-leaders - especially if one of the aims of this interaction is to facilitate a mentorship-type relationship between the two leaders.

Outdoor Experience Recommendations

1. Extend meal times with fewer interruptions for student-leaders, as these are some of the few downtime opportunities that participants are given throughout the day.
In addition, meal times were identified as an informal opportunity where relationship building between participants transpired.

2. Provide daily debriefing meetings for student-leaders that are not rushed and do not cut into the short meal time available. One of the suggested meeting times for student-leaders could be during cabin free-time, which would then require that either teachers or facilitation team members take on supervision duties so that the student-leaders could meet.

3. Provide more debriefing and downtime opportunities for SP1’s rather than trying to exhaust students by keeping them active all day long. The chances that SP1’s will be more responsive to the learning objectives that the MWLESP program is designed to promote is likely to increase if students have an opportunity to reflect upon what they are doing and make connections between lessons learned during the outdoor experience and their daily lives. However, the busyness and fullness of the schedule over the course of the three day experience, combined with the lack of downtime or reflection opportunities, limits this type of transference of learning from occurring.

4. Provide more time for evening cabin activities, because these were meaningful activities that allowed for good relationship building, processing and debriefing opportunities for SP1’s and student leaders.

5. Provide student leaders with better on-site orientation – give every leader their own copy of the site map and make more copies of the schedule available to leaders and make copies for the cabins.
6. Eliminate the night hike as it was considered a safety concern by teachers and student-leaders. In addition, SP1's revealed that during the night hike, they felt like "prisoners in a chain-gang" because they had been clipped to a rope together with carabineers and instructed to stay together (Steven, personal communication, February 22, 2007). The fact that students felt imprisoned is completely contrary to the learning objective that the activity was designed to achieve - which was to promote tribe unity and teamwork by working together to complete the hike. One possibility that the facilitation team may wish to consider is an afternoon hike instead of a night hike. This would provide participants with an opportunity to take in the natural scenery, a component of the outdoor experience that was repeatedly identified by SP1's as a highlight of their experience.

Follow-up Programming Recommendations

1. Offer all participants an opportunity to meet and debrief immediately following their return from the Muskoka Woods experience.

2. Have follow-up programming structures in place prior to leaving for Muskoka Woods, so that student follow-up (i.e., debriefing opportunities, "Take the L.E.A.P." initiative) can begin immediately following students' return to the school - this will increase the sustainability of the benefits participants derived from their outdoor experience.

General MWLESP Program Recommendations

1. Reconsider the age group of the students that the MWLESP program is targeting; this would require that the program's decision makers reconsider the aim of the program and its learning objective. Apart from me, the consensus amongst
facilitation team members is that grade 11 students are the “appropriate” age group for the MWLESP program rather than the grade 9 students. However, if the MWLESP program is offered to grade 11 students there will be no senior students (SP2’s) involved in the program, which minimizes the students-mentoring-students component, which was an integral component of this year’s program and provided SP1’s with sustainable benefits from the experience.

2. Decision makers need to continue to make a concerted effort towards differentiating the MWLESP program from the grade eight MWLE program.

3. SST’s should have a more active role in the decision making process.

4. Consideration should be given to the possibility of inviting some student leaders to stay at Muskoka Woods for the entire week – to lead both three day excursions. However, not every leader should or needs to stay up the entire week, because as suggested by one student-leader, having new leaders come to Muskoka Woods infuses new energy into the program and minimizes the tendency for program leaders to compare the groups, the programs, student responsiveness and ultimately the experiences had by participants.

3. Based on how much student leaders valued the information that they received prior to the Muskoka Woods excursion, along with their suggestion for even more training, it is my recommendation that serious consideration be given by decision makers to hire a student-leader coordinator to oversee student-leader recruitment, training, communication and be a support to these leaders prior to, during and following the Muskoka Woods excursion – especially if one of the aims is to keep student-leaders involved throughout the follow-up process. This position could be
a Graduate Assistant position held either by an MHK student or possibly done as an internship position in conjunction with some of the other responsibilities that I attended to this year as part of my master’s thesis (e.g., Facilitation team member, coordinating the follow-up initiatives).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME:</th>
<th>Marsha-Lynne Murdock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLACE OF BIRTH:</td>
<td>Calgary, Alberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR OF BIRTH:</td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oak Park High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba 1995-1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba 1999-2003 BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brandon University, Brandon, Manitoba 2003-2005 B.Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario 2005-2007 MHK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>