OUTDOOR EDUCATION PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Bringing the Classroom Outdoors: An Analysis of Toronto Educator Perceptions and Challenges

By

Karina C. New

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Copyright by Karina New, April 2016
Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that contribute to how three Toronto educators perceived and implemented outdoor education. Data for the study was collected through a literature review and qualitative interviews with three educators. A large body of research suggests that outdoor education can be a powerful tool for student learning and wellbeing, yet there are numerous areas where teachers require support in bringing their class outdoors as revealed through the interview process. While the participants each had positive personal experiences in the outdoors, felt that children truly benefitted from the outdoors, and suggested that outdoor education was of growing necessity to children, there were several barriers to outdoor education that stemmed from teachers’ perceptions, a struggle to connect outdoor lessons to the curriculum, a lack of outdoor space, and issues with school administration. Based on the research findings, I propose that teacher motivation be improved through professional workshops and increased collaboration, access to quality outdoor space be found at TDSB’s outdoor education centers or through school endeavours to green the school ground, and that clear practice-based outdoor education platforms and further research surrounding outdoor education policies should be conducted to help create meaningful provincial guidelines for future practice.

Key Words: outdoor education, Toronto, educators, teacher perceptions, teacher challenges
Acknowledgements

It is with great happiness and pleasure that I am able to conclude this research paper. I wish to thank a number of my colleagues and mentors who helped me along the way. Firstly I would like to thank Cathy Galberg and Jason Bellinger for opening my eyes to the world of outdoor education and the incredible effects it can have on children. I would like to thank Patrick Finnessy for introducing me to the power of qualitative research. I wish to acknowledge Nikki Karpinski, Peter Joong and Erin Sperling for the long hours of editing, revision, and advice throughout the writing process. Of course, I give my sincerest thanks to my research participants who volunteered the time and thoughtful insights that completely brought my research to life.
# Table of Contents

Abstract: ........................................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... 3  
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................ 7  
  1.0 Introduction to the Research Topic ........................................................................... 7  
  1.1 Purpose and Significance of Study ........................................................................... 9  
  1.2 Research Question .................................................................................................. 10  
  1.3 Personal Background and Interest in Topic ............................................................ 11  
  1.4 Overview of Research Paper .................................................................................. 15  
  1.5 Definition of Terms ............................................................................................... 15  
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................. 17  
  2.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 17  
  2.1 Why are Children Staying Indoors? ....................................................................... 17  
  2.2 Outdoor Education Theory ....................................................................................... 20  
    2.2.1 Experience-Based ............................................................................................. 21  
    2.2.2 Nature-Based .................................................................................................... 22  
    2.2.3 Practice-Based or Multi-Dimensional ............................................................. 23  
  2.3 The Benefits of Outdoor Learning .......................................................................... 25  
    2.3.1 Physical Health ............................................................................................... 25  
    2.3.2 Dynamic Learning ........................................................................................... 27  
    2.3.3 Mental Wellbeing ............................................................................................ 29  
    2.3.4 Environmental Awareness ............................................................................. 30  
  2.4 The Concerns and Challenges Faced by Educators .............................................. 31  
    2.4.1 Timing and Resources .................................................................................... 32  
    2.4.2 Educator Perceptions ....................................................................................... 33  
    2.4.3 Liability .......................................................................................................... 34  
  2.5 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 35  
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................... 37  
  3.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 37  
  3.1 Research Procedures ............................................................................................... 37  
  3.2 Instruments of Data Collection .............................................................................. 39
3.3 Participants ......................................................................................................................................... 40
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria ............................................................................................................................ 40
3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment .................................................................................................... 40
3.3.3 Participant Biographies .................................................................................................................... 41
3.4 Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 43
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures ................................................................................................................... 43
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths .......................................................................................... 44
3.7 Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 45

Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS ............................................................................................................. 47
4.0 Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 47
4.1 Benefits of Outdoor Learning .............................................................................................................. 48
4.1.1 Lasting Experiences .......................................................................................................................... 48
4.1.2 Rich Programming Opportunities .................................................................................................... 50
4.1.3 Student Wellbeing .......................................................................................................................... 51
4.2 Outdoor Learning as a Necessity ......................................................................................................... 54
4.2.1 Growing Need for the Outdoors ....................................................................................................... 54
4.2.2 Issues with Responsibility .............................................................................................................. 55
4.3 Challenges and Barriers ...................................................................................................................... 57
4.3.1 Curriculum and Planning ................................................................................................................ 57
4.3.2 Space as a Resource ........................................................................................................................ 58
4.3.3 Administrative Barriers .................................................................................................................. 60
4.4 Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 62

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION ............................................................................................................................. 66
5.0 Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 66
5.1 Overview of key findings ..................................................................................................................... 67
5.2 Implications .......................................................................................................................................... 69
5.2.1 Implications to the Educational Community .................................................................................. 69
5.2.2 Personal Implications ..................................................................................................................... 73
5.3 Recommendations ............................................................................................................................... 74
5.4 Areas for Further Research ............................................................................................................... 77
5.5 Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 78
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 80

APPENDICES
Appendix A: Interview Questions .................................................................................. 84
Appendix B: Letter of Consent ......................................................................................... 86

TABLES
Table 1.0 Case Study Participants .................................................................................. 42
Table 2.0 Summary of Key Themes and Links to Literature Review ................................. 63
Bringing the Classroom Outdoors: An Analysis of Toronto Educator Perceptions and Challenges

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Topic

Children in North America have become increasingly dependent on electrical outlets and finding answers with the click of a button. Consequently, children are losing the opportunity to be active, and to learn from hands-on experiences. Exploring the outside world and searching for answers directly from nature has been the traditional way to make discoveries for thousands of years, yet it is undeniable that times have changed. In the last few decades, children have become increasingly confined to indoor learning environments like the classroom or the computer lab. As a result, attention spans are shortening given that students no longer have to persevere to discover answers: they can simply access information online at the click of a mouse (Bird, 2007). Many children have lost the desire to actively explore the outdoors in favour of using technology (The Outdoor Foundation, 2010). In fact for some children, this increasing disconnect with nature has caused the outdoors to seem like an unfamiliar or even unfriendly setting (Louv, 2005). School conventions, timing issues, and the convenience of technology may mean that children are receiving fewer opportunities to discover the world outside their doors and all there is to learn from it.

Too often, students are restricted to a closed classroom, absorbing information from textbooks or board notes. Teachers have a limited time to deliver the school curriculum; the classroom is viewed as the most standard and practical way to reach these goals. Furthermore, while environmental education is highlighted across the Ontario curriculum, there is no compulsory requirement for outdoor education (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). For
this reason, students are often missing the opportunity to learn beyond the classroom. Yet staying indoors need not be the only way, or the best way, for students to learn. In fact, it is widely accepted that outdoor experiential learning can bring significant academic and behavioural benefits to children. Research shows that there are fundamental benefits to spending more time outside: leaving the classroom can create a more dynamic learning environment, help to increase environmental awareness in youth, and benefit students in both physical and mental health (Bird, 2007). Yet Ontario educators still express that it is a challenge to take the classroom outside (Tan & Pedretti, 2010). Why is this occurring, and how can teachers look past conventional teaching practices to instead incorporate more lessons out of doors?

The bottom line is: children will only receive the opportunity to go outside if their teachers are motivated and have the tools to do so. But little is known about how Ontario teachers perceive outdoor education and the driving forces behind their teaching decisions. What strategies and resources do teachers have at their disposal, and conversely, what are the challenges that are still holding teachers back? The aim of this paper is to unveil the attitudes and actions of Toronto District School Board (TDSB) teachers pertaining to outdoor programming. Such explorations, including the motivations and restrictions faced by teachers in the field of outdoor education, may help to improve pedagogy in the future.

This report explores outdoor education practices in Ontario classrooms in two primary ways: an exploration of relevant literature, and a case study analysis of 3 TDSB teachers who have agreed to share their point of view. The literature review discusses outdoor education in greater detail, and provides a framework for the case studies based on existing research. The case studies will give a real-world glimpse at current attitudes and practices of Toronto teachers. More specifically, the study will deconstruct the motivations of each teacher in order to
understand whether or not they view outdoor learning as an important resource, their instructional techniques, the challenges or barriers they face, and their needs for the future. Through the literature review and case study analysis, readers will gain a better understanding of outdoor education, and how to better equip educators for bringing their classrooms outside.

Teachers hold the power to shape student learning and motivations. Without proper understanding of their needs and attitudes, it will be nearly impossible to create positive change. As such, my role as a researcher is to tell the stories of Toronto educators as a means to explore the reality of teacher perceptions, introduce new and valuable ideas, or alter traditional teaching perspectives.

1.1 Purpose and Significance of Study

Why should educators and parents be concerned with outdoor education? If teachers can deliver curriculum in an efficient and concrete way to students within classrooms, is it truly necessary to face the challenges of taking children outside to learn? Teachers need time and additional resources to bring a class outside on a regular basis. Teachers are also conscious that the outdoor environment poses more factors to student safety and supervision compared to remaining in a controlled indoor space (Foster & Linney, 2007). However, I argue that going outside can have potentially huge benefits to a student that simply cannot be replicated in the classroom. Outdoor education can benefit students academically, produce more environmentally-driven citizens, and has direct impacts on physical and mental health (Bird, 2007). Educators must decide if it is worth facing the above constraints to promote such important learning benefits.

This report is prepared as a resource to inform educators, parents, and the general public about the difficulties faced by Toronto teachers. Teachers have a direct impact on student
wellbeing and academic success. As mentioned above, it is understood that the outdoors can supplement student learning and health, but are educators genuinely using these facts to shape their teaching? Very little Canadian research is available to help answer this question.

By exploring the 3 case studies summarized in this report, I hope to unveil information that may fill the gap of knowledge mentioned previously. The aim of my research is to explain existing phenomena in schools, and to use this knowledge to reshape or advance current instructional techniques so that children may have the best possible tools for learning. It is essential to recognize both the mindset of educators and also the potential obstacles that they face in order to foster such change.

Above all, the primary goal of my research is to provide voice for educators so that they can be given the support needed to help students grow. Outdoor education may one day be more attainable as part of a child’s learning routine if instructor attitudes and actions are better expressed and understood.

1.2 Research Question

While there is a large amount of research describing the benefits of outdoor education, there is much less exploration of the actual motivations and actions of educators, especially in the Toronto area. As a researcher, it is my intention to explore outdoor education through the current practices of teachers, especially those in urban-based schools. Urban-based schools face a unique challenge in leaving the classroom because natural and safe outdoor learning areas can be harder to locate compared to more rural environments.

The attitudes and actions of teachers play a crucial role in shaping student learning. I am interested to find out how Toronto teachers view outdoor education, what actions, if any, they already use to go outdoors, and what factors might be holding them back. Thus, the research
question posed is: “What factors contribute to how three Toronto educators perceive and implement outdoor education?” By addressing this question, I hope to uncover the obstacles that teachers face in incorporating outdoor programming into their routine. I also hope to shed some light on the benefits and constraints of outdoor education as seen through teachers’ direct experiences.

The above research question will act as a guide for my interviews with each teacher. Furthermore, it will also act as a starting point to explore further sub-questions. For instance, to fully understand the attitudes of my participants I must also uncover their needs, misconceptions, strengths, and future goals. Simply put, I wish to know what teachers are currently doing, why they are doing it, and what they still need in the realm of outdoor education.

Overall, by questioning what motivates and challenges teachers, I hope to build a better understanding of how to make outdoor education more widely accepted and implemented. I hope that in answering my research question, I will provide a starting point to foster change in Toronto schools.

1.3 Personal Background and Interest in Topic

My earliest happy memories were spent outdoors. In kindergarten I remember walking to the park down the street with my siblings, or to the pool where I would spend hours happily splashing in shallow water. My dad would often take me and my siblings to a nearby reservoir where we would play with bulrushes and nibble on clover petals to taste the nectar. I remember owning a book with nature activities that I loved; I learned to collect clay from creek beds, or watch worms make tunnels in soil through a clear glass jar. As we grew older, my siblings and I would spend weekends rolling logs over to find salamanders and insects, or watching ants in the
front yard gathering food and building colonies. We made forts in the forest and waded in swamp water in rubber boots. In the summers my parents would take our family canoeing and camping. These outdoor explorations truly shaped my childhood. My siblings and I would come home in the evenings hungry and stained with dirt, our minds racing with new discoveries.

One of my fondest moments in elementary school was a field trip to an outdoor education center. We were given nets and plastic trays to collect pond creatures and plants to look at under a magnifier. It was my first time tasting fresh maple syrup, and dissecting owl pellets with my classmates. It is incredible how much I remember of that day even though it was over a decade ago.

Regrettably, as I entered middle school my interest in going outside began to diminish. It became easier for me to flick on the television or chat with friends online. Going outside seemed exhausting and inconvenient. As soon as computers and the internet entered my life, it seemed to consume almost all of my free time. Aside from the occasional field trip or Phys-ed class, we were rarely brought outside during class time. My lack of interest in the outdoors during free time coupled with primarily indoor learning at school meant I spent only a tiny fraction of my day outside.

Later in life, my growing interests in the field of education lead me to work at an engineering and science summer camp. I noticed that children, even young students in grades 1 or 2, were constantly engaged in conversations about their phones, iPads, or the latest video games they were playing. When I asked children about their hobbies, almost no one mentioned playing outside. At recess time, I frequently noticed children sitting in clusters playing with portable gaming devices instead of being active. On many occasions, when I told children that we were heading outside for an activity, they groaned and complained, asking if they could stay
inside. I was shocked. I knew that I myself had slowly stopped outdoor play as I grew up, but I didn’t think young elementary students would be so heavily impacted as well. Did students simply not go outdoors anymore?

I completed my undergraduate degree in Environmental Science and Ecology. Many of my classes reinforced and strengthened my love of the outdoors and the natural world. My program made it necessary to spend many hours in the lab and on the computer so I began to cherish the moments where I could be outdoors. Even brief moments outside when cycling to class or performing field work brought familiar feelings of joy, calm, and curiosity. I made the decision to take field courses so I could spend more time out of the classroom and out in nature. For me, the outdoors was a natural source of physical and mental therapy. I began to wonder: if my childhood had not been enriched with outdoor experiences, would I have made the same effort to leave the classroom? Would nature still be inspiring to me, or would I find it uninteresting and unnecessary?

It was during one of my co-op terms that I was truly inspired by outdoor education and its potential to impact student learning and wellbeing. I worked at Durham Forest Centre (DFC), an outdoor environmental education center in Uxbridge, Ontario. I brought students on hikes, taught lessons about biodiversity, led low ropes courses and taught Aboriginal studies. Our goal at DFC was to encourage a sense of community and help students become active and environmentally aware. It was wonderful to inspire children, many of whom had never seen a camp fire or set foot in the woods. The supervising teacher at DFC, Jason, often wore a T-shirt that read: “Ask your teacher to take you outside.” This quote resonates with me to this day. I believe that children crave natural spaces. Even those that are hooked on video games seem to love climbing trees and catching fireflies when given the opportunity. Before coming to DFC, Jason taught grade seven
math. He told me that if his students ever asked to go outside, he would make it happen. This is not to say that teachers should forsake their curriculum goals to instead play in the park. On the contrary, it indicates that academics and the outdoors can go hand in hand, if only the teacher makes that choice. Teachers are a child’s biggest influence in that they decide on how and where to educate students.

Even though their stay at DFC was short, I could see a visible difference between children’s behaviour at the beginning of the week, compared to when they had to go home. I remember one student telling me: “You’re a good teacher. You taught me science but it didn’t feel like a regular boring lesson – it was really fun!” I am confident that I could have delivered the same lesson in a classroom and the student would not have been nearly as engaged. Seeing plants and animals firsthand helped students to better understand concepts because they were genuinely interested. I began to see that the simple act of learning and exploring the outdoors truly benefitted students. But field trips cost money and use up time. Was it possible for teachers to bring strategies used at DFC back to their classes at school? Why shouldn’t students be given the same rich opportunities in their own schoolyards?

Throughout my life, I have been touched by nature, witnessed a growing indifference toward nature, and seen how outdoor education can reconnect students with nature once more. My personal experiences and growing interest in outdoor education have made me wonder how best I can make outdoor programming accessible to Canadian students. Through meeting teachers like Jason, it is my belief that teachers are a key player in facilitating outdoor learning. I believe that the perceptions and struggles that teachers have determine how regularly they can take their class outside. My hope is that through my research, students can be given a better chance for rich outdoor learning opportunities, like the ones I had growing up.
1.4 Overview of Research Paper

My study will explore outdoor education through relevant literature and through case study analysis. To recapitulate, chapter 1 introduces the topic and purpose of study, the research question, and my personal interest in this area of study. The chapters to follow will more closely investigate the concept of outdoor education and teacher involvement. Chapter 2 is a literature review that will examine existing research and studies pertaining to the field of outdoor education. The literature review will focus on outdoor education theories, the benefits of outdoor learning, and common obstacles faced by teachers. Chapter 3 will outline the research methodology used to conduct each case study including recruitment procedures, data collection, ethics, scope, and limitations. Next, chapter 4 will serve to introduce each of the teachers involved in the case studies. It will explore the findings and observations collected in the field during each interview. Finally, chapter 5 will summarize the overall research implications. The final chapter will also provide recommendations for addressing certain challenges and areas for future research.

It should be noted that this report is not a conclusive exploration of all effective strategies and viewpoints pertaining to outdoor education. It can however, serve as a useful and current resource to readers. If interested, readers should seek further readings or online resources to learn more. Some of these resources are mentioned in Chapter 5.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The following is a list of commonly used terms and their meanings as used within the context of this report:
- **Classroom**: Any room or environment utilized for teaching students or supplementing student learning. For example, an outdoor classroom may be a space in the park or schoolyard where a lesson is carried out and students can explore for answers.

- **Educator**: An individual who provides instruction or education to students in one or more subject areas. May be used interchangeably with teacher, facilitator and instructor for the context of this paper.

- **Outdoor Education**: Education for, in, or about the outdoors. This includes any form of learning held in an outdoor environment and is not limited to merely environmental or ecological studies. Environments can be the schoolyard, gardens, outdoor education centers, parks, or wilderness areas. For this paper, outdoor education refers to specific organized activities or programming arranged by an instructor and delivered to a group of students outside of recess or extra-curricular times.

- **Student wellbeing**: The overall health and comfort of a student. This includes but is not limited to: engagement, academic achievement, physical fitness, emotional welfare, behaviour, attitude, happiness, and success.

- **Toronto District School Board (TDSB)**: The board that oversees public schools within the greater Toronto area. It is the largest and one of the most diverse school boards in Canada.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

It is my goal to investigate how Toronto teachers view outdoor education in order to build a better understanding of instructional motivations or techniques used in today’s classrooms. I hope to answer the question: What factors contribute to how Toronto educators perceive and implement outdoor education? In order to answer this question, we must first understand what outdoor education is, and why it is important. From there, we will explore the challenges commonly faced by educators as shown in the current body of research.

Chapter 2 explores outdoor education more deeply through a review of existing literature and research. The chapter will examine four main areas: 1. the reasons as to why children are staying inside more than ever before, 2. the theoretical and practical concepts that define outdoor education, 3. the benefits of outdoor education as shown in research, and finally 4. the challenges that Ontario teachers often face in this field. These explorations will help to provide a context for which to better understand the perceptions and actions shared during my interviews with Toronto teachers (see Chapter 4).

2.1 Why are Children Staying Indoors?

It is arguable that the need for outdoor education in schools is heightened due to the severe lack of outdoor play observed in children today. Both at school and at home, children are spending more time behind closed doors. Over the last few decades, socioeconomic changes and the rapid progression of technology have directly affected the recreational choices that children make. These changes translate to a decreased amount of time spent outdoors. More and more, children choose to watch television or use the computer rather than to engage in active outdoor play. In the USA, a nationwide survey of more than 41000 individuals showed that 46% of youth...
avoided regular outdoor activities due to a lack of time and interest. Furthermore, approximately one third of the participants failed to engage in outdoor recreation whatsoever (The Outdoor Foundation, 2010). It is apparent that many children no longer find time to go outside, and lack interest in doing so. The health and welfare of children is in jeopardy, and will only continue to worsen if more emphasis is not placed on active and outdoor programming.

Nearly one million Canadians between 12 and 19 years of age self-report that they are physically inactive during leisure-time (Statistics Canada, 2014). Not surprisingly, research suggests that high rates of sedentary behaviour are related to the observed decline in physical activity in youth. Sedentary behaviour includes time spent in front of a screen (television, computer, video games), reading, taking transit, and other inactive hobbies (Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011). This type of behaviour has become commonplace for Canadian children in recent years because of advances and availability of technology. Children are not motivated to go outside because it is more convenient to choose indoor, non-active options like video games or television.

Another significant factor that has limited children’s ability to go outside is parental concern for safety. While research documenting this trend is quite limited in Canada, the UK has a much larger body of research into outdoor and nature-related programming. A survey of over 1000 adults and 1000 children (aged 7 to 14) from across the UK showed that children’s ability to play outside was hugely limited by the concerns of their parents (Gleave, 2010). For example, nearly half of the adult participants stated that they would not let their children play outside unless an adult was present to supervise. Parents expressed concern over road accidents and also feared that children would make too much noise. Furthermore, a quarter of the children surveyed reported that they had been scolded by adults for playing ball games in their community (Gleave,
2010). Sadly, a child’s ability to spend time outdoors is often limited by situations outside their control, like parental anxiety. What Richard Louv refers to as “the criminalization of natural play” has become a significant barrier for children in today’s society (Louv, 2005).

A widely publicized report in 2007 showcased how, in just four generations, children in a UK family no longer roamed free outdoors. Dr William Bird reported that in 1919, George, a great-grandfather could walk 6 miles unsupervised to go fishing at eight years old. At the same age, Jack, his son, was allowed to walk for one mile to play in the woods in 1950. In 1979, Vicky, Jack’s daughter, could walk half a mile to the swimming pool. Finally, by 2007, her son Ed at age eight was only allowed to walk 300 yards to the end of his street (Bird, 2007). Vicky admitted that her fear of road accidents, a lack of other children to play with outdoors, and the fear of abduction, or “stranger danger,” contributed to this drastic change in her family’s habits. This trend can be frequently observed in Canadian culture as well, although there is a lack of hard data exploring this topic in depth. In general, a safe assumption is that children are losing the freedom for free roam largely due to overprotection from parents and the popularity of sedentary past-times.

To summarize, socioeconomic changes and the perceptions of parents mean that children are kept indoors more than ever before. Because children have so few opportunities at home to play and to roam outdoors, I argue that organized outdoor education in schools may be the solution in allowing students to experience the experiential benefits that they are missing out on. In the following sections, I will provide evidence as to why outdoor programming is a key component in a child’s education, as well as a contributor to happier, healthier lifestyles.
2.2 Outdoor Education Theory

I have repeatedly mentioned the need for outdoor education, but what exactly does it entail? There have been multiple theories proposed to explain how learning and the outdoors are linked. The historical roots of outdoor education theory date as far back as Ionic and Greek natural philosophers. They believed in “knowledge of the hand” – the knowledge that comes from first hand experiences in authentic natural environments (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998). There was no need for formal outdoor programming in the past as children were naturally spending time outside – for recreation and for work. Renowned philosopher, Aristotle, believed that “three things are needed for education: nature, study and practice.” While these fundamental beliefs about the role of man and nature are considered some of the earliest examples of outdoor experiential learning, contemporary views have arisen with new definitions of outdoor education. Today, outdoor education typically refers to specific organized activities or programming arranged by an instructor and delivered to a group of students. These activities include but are not limited to: outdoor games, open exploration, hikes, field studies, experiments, gardening, or orienteering. In its most simplistic definition, outdoor education is a form of experiential learning “in, about, or for the outdoors” (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958).

For the purpose of this paper, only activities held during structured learning hours will be examined. In other words, recess, personal recreational time, or extracurricular endeavours are not considered. It is important to note that outdoor education is instruction in, for, or about the outdoors; this means that while a lesson can involve specific study of the outdoors, taking children outside just for the sake of being in green space is also a completely acceptable way of taking part in outdoor education for the scope of this study.
To better understand the practice of outdoor education, it is valuable to explore the theoretical frameworks that structure pertinent values and concepts surrounding outdoor learning. There have been numerous theories proposed to explain the mechanisms and effects of outdoor education. Theories range from physiological, ecological, psychological, social to political. Overall, these theories can be generally grouped into three main categories: experience-based, nature-based, and practice-based or multi-dimensional theories (Neill, Theories of Outdoor Education, 2008).

2.2.1 Experience-Based

Experience-based theory, first coined by John Dewey, is one of the most commonly used and recognized theories to guide our understanding of outdoor education. In his well-known book, “Experience and Education,” Dewey performed a critical analysis of traditional education. His ideas have influenced the field of education over the last several decades.

Experience-based theory underlies most other theories of outdoor education because it emphasizes the ability to learn by direct experience; a common distinction between outdoor experiential education and learning from a book. In his book, Dewey emphasized that experience, experiment, purposeful learning, freedom, and progressive education are the guiding factors to education (Dewey, 1938). He argued that social and interactive processes contribute to learning – children are not merely empty boxes to be filled with information, but instead learn by building upon prior knowledge and experiences. Thus, the role of the educator is to guide students by being facilitators of experiential programming. While his theory has been viewed as a keystone guide for experiential pedagogy, its drawback is that it was not developed to pertain directly to
outdoor education, but toward all forms of learning. His theory fails to outline the direct benefits of nature and ecology toward student development and wellbeing.

2.2.2 Nature-Based

In contrast to the broader scope of experience-based theory, nature-based theory revolves closely around the argument that there are deeply-rooted benefits which the natural world has toward human beings. This theory accounts for the unique role that the outdoors plays in helping humans to recognize their place in nature both ecologically and spiritually. Most individuals who have experienced a sense of joy or peace when sitting on the banks of a lake or walking through the woods will agree with nature-based frameworks. Human beings have prospered in a natural setting for tens of thousands of years. It seems only logical that humans should inherently require natural spaces to some degree, and that a sudden loss of natural settings might cause some form of adverse effect. This distinctive concept is the foundation of nature-based theories - they emphasize the importance of direct human engagement within natural environments. Some prominent examples include the “Garden of Eden” theory and “Nature as a Friend” theory (Martin, 1999) which argue that returning to nature is inherently good. Regardless of what direct experimentation can prove, some researchers argue that nature must provide some form of deep-seeded benefit to human physiology and psyche.

Another interesting nature-based theory suggests that outdoor education can bridge the gap between modern Western-world lifestyles with the back-to-basics world with which humans originated. This theory, called “Psycho-evolutionary theory,” is coined by James Neill. Neill is an Australian researcher who studies the phenomena of human change. Neill believes that moving away from technology toward a “re-
engagement of the human being with environments and activities that are more akin to the environments of his/her ancestors and reflected in his/her genetic makeup, could awaken or activate particular types of physical and psychological "indigenous" responses” (Neill, Gray, Ellis-Smith, Bocarro, Sierra, & Desai, 2004). While I see the value of using nature to connect to humankind’s past roots, I believe outdoor education has broader influences beyond this.

While nature-based theories successfully emphasize the benefits of natural environments on human psyche, they have a major shortcoming: most fail to address the influence that educators and program facilitators have toward learning (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). I also question whether outdoor education must be held in strictly “natural” areas. I believe that outdoor education can also be effective in human-made environments like public parks, adventure playgrounds, farms, and gardens for instance.

2.2.3 Practice-Based or Multi-Dimensional

Practice-based theories address the need for practical application – a factor that is lacking in both experiential and nature-based theories. Practice-based theories address the realistic strategies needed to carry out outdoor pedagogy. Not surprisingly, many leading outdoor education organizations, like Outward Bound (Walsh & Golins, 1976) and Evergreen (Evergreen, 2013), choose to develop their own practice-based models to guide their programming. Practice–based models typically outline a number of ideal components and combinations for what is required for a successful outdoor education regime. These components often include the role of: the individual, activities and
ordering, the environment, the instructor, and the community or group. Thus, these theories are seen as multi-dimensional.

Some practice-based theories revolving more specifically around facilitator roles have also been proposed (Priest & Gass, 1997). For instance, the “Adventure Wave” model, widely used in experiential education, calls for facilitators to guide outdoor programming by focusing on a 3-stage instruction cycle: before (‘briefing’), during (‘activity’) and after (‘debriefing’) (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). Research suggests that this form of structured or guided instruction can create a more lasting influence on students. Because they are based on practical guidelines, practice-based theories are often more specific in scope compared to experience- and nature-based theories.

One potential concern about practice-based frameworks is that they may be too structured. While it is valuable to establish a guideline for how outdoor education should be delivered, it may also limit the freedom and spontaneity of certain outdoor activities. For instance, evidence shows that free exploration and play can bring cognitive, social, and health benefits (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005) - an area where less structure or instructor support is required.

In my opinion, despite potential drawbacks, practice-based theory is the most practical model for use in my study concerning Toronto educators. While practice-based theory is focused on instructional techniques, it often includes influence from both experiential and nature-based frameworks as well. Due to its relevance and practicality to classroom educators, a practice-based theory of outdoor education will be used as the framework for this study.
2.3 The Benefits of Outdoor Learning

With the passing of generations, evidence shows that children are roaming outdoors less and less (Bird, 2007). Keeping children inside under constant supervision seems like the most convenient and safest option for many parents and teachers. Should this lack of outdoor time be of concern? An extensive body of evidence has revealed that providing children with natural learning environments can have a significant impact on their wellbeing (Charles & Loge, 2012). A Toronto report claims that children who have access to diverse natural settings in their school grounds are more physically active, more aware of nutrition, more civil to one another and more creative (Bell & Dyment, 2006). The following sections will explore how outdoor education has been directly linked to better physical fitness, academic success, mental health, and more environmentally-driven attitudes.

2.3.1 Physical Health

One obvious consequence of children spending more time indoors is that they lack opportunities for physical activity. The act of moving up and out of seats promotes physical activity that could help to address the growing problems in fitness and fitness related diseases. Phys-Ed need not be the only period in the school day where children are allowed to be active. Outdoor education could be a plausible solution for Canada’s health crisis among children.

Introducing more outdoor education opportunities could help students to meet recommended daily physical activity (DPA) requirements. In 2005, the Ontario government released the DPA policy as part of the Healthy Schools Program. The Policy calls for 20 minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity each school day during instructional time (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Through outdoor
programming, students could better meet the standards outlined by the government. A large-scale study concluded that 88% of individuals aged 5 to 19 failed to meet the guidelines of Canada’s Physical Activity Guide (Canada Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2009). This in turn has contributed to substantial health issues - approximately one in ten Canadian children is clinically obese (Statistics Canada, 2010). In fact, obesity has nearly tripled among children 17 and under over the last 35 years (Sheilds, 2005). Evidence exists that the outdoors can be a cost-effective and valuable strategy for increasing physical activity and preventing obesity (Cleland, Crawford, Baur, Hume, Timperio, & Salmon, 2008). However, more exploration is still required in this field because there are a number of variables that can influence obesity rates: nutrition, exercise, and genetics for instance.

Only 19% of children and youth are meeting the guideline of less than two hours per day of screen time (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2009) which is a huge problem when studies show that overweight groups are more likely to spend two hours or more in front of a screen daily (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2009). Research suggests that children who spend more time outdoors have been proven to be more physically active (Cooper, Page, Wheeler, Hillsdon, Griew, & Jago, 2010), so could outdoor education programs be the key to inspiring students to spend more time on their feet?

Another concerning issue is that frequencies of food allergies and various other health issues like asthma, poor nutrition habits, vitamin D deficiencies, and poor eyesight that have been linked to decreased outdoor time (Charles & Loge, 2012). A growing body of evidence suggests that being outdoors has benefits to physical wellbeing that may not
be replicated indoors. Outdoor programming may offer a viable remedy for sedentary behaviour, lack of physical activity, and a plethora of other health issues.

### 2.3.2 Dynamic Learning

There are countless theories as to how children develop and learn, but as a whole, researchers are recognizing that brains are not fixed, but rather have the potential to grow intellectually. Educators should acknowledge that students need to be challenged and exposed to new ways of learning in order to reach their academic potential. This is what prominent psychologist Carol Dweck refers to as a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006). Thus, it is arguable that students should require a variety of different environments to be successful and to grow as learners.

Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences recognizes that all students have different strengths and abilities when it comes to learning – up to eight types of intelligences! While some students excel at learning from reading and writing, Gardner recognized that students also show strengths in bodily and kinesthetic learning, or possess more naturalistic abilities (Gardner, 1983). Yet the classroom fails to cater to more kinesthetic and naturalistic-oriented individuals. By acknowledging that students have the potential to grow intellectually and that students learn in unique ways, educators should question if the classroom is always providing students with equal opportunities to demonstrate their strengths. Outdoor experiential programming provides a rich learning atmosphere where children can move away from traditional learning methods, and see the curriculum from new angles.
I have frequently observed that when students are engaging in experiential learning, they regularly draw connections and are quick to build a sense of curiosity toward curriculum subjects. What better way to understand a theory or concept then to see and do it firsthand? Students who find it difficult to focus for long periods of time seated at a desk may find that they are much more successful when given the chance to learn in a different atmosphere. Research shows that proximity to, views of, and daily exposure to natural settings can increase a student’s ability to focus and enhance cognitive abilities (Wells, 2000). Indeed, outdoor learning can have a direct impact on academic achievement as well: a study by the American Institutes for Research demonstrated that students in outdoor science programs improved their science testing scores by 27 percent (American Institutes for Research, 2005). The repetitiveness of a school week can become overwhelming for students who are more energetic or who have problems with focus. More time out of doors can channel pent up restlessness to more positive learning outcomes. It only seems logical to provide balanced pedagogy that explores new learning perspectives, and appeals equally to students with different strengths.

Outdoor education could be an effective form of differentiated instruction, and a good method for diversifying an indoor-based teaching routine. While it is true that not all students will benefit equally from this form of education, I believe that the outdoors offers benefits that students could never experience if they are consistently taught indoors. For many, seeing and experiencing something is the only way to truly understand how it works.
2.3.3 Mental Wellbeing

Youth who have become accustomed to four walls and regulated heating miss the opportunity to be enriched with nature and the open air. Being outdoors can stimulate a student on a mental and emotional level. There is a large body of evidence that points toward the therapeutic power of nature. Researchers at the University of Illinois have shown that the greener a child's everyday environment, the more manageable their symptoms of attention-deficit disorder and depression (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011). There are numerous programs that target students with mental disabilities or severe behavioral disorders with nature therapy. Some children who could not function successfully in classroom environments have been shown to excel in natural surroundings. Children undertaking outdoor activities in nature were shown to improve symptoms of ADHD three times more so than those in indoor environments (Faber, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001).

Proximity and availability to natural spaces can also help reduce aggression, crime rates, levels of stress, and improve attention spans (Bird, 2007). Furthermore, natural environments help to build a greater sense of community and help individuals find a sense of place. Students in outdoor programming often exhibit positive and mature responses toward challenging situations (Ofsted, 2004). Nature offers comfort to countless children, and provides very real therapeutic benefits. Students in outdoor programming have a stronger sense of purpose and community. Outdoor education and greening school grounds are particularly valuable toward many urban students who are deprived of nature (Moore & Cooper Marcus, 2008). Overall, as suggested by nature-based theory, research shows that the outdoors can have significant impacts to mental
health and mindfulness – essential factors in the quality of life of all humans, both children and adult.

2.3.4 Environmental Awareness

An ancient Greek proverb states that “a society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.” Teaching children to be accountable for their ecological footprint is crucial to sustaining a healthy environment for future generations. If teachers are not allowing students the chance to be in nature, then how will youth come to love and protect our ever dwindling natural spaces? This removal of children from natural environments has been coined “nature-deficit disorder” by Richard Louv, prominent author and chairman of the Children & Nature Network (Louv, 2005). Louv recognizes the health and learning benefits that nature has toward children, and suggests that teachers and parents can help children to get outside more.

Physical and mental health is not the only problem that arises as children become disconnected from nature. It is easy to segregate oneself from the natural world and become ignorant of the interconnectedness of life when one never sees these connections firsthand. Students deprived of nature will have a poorer understanding of it and give it less value in their own adult lives. Louise Chawla has performed studies across Norway and the US to determine the motives for environmental activism. Through interviews, he showed that individuals were influenced to take environmental action based on two main factors: positive direct experience in the outdoors, and having been taken outdoors as a child by someone close like a parent, grandparent, or other trusted guardian (Chawla L., Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to Protect It, 2006). Similarly, recent studies utilizing an outdoor botanical garden showed that children demonstrated higher levels of
motivation and interest in learning about the environment when in green classrooms compared to children who lacked an outdoor experience (Drissner, Steigmüller, & Hille, 2013). These findings create yet another strong argument for outdoor education: it gives students the drive to become environmentally conscious citizens and future advocates for the environment.

In summary, outdoor education has been shown to provide a huge array of positive impacts on student wellbeing. Outdoor education can make parts of the curriculum more accessible by providing rich and varied learning opportunities, allow students to participate in active learning that is beneficial physically and emotionally, and increase a student’s awareness of environmental issues. There is a lack of research in some areas, however. For instance, how does outdoor education directly relate to minimizing sedentary behaviour and battling health deficits? Canada has far less investigations of outdoor education practices compared to the UK and United States. I hope that my research will provide an added perspective about outdoor education from a Canadian standpoint.

2.4 The Concerns and Challenges Faced by Educators

Although the benefits of outdoor education are many, educators in Canadian schools can face significant challenges in trying to move their classes outside. A famous quote by prominent environmentalist Baba Dioum is: “in the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.” Without strong mentors to guide students, students will lose an important source of learning. What factors are holding teachers back from taking their classrooms outdoors? Is it personal preference, a fundamental lack of resources, risk, or a combination of all three?
Research shows that Canadian teachers face a variety of obstacles when it comes to taking their class outdoors. A recent study at the Ontario Institute for studies in Education (OISE) used internet-based surveys and interviews to assess teacher perceptions of environmental education across Ontario. While environmental education and outdoor education are not the same, there are many areas of overlap, making this study relatable (especially when similar research of this scope has not been performed about outdoor education in Ontario). The OISE study revealed that there is a significant gap between what teachers believe environmental education should be and what they actually practice (Tan & Pedretti, 2010). The participants struggled with an “overcrowded curriculum, lack of resources, lack of alignment between curriculum and existing ministry expectations, low priority of environmental education in schools, access to the outdoors, student apathy, and the nature of sociopolitical action” (Tan & Pedretti, 2010). I will take a deeper look at some of these issues in the following subsections.

2.4.1 Timing and Resources

Ideally, a portion of every school day would be assigned to outdoor activities; however in reality, teachers face a tight routine and often lack funding or necessary resources to do so. While environmental education is becoming more valued and is in fact mandated in all grades and subjects in Ontario (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), there is no ministry expectation for how much programming should be held out of doors. Teachers are not necessarily motivated to move the class outside when there is no policy requiring them to do so. Furthermore, there can be a huge pressure for educators to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are covered in the school year and many are hesitant to spare any time to transition outdoors. An over-crowded curriculum was the number one concern expressed by Ontario teachers when interviewed about
environmental education (Tan & Pedretti, 2010). In Canada, poor weather can be yet another reason why youth are confined inside. Transition times, extreme weather, and a lack of green space nearby make moving the classroom outdoors tricky and inconvenient.

In Toronto, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) offers outdoor education centers to students from kindergarten to grade 8 (Toronto District School Board, 2015), but most students will only have the opportunity to visit such centers once or twice throughout their time in elementary school. Cost and a lack of time are among the reasons why students cannot go on field trips more frequently.

Moving outside can seem like a daunting task when faced with little funding and support. Financial and curricular resources for outdoor education are not readily available in schools: this was the second greatest concern expressed by educators across Ontario in the field of environmental education (Tan & Pedretti, 2010). This viewpoint is also reflected by educators in Nova Scotia in a similar but smaller study (Spence, Wright, & Castledon, 2013). Even for teachers who are motivated to bring students outdoors, without proper equipment and safe outdoor spaces, their motivations cannot reach fruition.

2.4.2 Educator Perceptions

Interestingly, another factor that influences whether or not teachers value outdoor education is whether or not they themselves had outdoor experiences as children. Numerous studies have shown that teachers with positive memories of the outdoors had stronger aspirations and aims for outdoor provision in their practice (Chawla L., 2006). In a UK study, 72% of the 334 outdoor practitioners surveyed shared personal stories or
fond memories they had about the outdoors (Waite, 2010). Simply put, educators that personally enjoy the outdoors are more willing to share this ideal with their students.

Aside from personal experiences, there is also evidence that socio-cultural expectations can help to override personal disinclination for outdoor teaching. Input from students, families, eco-schools programs, and principals can sway the pedagogical decisions made by educators (Waite, 2010). Conversely, if students feel apathetic and uninterested in learning about the environment, it can have a negative influence on a teacher’s motivations (Tan & Pedretti, 2010).

This research suggests that, other barriers aside, a teacher’s personal perceptions of outdoor education can be hugely influential on whether or not students will receive the opportunity for outdoor education. Additionally, socio-cultural motivations and guidance policies can motivate teachers to include more outdoor teaching practices. Thus, I argue that positive change is most likely to occur through increasing the motivations of teachers, and implementing curriculum guidance strategies.

2.4.3 Liability

While it would be ideal for every school to provide opportunities for regular outdoor learning, school boards face unique challenges in the realm of risk and liability. A combination of skewed parental perceptions and strict board regulations mean that some teachers do not feel free to teach outside even if they wanted to. Increased fear of injury and resulting lawsuits has created a trend whereby schools are hesitant to give consent for students to go on frequent outdoor learning excursions.
The risk of lawsuits if a student were to become injured can be a huge concern for Ontario educators (Foster & Linney, 2007). To get around such issues, permission forms may not be enough. Waivers of liability are legal documents required to prevent a finding of liability in negligence against a teacher or school board (Tomlinson, Mutcheson, Olevson, & Sud, 2012). In order for a waiver to be enforceable, it must be indisputably clear and straightforward. Furthermore, school boards face further limitations. Case law suggests that permission forms or waivers of liability may be unenforceable against minors even if the parent or guardian has signed the document on behalf of the child (Tomlinson, Mutcheson, Olevson, & Sud, 2012). If an accident were to happen outside of the direct scope of the waiver (e.g., on the bus ride to a site), school boards could then be held liable even with a signed waiver. Clearly, these regulations make it very risky for schools to allow students off grounds. It can be very time-consuming to organize trips off school property and ensure that every student has the correct paperwork. Schools and teachers must constantly take steps toward protecting themselves, making some outdoor education ventures unrealistic.

2.5 Conclusion

Indoor and sedentary behaviour have become a growing trend for 21st century children in Canada. Children are losing interest in the outdoors as technology becomes more readily available and parents are becoming more protective. This is a concerning trend when considering the health risks associated with lack of physical activity and fresh air. In fact, a growing body of research points toward the benefits of outdoor education to student health, learning, mental wellbeing, and environmental awareness. But all benefits aside, it is not surprising that outdoor education can be viewed as daunting or impractical toward teachers. Timing, limited resources,
skewed perceptions, and liability issues are all factors that educators have been known to deal with. Through a qualitative interview process explained further in Chapter 3, I hope to better understand the struggles faced by Toronto teachers when it comes to outdoor programming – an area that is lacking in research. Furthermore, I wish to determine firsthand what teachers require to ease such challenges. I believe that my explorations will help toward finding practical solutions to support teachers in the future.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the procedures and the ethical criteria through which data was obtained for the research paper. Overall, the paper was informed by a qualitative research platform. Qualitative research is characterized by its aims to understanding an aspect of life through descriptions, rather than numbers, as data for analysis (Bricki & Green, 2007). I chose to use a qualitative approach because it is better suited toward describing genuine opinions and unique occurrences that may not be possible through quantitative research. Data was collected through a review of literature, as well as three interviews with Toronto educators. I chose to use semi-structured interviews because it allowed participants to share their thoughts and expertise in a detailed and uninhibited manner.

The sections to follow will outline the specific processes by which data was gathered, details surrounding each participant in the study, data analysis procedures, ethics review, as well as the scope and limitations of this study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with a better understanding of the research methodology by making any procedures and limitations transparent.

3.1 Research Procedures

The research for this paper was conducted in two ways: a review of literature pertaining to outdoor education, as well as three semi-structured interviews (the primary source of data).

The literature review, found in Chapter 2, was conducted prior to the primary data collection. The purpose of the literature review was to build a firm body of knowledge surrounding outdoor education. Peer reviewed journal articles, research reports, and government
documents were the chief sources of information for the literature review. While I sited many relevant Canadian sources, I found that a majority of research concerning outdoor education stemmed from the United Kingdom and the United States. In general, I tried to cite sources that would connect well to outdoor education in Toronto, even if the sources were international. The goal of the literature review was to better understand the history and purpose of outdoor education, and how it might relate to Canadian teachers. I was able to use this review as a platform to formulate relevant interview questions for the next phase of data collection, and to inform my analysis of each interview (see Chapter 4).

Next, I performed three semi-structured interviews which involved recruiting and interviewing Toronto teachers. This approach stemmed from methodology found in *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (3rd ed.) by Creswell. These interviews were then summarized and compared for any patterns or major trends that related to the research question: “What factors contribute to how three Toronto educators perceive and implement outdoor education?”

The purpose of conducting each interview was to reveal the personal insights and perceptions held by Toronto-based educators in relation to outdoor education – an area that is lacking in literature. As such, I chose a semi-structured style of interview where specific questions were open-ended enough to allow room for further discussion of related sub-topics. Overall, the questions were organized into four main categories:

1. Background of Educator
2. Perceptions about the Outdoors
3. Implementation of Outdoor Education
4. Challenges and Future Needs

The organization of questions in such a way allowed for a chronology of individual participant responses where each set of answers informed the next. All questions used in the interview process were pre-approved by my research supervisor, and can be found listed in Appendix A. More information regarding the participants of the case studies can be found in section 3.3.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Semi structured-interviews were used as the primary tool for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to hear about participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Each educator willingly participated in a 20-question interview and was given the chance to follow up with any additional information they wished to add. A semi-structured interview style allowed me to move beyond the base set of questions if I wished to in order to discuss other relevant topics as they arose.

I met each participant at a location of their choosing and recorded their responses using audio-recording software on a laptop. I also used a field book for observation and note taking during the interview process. Each interview was between 45-60 minutes.

The interview recordings from each participant were transcribed digitally for analysis. As a further attempt at receiving the most precise and complete responses, I offered to share each transcript with the corresponding interviewee by email. I invited each participant to add to or reflect on their responses, though each expressed that they did not wish to. This member-checking process helped to ensure that the participants were indeed satisfied with the responses they shared. Each of the three participants responded that they felt their transcriptions were
truthful and needed no further revision. Once the member-checking process was complete, I began analysis of the interview scripts (see Section 3.4 for methodology).

3.3 Participants

Here, I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment. I will outline the criteria used in finding and selecting Toronto educators, as well as briefly introduce each participant.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Participants had to be educators in the GTA who were willing to consent to the semi-structured interview process and give up their own time. There were no specific requirements as to the gender, teaching experience, or age of the participants; however I wished to compare and contrast the responses of educators who had varying experience in education. For this reason, I recruited participants from different schools who varying levels of experience in the education field. I was also not concerned with what subjects each participant taught. I wished to see how a typical teacher viewed outdoor education in their classroom regardless of subject specialty. As such, it was not a requirement to be experienced in outdoor education.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

I recruited participants by asking for recommendations from colleagues or co-workers. As a master of teaching student at University of Toronto, I was immersed in an environment where many of my colleagues had contacts with educators. These colleagues recommended educators (usually their family members or friends) who were willing to share their time. Each participant volunteered to partake and was made aware
of the research topic prior to the interview. This was a form of convenience sampling - whereby participants were recruited for the study because they were readily accessible (Given, 2008). This was an effective method of sampling due to time limitations, and because there were very few specific criteria that participants had to meet for the study.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

The participants were selected from a variety of schools and had various degrees of experience in education (as summarized in Table 1). In the interest of being ethical, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms. The three participants in order of their interviews were: Aaron, James, and Khaali. Aaron was fairly new to teaching and was beginning his second year teaching at a Toronto private school. After taking a joint degree in math and education, Aaron taught Gr. 8 Math. James was a Kindergarten teacher at a public school. He had had a diverse career history - working for a sports team, at a banking position, and at a day camp before finding his passion in teaching. Lastly, Khaali taught Science and French to Gr. 7 and 8 students at a public alternative school. She also acted as a guidance counselor and Special Education instructor. Khaali emigrated from Somalia to Canada where she chose to pursue her university education. Table 1 provides an overview and brief biography of each participant as shared in their interviews. Any identifying information has been changed or substituted in the interest of anonymity.
Table 1.0 Case Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aaron</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Khaali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Title</strong></td>
<td>Gr. 8 Teacher</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
<td>Gr. 7,8 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place of Work</strong></td>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>Public Alternative School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject(s) Taught</strong></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>All subjects</td>
<td>French, Science,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance, Special</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Concurrent Bachelor of Math, Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts Sports Marketing Certificate, Master of Teaching</td>
<td>Bachelor degree, Partial Masters in Clinical Psychology, Bachelor of Teaching, 6 Additional Qualifications, Principal qualifications pending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior Job</strong></td>
<td>Mountain bike instructor at a camp</td>
<td>Sports management position</td>
<td>Counselor for terminally-ill patients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, each interview was transcribed verbatim to help facilitate analysis of data. I aimed to find recurring themes or important patterns within the script, and to compare these findings with the research collected earlier in the literature review process. To do so, I used a constructivist grounded theory approach to analyze the qualitative data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2002). Each transcript was read line-by-line and coded using the process of open coding whereby short phrases or words were used to summarize the essence of each statement. From there, the process of axial coding was used to identify the relationship between codes and to group any related codes into categories and subcategories. Finally, selective coding was used to organize categories to form overall themes (Walker & Myrick, 2006). These themes will be used to describe and explain the participant responses concerning outdoor education (see Chapter 4).

Of course, the overarching purpose of the study was to answer my research question. Thus, my next area of analysis was to link the important themes to the research question: “What factors contribute to how three Toronto educators perceive and implement outdoor education?” To answer this research question, I searched for similarities between the interview scripts and the literature review, as well as any areas where participant responses seemed to diverge. I discussed the relevant themes in participant responses in order to better understand their implications to the teaching community. These themes and a discussion of their importance are highlighted in Chapter 5.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Throughout the research process, I ensured that all procedures met the ethical standards laid out by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The
purpose of the study was shared with each participant prior to interviewing in order to clarify any outstanding questions about the topic. The location and duration of the interviews were decided upon before beginning. Prior to the interview process, consent forms were issued to participants outlining the interview procedure and participant roles (see Appendix B). I ensured that participants were aware that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, and described the member-checking process where participants were invited to review the transcriptions. Each participant gave signed permission to participate in the study given an assurance of anonymity: all names, places of work, or other identifying information would be kept confidential. The participants were also informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and that they were free to answer only the questions they felt comfortable doing so. Participants could choose to opt-out of the study at any point up until the paper was published without penalty of any kind. Finally, participants were invited to request a copy of the paper following the study’s completion.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The GTA was chosen as the research area because it is a relatively urban district, with limited natural spaces and conservation areas. Students in this region may not have as much access to outdoor learning compared to students in more rural parts of Ontario. Thus, I deemed this area to be relevant and meaningful to my purpose of study. It is important to note however, that my research can only provide qualitative data surrounding the select teachers in the study. Teachers interviewed in other parts of Toronto, or in other parts of the province may have very different views and practices in the field of outdoor education. While the interviews can be used to gain insight, they are by no means a conclusive look at outdoor education in Toronto.
Time and resource constraints restricted me to performing 3 interviews. Ideally, I would be able to extend my research by interviewing more candidates, and by collecting input from other individuals involved in this field: students, principals, families etc. Broadening the scope of the research would have provided a better understanding of the topic; however, a larger scope would demand more time and contacts, and a potentially more stringent ethics review process, making it impractical for the purposes of this paper.

Another constraint to the research was the task of locating candidates that suited the criteria of study, but were not associated too closely with myself as the researcher, a potential area of bias. Participants for the study were primarily found through convenience sampling: recommendations by my peers and colleagues. This proved to be an effective way to locate participants, and meant that I did not know the participants personally. With more time, a more randomized approach to locating participants would have been a more effective way to reduce bias.

3.7 Conclusion

In summary, the research methodology followed a qualitative research platform. It included collection of data through a literature review and semi-structured interviews. Properly approved steps were taken to recruit and interview each participant, and ethical measures were enforced to protect the participants. Participants each came from a different school in the GTA and had varying teaching experience. They did not have to have any direct experience with outdoor education. An introduction to each of the participants showcased pertinent background information and brief biographies (see Table 1).
In the following chapter, I will delve more deeply into the patterns and themes found during the interview process. Readers can expect to explore the opinions and experiences of each participant in relation to the research question. The research findings are revealed fully in Chapter 4 and analyzed for significance in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the overall findings from the research process. Recall that the paper was informed by a qualitative research platform based on three interviews with Toronto teachers. I interviewed the three participants, Aaron, James, and Khaali, approximately a month apart from one another on Sept 2, Oct 17, and Nov 20, 2015. The 20 interview questions were designed to allow the participants to share their background, personal perceptions surrounding outdoor education, and their challenges and needs in implementing such programming. To organize the complex information shared, the interview transcriptions were coded using succinct words or statements that captured the essence of the data (Saldana, 2008). I justified my codes based on the quotes that seemed most prominent in relation to my research question: “What factors contribute to how three Toronto educators perceive and implement outdoor education?” From here, I was able to identify the major themes across each of the three interviews. I have further grouped these themes into categories for ease of discussion as follows:

1) Benefits of Outdoor Learning
   a. Lasting experiences
   b. Rich programming opportunities
   c. Improved student wellbeing

2) Outdoor Learning as a Necessity
   a. Growing need for the outdoors
   b. Issues with responsibility

3) Challenges and Barriers
   a. Curriculum and programming
b. Space as a resource

c. Administrative barriers

The sections to follow will explore the above themes and their significance using the information shared in each interview. I will also make connections between the themes found and the research collected in the literature review (Chapter 2).

4.1 Benefits of Outdoor Learning

Outdoor learning experiences have been shown to support children in many ways – from physical health to learning engagement, to mental wellbeing. Recall from the literature review that an extensive body of evidence has revealed that children with access to natural learning environments experience positive effects on wellbeing (Charles & Loge, 2012). Each of the three research participants mirrored this fact during their interviews. Firstly, each participant shared lasting memories and values surrounding personal outdoor learning experiences. The participants also noted the dynamic and rich teaching opportunities they have had with their class. Lastly, the participants noticed positive impacts outdoor excursions have had on their students’ wellbeing.

4.1.1 Lasting Experiences

The first theme that emerged was that personal outdoor experiences seemed to resonate with each participant from childhood to adulthood. When asked about their experiences with the outdoors growing up, each participant gladly shared fond memories and rich experiences they had had in the outdoors. All three of the participants also showed habits of being active outdoors in their current life. Aaron recalled: “I grew up in Peterborough in the edge of the city so we were always very close to nature. So I would bike all the time in the forest.” Notably, Aaron went on to become a mountain bike instructor at a camp for many
years and currently cycled around the city for exercise. James described his childhood as being very rich with outdoor play: “I was always outdoors. I was always playing. And I was very much into sports – whatever it was – me and my brothers were always playing.” In fact, James was confident that being outside was his primary hobby growing up. James shared that he currently took his own children outside to the park and regularly spent about 3 hours a day outdoors. Similarly, Khaali’s childhood was immersed in nature: “I lived in Somalia and that’s pretty much how you went about life – you had to experience everything by touching and going out and feeling the outdoors.” She went on to share a more detailed recount:

When I was little, I’d say from birth to about 13 - I have fond memories – I had so much fun. My first house was on the edge of the forest. My parents for some reason weren’t worried about me being attacked by animals! But they really should have been! There were these huge animals similar to elk but [found] in Africa.

Khaali delightedly described her experiences exploring nature with her brother and their excitement at discovering the remains of animals to investigate. In her current life, Khaali spent a lot of her time walking and exploring the city of Toronto on foot.

Why does it matter that Toronto teachers personally connect with the outdoors? Research emphasizes the importance of educator experiences in outdoor education. Numerous studies have shown that teachers with positive memories of the outdoors had stronger aspirations and aims for outdoor provision in their practice (Chawla L., 2006). In fact, a UK study found that 72% of the outdoor practitioners surveyed shared personal stories or fond memories they had about the outdoors (Waite, 2010). Thus it is safe to say that educators who personally enjoy the outdoors are often more willing to share this habit with their students.
4.1.2 Rich Programming Opportunities

Another key benefit of outdoor education shared in the interviews was the potential for dynamic learning opportunities. Children exhibit many different learning styles, and the outdoors is a perfect venue for hands-on, naturalistic and kinesthetic learning. In her interview, Khaali gave one such example: “If you’re learning about ecosystems in grade 7, then going outside and doing it in a tangible way, where you go outside and you’ve got kids touching and feeling and using all their senses – it’s totally different [from the classroom].” Khaali recognized the importance of hands-on learning for her students. She believed that to truly understand ecological concepts, students must move past conceptual theories and actually interact with nature. James expressed a similar need for the outdoors, and recognized its potential for engaging programming. For instance, he was able to incorporate a variety of creative lesson plans surrounding a walk in the woods:

The other day we went down the Beltline, we collected all sorts of leaves and pine needles, and pine cones. It’s a big part of taking the outdoors inside and matching it to education. Because I can do all sorts of stuff: I can do sorting, I can do counting, I can do comparisons, I can do patterning. I can bring in literacy and [teach students] how to write ‘LEAF’ – I can do all sorts of things.

As a Kindergarten teacher, James was often able to link outdoor education to the needs of his students. In the past, he has gone outdoors to collect snow for use in a sensory table, and sometimes he simply allowed kids to play outside and be active. While Aaron expressed greater difficulty in linking the outdoors to his Gr.8 math lessons, he still found that outdoor programming not only engaged students but helped them connect with the environment more meaningfully:
We did a river study where [students] were putting nets into the river and just seeing what came out of the nets. It was really exciting for them, and they were learning about different species of crayfish… I think it gives them an appreciation for respecting nature which is something that - I mean you can teach them about species and ecosystems in the classroom but it's hard to foster an actual respect for nature without being in nature and having fun in nature.

There is research that correlates with Aaron’s beliefs, showing that students in outdoor programming often exhibit positive and mature responses toward challenging situations (Ofsted, 2004). Aside from building a better understanding of the environment, outdoor programming can also get students more interested in learning about topics they may not have been interested in before. Khaali noticed a positive attitude shift in her Gr.8 students during a natural exploration: “We found one or two [amoebas] as a whole class. But it wasn’t really about that. It was about the kids going crazy to find something…To see the [students] excited to say ‘oh my god we’re going to look through pond water!’” Outdoor education has great potential to improve student engagement and can be an essential curriculum tool if used correctly. On top of the positive learning outcomes mentioned by the participants, research also shows that outdoor learning can even have a direct impact on academic achievement, having the potential to improve test scores (American Institutes for Research, 2005).

4.1.3 Student Wellbeing

The body of research demonstrating positive social and health benefits as a result of outdoor interaction is expansive. Thus, it was not surprising that the research participants noticed certain behavioral and physical benefits in their students during and after outdoor learning. Aaron brought his class outside to a learning garden and found that:
Kids appreciate that they can move around a bit more - they have more freedom. And it's a bit less structured. So some students who are very antsy [become] less antsy because they know they can move around. Also kids who like quiet - peace and quiet and alone time - they find their own little corner in the garden to read. So there's more flexibility with the space.

Aaron’s students were better able to self-regulate in the outdoor learning garden, and found that the environment helped to calm them. In fact, proximity and availability of natural spaces can also help reduce aggression, crime rates, levels of stress, and improve attention spans (Bird, 2007). Furthermore, research shows that natural settings can increase a student’s ability to focus and even enhance cognitive abilities (Wells, 2000). Aaron noticed this phenomenon first-hand and was surprised at his student’s unusually high receptiveness and encouragement toward their peers as they shared poetry in the outdoor garden.

While the other two participants saw positive impacts as well, they also recognized the risk of outdoor activities causing potentially disruptive effects on student energy levels. When asked if outdoor activities benefitted his students’ behaviour, James admitted: “It depends on the day I’ll be honest with you. However, on rainy and really cold winter days it’s chaos in [the classroom] because [students] can’t get outside. But some days I’ll go outside and they’ll still be crazy, regardless.” He noticed that sometimes his students fed off the energy gained from being outside and were unable to calm back down, while other days it was essential for them to leave the class and expel excess energy. Overall, James concluded that: “Even if it plays against me, they still need that fresh air. They still need that outside play.” Khaali mentioned similar experiences to James in regards to outdoor time, but shared further techniques to bring energy levels back down: “They’re calmer. I want to say they are less
argumentative! But it can also go the other way around. So if you get them rowdy and they’re all hyped up, they come back [inside] then we do one minute [or] two minute meditation.” Khaali discussed her students’ responsiveness to such strategies and explained that they were very effective in mitigating the high-energy behaviour created after being active outside. As a whole, the participants agreed that outdoor learning was a definite benefit despite the possibility of increased energy levels.

On top of behavioral impacts, outdoor education is a realistic opportunity to meet Ontario’s Daily Physical Activity (DPA) guidelines that calls for 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day outside of recess (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). In relation, research shows that children who spend more time outdoors are more physically active (Cooper, Page, Wheeler, Hillsdon, Griew, & Jago, 2010). In his interview, James mentioned the need for sustained physical activity to improve student wellbeing: “[Students] need the gross motor action outside. If they can’t run, then they try to do it in [the classroom]. And they can’t do it in here. So getting the gross motor action outside and the freedom to not only move, but to vocally just scream is very important.” James acknowledged the very real need for students to move around, become familiar with their environment, and to develop overall physical literacy skills. These needs can be harder to meet in the confines of a classroom where space and volume-levels must be carefully monitored.

A final important note involving student wellbeing is the idea that the outdoors is an essential health component. Khaali stressed that: “you really can never compete with fresh air. …It’s amazing what it can do. So when you see [teachers] giving punishment and taking away recess for example, it literally drives me crazy. Because you’re not [just] punishing the kid, you’re punishing yourself, you’re punishing the class, and you’re ruining the kid’s
health.” The revoking of outdoor time as punishment is a very valid concern, especially in consideration of the therapeutic and mental health benefits the outdoors has been attributed with (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011).

4.2 Outdoor Learning as a Necessity

Outdoor education has received more attention over the last several years because of a growing trend of indoor and sedentary behaviour. Research suggests that high rates of sedentary behaviour are linked to being overweight (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2009) – an area of growing concern in North America. The research participants each expressed concern about the amount of outdoor time children currently receive. Their concerns show a growing necessity for the outdoors, but the responsibility surrounding who should be the advocator of outdoor education was more blurred.

4.2.1 Growing Need for the Outdoors

When asked if outdoor education was important to children, Khaali was confident in its necessity: “Intuitively you know [it is]. We’re animals, we belong outside. Our brain works differently when we’re outside. And there’s plenty of research out there to support that.” Khaali believed in the inherent benefit of the outdoors on human wellbeing. This belief aligns with the nature-based theory of outdoor education (Neill, Theories of Outdoor Education, 2008). James also noticed the essential role of outside activity in his students’ ability to function successfully at school: “for Kindergarten, being outdoors is a big part of getting comfortable and being at school… Outdoor play is one of the biggest parts of [students] growing up, and part of the kindergarten curriculum.” The outdoors has become a prime environment for James’ students to actively learn in a less structured way. This is essential
because primary students are still building the skills needed to interact with peers and with their surroundings.

Research shows that children are becoming less active outdoors over each generation. A well-known report showcased how, in just four generations, children in a UK family no longer roamed free outdoors (Bird, 2007). This type of behaviour has likely become commonplace because of parental protection and the widespread availability of technology. James commented about this phenomenon: “It’s disconnect, its attention, its interest. It’s very problematic. It’s like their only joy is technology. I have a couple [students] who – if I turn the computer on, they are right there. And that’s their conversations with me – they’re always about some sort of TV or video game.” This shift in student behaviour reflects a growing trend of too much screen time (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2009) and the potential health risks related to sedentary behaviour (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2009). Yet even with the acknowledgement that the outdoors is a necessity to children; the participants did not feel that they took students outside as often as would be ideal. Aaron admitted that he was only able to bring his class outside once in the last year and Khaali estimated that her students went out once a month. James was able to bring his class outside for two hours a day; however kindergarten students at his school are not given recess breaks. Overall, the participants felt that there was a growing need for students to get outdoors more.

4.2.2 Issues with Responsibility

If outdoor education is seen as an essential learning need, who should be most responsible for getting children outside? The participants were posed a question about responsibility with interesting results. Both James and Aaron believed that parents were the
most significant person in helping children get outdoors. In fact, a UK survey of over 2000 participants showed that children’s ability to play outside was hugely limited by the concerns of their parents (Gleave, 2010). John also mentioned how habits at home can leak over and take an effect in the classroom: “If the parents aren’t making an effort to help their kids get outside, then the kids are not going to go outside. They’re going to be stuck inside watching TV or playing video games. And it shows in [the classroom].” Parental effort is crucial to avoid constant screen time and indoor-play. Aaron had a similar viewpoint that parents have the most control over what children do, and what values to instill. Unfortunately as previously mentioned, parental concern for safety can significantly limit children’s ability to go outside (Gleave, 2010). If parents indeed have the most responsibility in ensuring children get outdoor time but are not meeting these needs, then educators may have to take on greater leadership.

Aaron also had less motivation to use outdoor instruction because it simply was not an area of focus at his school. Instead of feeling the responsibility to focus on outdoor education himself, Aaron mentioned a specialized instructor on staff with a more defined role in organizing school trips or outdoor excursions.

Khaali felt that the responsibility to bring students outside was shared by everyone equally. She discussed how outdoor education could be incorporated in a multitude of relevant ways using creative pedagogy. For instance, she mentioned how a colleague at her school connected with a local café to host a poetry slam for his students. It is the role of all educators and people in position of authority to help guide students. If issues of responsibility were better understood, it would be far easier for educators to collaborate with parents and navigate through challenges within their school jurisdiction.
4.3 Challenges and Barriers

While outdoor education is linked directly to engaging lessons, student wellbeing, and is seen as a growing need by the research participants, there is an undeniable lack of outdoor programming in many Toronto schools. What obstacles prevent teachers from implementing outdoor lessons more frequently? Three overall themes emerged in relation to this question: struggles in curriculum and planning, space as a limited resource and administrative barriers.

4.3.1 Curriculum and Planning

An over-crowded curriculum was the number one concern expressed by Ontario teachers when interviewed about environmental education (Tan & Pedretti, 2010). While there is a lack of research surrounding teacher challenges in outdoor programming, participants expressed similar concerns about curriculum expectations. Teaching an accelerated math program to intermediate students, Aaron expressed concern over connecting the outdoors to his lessons in a meaningful way: “It's pretty fast paced. We do a lot of analytic geometry, like graphing and algebra and statistics, so there's some measuring potential outside. But it's hard. With geometry and measurement it would be easier to go outside… but we don't do a lot of that in the year that I have to teach them.” Bringing a math class outdoors to immerse students in green space has the potential to provide students with physiological benefits (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011). However, Aaron recognized the difficulty of doing so in a way that also incorporated the curriculum. He expressed concern for the added timing issues and proper teaching equipment needed to leave the classroom. Issues with time and resources were also a prominent concern for James:

Learning in the classroom with the textbook and with your resources and your board – it’s almost easier than taking your whole class out. It’s not as easy as you might think.
And if you take them out there’s transitions – there’s so many things that come into play when just trying to go outside. Especially in the winter… And then you’re tacking on time to time that you already don’t have to deliver the curriculum.

Teachers must prioritize the success of their students, and when going outside gets in the way of covering the full curriculum, it can definitely be seen as a challenge. However, if outdoor education could be worked into the curriculum more seamlessly, teachers would not struggle as hard with lesson planning. Khaali believed that if outdoor learning became a mandatory part of the curriculum, many of the current challenges would be addressed: “[Outdoor education] is beneficial, and in fact, I’d figure out a way to make it mandatory if we could, for older children. Because it’s not included in the curriculum as much… and [including it] would make any policies in the school and getting permission much easier.” Curriculum concerns and meaningful lesson planning are issues that teachers must constantly face; thus, adding an outdoor learning component on top of covering curriculum content was an added stress to the participants.

4.3.2 Space as a Resource

Even for teachers who are fully motivated to bring students outdoors, access to safe outdoor spaces becomes a challenge. Space is indeed a valuable resource because children who have access to diverse natural settings in their school grounds have been shown to be more physically active, more aware of nutrition, more civil to one another and more creative (Bell & Dyment, 2006). Aaron expressed the importance of having accessible natural spaces in the area: “There are lots of spaces on our property. We also have the kids sign a form. There is a certain area, 10 blocks in every direction, which we can take them without having to get a permission form.” Other schools are not so lucky, especially in Toronto where the
majority of space is paved. When asked about his greatest challenges, James described environment as his biggest obstacle:

I think it’s the environment and the facilities that we are afforded with. Here, we don’t have a kindergarten playground. And most schools that you go to have a separate playground for kindergarten that’s attached to the school, that’s barriered off, that has washroom access and is big enough to accommodate all the kindergarten classrooms at the same time. We have none of those. The only yard we have is the yard that is shared with the rest of the school, so we can’t go out during recess.

With no safe a convenient area to go outdoors, James is faced with a huge obstacle. He mentioned that off-property areas can be a useful resource, but it can be difficult and risky to bring a class off school property. While aware of outdoor education centers offered by the TDSB, James acknowledges that visiting such facilities is not an everyday opportunity. For Khaali, available green space in Toronto is a cause of socioeconomic concern:

It’s concrete. The whole [city] is concrete… and parks are strategically placed. But when you look at it where do you find the parks? It’s an issue obviously in Toronto. Because there’s a socioeconomic divide when it comes to where you live and what parks are near you. If you live in a really urban area you’re not going to be next to that giant High Park. [The parks] are next to million-dollar homes. That’s not really for everybody – that’s just for a small percentage of population within the city.

Insufficient space in the school ground, and further, lack of available green space in surrounding areas can be a major drawback when planning to bring students outdoors. While Toronto offers some excellent natural areas, these environments are strategically located and
often are found in higher socioeconomic areas. These issues make it challenging for schools across the board to have the same opportunities for success in outdoor education.

4.3.3 Administrative Barriers

The final theme that emerged in the interviews was administration and policy issues. 21st century teachers have to balance their students’ needs with that of their school board or administrator, as well as the needs of parents. Outdoor activities can often be more high-risk than activities within the familiar class environment. Obtaining permission to do such activities can be a significant barrier for Ontario educators because there is always a risk of student injury or even lawsuits (Foster & Linney, 2007). Getting board approval for trips off school property by justifying risk versus benefit has been a tough battle for Khaali whose annual physics field trip was discontinued by the board. Not mentioned in the literature review are the additional administrative challenges occurring during union strikes. Khaali tried to work around this obstacle by bringing the outdoors inside, but still expressed difficulties: “I try to bring what’s out there into [the classroom]. I’m not allowed to ask [students] to do that. I can’t tell them to ‘go to the lake and collect water.’ I’ve gotten permission for certain things like that but because of the whole strike, there’s been too many disruptions and we weren’t sure what we are allowed to do.” Unfortunately, the recent teacher strikes in the TDSB have made policy rules less clear, and influenced Khaali’s ability to teach outdoors. At Aaron’s school, students each had a permission form signed at the beginning of the year that allowed them to go off the school property within a certain walking radius. This made planning outdoor lessons much smoother. Waivers can be a proactive solution to administrative concerns, however if an accident were to happen outside of the direct scope of the waiver (eg. on the bus ride to a site), school boards could then be held liable even with a
signed waiver (Tomlinson, Mutcheson, Olevson, & Sud, 2012). Clearly, these regulations make it very risky for schools to allow students off grounds. Sadly, school policies and lack of support from administration can interfere with a teacher’s personal needs for their class. Khaali reiterated her number one challenge in outdoor education:

- Board and ministry policies [are my greatest challenge]. To go outside on most outings I’ve mentioned I’d have to have about 4 different forms… The forms that we do at the beginning of the year and the forms that we follow up with; it’s so much that you think ‘would it be better just to figure out how to bring this in rather than go out there?’

Because schools and teachers must constantly take steps toward protecting themselves from liability issues, some outdoor education ventures become inconvenient and unrealistic.

While environmental and physical literacy has become a bigger focus in Ontario schools, outdoor education is not mandated. Another challenge mentioned in the interviews surrounded the need for more defined outdoor requirements as a means to motivate teachers. Aaron mentioned his lack of understanding surrounding how much time his students actually need outside. He discussed how he would be more motivated to incorporate outdoor education if he had more assurance, and if it aligned with his school’s mission statement. Similarly, James shared his concern over the lack of guidelines or mandated rules for how much outdoor time the students get at his school. Because there is no separate kindergarten area, lunch time coordination at James’ school was incredibly challenging as his students didn’t have a venue to let off energy. There were no resources provided by the school like bins of outdoor toys and James had to bring his own supplies from home. Overall, risk and liability issues as well
as policies that aren’t supportive to outdoor education were major setbacks for each participant.

4.4 Conclusion

The interview process revealed several themes that helped to better explain the perceptions, practices, and needs of the research participants. As a whole, there was a definite trend that the outdoors was seen as beneficial and valuable, but that many obstacles prevented outdoor education from occurring more regularly. The participants each had positive childhood experiences in the outdoors that carried to adulthood. In their teaching practices, the participants felt that children truly benefitted from the outdoors both through engaging programming and in overall wellbeing. Outdoor education appeared to be of growing necessity to children because of their inherent need for nature, and current trends in sedentary behaviour. However, participants had different views over who held the responsibility of ensuring children had the best support and mentorship in getting outside. While the participants undeniably valued outdoor learning, there was a definite trend that outdoor education was insufficient. The participants faced several challenges and barriers in this area: a struggle to plan for outdoor time in conjunction with the curriculum, a scarcity of accessible outdoor space, and issues with school administration. These findings aligned well with the research found in the literature review, but there were some gaps (eg. issues with union strikes). The major themes and corresponding links to the literature review are summarized more briefly in Table 2.0.
Table 2.0 Summary of Key Themes and Links to Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Summary of Findings</th>
<th>Supporting Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits of Outdoor Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasting experiences</td>
<td>Each participant shared positive childhood experiences in the outdoors and all three remained currently active in the outdoors in some way.</td>
<td>(Charles &amp; Loge, 2012) (Chawla L., 2006) (Waite, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich programming opportunities</td>
<td>The participants were able to use creative pedagogy and authentic teaching opportunities outdoors that helped students to engage meaningfully with the curriculum.</td>
<td>(American Institutes for Research, 2005) (Ofsted, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved student wellbeing</td>
<td>The participants found that students were able to practice gross motor skills, expel excess energy, find calmness, and be more receptive to others in an outdoor setting. Two of the participants admitted that outdoor learning could make students over-energetic but had strategies to mitigate this behaviour.</td>
<td>(Bird, 2007) (Cooper, Page, Wheeler, Hillsdon, Griew, &amp; Jago, 2010) (Faber Taylor &amp; Kuo, 2011) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) (Wells, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outdoor Learning as a Necessity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing need for the outdoors</td>
<td>Two of the participants believed that the outdoors were an inherent need for children considering growing trends of indoor,</td>
<td>(Bird, 2007) (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They felt that students should get more outdoor time than they currently receive.

Issues with responsibility

One participant thought that the responsibility for getting children outside was equally shared by all authority figures, while the other two thought it was the role of parents most.

Challenges and Barriers

Curriculum and programming

Two participants expressed a struggle to plan for outdoor instruction in a way that meaningfully connected with curriculum considering it is not mandated.

Space as a resource

Each participant was able to use the school grounds or surrounding area to facilitate learning, but was also limited to the space they had at hand.

Administrative barriers

The participants were only able to implement outdoor education within the rules, boundaries, and mandates of their school policy.
In the following chapter, the significance of these findings will be discussed further in order to help support educators or navigate future policies concerning outdoor education.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

I became interested in researching the topic of outdoor education after seeing the positive benefits of experiential learning during my time working at an outdoor education center, I decided to explore the role that teachers play in implementing outdoor education in their own classrooms. My research began with a literature review and was followed by interviews with three Toronto teachers concerning outdoor education during regular instruction time. Specifically, my research aimed to answer the question: “What factors contribute to how three Toronto educators perceive and implement outdoor education?” Recall that for the context of this paper, I have a broad definition of outdoor education: education for, in, or about the outdoors. Instruction held outside that is geared around the environment, ecology, physical activity, or simply learning in an outdoor setting are all viable examples of outdoor education by my definition. Note that recess or extra-curricular activities are not considered in my research.

In this final chapter, I will summarize the overall findings from the research process and discuss the implications of these findings. The overall goal of this chapter is to express the motivations and challenges shared by the research participants concerning outdoor education and connect these findings to future policy or practice in the field of teaching, as well as to my own experiences as a researcher. The chapter is broken down through: an overview of major findings, a discussion of possible implications to the educational community and to me on a more personal level, a list of recommendations that address key challenges, and finally, a suggestion of further research still needed in this area.
5.1 Overview of key findings

Preceding the interview process, a literature review was conducted to explore outdoor education more deeply and provide a theoretical framework to base my research on. Firstly, my exploration of literature showed reasons why children remain indoors more so than ever before. A diminishing interest in outdoor recreation (The Outdoor Foundation, 2010) and growing parental concerns for children’s safety (Gleave, 2010) has resulted in a decline in outdoor time. Next, I researched the theoretical and practical concepts that defined outdoor education. I found that a practice-based theory suited my research best as it linked outdoor education to specific instructional techniques (Neill, Theories of Outdoor Education, 2008). The literature review highlighted several important benefits of outdoor education toward student wellbeing. Research showed that outdoor learning and engagement with natural spaces promoted physical health (Charles & Loge, 2012; Cooper, Page, Wheeler, Hillsdon, Griew, & Jago, 2010), helped with academic performance (American Institutes for Research, 2005; Wells, 2000), had noticeable benefits to mental wellbeing (Bird, 2007; Faber, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001; Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011), and promoted environmental awareness (Chawla L., 2006; Drissner, Steigmüller, & Hille, 2013). Finally, a review of the barriers faced by educators revealed that limited resources, skewed perceptions, and liability issues were major challenges (Chawla L. , 2006; Foster & Linney, 2007; Spence, Wright, & Castledon, 2013; Tan & Pedretti, 2010; Waite, 2010). These explorations helped to provide a context for which to better understand the information shared during my interviews with Toronto teachers.

During the interview process, several themes emerged relating to the perceptions, practices, and future needs of the three research participants. These themes generally supported the data gathered during the literature review (See table 2.0). Firstly, there were three major
themes surrounding the benefits of outdoor education. The first pattern that emerged was that outdoor experiences had lasting effects: the participants, Aaron, James and Khaali, each shared positive childhood experiences in the outdoors and all three remained currently active in the outdoors in some way. Secondly, the participants each expressed that the outdoors truly benefitted students through engaging programming opportunities. The participants were able to use creative pedagogy and authentic teaching opportunities that helped their students to engage more meaningfully with the curriculum compared to typical in-class lessons. Thirdly, Aaron, James and Khaali each noticed that being outdoors had some degree of positive impact to student physical or behavioral wellbeing. They found that it was a great way to explore gross motor skills, expel excess energy, become calmer, and show receptiveness to others. On the other hand, James and Khaali mentioned that going outside could sometimes over-energize the students, but had strategies to mitigate this behaviour. The next set of themes pointed toward the necessity of outdoor learning through: a growing need for the outdoors, and the responsibility to take children outside. James and Khaali acknowledged that being outside was an inherent need for children, yet all three participants felt that students could receive more outdoor instruction compared to their current opportunities. Aaron was only able to bring his class outside once in the last year, Khaali estimated once a month, and James was able to bring his class outside for two hours a day; however his kindergarten students were not given recess breaks. This pattern tied into the participants’ beliefs surrounding the responsibility of taking students outside; Khaali thought this responsibility was equally shared by all authority figures, while James and Aaron thought parents held the most responsibility. Unfortunately, the participants faced several challenges and barriers in implementing outdoor education, bringing us to the last set of themes. Firstly, Aaron and Khaali expressed a struggle to plan for outdoor time in a way that meaningfully connected with
curriculum considering it is not mandated by administration. Next, it was apparent that space was considered a valuable resource to all three participants. Each participant was able to use the school grounds or surrounding area to facilitate learning, but was also limited to the space they had at hand. Finally, a major barrier for participants involved school administration or policies at their school. The participants were only able to implement outdoor education within the rules, boundaries, and mandates of their school.

5.2 Implications

The overall trend of the research findings is that participants viewed outdoor education as highly beneficial, but that personal perceptions about responsibility, available space and administrative obstacles prevented outdoor education from occurring more regularly. The goal of this section is to unpack the implications of these findings so that teachers, school administrators, and parents will be better equipped to support children in getting outside. Firstly, I will discuss the possible impacts these findings have toward the educational community and afterward I will discuss the implications in the context of my own teaching and practices as a researcher.

5.2.1 Implications to the Educational Community

The research findings have provided new information surrounding the perceptions and challenges that Toronto teachers have in outdoor education, but how does this knowledge impact the educational community? Based on the research findings, I feel that at least four main parties are affected in the educational community: teachers, parents, school administrators, and provincial policy makers.

Teachers have a very powerful role to play in implementing outdoor education. Their beliefs and experiences drive their teaching strategies. As prior mentioned, teachers who
advocate for outdoor learning often have positive personal experiences in the outdoors (Chawla, 2006; Waite, 2010). It is important for educators to value outdoor experiences in their own daily lives in order to feel motivated to do the same in their class. However as we know from the interviews, these personal connections and positive perceptions are sometimes still not enough to fully motivate teachers (while each participant held positive attitudes toward outdoor education, they did not necessarily go outside as much as they felt was ideal). The participants, Aaron, James and Khaali, had differing perceptions about the responsibility for taking children outside (the participants believed that responsibility was held most by parents or it was equally shared by all authority figures), and none of them felt that the primary responsibility holder was themself, the teacher. In order for teachers to embrace outdoor education more regularly, they must see its benefits, and further they must take responsibility into their own hands. Another issue participants faced was the task of incorporating outdoor education into a crowded and demanding curriculum especially when there are no requirements for it in Ontario policy. On top of that, subject and grade can also make outdoor education tricky to include - Aaron taught fairly advanced math while Khaali and James had a broader set of subjects that seemed to link to the outdoors more naturally. In order to make outdoor learning relevant to the curriculum, teachers must be willing to think creatively and plan ahead to make lessons meaningful. This would decidedly require more time and effort on the part of the individual teacher; however, it could be well worth the effort when considering the benefits that the outdoors can have on student engagement, performance, and health. Teachers are also faced with many challenges that are outside of their control including lack of space and administrative barriers. While teachers can use strategies that involve flexibility and creative pedagogy (like accessing local spaces, making
use of a student walking-radius, or collaborating with other individuals or organizations),
teachers may find that they do not have the resources to overcome these challenges without
assistance from higher administration.

Parents or guardians are the second group of individuals that this research impacts.
Research shows that parental protection is one of the leading reasons that children remain
indoors (Gleave, 2010). As James mentioned in his interview, habits at home are often carried
over into the classroom. If children are not receiving positive outdoor experiences at home
from trusted mentors, they will be even more in need of these experiences at school. Thus,
parents have a big role to play in changing the mindsets and habits of children. Aaron and
James went as far as to say that parents have the highest responsibility to get children
outdoors. On the contrary, from an educational standpoint, teachers should not rely on parents
to change their home-routines. In fact, if teachers accept that not every student will have the
parental support to get outdoors, they may feel a greater duty to do so during school time.

As mentioned earlier, teachers can face some barriers to outdoor education that are
simply beyond their immediate control. It is here that schools administrators have to play a
role in supporting teachers. For example, equitable and safe outdoor spaces can be a challenge
to find in many schools and areas of Toronto. Aaron was lucky enough to have a ravine
nearby that his students could get to on foot, but this opportunity is not available at every
school. Khaali and James both expressed frustration in the fact that appropriate green space
for students was lacking. By considering converting paved school grounds into gardens,
learning areas, or even offering more outdoor supplies, school administrators can support
teachers in finding safe outdoor activities. James mentioned that he had to invest and bring in
his own outdoor supplies from home. The personal expense and extra responsibility required
to support students outside would no longer be necessary if schools offered more in the way of outdoor resources. School administrators also have the power to promote outdoor education as a stronger focus. Aaron was apprehensive to bring his class outdoors more often when he couldn’t see a clear connection to his curriculum and to his school’s overall mission statement. Aaron also had little motivation from administrators to advocate outdoor learning and saw it as the role of more specialized individuals at his school. Collaboration and communication among staff and administration could be a way to solve this challenge. School administration should consider what guidelines to set, and what workshops are needed to support teachers during curriculum planning. If teachers could receive more professional development or be exposed to authentic teaching strategies, they could find rich opportunities for outdoor education that connect with curriculum more meaningfully. Finally, Khaali felt discouraged from the amount of hoops her school administration made her leap through to get permission for outdoor excursions. It is clear that school administration has a powerful sway on pedagogical choices. If school policies advocated for and promoted teachers to go outside as opposed to overlooking or overcomplicating the process, teachers would have a much smoother transition from the classroom to the outdoors. Offering a walking radius and promoting parents to sign liability waivers at the beginning of the term is a good start. Increased funding for outdoor resources and better communication and collaboration with parents could be strong steps to take in the future.

Lastly, provincial policy as a whole is implicated by these research findings. Aaron expressed confusion over how much outdoor instruction was truly necessary for his students. Khaali also mentioned the need for regulated or mandatory outdoor education for a better chance of students getting outside. The Ontario curriculum includes mandated environmental
education across all subjects (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), and the province has mandated DPA (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005), but guidelines surrounding outdoor education during routine instructional time have yet to be considered. In order for this to occur, more Canadian research is needed surrounding how much learning time should be spent outdoors. For outdoor education to be seen as a greater priority by policy makers and an area that warrants increased research and funding, teachers and parents must advocate for such practices more compellingly.

### 5.2.2 Personal Implications

The research process and findings have affected my viewpoints as a researcher and as a future teacher. As a researcher, I understand that there are still many limitations and questions left unanswered by my research (see more in Section 5.4). I have, however, gained a stronger appreciation for the challenges and subtleties faced by educators. Educators try to balance many roles – delivering curriculum, supporting student wellbeing, and navigating through administrative regulations. The pedagogical choices of a teacher are not always black and white, and do not always reflect what the teacher feels is ideal for their student because they face an array of outside factors. I believe qualitative research strategies are the best way to share these subtleties. As a researcher, I feel it is important to explore these issues with a non-judgmental lens, and to critically think about the implications. My overall mission as a researcher is to merge theory with practice by considering practical ways that my research findings could support teachers or educational policies (see recommendations).

As a future teacher, I have gained a better understanding of the challenges that I myself will one day face in implementing outdoor education in my own classroom. Overall, I am inspired and intrigued by the many benefits of outdoor education seen both in the existing
body of literature and through my interviews with Toronto teachers. I have come to believe that I hold a degree of duty in helping children experience the benefits of being outside that I myself once felt growing up. In addition, the participants in my study have shown me the benefits of creative lesson planning and personal dedication that can mean the difference between remaining indoors and getting children outside in a meaningful way. I feel that above all, a teacher must be cognizant of their own perceptions, and be personally driven to overcome obstacles or barriers on a proactive basis.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the overall trends found from the research process, I have put together some recommendations as to how to overcome or ease some of the challenges discussed. There are three main areas that teachers could use support: personal motivation, access to quality outdoor space, and better outdoor education policies.

A major setback in outdoor education is the lack of teacher motivation because they feel that the responsibility lies elsewhere, or because of minimal ministry support. Even when teachers had positive outdoor experiences and acknowledged that the outdoors were beneficial to their students, they still found it challenging to get outside more often. The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) offers annual conferences, workshops and a large array of useful resources for educators (The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 2015). These workshops may prove to be helpful but may not always align realistically with outdoor resources found in inner-city environments. Additional qualifications in environmental and sustainability education offered at educational institutions offer ties to outdoor education strategies that may be more feasible. Continued learning and an openness to teach in new ways are necessary perception shifts that educators must be willing to undertake and that school administration should support.
As discussed earlier, changing perceptions about risk and stepping away from “over-protecting” children is also necessary to truly allow change. Teachers and caregivers must become open to allowing a certain degree of risk when it comes to allowing children to learn in new environments and re-connect with nature. Here, teachers must collaborate more closely with parents to ensure that student safety and outdoor education are not considered mutually exclusive. Collaboration amongst teachers can also be an effective strategy whereby outdoor teaching strategies are freely shared, and more experienced teachers can mentor teachers who are newer to the task.

The next set of recommendations revolves around access to space and outdoor resources. The 2009 Ontario policy document *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* specifies that it is the duty of school boards to share information about local resources that support outdoor education (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). There are 11 outdoor education centers run by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) including day and night camps (Toronto District School Board, 2015). These centers deliver programming in conjunction with the Ontario Curriculum and are available to all schools in the GTA. However, while these facilities offer highly effective learning opportunities, they can also be costly. Fortunately, teachers need not only rely on field trips or off-school venues for hosting their lessons: many educators have found that the schoolyard, school gardens, or nearby parks can be incredibly effective teaching tools (Feille, 2013). Outdoor learning circles and teaching areas are becoming more sought after in Ontario schools. Resources such as these are a more cost-effective and timely way to move the class outside. In Toronto, equitable green spaces may be lacking but that does not mean that students should lose the opportunity to connect with the outdoors. Teachers are recommended to work alongside their school administration, community, and with students themselves to create
outdoor learning spaces. Of course, this may require fund-raising and educators should consider applying to grants offered by the government or organizations like Evergreen or Outward Bound. Accessing available resources no matter the surrounding is a key factor for success in outdoor education.

Finally, teachers will require support from policy makers if outdoor education is to be implemented more regularly across the province. Ontario policy dictates that the Ministry of Education will “share tools for planning environmental education activities, including outdoor experiences, in local places” (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Sharing resources is a good start to motivate teachers, but as prior mentioned, if predetermined guidelines, direct curriculum links, or mandated outdoor time is not specified, teachers will not be fully motivated. I believe schools would benefit from having practice-based outdoor education guidelines set in place to support both teachers and students. Recall from Chapter 2 that a practice-based theory addresses the realistic framework needed to carry out outdoor pedagogy. Without practical direction, the responsibility to promote outdoor learning falls solely on educators. Through a practice-based outdoor education theory that is implemented school or province wide, educators can be provided with more guidance in a realistic, specific, and achievable way. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, policy makers should consider funding more research regarding the necessity and enforcement of outdoor education (see Section 5.4 for more detail). Policy makers should consider including outdoor education strategies as a component of teacher education so that pre-service teachers will enter the field with more understanding and confidence in this area.

In conclusion, there are many common setbacks that prevent teachers from taking their class outdoors, but I argue that it is possible to find a solution to such challenges through creativity, an openness to learn, and a shift in educational policy.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

Research surrounding outdoor education is still limited in Canada and there are a number of areas that require more attention. The research findings in this study were narrow in scope because they were limited to the perceptions of three individual teachers in Toronto. While the implications from these interviews are still relevant, similar studies with more participants would give a better picture of the overall needs and experiences of teachers. Of course, there may also be different trends in teacher perceptions according to the city or province studied because every area has spaces, resources, and policies that are unique. Furthermore, the participants in this study varied in background, teaching experience, grade and subject taught, and school (ie. public, private, and alternative). These other variables and their relationship to outdoor education may be another area worth exploring.

While this study focused on the attitudes and needs of teachers, the research findings point toward the role that parents have in outdoor education. Further explorations of parental roles and how they relate to education could be very useful. Additionally, research that could give voice to students themselves could provide more direct insight into improving teaching practice.

Perhaps an area of research that could create the biggest shift in teaching practice surrounds educational policy as a whole. There is plenty of research showing the benefits of learning outdoors, yet it is still hard to quantify just how much outdoor education is “sufficient” or “essential” to children. Does outdoor education have the grounds to be mandated based on the information we currently have? For policy makers to effectively provide guidelines or to mandate outdoor education, more research into the necessity and feasibility of outdoor education is needed.
5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that contribute to how three Toronto educators perceived and implemented outdoor education, and use their experiences to help support future practice.

The interview process revealed several themes that supported the literature review. Overall, the participants expressed that the outdoors had many benefits to their students, but that certain barriers prevented outdoor education from occurring more regularly. This lack of outdoor instruction is understandable due to three primary obstacles: a struggle to connect outdoor lessons to the curriculum expectations, a lack of outdoor space, and issues with school administration.

These research findings pose implications to the educational community (teachers, parents, school administrators and provincial policy makers) as well as to myself as a researcher and future practitioner. Teachers must be aware of their personal perceptions, and acknowledge that they will have to face certain challenges by using creative pedagogy and accessing available resources. Parents are also implicated by the research findings because they hold great influence over the learning habits and experiences of their children. School administration should support teachers in finding equitable accesses to green school grounds, provision of outdoor resources, and supporting outdoor excursions. Finally, provincial policy makers hold the ability to support teachers through clearer curriculum guidelines. If outdoor learning was more carefully mandated, teachers could feel greater accountability and motivation. On a personal note, the research findings have allowed me to gain a better understanding of the subtleties, benefits, and challenges of teaching outdoor education which will inform my practice as a future educator.
Based on the research implications, I propose a variety of recommendations. Firstly, teacher motivation can be improved through professional workshops, online resources, and collaboration with colleagues. Secondly, access to quality outdoor space can be found through TDSB’s outdoor education centers or through school endeavours to green the school ground. Finally, clear practice-based outdoor education platforms and further research surrounding outdoor education policies could help to create meaningful guidelines for future practice.

Further research is recommended as the scope of this study was limited to only three teachers within Toronto. Other important variables to consider include: teacher experience, location of study, parental roles, and future provincial outdoor education guidelines.

In conclusion, this study suggests that outdoor education can be a powerful tool for student learning and wellbeing, yet there are numerous areas where support for teachers is still needed. Teachers themselves must acknowledge their responsibility in getting students to connect with the outdoors. They must be willing to think critically about their teaching practices and find motivation to include authentic learning strategies outdoors. However, without the collaboration with parents and support from school administration, outdoor education opportunities may still be sparse. In order for students to benefit from outdoor learning experiences, we must continue to listen to the beliefs and needs of teachers so that we may best support them in the years to come.
REFERENCES


Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2011). *Obesity in Canada*. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada.


Appendix A: Interview Questions

**Background of Educator:**

1. What is your position title?

2. What school do you currently teach at?

3. What grade(s) do you currently teach?

4. What subject(s) do you currently teach?

5. How many years have you been teaching?

6. Describe your post-secondary educational background.

7. Briefly describe any prior experience or background in the field of education before teaching.

8. Briefly discuss why you choose to be a teacher.

**Perceptions about the Outdoors:**

9. Describe your experiences with the outdoors growing up.

10. Was there any person who influenced your opinions or experiences with the outdoors as a child? If so, explain how.

11. Do you currently spend time outside on a regular basis? If so, describe your activity.

12. Do you think outdoor education is important or beneficial to children? Why or why not?

13. Do you think that children in urban areas like Toronto face any unique challenges in getting outside? If so, how?
Implementation of Outdoor Education:

14. Who do you believe should be responsible for getting children outside?

15. Do you ever take your class outdoors (excluding recess)? If so, provide examples.
   a. How frequently would you say you bring your students outside?
   b. Have you noticed any positive effects of being outside on your students (physically, behaviorally, emotionally)?

16. Do you believe children in school receive enough time learning outside? Why or why not?

Challenges and Future Needs:

17. What do you believe are the main barriers or challenges which hold you back from teaching outside more?

18. Do you have any resources or strategies available to you at your current job in helping to get children outside?

19. What resources or next steps do you wish were available to help motivate you and other educators to teach outdoors more frequently?

20. Do you have any final thoughts or comments regarding outdoor education in Toronto?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent

Date:

Dear ____________________,

My name is Karina New and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the perceptions and challenges faced by Toronto educators in the area of outdoor education. I am interested in interviewing teachers in the Greater Toronto Area with classroom experience who would be willing to share their insight. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor ________________. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Karina New
519-616-5910

karina.new@hotmai.com

Course Instructor’s Name: _________________________

Contact Info: ____________________________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Karina New and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________________

Date: ___________________________