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An Historical Geography of Ontario School-Board-Operated  
Outdoor Education Centres

By

James Borland

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Faculty of Education and Academic Development  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2015

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An Historical Geography of Ontario School-Board-Operated  
Outdoor Education Centres

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## DECLARATION OF PREVIOUS PUBLICATION

This dissertation includes aspects of an original paper that have been drawn from across this dissertation that have been previously published as a book chapter, as follows:

Dissertation Chapter	Publication title/full citation	Publication status
Throughout	Borland, J. (2014). Sustainability of Ontario school-board-operated outdoor education centres. In F. Deer, T. Falkenberg, B. McMillan, & L. Sims (Eds.), <i>Sustainable well-being: Concepts, issues, and educational practice</i> (pp. 7-21). Winnipeg, MB: ESWB Press.	Published

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## ABSTRACT

School facilities are not passive containers, but designed spaces that project particular systems of values. Prior to the development of the idea that separate school facilities should be built to provide students with outdoor learning spaces, classroom teachers commonly used outdoor spaces within their local communities as pedagogical resources. Across Ontario, Canada's most populated province, it is commonly perceived by several scholars, news media, and many classroom teachers that school-board-operated outdoor education centres are one of the few spaces where students can learn about nature. In 2012, the Ontario Ministry of Education announced \$20 million in funding "to support outdoor learning activities for students provided by school boards or by third party organizations, such as not-for-profit or community groups," while restricting school boards from using this funding for "costs associated with board outdoor education facilities" (Gallagher & Clarke, p. 1). Little is known about the history of Ontario school-board-operated outdoor education centres. This dissertation asked the following research question: *How have Ontario school-board-operated outdoor education centres evolved since the establishment of the first facility in 1960?* Although school facilities are often assumed by researchers of educational issues to be stable sociological givens, this dissertation provides empirical evidence which challenges such an assumption. This dissertation illustrates that from 1960 to 2012, the state of Ontario school-board-operated outdoor education centres underwent several waves of growth during times of economic prosperity, and decline during periods of economic recession. Based on the evidence provided in this dissertation, stakeholders interested in the operation of these facilities are recommended to consider the financial structure of school boards prior to the development of such assets. Through careful consideration of the financial structure of school boards, stakeholders can more effectively ensure the financial sustainability of these facilities during times of both economic growth and decline.

**DEDICATION**

To all who provided me with their generous support and patience as I traveled on this academic journey—thank you, it is appreciated.

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This doctoral dissertation marks my departure from the field of outdoor education to the broader interdisciplinary study of the intersections between pedagogy, students, and the influence of facility design. School facilities not only provide places where students learn, but influence how and what students learn. I would like to thank the following committee members for their patience and guidance: Dr. Larry Glassford, Dr. Lynda Corkum, Dr. Maureen Connolly, Dr. Darren Stanley, and Dr. David Hutchison. I would also like to thank Dr. Don Metz for performing his duties as external examiner, Dr. Phil Graneiro for performing his duties as Chair of Defense. I would like to thank the staff at the University of Windsor Academic Data Centre, namely Xue (Carina) Luo, Kristi Thompson, and Dan Edelstein for their technical support and training in statistics and GIS analysis. To Cindy Lu, Senior System Integrator, from the Data Collection and Decision Support Solutions Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education, thank you for donating the 2010 Generalized District School Board ArcGIS files to Kristi Thompson from the Academic Data Centre for public access and use. Thank you to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship program, University of Windsor Faculty of Graduate Studies, and University of Windsor Faculty of Education for the associated scholarships that funded this dissertation. Finally, to my mom and dad, thank you for your financial support, listening, daily guidance, more listening, even more listening, and humor throughout the highs and lows of this academic expedition.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF PREVIOUS PUBLICATION .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiv
SECTION 1.....	1
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION.....	2
Evolving Relationships .....	3
Research Problem.....	6
Research Questions .....	12
Rationale for Dissertation.....	13
Chapter 2: THE ROOTS OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRES .....	15
A Short Discussion about Nature .....	16
Philosophical Roots of Outdoor Education.....	19
Colonization .....	20
Agricultural Education Movement.....	23
Urban Romanticism.....	25
Camping Education Movement.....	27
Conservation Movement .....	29
Conservation Education .....	32
Inception of School-Board-Operated Outdoor Education Centres.....	35
Summary .....	40
Chapter 3: RESEARCH PLAN .....	44
What is HGIS? .....	44



Strengths of HGIS .....	45
Challenges of HGIS .....	48
Rationale for Using HGIS .....	51
Data Sources .....	52
Archival Sources.....	53
Secondary Review Sources.....	56
Online Appraisal Sources. ....	56
Data Collection and Analysis .....	57
Quantitative Data.....	58
Statistical Analysis. ....	59
GIS Analysis.....	63
Qualitative Data.....	64
Qualitative Analysis. ....	65
Summary .....	65
SECTION 2.....	67
Chapter 4: OFFICIAL POLICY GOALS .....	68
Schools Administration Act .....	68
The Emergence of the Environmental Movement.....	69
The Emergence of the Adventure Education Movement .....	72
The Ontario Department of Education .....	73
Government Policy Goals and Outdoor Education Centres .....	78
Summary .....	84
SECTION 3.....	88
Chapter 5: THE EARLY DECLINE.....	89
Ontario Teachers' Federation .....	92
The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario .....	95
Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1972–1973 .....	96

A Shift in Government Policy .....	106
COEO's Code of Recommended Practices .....	112
First Cuts .....	115
Refocussing on Adventure Education .....	118
Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1978–1979 .....	121
Summary .....	128
<b>Chapter 6: ECONOMY, RECESSION &amp; GROWTH .....</b>	<b>133</b>
Tensions of the Early 1980s .....	136
Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1985–1986 .....	141
The Provincial Liberals: 1985–1990 .....	145
Summary .....	151
<b>Chapter 7: THE ONTARIO NDP GOVERNMENT .....</b>	<b>154</b>
Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1992–1993 .....	156
The Economic Realities of Early 1990s .....	160
Summary .....	168
<b>Chapter 8: THE COMMON SENSE REVOLUTION .....</b>	<b>171</b>
Provincial Restructuring .....	171
Curriculum Restructuring .....	172
Financial Restructuring .....	181
The Response to Bill 160 .....	183
The Curriculum, It's Only a Trend .....	188
Equality in Education .....	195
New Outdoor Education Centres .....	198
The Scope of OE Centres: 2002-2003 .....	200
Summary for the Common Sense Revolution .....	203
<b>Chapter 9: THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>207</b>
Shift 2003–2006 .....	208

An Official Environmental Education Policy Framework .....	212
Curricular Criticism.....	216
Scope of Outdoor Education Centers: 2011–2012 .....	220
School Board Outdoor Education Policy .....	226
In Memorandum .....	232
Summary .....	234
Chapter 10: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION .....	239
Revisiting the Research Problem .....	239
Revisiting the 1960s .....	240
Revisiting 1960 to 2012 .....	242
Implications .....	245
Develop clear rationales. ....	245
Develop partnerships. ....	248
Accept the finite nature of school facilities. ....	250
Future Areas of Research .....	252
References.....	256
APPENDIX A.....	290
APPENDIX B .....	292
Vita Auctoris.....	294

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Example of Areal Interpolation Calculations.....	62
Table 2: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973).....	96
Table 3: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1978-1979).....	121
Table 4: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1985–1986).....	141
Table 5: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1988–1989).....	146
Table 6: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1992–1993).....	157
Table 7: Status of OE centres 1992–1993 to 2011–2012 school years.....	201
Table 8: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 2011–2012).....	221

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1972–1973 school year (English Public School Board System).....	97
Figure 2: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1972–1973 school year (English Catholic School Board System).....	98
Figure 3: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1978–1979 school year (English Public School Board System).....	123
Figure 4: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1978–1979 school year (English Catholic School Board System).....	124
Figure 5: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1985–1986 school year (English Public School Board System).....	143
Figure 6: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1985–1986 school year (English Catholic School Board System).....	144
Figure 7: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1992–1993 school year (English Public School Board System).....	158
Figure 8: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1992–1993 school year (English Catholic School Board System).....	159
Figure 9: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 2011–2012 school year (English Catholic School Board System).....	222
Figure 10: School-board-Operated OE Centres for the 2011–2012 school year (English Catholic School Board System).....	223

**LIST OF APPENDICIES**

APPENDIX A: Percentage rate of change of Ontario School-Board-Operated OE Centres.....	290
APPENDIX B: Consent to Publish and Copyright Agreement.....	292

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

COEO	Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario
DSBONE	District School Board of Ontario North East
DSB	District School Board
GECD SB	Greater Essex County District School Board
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
HGIS	Historical Geographic Information Science
KEEP	Killarney Experiential Education Program
OAC	Ontario Academic Credits
OE	Outdoor Education
OEE	Outdoor Experiential Education
OTF	Ontario Teacher's Federation
P1J1	The Formative Years: Circular P1J1
RCSSB	Roman Catholic Secondary School Board
TBE	Toronto Board of Education
TDSB	Toronto District School Board

## **SECTION 1**

This section provides an overview about the rationale and research plan for this dissertation. It is comprised of three chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview about the research problem, research questions, and rationale for conducting this dissertation. Chapter 2 provides a review of scholarly literature that unpacks the intercontinental and continental influences that initially led to the idea that North American school boards should design, build, and operate specialized outdoor education facilities. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research plan that guided the creation of this dissertation.



## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Across Ontario, Canada's most populated province (Bone, 2005), it is commonly perceived by scholars who specialize in the study of Ontario-based outdoor education programs, the southern Ontario metropolitan news media, and many classroom teachers (predominantly from across urban areas of southern Ontario) that *school-board-operated outdoor education centres* provide one of the few spaces where students can learn about and engage with nature (Andrews, 2003; Foster & Linney, 2007; Kalinowski, 2003, January 28; Linney, 2002, November 21; Payne, 2008, April 1; Sharpe & Breunig, 2009; Spears, April 22, 1995; Tan & Pedretti, 2010). *Nature* is commonly defined as natural environments or wilderness areas where rocks, forest, beaches, and wild animals have not been substantially altered by human intervention or persist despite human intervention (Cronon, 1995a). *Outdoor education (OE)* is conventionally described as a multidisciplinary teaching method where educators intentionally use outdoor spaces to teach skills and concepts deemed best learned through direct contact with the natural environment (Andrews, 2003; Borland, 2011; Brookes, 2002; Carlson, 2000; Foster & Linney, 2007; Priest, 1986; Sharp, 1943; Whitcombe, 1991). *School-board-operated OE centres*, which are also known as natural science schools, environmental education centres, and field centres, are school board facilities acquired by purchase, lease or special agreement for the operation of day or residential natural science schools or other out-of-classroom programs (Eagles & Richardson, 1992; Ontario Education Act, 1990; York Region District School Board, 2008). Distinct from OE centres operated by third party providers whose facilities often serve as sites for programs that schools can choose to purchase on an individual basis, Ontario school-board-operated OE centres typically

are owned by school boards for exclusive access to facilities with rural, wilderness, or naturalized ecosystems for curricular study (Bluewater District School Board, 2007; Crozman & Eagles, 1988; Durham District School Board, n.d.; Eagles & Richardson, 1992; Foster & Linney, 2007; Lakehead Public Schools, n.d.; Outdoor Education Council of Ottawa, 2011; Waterloo Region District School Board, 2005; York Region District School Board, 2008).

### **Evolving Relationships**

Since the establishment of the first school-board-operated OE centre in 1960, called the Island Natural Science School, located on Centre Island in the Toronto Islands, operated by the Toronto Board of Education (now known as the Toronto District School Board or TDSB), several Ontario-based scholars, teachers, and outdoor educators have stated that school-board-operated OE centres have historically served as the primary vehicles for the facilitation of environmental education programs across Ontario's publicly funded education system (Aikman, 1976; Birchard, 1996; Eyres, 1973; Crozman & Eagles, 1988; Eagles & Richardson, 1992; Martindale, 1974; Passmore, 1972; Raffan, 1996; Sharpe & Breunig, 2009; Tan & Pedretti, 2010). Since the 1960s, different Canadian educational authorities have referred to OE by several different terms such as "the expression 'out-of-school' education" (Passmore, 1972, p. 12). "Teachers with a special interest in ecology and environmental problems" have preferred, "to describe their programs as environmental education or conservation education" (p. 12). Educators who have been "strongly inclined toward exploration, challenge and adventure" have used, "the terms open country education or outward bound education" (p. 12). More recently, some scholars now include OE as a practical way to promote students' place-based

knowledge of their surrounding urban school communities (Brookes, 2002; Foster & Linney, 2007; Gruenwald, 2003). As former environmental education consultant for the Niagara District School Board, and current Brock University outdoor and environmental education lecturer Bert Murphy (1994) states, OE “it is not a discipline or curriculum unto itself, but rather an adjunct to reinforce and strengthen learning in other disciplines such as science, mathematics or geography” (p. 39). As Murphy recounts, in the 1960s “Outdoor and environmental education evolved . . . in response to growing concern for environmental well-being” (p. 39). Since the 1960s, for those involved in the operation of school board OE facilities and programs across Ontario’s publicly funded education system, OE has been conventionally viewed as an interchangeable concept with, and a unique component of, a school board’s interdisciplinary approach to environmental education (Aikman, 1976; Borland, 2011; Eyres, 1973; Martindale, 1974; Murphy, 1993; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Passmore, 1972; Working Group on Environmental Education, 2007).

Although some scholars may disagree with the historical record regarding the relationship between OE, environmental education, and Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, over the past decade, the Ontario Ministry of Education has chosen to identify OE as a distinct and critical component of environmental education (Working Group, 2007). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) defines *environmental education* as that which promotes an understanding of, active experiences in, and appreciation for: (a) the dynamic interactions of the planet’s physical and biological systems; (b) how social and economic systems rely on natural systems for subsistence; (c) the human and scientific dimensions of environmental issues; and (d) the positive and

negative consequences created between human and natural systems. As a component of this new interdisciplinary policy framework, classroom teachers are encouraged to provide their students with regular opportunities to engage in outdoor environments “to foster a connection to local places, develop a greater understanding of ecosystems, and provide a unique context for learning” (Working Group on Environmental Education, 2007, p. 6). As stipulated within the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2009) contemporary environmental education policy framework titled *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, based on the implementation of this framework, as environmental education is embedded within each of the province’s revised subject curriculum documents, schools and classroom teachers will be expected to integrate environmental education lessons across all grade levels and curriculum subjects.

Within the *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* environmental education policy framework, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) stipulated that it would help school boards and schools “build student capacity to take action on environmental issues” by integrating “opportunities throughout the curriculum for students to take actions that foster engaged citizenship within and outside the classroom” (p. 15). School boards are expected to support this initiative by encouraging “environmental learning for all students inside and outside the classroom” (p. 15). Schools are expected to “create opportunities for students to address environmental issues in their homes, in their local communities, or at the global level” (p. 15) to “provide leadership support to enhance student engagement and community involvement” (p. 16). School boards are now expected to “share information about local resources that support . . . outdoor education” by fostering “links and partnerships with community organizations (such as non-profit organizations,

businesses, farms, and industries) to help extend engagement in and responsibility for environmental education to the broader community” (p. 17). Through these partnerships, schools are expected to “enrich and complement students’ classroom learning by organizing out-of-classroom experiences and activities (such as the naturalization of the school yard) as appropriate” (p. 17). To accomplish these goals and help school boards “increase the extent to which environmental education is integrated into school board policies, procedures, and strategic plans,” the Ministry stipulates that it will “share tools for planning environmental education activities, including outdoor experiences, in local places” (p. 19).

### **Research Problem**

Many Ontario school boards contend that the purpose for owning and operating OE centres is to provide board-controlled spaces where students can participate in teacher-led activities that foster environmental awareness and an appreciation for the natural environment (Bluewater District School Board, 1998; District School Board Ontario North East, 2003; Lakehead District School Board, 2005; York Region District School Board, 2008). It can easily be assumed that school boards that operate OE facilities may be the most prepared to quickly adapt to and implement the province’s new environmental education policy framework. On July 20, 2012, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a memorandum to the Directors of Education and the Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities announcing the provision of a one-time Program Enhancement Grant of \$20 million in funding for OE for the 2012–2013 school year. This memorandum stipulated that the funding was to be used “to support outdoor learning activities for students provided by school boards or by third party organizations,

such as not-for-profit or community groups” (Gallagher & Clarke, 2012, July 20, p. 1). This funding was strictly prescribed to cover expenses associated with transportation costs and student user fees for participation in OE programs. School boards were restricted from allocating this funding to cover costs associated with the operation or staffing of “board outdoor education facilities” (p. 2). Although, through the July 20, 2012 memorandum, the Government of Ontario did not restrict school boards from choosing to operate their own OE facilities, the position expressed by the Ontario Ministry of Education appears to illustrate a shift away from permitting school boards to use new government funding for school-board-operated OE centres. For example, as reported by Owen Sound Sun Times, news reporter Bill Henry, on October 19, 2012, during a visit to the Bluewater Outdoor Education Centre, the Ontario Education Minister Laurel Broten, praised the Bluewater District School Board for its unique partnership with the Bluewater Education Foundation, where since 2004, the ownership of the facility has been financed and operated by the foundation, while the school board provided the staff and OE programs for its students.

Although it could be assumed that the province’s decision regarding the allocation of funding for OE is informed by scholarly research, only one empirical peer-reviewed study has sought to examine the state of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. Published in 1992 by Eagles and Richardson in the *Journal of Environmental Education*, and now over 20 years old, this study provides an assessment about the state of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres for the 1988–1989 school year. Acknowledging that the first OE centre, called the Island Natural Science School, was established in 1960 by the Toronto Board of Education, Eagles and Richardson report that by the 1988–1989

school year, the number of school boards that owned and operated an OE centre had grown to 26.7% of all Ontario school boards, providing 20.6% of all Ontario students with access to OE programs offered through such facilities. What Eagles and Richardson did not specifically report, although it is implied through their study is that, for this same school year, their statistics indicated that 73.3% of school boards did not report being involved in the operation of a school-board-operated OE centre and, as a result, 79.4% of Ontario students did not have the opportunity to attend OE program provided through such a facility. Based on this data, Eagles and Richardson felt it was acceptable to conclude that from 1960 to the 1988–1989 school year, the use of school-board-operated OE centres had grown slowly, but steadily, across the province, making it appropriate for them to claim that Ontario schools made “extensive use of specialized field centres” (p. 9).

Over the past decade, several scholars who specialize in the study of Ontario-based OE and environmental education programs have published anecdotal accounts that report that from the 1990s to the early 2000s many school-board-operated OE centres were closed because of financial constraints imposed by the provincial government upon school boards (Andrews, 2003; Breunig & O’Connell, 2008; Foster & Linney, 2007; Potter & Henderson, 2004; Sharpe & Breunig, 2009). Andrews states that over the last few decades several Ontario school boards have “gradually reduced their financial commitment to outdoor education. As a result, many residential field centres have been closed and the frequency of day trips to field centres has been significantly reduced” (p. v). Potter and Henderson contend that “starting in the early 1990s many school board outdoor education centres closed, shifting to privately funded centres on a user-fee basis”

(p. 80). Foster and Linney state that financial constraints placed upon school boards by the Ontario Ministry of Education, while it was controlled by a Conservative majority government, resulted in the closure of many centres over the past couple of decades, leaving “the remaining ones in constant jeopardy” (p. 32). Breunig and O’Connell affirm that significant cuts to school-board-operated OE centres occurred in the late 1990s, when six Toronto-area school boards were consolidated into a single large metropolitan school board. Sharpe and Breunig contend that proceeding into the early 2000s, a shift in the ideology of the provincial education system from a progressive ideology of educational innovation to a fiscal conservative ideology of economic accountability, efficiency, and a back-to-the-basics standardized curriculum contributed to the closure of numerous school-board-operated OE centres.

Although the accounts by Andrews (2003), Potter and Henderson (2004), Forster and Linney (2007), Breunig and O’Connell (2008), and Sharpe and Breunig (2009) each provide potentially valuable anecdotal evidence which supports an assumption that most Ontario school boards previously owned and operated an OE centre, a lack of empirical evidence exists to support these accounts. Nevertheless, several classroom teachers (predominantly recruited from the Greater Toronto Area) that participated in a study published by Tan and Pedretti (2010) provide support for the anecdotal accounts of these scholars. These classroom teachers report that, after several decades of cuts and closures to numerous school-board-operated OE centres, there no longer exists the scope of school board leadership or specialists to assist them in the delivery of outdoor learning opportunities. These classroom teachers claim that this absence of school board leadership and loss of support previously provided by OE centres now impacts their



pedagogical ability to access and use outdoor spaces to implement the Ministry's new environmental education policy framework.

The position of these scholars and classroom teachers seems to be corroborated by past newspaper articles which illustrate that when Ontario school-board-operated OE centres have been threatened with cutbacks and closures over the past decade, such decisions have often been confronted by significant public opposition. When journalists from major southern Ontario metropolitan newspapers have explored these issues, they have often cited quotations from stakeholders invested in the operation of these centres in a way that has shaped a public narrative which makes the decision to close these facilities seem like a morally wrong and irrational action that defies logic. For example, "closing these particular centres defies logic (Toronto District School Board Trustee Paula Fletcher in Kalinowski, 2003, January 28, p. B01); a visit to these centres is often described as "the first real taste some...students get of the great outdoors" (Payne, 2008, April 1, p. B4); "How can urban children be informed and motivated to act on environmental concerns without having teacher-led experiences at outdoor education centres?" (Linney, 2002, November 21, p. A23); "Children must see, smell, and feel nature from an early age to learn to love it...opposition to (school-board-operated OE centres) is almost persecution" (Toronto Board of Education Superintendent of Curriculum and former staff member of Island Natural Science School, Chuck Hopkins in Spears, 1995, April 22, p. C1).

In response to the anecdotal accounts reported by these scholars, classroom teachers, and the southern Ontario metropolitan news media, the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), is now lobbying the provincial government to increase

funding to school boards for the construction of new school-board-operated OE centres. COEO is recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education as a professional body which represents Ontario-based OE practitioners (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 2012; Working Group on Environmental Education, 2007). COEO contends that further provincial funding is required for school-board-operated OE centers, to ensure that all Ontario students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 receive a minimum of two one-day OE programs and one five-day OE program. COEO argues that such a policy would ensure that all students receive access to free low cost OE opportunities (Foster & Linney, 2007). In COEO's report titled *Reconnecting Children through Outdoor Education*, where these recommendations were written by Foster and Linney (2007), it appears that these recommendations are supported by an end-note reference to outcomes-based research. However, no outcomes-based research was actually referenced to justify the minimum standard Foster and Linney recommend should be funded by the province. Endnote 168, on page 74 of this report, merely states that "it should be left to the discretion of each school board as to how best to provide these experiences (e.g., the construction of their own centres, the use of one shared with other boards or agencies, or the use of existing centres run by public and private agencies)." Although several scholars, classroom teachers, and the COEO each affirm that school-board-operated OE centres are one of the best ways to deliver OE programs within the provinces' publicly funded education system, no attempt has been made to empirically assess the state of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012.

## Research Questions

This dissertation provides an empirically-based account about what influenced publicly funded school boards across Ontario to establish, operate, and close school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012. This dissertation provides a long-term account about the financial and operational sustainability of school-board-operated OE centres. The information reported within this dissertation provides educational stakeholders with important information they can use to make future fact-based decisions regarding the development and use of school-board-operated OE centres.

To guide this inquiry, the following central research question was asked: *How have Ontario school-board-operated OE centres evolved since the establishment of the first facility in 1960?* This research question was intentionally designed as a broad research question so that the perspectives of no one single group could be privileged, permitting what MacMillan (2010) describes as the complexities of the historical record to emerge. In seeking answers to this central research question, three supporting research questions were asked, based on the following rationale. Since scholars, such as Passmore (1972), as well as Eagles and Richardson (1992), indicate that the first Ontario school-board-operated OE centre, the Island Natural Science School, was established in 1960 by the Toronto Board of Education (TBE), it was important to explore the initial reasons why school boards, such as the TBE in the 1960s, chose to invest in, establish, and operate a school-board-operated OE centre. Thus, the following research question was asked to guide this inquiry: *What were the official policy goals for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres in the 1960s, and how well did these early facilities meet these goals?* Scholars, such as Andrews (2003), Potter and Henderson (2004), Linney and

Foster (2007), Breunig and O'Connell (2008), Sharp and Breunig (2009), and Ontario teachers surveyed by Tan and Pedretti (2010) each report that numerous school-board-operated OE centres were closed across the province from the 1990s to early 2000s. To test the clarity of these accounts, it was important to ask: *What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?* Finally, because historical inquiries often play a unique role in helping stakeholders and policymakers design more informed policy resolutions based on added factual knowledge about past events (MacMillian, 2010), based on the insights answered through the two previous support questions, the following question was asked: *Based on these findings, what are the implications for future educational policy related to school-board-operated OE centres in Ontario?* Through the process of conducting this inquiry, this doctoral dissertation can provide unique insights that policymakers may use to better inform their decisions regarding the future design and delivery of OE opportunities within Ontario's publicly funded education system. Furthermore, at a broader level, this document may be used by other regional public education systems as a case study which examines the complex dynamics that go into the political decisions to establish, operate, or occasionally close specialized educational facilities.

### **Rationale for Dissertation**

Although several Ontario-based OE scholars promote the idea that publicly funded school-board-operated OE facilities are the most financially sustainable vehicle for the delivery of OE programs (Andrews, 2003; Potter and Henderson, 2004; Foster and Linney, 2007; Breunig & O'Connell, 2008; Sharpe and Breunig, 2009), the personal

accounts provided by each of these scholars only provides anecdotal evidence to explain what happened to the prevalence of these specialized facilities from the 1990s to early 2000s. No historical or geographic study has been conducted to assess the broader prevalence, use, and sustainability of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012. Such a line of inquiry may not have been previously conducted because until the last decade, as educational psychologist Urie Brofenbrenner (1976) states, most educational researchers often assume that school facilities exist as stable sociological givens. The reality is, as educational historians Burke and Grovensor (2008) state, that the usefulness of school facilities is always finite. Consequently, Burke and Grovensor infer that the material structures of educational facilities exist within a constantly changing political landscape. It is within this constantly changing political landscape that some Ontario school-board-operated OE centres continue to remain educationally relevant and successfully useful, while other facilities have been forced to face budgetary cutbacks or even closure.

## Chapter 2: THE ROOTS OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRES

Before a discussion can be conducted about how the history of Ontario school-board-operated outdoor education centres have evolved from 1960 to 2012, it is important to unpack the intercontinental and continental influences that initially led to the idea that North American school boards should design, build, and operate specialized OE facilities. British geographer Doreen Massey (2005) states that the politics of the design, establishment, and use of school facilities, such as school-board-operated OE centres, is an inherently spatial problem. Massey states that *space*, as a social theory, is predicated upon an understanding that across time, there exist a multiplicity of spatial relationships between people and places. Massey states that spatial inquiries: (a) expose how the political conceptualization of space regulates how human beings participate in the constant negotiation of the multiple levels of material interrelations which shape our interpretation of our social and ecological world from the distantly global to the intimately local; and (b) explain how multiple heterogeneous social trajectories can coexist simultaneously and influence each other. Burke and Grovensor (2008) state that schools and other specialized educational facilities “should not be viewed merely as capsules in which education is located . . . but as *designed spaces* that, in their materiality, project a system of values” (p. 8, emphasis added in italics). As designed spaces, Burke and Grovensor contend that school facilities privilege particular social behaviours, while discouraging others. Consequently, Burke and Grovensor state that when particular systems of values become embodied within the design of school facilities, these systems both influence and constrain the pedagogy of educators and the experiences of students. Based on Burke and Grovensor’s premise, the design and use of

Ontario school-board-operated OE centres also project particular systems of values that could be inferred to privilege a regional-based way students and the broader public have been taught to perceive their spatial relationship to *nature*.

### **A Short Discussion about Nature**

Anthropologist Matthew Cooper (1994) states that throughout history leaders and social movements have either drawn upon or developed spatially predicated regional-based value systems to influence how people within their communities perceive their relationship to the immediate material world. Cooper postulates that through the promotion of specific ideologies of place, particular leaders and social movements have taught, and continue to teach the public, how to conceptually frame specific spaces as moral landscapes. When the public is successfully influenced to adopt a particular place-based ideology, such an adoption helps establish social boundaries around specific spaces that make it easier for leaders or social movements to shape public perceptions about how they expect these spaces to be used. Based on Cooper's argument, it could be argued that when proponents such as the President of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), Grant Linney (2002), contends that children cannot "be informed and motivated to act on environmental concerns without having teacher-led experiences at outdoor education centres" (Linney, 2002, November 21, p. A23); when Southern Ontario newspaper reporter Payne (2008, April 1) characterizes the use of school-board-operated OE centres as one of the few places where students can engage with "the great outdoors" (p. B4); and when Toronto District School Board Superintendent of Curriculum Chuck Hopkins, describes the decision to close school-board-operated OE centres as an act of "persecution" because "children must see, smell, and feel nature from

an early age to learn to love it” (Spears, 1995, April 22, p. C1); that each of these proponents are promoting a particular spatial discourse which privileges a particular point of view about what they believe people in their society should define as *nature*, identify where *nature* can be located, and perceive their relationship to the role that *nature* plays as part of their material world.

Scholars Massey (2005), Clarke (2002), and Cronon (1996b) each assert that popular human constructions about *nature* and *the great outdoors* are often grounded upon an assumption that if left to itself, nature will stay put, remain in, or return to its previous indigenous state. Geographer Nigel Clarke states that when people conceptualize nature as a quality that can only be interacted with, in particular places, it is these spatial conceptualizations of nature that are predominantly based upon an environmental belief that nature will *stay put* in the spaces that human societies designate for it. As Clarke asserts that reality dictates that nature is constantly undergoing change, and argues that beliefs which promote the idea that humans can make nature *stay put* are only derivatives of “a metropolitan detachment from the daily dynamics of bio-materiality” (p. 117). Massey contends that when people choose to view nature as something that stays put, they are expressing an artificial, politically designed “desire for a foundation; a stable bottom to it all; a firm ground on which the global mobilities of technology and culture can play” (p. 98). Massey (2005) asserts that once the relationship between the human world and the non-human world is reconciled, arguments that strive to isolate nature to specifically designated spaces become exposed for what they are: political arguments about how specific leaders and social movements want us, the general public, to perceive our spatial relationships to the material world.



Massey (2002) states that how leaders and social movements strive to influence how the general public perceives their spatial relationships to the material world illustrates how all societies are spatially constituted. According to Massey, this means that “all social (and indeed physical) phenomenon/activities/relations have a spatial form and a relative spatial location” (p. 80). Massey argues that when scholars engage in a critical examination of *space* as a social theory, they can begin to unpack how specific political leaders and social movements strive to influence and control how people perceive their relationships to the material world.

Burke and Grovensor (2008) state that it is important to recognize that the indoor and outdoor spaces of school facilities are not neutral or passive containers, but instead are active agents that shape school experiences. As active agents, the design of school facilities pioneer particular ways of understanding education, which can even function, as educational geographers Green and Letts (2007) state, to establish or reify the sovereignty of nations. As Burke and Grovensor (2008) contend, in the search to uncover the critical meanings behind the historical impacts and influences of school facilities, educational historians

need to bring the subject and object, both historically located, together in the same narrative. Such a narrative begins with the moment of a building’s conception and continues through its design, construction and use – concluding, in some cases, in its eventual destruction – it should try to include the views of all those involved in each of these stages. (p. 8)

When considering the construction and use of *objects*, such as school-board-operated OE centres, educational historians must first unpack how many contemporary Canadians now

conceptually define the *subject* of these facilities: *nature*. To unpack the subject of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres requires an exploration of North America's colonial history, which environmental historian Richard White (1996), geographer Nigel Clark (2002), and educationalist Sheelah McLean (2013) each argue continues to influence how most contemporary North Americans view nature: as a vast wilderness landscape, instead of an intimate component of our daily surroundings.

### **Philosophical Roots of Outdoor Education**

How North American OE theory is tied to the roots of colonialism is most clearly evident in how its contemporary scholars choose to align the philosophical roots of their practice to the works of three European philosophers: John A. Comenius (1592–1670), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) (Carlson, 2000; Donaldson, 1979; Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin, & Ewert, 2006; Hammerman, Hammerman, & Hammerman, 2001; Knapp, 2003; Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999; VandenHazel & Benson, 1973). Several OE scholars commonly recount that these philosophers supported, as a worthy educational endeavor, the direct observation and study of a student's local natural surroundings. Comenius advocated that children learn through their senses by being directly exposed to natural objects, prior to learning concepts or skills through rote or books (Donaldson, 1979; Gilbertson, 2006; Hammerman, et al., 2001; VandenHazel & Benson, 1973). Rousseau believed that the facilitation of direct experiences (especially physical activity) in nature taught children self-reliance (Donaldson, 1979; Hammerman et al., 2001). Pestalozzi expanded upon teaching the conventional school subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic by integrating the use of outdoor experiences within local natural areas into the lessons he

designed and taught (Donaldson, 1979; Hammerman et al., 2001). Based on the consolidated interpretations of these three philosophers, North American OE scholars often credit Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi as the people who first developed the idea to use direct experiences in natural settings as a way to promote learning. As Dutch educational historians Johan Sturm and Leendert Groenendijk (1999) contend, it is a common trend among modern educationalists to claim European philosophers, such as Comenius as one of their founding fathers. When scholars make such claims, they often do so in an uncritical way for their own strategic or ideological reasons, rather than to promote these philosophers as seminal historical figures of their social movement. Sturm and Groenendijk state when scholars engage in such actions, they pervert the philosophical intent of the philosophers and their philosophical influence. Consequently, it is important to recognize that the specifics about what these European philosophers actually referred to as natural objects, nature, and local natural areas is left undefined by the North American OE scholars cited in this paragraph. Although OE specialists often seek to canonize Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi, as the forefathers of the modern OE movement, what these philosophers may have defined as nature should not be assumed to mean the same thing as what contemporary OE theorists define as nature.

### **Colonization**

When the concept of nature is explored through the works of environmental historians Alfred Crosby (1986), William Cronon (1995b), and Carolyn Merchant (1995), each of these scholars espouse that throughout the lives of Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi what Europeans and their New World colonial settlers considered natural was not the same as what is celebrated as nature within contemporary North American

society, including within the field of OE. Although contemporary North Americans often define the epitome of nature as known through their protected wilderness areas, during the time of colonization Europeans and their North American colonial settlers commonly considered wilderness areas to be wastelands that should either be avoided or transformed (Cronon, 1995b; Crosby, 1986; Merchant, 1995). Many settlers were taught by their church and state to believe the reason why their Christian deity placed them on the Earth was to transform the unproductive wastelands of North America back to its true natural condition - productive agricultural properties. In return for their efforts, their deity, as promised through their church and state, would grant them the right to manage the lands they transformed. Through this act of transformation, settlers were promised by their church that they could then find spiritual reformation and restored health. The reformation that settlers really found was an ability to participate in an expanding global capitalist market where the profits they made through the export of fish, furs, timber, coal, and cash crops to Europe granted them the opportunity to live more affluent lifestyles.

Historian Timothy Silver (2003) states, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europe had become part of a global trading economy, dominated by the idea of capitalism that favored profit and material possessions as the way to ensure an individual's prosperity and gage his status by participating in the struggle to transform the wilderness of North America into controlled agrarian landscapes. Colonialism provided former European commoners, from nations such as France and Great Britain, the opportunity to become members of a new wealthy elite, which they and their European governments both believed they could never be a part of if they had chosen to stay in Europe. Settlers, who survived the process

of establishing colonies, were able to acquire one of the key symbols of wealth in exchange for risking their lives to colonize North America: the ownership of property. Once settlers had transformed their properties into productive agricultural farmsteads, they had further opportunities to enhance their wealth through the process of “producing commodities for the market” (Silver, 2003, p. 25).

Since disease had decimated most Aboriginal nations who had once governed North America as a shared commons, the transformation of the continent from a vast wilderness hinterland into expansive agricultural landscape by colonial settlers was easily accomplished (Silver, 2003). For subsistence reasons, surviving members of indigenous groups were forced to adapt to a new spatial way of negotiating their traditional territories. Aboriginals often either chose to hunt animals to supply furs to the European market or adapt to agricultural lifestyles in regions, such as southern Ontario, where previously forested regions had been transformed into vast agrarian landscapes (Silver, 2003). Although indigenous societies continued to believe in the common good for themselves and respect for the rest of the natural world, “Europeans who settled North America. . . failed to realize that Native Americans depended on uncultivated lands, such as forests for much of their food” (Silver, 2003, p. 25). For colonial settlers, subsistence activities, such as hunting and fishing, which were critical for Aboriginal communities, were regularly dismissed as unproductive activities because colonists held traditional views that hunting and fishing were only meant as leisure pursuits, while laboring in the earth through farming was considered a worthy productive pursuit. “Convinced that the native peoples did not make adequate use of the land, most colonists believed they had the right to tame the wilderness and make it productive” (Silver, 2003, p. 25). As a

result, the subsistence hunter-gatherer lifestyle of many Aboriginal people was not considered by most settlers as an effective way of life within a reconstructed landscape that favored capital profit through the mono-cultural cultivation of cash crops. Therefore, the settlers set out to assimilate Aboriginal people into their spatial way of living.

### **Agricultural Education Movement**

In the 1820s, as British settlers in the province of Upper Canada (now known as Ontario) continued to transform the forested landscape into agricultural farms (Wynn, 2007), Christian missionaries such as Egerton Ryerson (who later became Upper Canada's first Superintendent of Education), employed at Indian Missions, began to experiment in the delivery of agricultural education as a way to improve the lives of a declining aboriginal population. Across the Dominion of Canada, this decline was often considered by politicians and colonial missionaries to be a product of living an unsustainable nomadic lifestyle (Wynn, 2007). Within documents written to the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, at this time, it was regularly recommended that agricultural skills be taught to aboriginal youth to help them learn how to live a sedentary life (Madill, 1930). These practices would continue to be implemented into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In collaboration with the agricultural education movement, there emerged the nature study movement founded in 1839 by scientist-educator Louis Agassiz, who promoted the study of nature over books (Carlson, 2000; Pyle, 2001; Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999). The key goal of the nature study movement was the promotion of nature literacy. Proponents of the nature study movement advocated that for the healthy development of society's youth, it was essential that students have knowledge about the local natural

history of the places where they lived. During the agricultural recession of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nature study movement organized Junior Naturalists Clubs, teacher education courses, and the publication of several textbooks, such as the Anna Botsford Comstock's (1911) *Handbook of Nature Study*. Through her book, Comstock asserted, what she considered to be the fundamental knowledge that any intelligent youth from the countryside should know about his local environment (Comstock, 1911; Pyle, 2001).

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, since agriculture had become one of the mainstays of Canada's growing economy (Ambrose, 2004), to increase support and promote economic development, the Government of Ontario made agricultural education an officially recognized subject-discipline of the provincial curriculum (Madill, 1930). "In 1913, the Canadian government introduced The Agricultural Instruction Act, a measure which granted ten million dollars to the provinces over ten years to aid agriculture" and advance the farming industry (Ambrose, 2004, p. 257). From 1911–1928, several thousand Ontario secondary school teachers participated in summer training courses to teach agricultural education, while several thousand elementary teachers took courses on school gardening and nature study to provide students in urban areas similar experiences on the grounds of school properties and within the parks of their urban communities. At that time, the Government of Ontario was also striving to encourage its students to continue their education beyond the eighth grade and enroll in secondary school. Agricultural education enabled students who had to stay at home during the fall harvest and spring planting seasons, the opportunity to engage in formal schooling through the assessment of mobile agricultural education teachers. Agricultural education teachers assessed student knowledge of curricular subjects such as mathematics, biology, and

chemistry through demonstrations of farm work, while school gardening programs assisted the government in promoting an appreciation for the agricultural industry and the value of funding agricultural education programs (Madill, 1930). Through the implementation of agricultural education programs, the engagement of Ontario students in outdoor agricultural environments became a relevant way to encourage the province's youth to stay enrolled in an evolving secondary public school system, and promote political support for the nation's growing economic sector.

### **Urban Romanticism**

Alongside the emergence of strong Canadian and American agricultural sectors, Silver (2003) states that some members of settler society began to become concerned that their imported colonial lifestyles had imposed unknown limits upon a landscape they now called home. In rural areas, settler communities were forced to confront how their agrarian lifestyles imposed ecological pressures upon the land, such as increased soil exhaustion and timber shortages. Although ecological issues, such as soil exhaustion, presented more pressing problems for farmers, timber shortages affected the ability of both urban and rural communities to access a supply of fuel sources and construction supplies. Colonial authorities passed "legislation designed to . . . curb the commercial exploitation of forests" (Silver, 2003, p. 25). In expanding urban centers, new social pressures and environmental pollution issues, such as raw sewage and water pollution, began to emerge as settlers and new immigrants moved to cities to work in rapidly expanding industrial manufacturing sectors. As settler society was forced to confront the ecological constraints their lifestyles now imposed upon a landscape that they previously believed would provide a perpetual supply of natural resources, small groups of the urban



social elite began to experiment in the creation of alternative social movements. These social movements sought to resolve what they believed to be social evils created through luxurious lifestyles provided to settlers through their participation in the agricultural transformation and urban industrialization of the landscape. These members of the urban social elite began to seek spiritual reformation and the restoration of human health within the remaining wilderness areas that their pioneering grandparents had previously sought to either avoid or transform. Subsequently, it was through the efforts of these elite urban social movements that the descendants of colonial settler society would begin to reinterpret their spatial relationship to nature.

The first prominent social movement to experiment with re-conceptualizing the spatial relationship between people and nature was the Transcendental movement. Prominent leaders of elite urban society, such as American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836), began to advocate that urban living did not reflect the real world and negatively afflicted the human soul through the social ills of political corruption, crime, religious intolerance, and pollution caused by an overcrowding of urban cities by agricultural migrants and European immigrants. Transcendentalists believed that only by reconnecting with nature, which Emerson described in his 1836 essay *Nature*, as *the real world*, could humans discard the ills of city life and refresh their souls (Emerson, 1836; Strelow, 2002). The popularity of Transcendentalism was short-lived as the North American Romanticism movement, inspired by the Transcendental movement, grew in popularity. The Romanticism movement influenced writers and artists to produce art that was “suffused with passion and mysticism, celebrating the freedom of wild nature in a rejection of the ever advancing industrial revolution” (Woodford, 2003a, p. 86). Through

a rejection of urban industrialism, the Romanticism movement encouraged its elite supporters to return to wild nature in an attempt to transform human society “through imagining an alternative to industrial despotism” (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 29). Members of the Romanticism movement believed that industrial despotism had been imposed upon nature through the processes of imperial expansion, industrial capitalism and rapid urbanization. Through Romanticism, the urban church was replaced by *nature* as the place to discover one’s spirituality. Spaces of natural wilderness became re-contextualized as the new cathedrals for spiritual fulfillment where elite Canadian and American men could wax about losses of wild nature while testing their maleness, strength, and virility in the remaining swaths of wilderness wastelands that their settler families had previously struggled to transform (Woodford, 2003a).

### **Camping Education Movement**

Throughout the emergence of the Transcendental and Romanticism movements, at several private schools across the United Kingdom and North America, educators began to experiment in the use of natural outdoor spaces as pedagogical resources, by taking their students on camping expeditions to foster the skills, concepts, and attitudes their contemporary society deemed essential for the intellectual, moral, and physical development of future democratic leaders. Through these experiments evolved the camping education movement (Cook, 2001; Hammerman et al., 2001; Smith, 2006). According to Cook, in the United Kingdom, early experiments in camping education were first designed for all-boys private schools for the purpose of shaping the moral character of boys to prepare them for civil service and the conditions of war, while no such opportunities were designed for girls. Raiola and O’Keefe (1999) state that

although, in the United States, similar experiments in camping education would first be designed for private all-boys schools, early US activists within the feminist movement actively experimented in providing similar school camping experiences at private all-girls schools.

The first recorded experiments in North American school camping occurred from 1823–1834 at the Round Hill Schools in Northampton, Massachusetts, as a method of integrating real life experiences with curricular learning (Carlson, 2000, 2008; Donaldson & Donaldson, 1982; Hammerman et. al., 2001). Subsequent experimentations by Fredrick Gunn at the Gunnery School for Boys, in Connecticut, incorporated camping education as part of the official school curriculum. Hiking expeditions through the local backcountry were planned for the early school year. Through camping experiences, it was believed that students learned practical skills such as cooking and conducting chores, and social skills through participation in leisure experiences such as swimming (Carlson, 2000, 2008; Hammerman et al., 2001; Raiola & O’Keefe, 1999). After the success of the Gunnery school experiences, the development of other camping education programs would expand across the continent. Although, from the 1870s to 1925, camping experiences would be established for both girls and boys at many private schools across the continent, the development of the organized summer camp movement supported by charitable organizations such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Scouts, Boys Club, Camp Fire Girls, and Life’s Fresh Air Fund (Carlson, 2001; Raiola & O’Keefe, 1999), made it possible for children from across all social classes to attend and participate in a camping education program (Smith, 2006).

In Canada, as educational historian Sharon Wall (2008) states, from the 1920s to the 1950s, summer residential youth camps would gain in popularity as a central vehicle for preparing its children to become the future democratic leaders and productive workers of Canadian society. Commonly promoting the idea that summer camp provided an anti-modern escape for children, camp administrators would apply the latest psychological principles of education and pedagogical principles of the progressive education movement to frame their businesses as places which provided ideal environments for fostering the positive psychological health for children. By 1947, Dr. J. G. Althouse, Ontario's Chief Director of Education, would praise the natural setting of summer residential youth camps as places where children could be engendered with old-fashioned self-sufficiency through spaces where the complications of modern lifestyles were temporarily removed to promote their growth. Although not always directly connected to the official school curriculum, the camping education movement facilitated through private school expeditions and summer residential youth camps would provide the foundations for early 20<sup>th</sup> century school boards in Dubuque (Iowa), Chicago, Atlanta, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Los Angeles to develop the first North American government-supported school camping programs (Carlson, 2000).

### **Conservation Movement**

Alongside the emergence of the Romanticism movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emerged the Conservation movement. Spurred by a group of urban upper class and middle class North Americans, unlike their Romanticist counterparts, these citizens decided to confront what they believed to be the social and environmental ills affecting their cities and natural-resource-rich rural areas. In response to issues of overpopulation,

water pollution, and air pollution in North American cities, several individual citizens and groups joined together to form the Urban Park movement “in a systematic effort to plan, manage, and . . . beautify the industrial-era city” (Sanders, 2003, p. 84). In response to rural declines in forest resources and other natural resources, a collaborative emerged between Canada and the United States to found and institutionalize the Conservation movement.

Environmental historian Jeffery Sanders (2003) reports that, as large waves of immigrants continued to move to urban centres in the 1840s attracted by the promise of well-paying jobs in the industrial manufacturing sector, cities became increasingly ill-equipped to support the ongoing flood of new residents. This impelled the need to redesign urban space. Although several members of the middle and upper class, inspired by the Romanticism movement, chose to ignore these urban issues and instead flee the city, “others applied their energies to solving urban problems” (p. 84). Environmental historian Larry McCann (2003) states that, beginning in the 1840s–1850s, the Urban Park movement led by prominent landscape architects, such as Fredrick Law Olmstead, began to design naturalistic urban parks to improve the urban landscape by providing sites for restorative respite “where all residents, whether rich or poor, native-born or immigrant, might stroll, drive, or sit to enjoy the open air and view soul-replenishing scenery” (p. 98). Landscape architect Anne Whiston Sprin (1995) states that Olmstead mastered the skill of designing built landscapes that came “to stand as monuments of nature untouched by human artifice” (p. 91). McCann (2003) states that, supported by funds provided by various municipalities and philanthropic individuals in both Canada and the United States, Olmstead participated in the design of Canadian urban parks such as Montreal’s

Mount Royal Park, Toronto's High Park, and Vancouver's Stanley Park, as well as American urban parks, such as New York's Central Park, and the Boston Commons. Sprin (1995) states Olmstead was so successful in mastering the skill of designing naturalistic scenery that he was even hired to design American wilderness parks, such as Yosemite National Park.

While the Urban Park movement was successful in contextualizing nature as places of social and spiritual respite within North America's largest cities, during the 1880s to the 1920s, in response to rural declines in natural resources, prominent members of the continent's wealthy elite and government ranks pushed to institutionalize the North American Conservation movement as a way to call "for the planned and efficient use of natural resources to assure that they would be available for future generations" (MacEachren, 2003, p. 111). Concerned that the present economic management of natural resources was negatively exploiting reserves that should be preserved for the use of future generations, conservationists constructed natural spaces called wilderness parks, such as Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park and America's Yosemite National Park, to ensure that future generations could economically benefit from the judicious extraction of natural resources, while providing spaces for all Canadians (but predominantly accessible to affluent Canadians) to participate in the appreciation of nature through outdoor recreation activities such as camping and canoeing. In 1909, conservationism became institutionalized in Canada, when

Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's government created a national conservation body, the Commission of Conservation . . . to coordinate conservation within the federal government. . . . Although the

commission only held advisory status, the nonpartisan, publicly funded group was expected to consider, investigate, and frame recommendations on all manner of conservation issues. . . . The commission was involved in everything from rationalizing fish and game regulations . . . to town planning, to publishing hundreds of reports on the status of Canada's natural resources. (MacEachren, 2003, p. 113)

Although the Commission of Conservation was dissolved in 1921, during the economic boom of the roaring twenties, the commission left a lasting impression on the identity of Canadians that historian Alan MacEachren (2003) states laid the foundations for the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1960s.

### **Conservation Education**

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the political push to promote a public conservation ethos was, in part, facilitated through Canadian and American school systems. Although conservation policy in both of these nations is commonly thought to have been a strictly scientific exercise in the preservation of natural resources, educational historian William Marsden (1998) reports that the political development and facilitation of conservation education served a dual purpose: (a) to educate youth about the responsible use of, and appreciation for, the natural resources of its nation; and (b) within the pedagogical scope of school employees, to cultivate the positive qualitative and human aspects of a democratic society. Marsden states that through the use of North American public education systems, the Conservation Education movement sought to engage educators in the practice of cultivating its children, just like their scientific counterparts in the forestry sector sought to preserve and cultivate trees. Often supported

by the assistance of political groups, such as the eugenics movement, the Conservation Education movement sought to promote a sense of national pride within its children to ensure the conservation of “military and naval power, the honour of the country, and the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Marsden, 1998, p. 347). Throughout this time, many members of the Conservation Education movement supported the educational segregation of Anglo Saxon children from children of different racial backgrounds, such as Aborigines, Blacks, and undesirable immigrants, who members of the Conservation Education movement believed were defective aspects of their population. As a result, Marsden states that from the 1880s to the 1940s, several supporters of the Conservation Education movement (including American President Roosevelt) promoted, in conjunction with the preservation and responsible use of natural resources, strategies which sought to protect the physical and moral improvement of the Anglo Saxon population, which they believed was important for preserving society’s economic efficiency and ability to expand their national commerce. Through the strategies of the Conservation Education movement, “emerged a telling justification for the promotion, and curricular linkage, of outdoor, health and citizenship education” (p. 345).

To accomplish such goals, Marsden (1998) contends that the Conservation Movement strove to use the regional education systems of North America, as gigantic (and often unrealistic) vehicles for social reform, particularly “for the rescue of an urban population seen as slipping in physical and moral degeneracy” (p. 348). Through the pedagogical influence and practices of the Agricultural Education, Nature Study, and Camping Education movements, Conservationists engaged students in curricular-based outdoor fieldwork as ways to counter what they perceived to be the social ills inculcated



upon children in urban society through practices they called democratic character development. Across Canada, it can be inferred that Agricultural Education became a federally supported practice and an official subject discipline within Ontario, to not only promote the growth of its dominant agricultural sector, but also keep rural students enrolled in the secondary school system to ensure the cultivation of their growth as democratic citizens. Marsden states that many nature study proponents sought to use Comstock's *Handbook of Nature Study* as a way to engage teachers and children in the study of both the urban and rural environments and to help citizens identify what Conservationists believed to be the urban problems of cities. Through this process, these nature study proponents strived to cultivate within students a desire to participate in practical outdoor leisure pursuits in the rural countryside as a way to help improve their physical and moral health. It can be inferred that camping education was used as a vehicle by Conservationists to provide children a temporary opportunity to escape what they believed to be the social ills of urban society through experiences in natural settings that they believed helped children develop social skills and self-sufficiency. Although these four education movements (agricultural education, nature study, camping education, and conservation education) did strive to facilitate some social and education benefits for students within Canadian and American society, it would be inappropriate to ignore the fact that throughout the duration of their emergence and use throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the benefits facilitated through these educational movements privileged and provided positive opportunities only for students from Anglo-Saxon Caucasian racial backgrounds, while at the same time being used to assimilate

Aboriginal children, and simply not being provided to children of other segregated racial minorities.

### **Inception of School-Board-Operated Outdoor Education Centres**

During the tenure of the conservation education movement, the idea for school-board-operated outdoor education centres (OE centres) emerged. This idea was first advocated by American professor Dr. L.B. Sharp, who, in his 1943 article “Outside the Classroom,” published in the *Educational Forum*, coined the term “outdoor education.” Sharp, who was the director of Life Fresh Air Camps and a former PhD Candidate of educational philosopher John Dewey, a founder of the progressive education movement, used the term outdoor education as a headline for a section about camping education. In this article, Sharp defined camping education as follows: “*that which ought and can best be taught inside the schoolrooms should there be taught, and that which can best be learned through experience dealing directly with native materials and life situations outside the school should there be learned* [italics in original]” (p. 363-364). Sharp argued that camping promoted the following educational values, such as

caring for oneself in the open, meeting adversities of weather and the problems of food and shelter, coming in direct contact with the many phenomena of nature, learning the social values of living in small groups and how to produce and cook the food needed. (p. 363)

Promoting camping education as an outdoor movement, Sharp advocated that school camps should be an important part of educational facilities, claiming that without outdoor learning children cannot fully comprehend what they learn from books and lessons taught within school classrooms (Carlson, 2000, 2008; Hammerman et al., 2001).

While Sharp, like his mentor Dewey, advocated that students should learn by doing (Carlson, 2008; Knapp, 2000), it is often overlooked that he was never a classroom teacher (Borland, 2013). Sharp's experiences as the Director of Life Fresh Air Camps, distanced himself from the realities that students regularly confronted within their local communities. Although Dewey (1938) argued that students learned best when teachers engaged their students in the direct study of their local school communities, Sharp's promotion of school camps unwittingly contradicted the educational philosophy of his mentor, advocating that the direct study of a student's natural surroundings is best taught at specialized outdoor facilities, located away from a student's local community.

Following the 1943 dissemination of Sharp's ideas, Toronto Board of Education teacher, Robin E. Dennis, began to lobby the Ontario provincial government to permit his school board to establish a residential natural science school (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976a; Passmore, 1972). At this time, the Ontario Department of Education (1954) stipulated in its elementary school curriculum that classroom teachers should take their students outdoors to teach the principles and skills of conservation and natural science through direct exposure in their local natural surroundings. Dennis believed that school children from urban environments could not learn the skills and concepts required to master natural science solely through experiences in their classrooms and local communities. Seeking to provide students with direct outdoor experiences in a space he described as a more natural environment, Dennis sought to develop a specialized residential facility where, for five days, students from the city of Toronto could enhance their knowledge of natural science. After searching the agrarian rural countryside just outside the city of Toronto, for several months in search of a

suitable site, Dennis would face opposition from his own school board that would prove to be a temporary barrier in his efforts to develop such a facility (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976a).

Although, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Dennis' efforts to establish a residential natural science school would prove unsuccessful, other teachers, such as Blanche Snell and Bert Horwood, began to experiment in the design and facilitation of OE experiences with some success. In 1954, after returning from a tour of British field studies centres, Blanche Snell, a secondary school teacher from the Toronto Metropolitan Board of Education, began to facilitate a week-long residential camping program for grade nine students, hosted in early September at the Albion Hills Conservation Authority, in Peel region. Snell's program was designed to provide grade nine students at her high school with an opportunity to socialize through outdoor recreation activities with senior students and teachers to help them develop a strong sense of school community (Carr, 1996; Passmore, 1972; Whicombe & Gyemi-Sculze, 2002). By 1957, in Northern Ontario, Sault Ste. Marie Board of Education teacher Bert Horwood (2011) began to design and facilitate school-sponsored canoe trips to local recreational wilderness areas to teach his students about natural science and the principles of conservation through direct experiences in local protected wilderness areas. These initiatives supported what Educational historian Paul Alexrod (2005) argues were progressive Ontario curriculum reforms made throughout the late 1930s to 1950s, where in addition to core subjects such as English and arithmetic, classroom teachers were also expected to teach health education and natural science. Through health education, students were instructed in the "appropriate habits, physical inspections, and games and sporting activities" of this

period” (p. 230). Through natural science, wherever possible, students were engaged in “hands-on instruction and displays, including the observation of these phenomena in their natural environments” (p. 230). Unlike Dennis, who believed that school boards needed to own specific properties for the delivery of OE experiences, teachers like Snell and Horwood demonstrated that OE programs could be successful and support the provincial curriculum, when operated through the use of local community resources.

Although by the 1950s, several teachers were beginning to experiment in the delivery of OE programs with mixed success, OE as a distinct pedagogical methodology had not yet reached the attention of the Ontario Department of Education. Throughout the 1950s, the Ontario Department of Education was focused on consolidating its twelve legislative acts that governed the operation of the provincial education system into five legislative acts, so that the provincial government could streamline conflicting services (Gidney, 1999). On April 6, 1954, the Province of Ontario enacted the *Schools Administration Act* as part of this consolidation (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1954). The *Schools Administration Act* addressed compulsory school attendance, the legal powers and responsibilities of teachers and school board trustees, and the operation of school properties including the purchase of new school properties. Previously left undefined in earlier provincial legislation, school sites were now defined as “the land necessary for a school house, school garden, teacher’s residence, caretaker’s residence, drill hall, gymnasium, offices and playgrounds connected therewith, or other land required for school purposes or for the offices of a board” (p. 491). School boards were now permitted the freedom to purchase or lease property “for any education or other lawful purposes which it deems proper, provided the proper conduct of the school is not

interfered with” (p. 482). Although this act did not specifically identify Sharp’s (1943) concept of a school camp or Dennis’ concept of residential natural science school as potential school board sites within the scope of this new act, this legislation provided school boards the freedom to determine what properties it felt necessary to purchase or lease for the education of its students that would enable the future development of school-board-operated OE centres.

By 1960, after two decades of lobbying the government to permit the development of a natural science school, Dennis would successfully convince the provincial Minister of Education to amend the *Schools Administration Act* to permit students to specifically attend a natural science school (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976a; Passmore, 1972). In the late spring of 1960, an additional clause was added to the *Schools Administration Act*, stipulating that school boards may “provide or pay for board and lodging for a pupil for a period not exceeding two weeks in any year while he attends a school for a course in conservation or natural science with the consent of his parent or guardian and with the permission of the board” (Ontario Statues of the Province of Ontario, 1960, 434). After this amendment was made, the first Ontario school-board-operated residential OE centre called the Island Natural Science Centre was opened on Centre Island, by the Toronto Board of Education, under the leadership of Dennis as principal, in September of 1960 (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976a; Eagles & Richardson, 1992; Passmore, 1972; Toronto District Board of Education, 2008).

The historical irony embedded in the 1960 decision to establish the Island Natural Science School, on Centre Island, is that although it was designed to provide children

direct outdoor experiences to learn about and appreciate nature, this facility is situated on one of the city's most artificially constructed natural landscapes. As Anthropologist Mathew Cooper (1994) reports, although the Toronto Islands are often symbolically conceptualized by Torontonians as a natural area, the reality is that these islands do not exist in a natural state, but instead have been designed, constructed, and maintained as a city park since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to provide its citizens a space for urban respite. Constructed upon the site of a naturally shifting freshwater lake sandbar that had been used for thousands of years by First Nations people “for hunting, fishing and spiritual purposes” (Kidd, n.d., p. 4), the decision to freeze, redesign, and construct artificial islands upon this former sandbar is predicated upon the same colonial ideal, which was used by settlers to argue that Aboriginal communities did not make adequate use of the land, and justify their “right to tame the wilderness and make it productive” (Silver, 2003, p. 25).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a broader understanding about the historical development of ideas about how contemporary Canadians, particularly from urban metropolitan areas such as Toronto, now interpret their spatial relationship to nature. It is through the emergence of this spatial conceptualization of nature that the design and continued operation of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres is commonly justified. Burke and Grosvenor (2008) state that if educational historians wish to uncover the critical meanings behind the historical impacts and influences of school facilities, it is important for these scholars “to bring the subject and object, both historically located, together into the same narrative” (p. 8). Consequently, the *subject* –

nature—which led to the design of the *object*—school-board-operated OE centres—is predicated upon the elitist colonial ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Transcendental, Romanticist, and Conservation movements. Although the constituents of these past social movements romanticized the same wilderness environments that their forefathers considered wastelands that needed to be transformed into productive agrarian landscapes, it is often overlooked that these same urban elites participated in the reconceptualization and material reconstruction of these wilderness spaces for the purpose of: (a) conserving their nation’s natural resources for future economic exploitation, and (b) to provide spaces where they and the general public could seek temporary urban respite and spiritual reform.

The contemporary consequence of continuing to teach Ontario students to culturally conceptualize *nature* through the use of school-board-operated OE centres as one of the few spaces where they can learn about and engage with nature (Andrews, 2003; Foster & Linney, 2007; Kalinowski, 2003, January 28; Linney, 2002, November 21; Payne, 2008, April 1; Sharpe & Breunig, 2009; Spears, April 22, 1995), is that we continue to perpetuate a colonial-based, romanticized ideal of nature. Through the design and cultural intent of school-board-operated OE centres, children are taught to define some landscapes as natural and others as artificial. Consequently, how nature is conceptualized through the design and use of school-board-operated OE centres overlooks the fact, as Sprin (1995) states, that landscapes are never really wholly natural or artificial.

Such thinking promotes the persistent, common conception of the city as a degraded environment and wilderness as a pristine place untainted by



human presence. Seeing humans, ourselves, as solely or mainly a contaminating influence prevents us from appreciating the potential beneficial effects we might have and limits what we can imagine possible. (Sprin, 1995, p. 111)

Sprin's argument does not mean that the design and use of school-board-operated OE centres should be dismissed for the historical role these school facilities have played in the spatial education of Ontario students. Rather, that it is apt for scholars, such as OE specialists, to begin to explore, challenge, and reconsider how some of the historic ideals embodied within the development of school-board-operated OE centres may presently be constraining the ability of classroom teachers to make effective pedagogical use of outdoor spaces for the education of their students. By acknowledging how ideologies of past social movements such as the Transcendentalists, Romanticists, and Conservationists continue to influence how Ontarians (and at a broader scale Canadians and North Americans) conceptually perceive the human constructed facilities of school-board-operated OE centres and urban parks as more natural than the ordinary places where we live, it forces people to confront how these past social movements have taught us to artificially segregate ourselves from the surrounding natural world. By demystifying the construction of these places as extraordinary, we are permitted to celebrate the human ability to shape our immediate material surroundings so that society may foster "similar qualities in ordinary landscapes" (Sprin, 1995, p.113).

By unpacking some of the intercontinental and continental social influences that have contributed to the evolution of OE as a relevant North American educational methodology and the system of cultural values which have become entrenched in the

inception and prescribed uses of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, stakeholders involved in the design of educational policy regarding these specialized facilities can be provided with a more factual analysis of the historical dynamics that have impacted how Ontario school-board-operated OE centres evolved from 1960 to 2012. In the subsequent chapters, this dissertation will provide a more empirical analysis about the reasons why some Ontario school-board-operated OE centres continue to remain educationally relevant, while others have unfortunately been forced to close. Prior to discussing the findings of this study and provide a background understanding about how this analysis was conducted, the following chapter discusses the research plan which guided this doctoral inquiry.

### **Chapter 3: RESEARCH PLAN**

This dissertation sought to unpack the reasons behind the establishment, operation, and occasional closure of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. Since the design and use of these specialized educational facilities is historically predicated upon how contemporary North American society politically defines its spatial relationships to the natural world, the research methodology of *Historical Geographic Information Science (HGIS)* was selected to guide this inquiry. HGIS is an empirical exploratory research methodology where scholars draw upon archival research methods, exploratory statistical analysis, and Geographic Information Science (GIS) mapping techniques to analyze how, over time, human social systems (such as the publicly funded Ontario education system) are shaped by the spatial relationships and constraints of their surrounding physical and human geography (Bodenhamer, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Gregory & Ell, 2007; Knowles, 2000, 2008; Knowles, Hillier & Balstad, 2008; Tukey, 1977).

#### **What is HGIS?**

The purpose of HGIS scholarship is to expand upon conventional historical analysis techniques by providing a new means of synthesizing large sets of data collected from archival sources into statistical information and GIS maps. Through new possibilities provided by statistical and GIS software programs, researchers implementing HGIS studies now have the ability to visually analyze how spatial-temporal distributions of historical phenomena have changed over time as a result of interacting social and ecological factors, such as the changing characteristics of an area's physical geography, land use, demographics, political boundaries, and the implementation of institutional policies. In this dissertation, the locations of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres,

school boards, and the student enrolment statistics of individual school boards were collected for statistical analysis and visual representation. Through the use of GIS software, thematic maps were created to identify potential geospatial relationships between these disparate data sources. Through the design and implementation of HGIS research plans, scholars are able to expand their ability to interpret complex historical problems and provide more factual analyses of historical phenomena that previously could not be accomplished through the use of more conventional research methods (Bol, 2011; Gregory, 2008; Gregory & Ell, 2007; Knowles, 2000, 2008). Consequently, data for this study were collected through archival research methods, a review of published secondary scholarly sources, and an online appraisal of contemporary Ontario district school board websites. Through an integrated methodological inquiry, implementing the techniques of descriptive statistical analysis, GIS analysis, and qualitative analysis, the scope of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012 was statistically assessed, visually mapped, and qualitatively analyzed to craft a historical geographic narrative that offers an account about the past reasons for the design and use of these specialized educational facilities.

### **Strengths of HGIS**

HGIS was selected as the research methodology for this doctoral dissertation because the use of GIS technology provides researchers with new tools, previously unavailable to past historians, which enable scholars to expand the complexity of their historical geographic inquiries. GIS software programs now provide scholars with the ability to aggregate large sets of seemingly disparate quantitative and qualitative archival data into GIS databases that can be used to digitally reconstruct visual representations of

past landscapes through the generation of thematic maps. Through the use of innovative GIS applications, scholars can now digitally reconstruct and analyze these past landscapes that, when layered with more conventional archival research techniques, help scholars compose more complex historical narratives to prompt new insights about a particular phenomenon under investigation that scholars previously did not have the ability to study (Bodenhamer, 2008; Cunfer, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Gregory & Ell, 2007; Gregory, Kemp, & Mostern, 2001). For example, studies published by Knowles and Henley (2006), Henley (2007), Cunfer (2008), and Bol (2011) illustrate how the incorporation of large sets of archival data into GIS databases enabled them to reconstruct historical landscapes and uncover new insights about particular phenomena under investigation.

In the field of American industrial history, ripe with a well-represented literature-base documenting labour/management conflict issues related to the iron and coal industries, Knowles and Henley (2006) and Henley (2007) used HGIS techniques to document the business history of these industries previously overlooked by their colleagues. By synthesizing several decades of archival data collected from land acquisition documents and investment records into a set of GIS databases, Henley (2007) and Knowles and Henley (2006) were able to construct GIS maps which illustrated how the establishment of 19<sup>th</sup> century Pennsylvania iron and coal industries were connected to the operation of railroad companies. This provided new insights into the role that transportation systems have played in the evolution of America's energy economy.

Studying the environmental impacts of the 1930s North American Dust Bowl, Cunfer (2008) challenged contemporary historical assumptions that the "Dust Bowl was

caused by misuse of a fragile ecosystem" (p. 96) impacted by the over-plowing of the prairies. Based on a GIS analysis of archival data from 200 American prairie counties from the 1880s to the 1930s, Cunfer produced maps, which upon analysis, illustrate that the North American prairie grasslands are historically prone to cyclical periods of soil erosion due to drought-induced dust storms. By integrating more conventional archival research skills with the use of new HGIS techniques, Cunfer was able to provide new insights about the social and ecological history of the North American prairie ecosystems that challenge present accounts which claim that the Dust Bowl was caused purely by the actions of prairie farmers.

Through the creation of the Chinese HGIS Database, Bol (2011) challenged previous historical inferences which promoted the idea that the establishment of ancient Chinese temples was historically associated with the economic affluence of political regions. Through the implementation of HGIS research design, Bol discovered that these temples were commonly located in high mountainous regions that often functioned as the physical borders between political regions. Bol theorized that the decision to build temples in these regions may have been more closely related to the geographic safety that these mountains provided, instead of the economic affluence of the particular political regions in which they were located. These new insights provided scholars of Chinese history with new information about how the past relationships between religious institutions, political regions, and physical geography may continue to influence the structure of Chinese society.

Based on the studies published by Knowles and Henley (2006), Henley (2007), Cunfer (2008), and Bol (2011), each of these examples demonstrate that the central

strength of HGIS research designs is that this new methodology permits scholars the ability to integrate and analyze a greater complexity of quantitative and qualitative data sources together that other scholars may have previously assumed were either unrelated or irreconcilably disparate factors. Although the new insights provided by HGIS research designs may challenge previous historical accounts by scholars who have used more conventional archival research techniques, it should be acknowledged that the new insights of HGIS research designs are made possible only through the contemporary design of accessible GIS software systems and techniques that scholars previously did not have the ability to analyze through more conventional research methods (Bodenhammer, 2008). I used HGIS research designs to visually map the evolving relationships between school board boundaries, location of school-board-operated OE centres, and student enrollment statistics to produce an empirical account about the operation of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012. The visual patterns, as shown in GIS maps have pushed me to explore a broader array of seemingly disparate social and ecological factors that other scholars may not have considered previously because of the conceptual and technical limitations of more conventional archival research methods.

### **Challenges of HGIS**

Although the strength of HGIS research designs provide scholars with new avenues and techniques to conduct historical research, as innovators of HGIS research designs, Gregory and Eil (2007) and Bodenhammer (2008) contend that it is important for scholars using HGIS methodology to discuss the challenges they have been forced to confront through their decision to craft and implement an HGIS research design.

Through this practice, present scholars are expected to engage in the practice of critical

self-reflection so that they and future scholars can be better informed about how to address problems and limitations in the creation and implementation of HGIS research designs. Upon considering the choice of constructing an HGIS research design, the first challenge I faced was to identify whether I had access to archival sources that could provide relevant data for GIS analysis. The second challenge I faced was ensuring I had access and training in the use of GIS software. The third challenge included learning how to interpret and integrate an analysis of the GIS generated maps into a broader narrative that supported the analysis of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

When I began to consider building an HGIS research design, the first challenge I was confronted with was identifying whether I had access to archival sources that could provide data for GIS analysis. What is important for scholars who are considering whether or not to craft an HGIS research design is grasping the function and use of GIS software. GIS software transforms data collected from archival sources into geographic points of longitudinal and latitudinal reference that are analyzed by computers to construct thematic maps. Data that are best suited for analysis through GIS software programs include, but are not limited to, demographic data, the location of specific institutions, and political boundaries (Gregory & Ell, 2007). Based on a preliminary review of accessible archival data sources, I located a number of documents that provided information on the past locations (or approximate locations) of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres and school board student enrollment statistics for the geographic jurisdictions of individual school boards for several different years of study from 1972 to 2012. Realizing that these data sources could be consolidated together into GIS synthesized maps that I could use to empirically compare the spatial relationships



between the former school board student enrollment statistics and the location of past school-board-operated OE centres, I decided that I had access to relevant archival data sources for the construction of an HGIS research design.

Prior to finalizing my decision to construct an HGIS research design, I realized I was confronted with a second challenge which needed to be overcome. Did I have adequate access, training, and support to implement an HGIS research design? It is important to acknowledge that GIS software is very expensive and often time-consuming to learn how to use. It is important for scholars who are implementing HGIS research designs for the first time to have a strong support network to assist them in problem-solving emerging problems they will likely confront during the process of integrating conventional historical research approaches with the use of GIS technology (Bol, 2011; Gregory, 2008; Gregory & Ell, 2007; Healey & Stamp, 2000). Access and technical assistance in the operation of GIS software was provided through the Academic Data Centre, operated by the University of Windsor, for students, staff and faculty (University of Windsor, 2012).

The third challenge I faced when constructing my HGIS research design, as Gregory and Ell (2007), Gregory (2008) and my doctoral supervisor Dr. Larry Glassford (personal communication, August 27, 2012) each acknowledge, is that it is important for scholars to recognize that the products produced through GIS applications only provide researchers with interpretive visual aids. I integrated a written analysis of my thematic maps with a written analysis of the descriptive statistics to construct a discussion about the prevalence of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. This discussion was then supported by a written analysis of qualitative sources such as practitioner journals and

government policy documents that address issues regarding the operation and use of such facilities. Through a process of layering these three written analyses together, I was able to construct a more sophisticated analysis about how the development of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres evolved from 1960 to 2012.

### **Rationale for Using HGIS**

After acknowledging these challenges, as Knowles (2008) states, my choice to craft an HGIS research design has been driven by my spatially-oriented research problem. The combined accounts of Eagles and Richardson (1992), Andrews (2003), Potter and Henderson (2004), Foster and Linney (2007), Breunig and O'Connell (2008), and Sharpe and Breunig (2009) promote two key assumptions about the history of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres: (a) prior to the 1990s, school-board-operated OE centres were spatially significant across the province, and hence, prevalently used by most school boards; and (b) from the 1990s to the early 2000s, Ontario school-board-operated OE centres across the province were significantly reduced due to a shift in the educational ideology imposed by a Conservative provincial majority government. It should be noted that the accounts provided by each of these scholars only provides evidence to explain what may have happened to the state of these specialized facilities from the 1990s to early 2000s. No historical or geographic study has been conducted to assess the broader prevalence, use, and sustainability of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012. HGIS opens up new, previously inaccessible avenues from which researchers can explore the historical spatial patterns regarding the prevalence and geographic scope about these school facilities from 1960 to 2012. Through the implementation of an HGIS research design, the geographic-historical state

of these facilities can now be visually analyzed through the use of GIS software.

Through this process, stakeholders involved in the future design of educational policy and/or decisions regarding the use of school-board-operated OE centres can be provided with a more empirically-based account about what dynamic factors have influenced specific school boards to become involved in the operation of these facilities and why they have either chosen to sustain such operations or opted for closure.

### **Data Sources**

Data were collected from primary archival sources, published secondary sources, and an online appraisal of digital sources available through Ontario district school board websites, for statistical, GIS, and qualitative analysis. *Primary archival sources* are artifacts that are housed in a variety of institutions, including public archives and libraries (Duncan, 1999; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011; Hill, 1994, Roche, 2010). “A primary source is one prepared by an individual who was a participant in or a direct witness to the event being described. An eyewitness account of the opening of a new school would be an example, as would a researcher’s report of the results of his or her own experiment” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011, p. 538). According to Roche (2010), primary sources include documents created by their producers, such as handwritten letters, policy documents, and government legislation, but can also include copies of rare documents protected in archives and libraries such practitioner newsletters or journals. Published secondary sources are documents “prepared by an individual who was not a direct witness to an event but who obtained his or her description of the event from someone else” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011, p. 538). Roche (2010) states published *secondary sources* are often uncovered through the collection and analysis of archival

sources that the researcher deems relevant for review because of their potential to provide important supporting data for analysis, “for instance, newspapers . . . provide valuable material for cross-referencing with the archival record” (Roche, 2010, p. 182). However, as Roche states, it is also important to recognize that on occasion, new primary sources can also be uncovered through an analysis of secondary sources. Published secondary sources normally include newspaper reports, books, and some peer-reviewed academic journal articles. *Online appraisal* sources are identified and collected from a predefined list of publicly accessible institutional websites that share similar characteristics for inquiry (Baym & Markham, 2009). Raw data for statistical and GIS analysis were first collected in Microsoft Word 2010 files and then transferred into Microsoft Excel 2010 databases, and raw data for qualitative analysis were organized into a chronological annotated bibliography as a Microsoft Word 2010 file.

**Archival Sources.** Primary source archival data were collected from the following public institutions: Ryerson University Library, Brock University Library, the digital archives of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), the government documents and education sections of the University of Windsor Leddy Library, documents within the researchers’ personal collection, and the contemporary Ontario Ministry of Education website. Uncovered through secondary scholarly review, Ryerson University Library provided access to a primary source document written by Martindale (1974) called the *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools*, which is the first catalogue ever created that provides a list of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres for the 1972-1973 school year and descriptions of the

programs offered through these facilities. From the digital COEO archives, the following documents were downloaded for analysis:

- Proceedings from the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual COEO (1972) conference *Without Boundaries*
- *COEO Newsletter* published from 1971–1977
- *ANEE News-Journal* published from 1977–1988
- *Catalogue of Programs and Personnel Sites and Services in Outdoor Education in Ontario*, published in 1979, 1986, and 1992

The proceedings from the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual COEO (1972) conference, *Without Boundaries*, provided descriptive information about the early operation of two key school-board-operated OE centres (Forest Valley OE Centre; Island Natural Science School). The COEO Newsletter 1971–1977 and ANEE 1977–1988 provided descriptive data discussing details involved in the delivery of OE across the province. The *Catalogue of Programs and Personnel Sites and Services in Outdoor Education in Ontario* for 1979, 1986, and 1992 provided a list of the locations and descriptions of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres for each date of publication.

The Brock University library provided access to a complete collection of published hardcopies of *Pathways: The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education*, published by the COEO from 1989–2012. Pathways provided primary source accounts written by OE practitioners such as the Director of the Toronto Board of Education OE centres, Mark Whitcombe (1991); Director of the Earth Awareness Centre, J. Jordinson (1992); Co-ordinator of OE for the Waterloo County Board of Education, Frank Glew (1994); the Director of the Bruce County Board of Education OE centre, Clarke Birchard (1995),

among numerous other first-hand accounts written by OE practitioners. Although some scholars may express concerns that these accounts solely promote the biased opinions of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, as stated within many editions of *Pathways* is a disclaimer which states that the “opinions expressed by contributors to *Pathways* are theirs solely and not necessarily those of the *Pathways* Editorial Board” (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1990, p. 1, italics in original). From the researchers’ own personal collection, as part of his membership in the Ontario Society of Environmental Education (OSEE), access was provided to a comprehensive collection of *Interactions: The Ontario Journal of Environmental Education* published from 1988 to 2012. *Interactions* provided primary source accounts written by school board administrators, teachers, as well as OE practitioners such as Chisholm Public School teacher, Robert Briehl (1990); Ajax High School vice-principal Bowyer (1996); and Waterloo Region Board of Education, OE coordinator Frank Glew (1996).

From the University of Windsor Leddy Library, qualitative descriptive data were collected from the 1954, 1960, 1965 and 1972 *Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario*, as well as key Minister’s reports, policy and curriculum documents published by the Ontario Ministry of Education from 1960 to 2012. Student enrollment statistics for provincial school boards were drawn from Ontario Ministry of Education statistical documents for 1973, 1979, 1986, and 1992–1993. Promotional documents such as an early school-board-operated OE centre publications created by the Toronto Board of Education (1960, 1970), OE program guides created by the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (1970, 1971, 1973), and scholarly research reports such as Passmore’s (1972) study titled *Outdoor Education in Canada – 1972: An Overview of Current Developments in Outdoor*

*Education and Environmental Studies*, also served as relevant primary archival data sources for analysis.

**Secondary Review Sources.** Sources assessed through the secondary review process were drawn from scholarly books, some peer-reviewed journals, and newspaper articles that provided secondary accounts of historical events. For example, scholarly books such as Winfield's (2012) *Blue-Green Province: The Environment and Political Economy of Ontario*; Gidney's (1999) *From Hope to Harris*; as well as edited book chapters such as Paehlke's (2007) *Green politics and the rise of the environmental movement*, provided important supporting data for analysis. Newspaper articles drawn from digital databases such as OurOntario.ca (2012) *Community Newspapers Collection*, and the Proquest (2014) *Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies*, provided key insights about important historical periods and events, not available through primary archival sources.

**Online Appraisal Sources.** Because policy documents are often available online for public access, to ensure that district school boards now appear politically accountable and transparent to parents and taxpayers (Baym & Markham, 2009), a comprehensive list of district school board websites available through public access on the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) website section titled *Find a School Board* was used to locate and appraise district school board websites for pertinent policy documents and information regarding school-board-operated OE centres. Site maps and search functions available on these institutional websites were used to locate and download pertinent policies and information on school-board-operated OE centres. Descriptive, statistical, and locational website information regarding school-board-operated OE centres and student enrollment statistics identified on these sites were collected for analysis. The Penetanguishene

Protestant Separate School Board was not appraised for analysis because no website was available for analysis. A small minority of 10 specialized school boards associated with hospitals and juvenile detention facilities were also not appraised because these boards were not designated as district school boards, but instead as specialized programs, and an analysis uncovered through primary archival sources indicated that several of these facilities had historically not been involved in the operation of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres because their students were often restricted from going outdoors (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1979, 1986, 1992; Martindale, 1974). Collected data were then identified as either quantitative for statistical and GIS analysis or qualitative for qualitative analysis.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The following data sources provided quantitative data about the existence and location of school-board-operated OE centres for five different provincial school years:

- Martindale's (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools*, provided locational data for the 1972-1973 school year
- The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario's *Catalogue of Programs and Personnel Sites and Services in Outdoor Education in Ontario*, published in 1979, 1986, and 1992, provided locational data for the 1978-1979, 1985-1986, 1992-1993 school years
- Data collected through the online appraisal process provided locational data for the 2011-2012 school year

These sources provided five selected school years (1972-1973, 1978-1979, 1985-1986, 1992-1993, and 2011-2012) from which to begin the HGIS analysis. Quantitative data



were organized into preliminary Microsoft Word 2010 files for these five different provincial school years and then transferred into Microsoft Excel 2010 files for use with GIS software applications and statistical analysis. Qualitative data were organized into a Microsoft Word 2010 file as a chronological annotated bibliography (Hill, 1994). For security reasons, each of these electronic files were subsequently stored and managed on two independent USB keys and a backup of all data was downloaded on a daily basis onto an independent USB drive that was stored at the PhD Candidate's home.

**Quantitative Data.** For each selected school year under study (1972–1973, 1978–1979, 1985–1986, 1992–1993, and 2011–2012), two types of data were collected for GIS and statistical analysis. The first type of data collected was the location data for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, which included the name of specific facilities, the type of specific facilities (day, residential, or dual purpose facilities which provided both day and residential programming), the address including the postal code of each facility, or the closest approximate location of a previous facility if it no longer existed, and the name of each Ontario school board that operated such a facility. Also, when possible, the longitude and latitude coordinates for school-board-operated OE centres were collected through Google Maps. Locational data for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres were organized into five Microsoft Word 2010 databases based on the selected years of study and then subsequently transposed into a total of ten Microsoft Excel 2010 files for school-board-operated OE centres based on whether these facilities were operated through the Public or Catholic branches of the Ontario publicly funded education system. The second type of data that was collected for statistical and GIS analysis was student enrolment numbers for past Ontario school boards based on each

identified year of study. Student enrolment numbers were collected for each Ontario school board in operation during a selected year of study and then organized into a single Microsoft Word file, which was then transposed into ten separate Microsoft Excel files for Public and Catholic school board branches. All Microsoft Excel files were then saved as CSV (comma-separated values) files to prepare them for importation into the GIS software program, ArcGIS, which was used to create thematic maps to visually depict the relationships between school board jurisdictions, student populations, and the location of school-board-operated OE centres for each year of study for both the Public and Catholic school board branches of Ontario's publicly funded education system.

**Statistical Analysis.** Data for statistical analysis were drawn from the Microsoft Excel files generated through the quantitative data collection process. Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the frequency of different types of school-board-operated OE centres and analyze the percentage rate of change in the overall prevalence of facilities between each selected year of study. Descriptive statistics describe the characteristics of individual variables (Norman & Streiner, 2003). Descriptive statistics were derived from the categories used in Eagles and Richardson's (1992) study which included two facility types: *day-use facilities* and *residential facilities*. The addition of a new facility type that was not previously assessed by these scholars called *dual-purpose centres* was added to this assessment. For both the Public and Catholic branches of the Ontario publicly funded school system, Microsoft Excel databases were then constructed for each year of study to collate the locational data for each facility, which was subsequently used to assess the frequency counts for each facility-type. These frequency counts were then added together, for each year of study, to provide the values for two

new categories: the total number of *boards with OE centres* and the *total number of OE centres*. These descriptive statistics were then displayed in Tables 2-8 (displayed and discussed in chapters 5–9) based on the following four categorical frequency groupings: (a) the total number of *Ontario school boards* in operation for a selected year of study; (b) the total number of *boards with OE centres*, including a breakdown of the number of *boards with day-use centres*, *boards with residential OE centres*, and *boards with dual-purpose centres*; (c) the *total number of OE centres*, including a breakdown of the total number of *day-use facilities*, *residential facilities*, and *dual-purpose OE facilities*; and (d) a breakdown of the total number of *public system facilities* and *Catholic system facilities*.

Frequency percentages were then calculated from these frequency counts for each category of school boards that operated a particular type of facility, by taking the individual values for each facility-type, multiplying that number by 100, and then dividing that value by the total number of *boards with OE centres*. It is important to note that since school boards can operate more than one type of facility at the same time, the proportional percentages for each of these facility-type categories does not necessarily add up to 100%, but instead simply reflects the proportion of school boards which chose to operate each particular facility-type. Frequency percentages were also calculated from the frequency counts for each individual facility-type. These values were calculated by multiplying the count for each facility-type by 100 and dividing it by the overall *total number of OE centres*. These data were then compiled into a comprehensive table for comparison against the data collected by Eagles and Richardson (1992) for the 1988–1989 school year, providing a final total of six school years (1972–1973, 1978–1979, 1985–1986, 1988–1989, 1992–1993, and 2011–2012) for comparative analysis.

Frequency counts from the *total number of OE centres* category was then used to assess if the prevalence of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres had underwent either a state of growth or decline between each year of study. Percentage rate of change indicates the annual linear percent growth or decline of a particular variable assessed across two distinct periods of time (Parker, 2002; Patton & Sawicki, 1993). The percentage rate of change in the *total number of OE centres* was calculated for each selected school-year under investigation. Percentage rate of change (PR), which is a basic statistical calculation used in planning analysis, was calculated using the following formula:

$$PR = \frac{(V_{pres} - V_{past})}{V_{past}} \times 100$$

*PR = rate of change (as percentage)*

*V<sub>pres</sub> = present value*

*V<sub>past</sub> = past value*

PR values provided either a positive number which indicates a positive average rate of change (growth) or a negative number which indicates a negative rate of change (decline) in the *total number of OE centres* in operation between each selected year of study (Parker, 2002; Patton & Sawicki, 1993). Percentage rate of change data were then compiled into a comprehensive table (Appendix A) for comparative analysis to assess how the prevalence in the total number of OE facilities has changed from the 1972–1973 to 2011–2012 Ontario school years. Relevant individual statistical values were subsequently discussed for each selected school year of study, in relation to trends uncovered through the GIS analysis and qualitative analysis of narrative data.

Prior to conducting the GIS analysis, a final statistical technique was conducted called a geospatial areal<sup>1</sup> interpolation. Areal interpolation is a geospatial statistical technique where researchers aggregate data from two or more smaller geographic areas together to produce an estimated value that is fitted to a larger geographic area (Gregory, 2008; Gregory & Ell, 2007). For this dissertation the technique of areal interpolation was used to aggregate, for each selected school year of study, the student enrolment statistics from previous school years when a greater number of smaller school board jurisdictions had existed, to fit the average estimate of these aggregated student enrollment statistics across the existing larger district school boards (DSB) jurisdictions that have governed these geographic areas since 1998 implementation of Bill 160 (discussed in chapter 8).

Table 1: Example of Areal Interpolation Calculations

2012 DSB	Total Population	1992 School Boards & Student Enrollment
Superior-Greenstone DSB	4878	Nipigon-Red Rock (K-8) 554 + (9-13) 361 = 915 Geraldton (K-8) 456 + (9-13) 549 = 1005 Lake Superior (K-8) 1676 + (9-10) 1282 = 2958
Waterloo Region DSB	54484	Waterloo County B of E (K-8) 34112 + (9-13) 20372 = 54484
Lambton Kent DSB	35459	Kent County B of E (K-8) 9696 + (9-13) 6354 = 16050 Lambton County B of E (K-8) 12205 + (9-13) 7204 = 19409

Source data for the population of school boards were calculated manually in five separate MS Word 2010 files (which included separate sections for both Public and Catholic branches of the publicly funded provincial education system) to calculate the overall geographic estimates for existing DSB's. This data was then sorted into the school board jurisdictions for both Public and Catholic branches of the publicly funded provincial

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster (2013) online dictionary defines the word *areal* as “the surface included within a set of lines” such as how the regional boundaries of Ontario district school boards are defined on a map.

education system. These new data sets were then compiled into Microsoft Excel files for each year of study and saved as CSV files for later use in the generation of GIS thematic maps. Areal interpolation data for each school year of study was subsequently fitted to the 2010 Generalized District School Board ArcGIS map file, to visually analyze through the creation of GIS maps, if any correlations existed between the location of school-board-operated OE centres and past student enrollment statistics.

**GIS Analysis.** Microsoft Excel 2010 CSV files were imported into the ArcGIS software system to generate thematic maps for each selected year of study and branch of the Ontario school system (Public or Catholic), with the exception of the 1988–1989 school year studied by Eagles and Richardson (1992)<sup>2</sup>. ArcGIS is a GIS software program that contains an existing geospatial database of geographic information including global topography and postal code zones. Specific files can be created by system administrators, such as those employed by the Ontario Ministry of Education, to provide more detailed information, such as the 2010 Ontario district school board boundaries, in specialized ArcGIS files (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; University of Windsor, 2012). ArcGIS then transforms locational information entered into these files using longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates, such as Canadian postal codes, to generate GIS thematic maps.

Contemporary district school board jurisdictions were layered onto a boundary map of Ontario, using the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized District*

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<sup>2</sup> Thematic maps could not be created from the data reported in Eagles and Richardson's study because their statistics only provide the total number of facilities across the province for the 1988-1989 school year, instead of the location of individual facilities.

*School Boards* ArcGIS file. Areal interpolation of data was fitted into contemporary district school board boundaries to illustrate, per school system branch and year of study, an average distribution of student enrolment statistics to visually assess if any correlations existed between the location of school-board-operated OE centres and past student enrollment statistics. Student enrolment statistics were divided into quartiles to provide five visual gradients of population density to enable the delineation of individual district school board jurisdictions. Quartiles are descriptive statistics that illustrate quarter intervals of data distributed from the median data interval (Norman & Streiner, 2003). Locational data for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, for each year of study, and Public and Catholic branches of the provincial education system were then transformed into points and layered onto the previous data sets. Through this process, a set of five maps for each year of study for the Public and Catholic school systems was created to visualize how the spatial distribution of school-board-operated OE centres are historically correlated with past student enrollment statistics for individual 2010 district school board jurisdictions across the province.

**Qualitative Data.** After the quantitative data were collected and analyzed, descriptive and narrative data related to the operation of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres was collected for qualitative analysis and organized into a chronological annotated bibliography (Hill, 1994). The annotated bibliography incorporated: an American Psychological Association (APA) reference of the source document, a minimum 100 word summary of each pertinent document, quotations of special relevance with page numbers, and, when possible, notes about the ideological orientation of a

document's author (Hill, 1994; Duncan, 1999; Roche, 2010). This chronological annotated bibliography was then saved as a Microsoft Word 2010 file.

**Qualitative Analysis.** Qualitative analysis drew upon qualitative data collated into the chronological annotated bibliography, as well as the findings derived from the statistical and GIS analysis to compose a narrative layered account. A narrative layered account is a writing technique often used by ethnographers that encourages researchers to blend a review of relevant literature with findings discovered through empirical data analysis (Ronai, 1995). Through the process of constructing the layered account, an interpretation of the qualitative data included in the annotated bibliography was layered with the findings from the statistical and GIS analysis stages to construct a summative narrative account about how Ontario school-board-operated OE centres have evolved from 1960 to 2012. By layering these sources together, a narrative account was created that describes how the development, operation, and use of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres have evolved from 1960 to 2012.

### **Summary**

The implementation of an HGIS research design made it possible to identify, collect, and analyze geographic, statistical, and qualitative evidence about the status of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. Through the use of multiple sources of evidence and methods of analysis, this dissertation provides stakeholders involved in the operation of these school facilities with an empirical account of the history of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012. The subsequent sections and chapters of this dissertation provide a narrative account about how Ontario school-board-operated OE centres have evolved from 1960 to 2012. These chapters are followed by a



final summative chapter which provides recommendations for how the information contained in this dissertation can help stakeholders make more informed decisions regarding the development of policy and administrative decisions related to the operation of these school board facilities.

## SECTION 2

This section discusses the research findings for the following question: *What were the official policy goals for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres in the 1960s, and how well did these early facilities meet these goals?* This section is constructed as a narrative layered account. It provides an overview about the reasons why, in the 1960s, several school boards across Ontario initially decided to become involved in the operation of OE centres.

## Chapter 4: OFFICIAL POLICY GOALS

To understand how Ontario school-board-operated OE centres have evolved from 1960 to 2012, it is important to first ask: *What were the official policy goals for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres in the 1960s, and how well did these early facilities meet these goals?* Throughout the 1960s, the intersecting trajectories of the North American environmental movement and the Ontario government led to an initial decision that publicly-funded provincial school boards should be encouraged to become involved in the operation of OE centres. In response to these intersecting trajectories, the decision to establish school-board-operated OE centres established an ideological foundation that for many people (particularly in urban areas) would dictate how they learned to define their spatial relationships to nature and their immediate material landscapes.

### **Schools Administration Act**

As previously stated, after two decades of lobbying the Ontario provincial government to permit the development of a natural science school, in 1960, Toronto Board of Education teacher Robin Dennis would successfully convince the provincial Minister of Education to amend the *Schools Administration Act* (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976a; Passmore, 1972). As stipulated within the *Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario* (1960), this legislative decision enabled school boards to financially establish and operate specialized school facilities or fund opportunities for students to participate in a program at a residential school for natural science or conservation education. Through the addition of a new clause to the *Schools Administration Act*, school boards were now allowed to “provide or pay for board and lodging for a pupil for a period not exceeding two weeks in any year while he attends a

school for a course in conservation or natural science with the consent of his parent or guardian and with the permission of the board” (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1960, p. 434). After this amendment was passed, in September of 1960, the first residential Ontario school-board-operated OE centre was opened by the Toronto Board of Education, under the leadership of Dennis as its principal, on Center Island, called the Island Natural Science School (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976a; Eagles & Richardson, 1992; Passmore, 1972; Toronto District Board of Education, 2008). This facility provided (and continues to provide to this day) grade 5 and 6 students from city schools with what Toronto school boards have historically stated is, for many students, their first and only opportunity to stay on, and experience, the island so that they may develop a greater appreciation of nature and increase their knowledge about natural science (Toronto District School Board, 2008).

### **The Emergence of the Environmental Movement**

Although the operation of the Island Natural Science School would flourish for its first two years under the leadership of Dennis, it was not until the emergence of the modern environmental movement in 1962 (Forkey, 2012; Hazlett, 2003; Paehlke, 1997; Winfield, 2012), that other Ontario school boards began to become involved in the mainstream operation of OE centres (Birchard, 1996; Raffan, 1996). Upon the publication of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, in 1962, mass public concern about the health of the natural environment and its relationship to their personal health, would erupt into a major area of public political concern across the continent (Hazlett, 2003). Although Carson’s book focussed specifically on how the human use of chemicals threatened the environmental stability of crops, forestry resources, and human subsistence

(Carson, 1962; Forkey, 2012; Hazlett, 2003; Paehlke, 1997; Raffan, 1996; Winfield, 2012), reactions “to *Silent Spring* laid the groundwork for the development of the contemporary environmental movement which gained strength throughout the 1960s and 1970s” (Hazlett, 2003, p. 141).

Across Ontario, just like many other regions of North America, public concerns about the environment would become major political issues throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Andrews, 2003; Birchard, 1996; Hazlett, 2003; Paehlke, 1997; Winfield, 2012). During the 1960s, as the modern environmental movement emerged, across Ontario, several new groups formed to establish the inner core of the Canadian environmental movement (Andrews, 2003; Birchard, 1996; Forkey, 2012; Hazlett, 2003; Paehlke, 1997; Winfield, 2012). According to Read (2003), many of the people who formed these environmental groups had regularly enjoyed outdoor experiences as youths at residential summer camps or through wilderness camping excursions with their families in northern Ontario. Read states that it was these youth camping experiences that often led the members of these groups “to value and appreciate nature” (p. 164). With a desire to promote among Ontario citizens a greater appreciation and concern for nature, several of these groups used the public education system as one of the central vehicles for their public outreach programs. Groups from urban areas, such as Pollution Probe, and from rural areas, such as the Algonquin Wildlands League (AWL), developed sophisticated public education programs to promote environmental awareness and foster social change (Forkey, 2012; Killian and Warecki, 1992; Read, 2003).

Across Ontario’s urban landscape, environmental groups such as Pollution Probe, “helped to shift debate on the environment from traditional political parties to public

pressure groups” (Read, 2003, p. 164). Concerned about the health impacts of air and water pollution on the natural environment, the first goal of Pollution Probe was to challenge negligent government and corporate actions through public debate, and when necessary, litigation. Its second goal was to empower the public through social activism, research-based education, and facilitating opportunities for public participation in activities to foster social change. Pollution Probe actively mobilized scientific information through its media announcements and government lobbying that resulted in provincial restrictions on the insecticidal chemical dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT). The success of restricting DDT was often considered the "result of its ability to combine public education and attention-generating activities with valid science” (Read, 2003, p. 165).

In 1968, wilderness preservationists established the Algonquin Wildlands League (AWL) (Killian and Warecki, 1992). The AWL was comprised of naturalists, wilderness sporting organizations, such as the Ontario Anglers and Hunters Federation, and concerned members of the public. The AWL sought to stop logging within Ontario’s provincial parks by publicly pushing for the re-designation of parks, such as Algonquin Provincial Park and Quetico Provincial Park. At this time, provincial parks had no master plans to designate what activities were permitted within. The AWL pushed the provincial government to revise their “multi-use designation” which permitted logging and outdoor recreational activities to occur in the same areas. Instead the AWL advocated the label of “primitive use designation” to restrict logging activities while permitting increases in non-motorized backcountry camping. The AWL effectively garnered public support through community outreach campaigns using two outlets: the

news media and classroom teachers. Classroom teachers were encouraged to use the AWL's educational resources to raise public awareness about these parks (Killian and Warecki, 1992). Alongside news-media press releases, the AWL would successfully influence the Ontario government to design master plans for all of its provincial parks (Killian and Warecki, 1992).

### **The Emergence of the Adventure Education Movement**

In the early 1960s, alongside the rise of the environmental movement, there emerged an adventure education movement, which would also significantly influence the design and use of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. Adventure education is defined as a teaching methodology where educators intentionally use risky and perceived-risky outdoor pursuits (non-motorized forms of wilderness travel) or artificial climbing environments to promote positive interpersonal and intrapersonal social development (Ford, 1986; Priest, 1986). In 1962, Kurt Hahn would establish the first North American Outward Bound (OB) School in Boulder, Colorado. Throughout the 1960s, four other OB schools would be established, including the Hurricane Island OB School in Maine, North Carolina OB School, Voyager OB School in Minnesota, and the Pacific Crest OB school in Oregon (Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006). In the decades following the 1960s, the establishment of these schools would influence the further development of other OB schools and adventure education programs across the United States and Canada (Hammerman et al., 2001; Raiolia & O'Keefe, 1999). Alongside the development of these programs emerged the need to purchase, design, and operate spaces that could support outdoor pursuit-based adventure programs. Beginning in the late 1960s, several Ontario school-board-operated OE programs were designed to

directly support the integration of outdoor pursuit-based programming at their facilities (Birchard, 1996; Raffan, 1996; Passmore, 1972).

### **The Ontario Department of Education**

At the same time as the emergence of the environmental movement and the adventure education movement, in 1965, the Ontario Department of Education would again amend the *Schools Administration Act*, permitting large school boards with over 10,000 students to buy land and operate a natural science school (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1965; Passmore, 1972). Specifically, this amendment stated that:

A board that had an average daily attendance of 10,000 or more in the preceding year in the schools under its jurisdiction may acquire by purchase or otherwise, land in any municipality, not exceeding 200 acres for the purpose of erecting a natural science school, and may build and operate such a school thereon. (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1965, p. 546)

By permitting school boards with over 10,000 students to build their own OE centres, the Progressive-Conservative-led provincial government of the 1960s sought to use education as a vehicle to support environmentalism, publicly stating that the development and use of natural science schools would help foster future environmentally literate citizens. Strategically geared towards the urban school board jurisdictions where the greatest support for the early environmental movement was situated, historian Mark Winfield (2012) states that such strategies provided the Progressive Conservative government an opportunity to politically frame themselves as supporters of



environmentalism, enabling them to evade public calls to increase environmental regulations on the province's natural resource and industrial manufacturing sectors which they feared would stall economic growth.

After this amendment was passed, several Ontario school boards established sites and appointed OE coordinators (Birchard, 1996). For example, in 1966, the Etobicoke Field Study Centre was established by the Etobicoke Board of Education (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1975; Martindale, 1974); The MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre was established by the Ottawa Board of Education (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1980); the D. E. Brian Nature Interpretive Centre was established by the City of Windsor Roman Catholic Separate School Board; the Field Studies Centre was established by the Oxford County Board of Education; and the Burlington Outdoor Resource Centre was established by the York County Board of Education (Martindale, 1974). Then, in 1967, the Forest Valley Outdoor Centre was established by the North York Board of Education (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1975; Martindale, 1974). In 1969, the Glen Road Outdoor Education Centre, Christie Outdoor Education Centre, and Resource Management Centre were established by the Board of Education for the City of Hamilton (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1975; Martindale, 1974).

Although the Ontario Department of Education encouraged school boards to establish and operate their own OE centres as a way to appease public environmental concerns, this was not the only reason why the government changed policy to permit boards the freedom to establish specialized facilities. As educational historian Robert Gidney (1999) reports, the reason why many of these school boards could afford to build

and operate unique educational facilities was that, throughout the 1960s, the province was experiencing a provincial surplus; its government had a triple-A global credit rating, and there was a pressing need to quickly build new educational facilities to accommodate the demographic bulge of the baby boom. To ensure that Ontario students were provided the best education the government could afford, while politically appeasing the parents of baby boomers, the provincial government at this time decided to assume 60% of the total provincial cost of education, while encouraging school boards to design new facilities and innovative programs. According to educational historian Kurt Clausen (2014), school boards began to experiment in the pedagogical design and implementation of innovative progressively-oriented ideas, such as open concept school plans, team teaching, and the use of audio-visual aids. As government-supported school experiments, such as the open concept plan at Pleasant Avenue School in Willowdale, Ontario, proved successful, the government encouraged other school boards to invest in such initiatives as the de rigueur design across the province. To accomplish these goals, it could be said that the 1965 amendment to the *Schools Administration Act* was one of many changes the Ontario Department of Education made to the provincial education system to support a larger initiative to redesign and modernize its educational facilities, resources, pedagogical ideology, and curricular direction of the provincial education system (Gidney, 1999).

In 1967,

Important progress in Ontario's outdoor education began . . . with the first Geneva Park Conference. Other conferences followed: on "Teacher Education", "Man and His Total Environment", "Education and the

Environmental Crisis”, and “Conservation and Education”. They were all co-operative undertakings involving the Ontario colleges of education, conservation authorities, the Ontario Department of Education, teacher’s federations, and many voluntary agencies concerned with *environmental education*. (Passmore, 1972, p. 44, emphasis added in italics).

By 1968, the Ontario Department of Education released a publication titled *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario* (which became more popularly known as the Hall-Dennis Report). This report outlined a new direction for how students would be taught through the provincial education system. Within the Hall-Dennis Report, the Ontario Department of Education (1968a) declared that a child’s educational experiences should not be confined to school, but instead be extended to teacher-led tours in places such as museums, government buildings, and natural settings. Natural settings were encouraged by the government to be used to provide various types of experiences, including pleasurable exercise, recreation, and learning. Within the report’s recommendations, school staff were encouraged to provide “educational tours and field trips as a regular part of the learning experience at all levels” (Ontario Department of Education, 1968a, p. 182). School boards and conservation authorities were now encouraged to cooperate “to provide natural science schools for outdoor education and the development of conservation principles” (Ontario Department of Education, 1968a, p. 182).

By the end of 1968, the Minister of the Ontario Department of Education, W. G. Davis, acknowledged in his annual report that because there had been a growth in the number of OE facilities and appointed specialists, OE was now a recognized method of

teaching within the provincial education system (Ontario, 1968b). In response to the growth in the number of OE specialists, Minister Davis “appointed Jack G. Davis as an assistant superintendent of curriculum in out-of-school education” (Ontario, 1968b, p. 8). In the following year, in his Report as the Minister of Education, Davis included a single caption accompanying a photograph of three students and a teacher sitting outside around a basket examining a potato, which exclaimed, “The Department endorses the idea of education outside the classroom” (Ontario, 1969, p. 39). Following these endorsements by the government in favour of school-board-operated out-of-school programs, in the spring of 1970, the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) held a provincial conference on the subject of OE at the Cedar Glen Conference Centre (a site that would be later used by the East York Board of Education as an OE Centre). At this conference, a number of OE specialists from across Southern Ontario gathered, informally, to discuss the establishment of a professional body for themselves, which in 1972 became the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1971, 1976b).

As stipulated through the Ontario Department of Education, three official policy goals were established by the provincial government for school-board-operated OE centres. In 1960, the government passed legislation which would permit school boards to pay for the room and lodging of students to attend specialized residential school facilities for the delivery of conservation or natural science programs. In 1965, the government passed legislation which provided school boards from predominantly urban areas the right to establish specialized educational facilities for the operation of a natural science school. In 1968, the Hall-Dennis report recommended that school boards and teachers

should begin to extend the learning opportunities for students beyond school classrooms into a variety of venues including unspoiled natural settings. To accomplish this goal, the government encouraged school boards to partner with local conservation authorities to provide natural science schools for the development of conservation principles. As illustrated by the 1960 and 1965 amendments made to the *Schools Administration Act* as well as the recommendations expressed in the 1968 Hall-Dennis report, the central goal of the provincial government for the promotion of school-board-operated OE centres was to provide venues where students could engage in OE programs oriented towards the goals of the conservation education movement.

### **Government Policy Goals and Outdoor Education Centres**

Throughout the 1950s, American scholars, such as Leopold (1949), had contended that the usual reaction of North American governments to public concerns about the environment was to provide more conservation education. This is exactly what the government of Ontario did. Educational historian William Marsden (1997) states that conservation education was often perceived by North American regional governments as the best pedagogical solution for supporting the environmental movement throughout the 1960s. Throughout this period, early provincial school-board-operated OE centres effectively supported the goals of the Ontario Department of Education by engaging their students in conservation education programs, inculcating them to the past values of the conservation movement.

By the time of the emergence of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s, the past uses of conservation education as an overt tool of racial cultivation had ended (Carter & Simmons, 2010; Forkey, 2012; Marsden, 1997). Across Ontario, the

focus of conservation education was now predominantly promoted by the government, classroom teachers, and OE practitioners as a way to extend curricular learning for students beyond the classroom. Through the use of school-board-operated OE facilities, like the conservation education movement of the past, conservation education continued to be used as a vehicle for social reform. Consequently, outdoor educators employed at school-board-operated OE centres perceived the citizens of urban cities in the same way as their predecessors within the conservation education movement had as people under threat of physical and moral degeneracy. Many outdoor educators believed that only through exposure to nature could the student populations they served be saved from such dangers (Marsden, 1997; Wall, 2008). This would set the foundation for why contemporary OE practitioners, such as Chuck Hopkins, described threats to close school-board-operated OE centres as acts of persecution against children (Spears, 1995, April 22), and Linney (2002, November 21) continues to posit the question, “How can urban children be informed and motivated to act on environmental concerns without having teacher-led experiences at outdoor education centres?” (p. A23).

The use of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres as the primary vehicle for the delivery of conservation education programs throughout the 1960s was often contextualized through the traditional values of conservationism that sought to promote social reform through the provision of natural settings for urban respite and physical health through participation in outdoor recreational activities. The Hall-Dennis Report encouraged schools and classroom teachers to design and teach students the principles of conservation through the use of outdoor school facilities (Ontario Department of Education, 1968a). To improve the learning experience for students, recommendation 25

of this report encouraged classroom teachers and school staff to “introduce learning experience in health and recreation that are in keeping with the needs and interests of individuals in these areas” (p. 181). “To extend the learning experience beyond the school,” recommendation 33 encouraged school boards, conservation areas, and other agencies to cooperate to “provide natural science schools for outdoor education and the development of conservation principles” (p. 182).

Through the lens of the Hall-Dennis report, school boards, such as the Toronto Board of Education, were able to frame OE as an important means of introducing children raised in urban environments to the country’s natural heritage and enhancing their scientific knowledge of basic ecology (Martindale, 1974). The official policy of the Toronto Board of Education stipulated that “we no longer assume that the children of the City of Toronto are going to absorb incidentally an understanding of the intricate environmental relationships upon which all life depends” (Martindale, 1974, p. 72). The Forest Valley Outdoor Education Centre, operated by the North York Board of Education, expressed a similar operational focus, indicating that the intent of the program was to provide its students with opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the environment, while the Hamilton Board of Education sought to develop within its students “a healthy and appreciative attitude towards the out of doors” (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1975). To support these aims, staff employed at facilities such as the MacSkimming OE centre, operated by the Ottawa Board of Education, argued that their function in society was to bring urban children into more intimate contact with the outdoors (Martindale, 1974). Throughout the 1960s, Ontario school-board-operated OE centres aptly supported the primary goal of conservation education by conceptually

framing these specialized learning spaces as moral landscapes which provided students with access to what was framed as unspoiled natural settings for the use and appreciation of natural resources through the delivery of science, geography, and history lessons.

Passmore (1972), Eaton (1999), and Horwood (2011) state that, in the 1960s, it was commonly believed that classrooms restricted how students learned by only making use of student's visual and auditory senses. According to Eaton, the use of outdoor natural settings was believed to help students enrich their cognitive understanding of the school curriculum through sensory learning, particularly in the fields of science, geography, and history. These subjects were historically used by proponents of conservation education programs to inculcate a sense of responsibility and appreciation for natural environments (Marsden, 1997, 1998). Natural science-oriented learning opportunities were often identified by early OE programs as the central purpose for providing educational support services. Learning opportunities often focused on promoting the development of ecological knowledge and were often framed around particular environments available on site such as stream and marsh studies available through the Christie OE centre, pond studies available through the Island Natural Science School and Burlington Outdoor Resource Centre, or forest studies available through the St. Johns Outdoor Studies Centre (Martindale, 1974).

For example, the Toronto Island Natural Science School provided students with opportunities to extend their knowledge of the natural sciences (biology, geology, ecology, and agriculture) through direct contact with representative ecosystems located on the school property and the adjacent lands of Centre Island. An early 1960 publication created by the Toronto Board of Education provided parents and the general public with



photographs of students participating in the different conservation and natural science-based programs offered at the school. A program schedule included in this publication illustrates that students circulated in small groups of ten to twelve, through various activity areas, participating predominantly in natural science and conservation education programming based on a series of studies of different environments, such as meadow, beach, and pond ecosystems. A 1970 publication titled the Island Natural Science School served as an activity booklet that students were expected to complete on site while engaging in conservation and natural science activities, illustrating the early curricular emphasis of this program. Students were expected to make observations about the on-site pond, drawing and writing observations about pond ecology to demonstrate their understanding of the relationships they observed between the plants, animals, and other aquatic organisms within this environment (Toronto Board of Education, 1970). Through direct experiences and observation of these different environments, the objective of this program was to focus on encouraging students to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the representative ecosystems available for study at this facility.

Passmore (1972) and Andrews (2003) state that, although many of the programs offered at early Ontario school-board-operated OE centres supported the study of conservation principles through the subjects of science, geography and history, the staff at these facilities often drew upon the province's broad framework of curriculum subjects in an interdisciplinary fashion such as language arts (through creative writing and storytelling), mathematics (through collection and analysis of quantitative data for natural science), visual arts (through landscape drawing and photography), and physical education (through participation in outdoor pursuits), to extend the use of outdoor natural

settings as a resource that could be used to promote student learning opportunities for all Ontario curriculum subjects. For example, the aim of providing outdoor learning opportunities at the D.E. Brian Nature Interpretive Centre, operated by the Windsor Roman Catholic Separate School Board, was to support the curriculum by providing students “the opportunity to pursue themes and topics which they began to investigate at the school grounds” (Martindale, 1974, p. 50). At the Christie Outdoor Education Centre and G.R. Allen School in Hamilton, OE programs were intended to encompass many subject disciplines including math, English, science, geography, and physical education. At the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre, the intent of OE programming was to enrich and explore an area of study through direct experiences outdoors, rather than cover a specific course of study indoors (Martindale, 1974). The Burlington Outdoor Resource Centre indicated that “the aim of this program is that the studies done at the centre become an integral part of the regular school curriculum” (Martindale, 1974, p. 83). Through the use of school-board-operated OE centres, these facilities were able to support the Ontario Department of Education’s goal to promote a conservation ethic among students not only by teaching the principles of conservation across the traditional subjects of science, geography, and history, but also by extending the use of outdoor spaces to integrate these principles across other provincial curriculum subjects.

Throughout the 1960s, Ontario school-board-operated OE centres also supported the second goal of conservation education, which was to cultivate the positive qualitative and human aspects of a democratic society through the use of outdoor recreational activities and by engagement in daily chores at specific facilities as ways to promote the personal and social development of democratic citizens. Through a 1960 promotional

publication for the Island Natural Science School, in conjunction with promoting the opportunities for students to learn the principles of conservation, it was also advertised that students were engaged in community chores to teach them social skills required to live in democratic communities. Students were also engaged in recreation activities, such as bird watching, fishing, rifle shooting, and archery, to expose students to positive life-long outdoor leisure pursuits (Toronto Board of Education, 1960). Andrews (2003) adds that outdoor recreation activities such as orienteering, hiking, and outdoor living (camping) skills also taught students physical skills and spatial thinking habits required to visit the representative ecosystems on these school board properties and negotiate their local communities. For example, being able to read and understand a topographical map through orienteering, then hike to a location and develop the basic skills to be outdoors in a diversity of seasons and environments at the Christie Outdoor Education Centre or Etobicoke Field Studies Centre, often provided children with physical skills and spatial skills they could use in future investigations of specific ecological environments such as meadow or stream ecosystems within their local communities (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1975; Martindale, 1974). Through engagement in these activities, it was assumed that students could begin to develop appropriate social skills, leisure interests, and spatial thinking habits which would begin to shape them into positive democratic citizens.

### **Summary**

Let us return to the research question addressed by this chapter: *What were the official policy goals for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres in the 1960s, and how well did these early facilities meet these goals?* The initial reason why many

Ontario school boards became involved in the operation of OE centres, were because the Ontario provincial government both permitted and encouraged school boards to design and operate their own facilities. The official policy goals for school-board-operated OE centres, as stipulated by the government, were to instill within the province's students, the values and principles of conservationism. Early Ontario school-board-operated OE centres supported these goals by promoting knowledge about and appreciation for a variety of different natural ecosystems, while also providing opportunities for students to learn democratic social skills through participation in outdoor recreational leisure activities.

The initial reasons why the Ontario Department of Education made it an official policy to encourage school boards to establish and operate their own OE facilities, was guided by the underlying ideas and values of the Conservation Education movement. After the 1960 amendment to the *Schools Administration Act*, that granted school boards such as the Toronto Board of Education, permission to provide and pay for students to attend a school for a course in natural science or conservation. Upon the emergence of the continental environmental movement, and the adventure education movement, the promotion of conservation education through the use of school-board-operated OE centres, provided the government an opportunity to align itself as a supporter of environmentalism, while permitting it to evade public calls to increase industrial environmental regulations. This strategy was accomplished through the implementation of the 1965 amendment to the *Schools Administration Act*, which encouraged school boards with enrolments of 10,000 or more students to develop their own OE centres. Through this process, the government was able to target and appease constituents located

in southern Ontario's urban school board jurisdictions, where the emerging environmental movement garnered its greatest support. By spatially framing the use of school-board-operated OE centres as an effective way to expose students to a variety of natural ecosystems, the provincial government was able to embed within the public ethos the idea that these facilities served as one of the few moral landscapes where Ontario students could develop an appreciation of *nature*, and permit the government to push the responsibility for environmental resolutions onto the shoulders of the local school boards and its next generation of provincial voters.

After the 1965 amendment to the *Schools Administration Act*, several southern Ontario urban school boards established their own OE centres. These facilities predominantly focussed on instilling within students knowledge about and appreciation for a variety of different natural ecosystems, while providing children opportunities to develop new social skills through exposure to outdoor leisure and learning activities. In conjunction with the development of these new facilities, through government sponsored conferences as well as provincial reports, the Ontario Department of Education, framed itself as a supporter of outdoor education, under a new grassroots pedagogical term called environmental education, which was yet to be scholarly defined.

Coincidentally, school-board-operated OE centres were never supposed to serve as catch-all sites for the facilitation of outdoor learning experiences, but instead provide facilities where classroom teachers could build on OE experiences they provided within their school communities (Martindale, 1974, Wood, 1977b). For example, as previously discussed, the Windsor Roman Catholic Separate School Board, programs delivered at the D.E. Interpretive Nature Centre were meant to enrich student lessons already begun

on their local school grounds. As Eyres (1973) states, by the 1970s classroom teachers had begun to perceive school-board-operated OE centres as necessary sites for the provision of outdoor learning experiences. Eyres reports that as a result, very little emphasis was placed by these teachers on teaching students about their urban environments. “This was especially evident in areas where it could easily apply, i.e. Southern Ontario, and more specifically, in city boards” (Eyres, 1973, p. 26). Consequently, Eyres indicates that little consideration was made by school administrators or classroom teachers to provide outdoor learning opportunities within their local school communities. As a result, Eyres states that instead of taking the initiative to become trained in the facilitation of OE opportunities, classroom teachers and school administrators often chose instead to blame the government for failing to provide training in the facilitation of OE experiences. As time progressed further into the 1970s, and the province’s economic situation shifted from an era of fiscal surplus and government spending to a state of economic recession and government constraint, accountability for the use of taxpayer money started to become a more important factor in how the Progressive Conservative government was publicly scrutinized, and hence how the education system was funded (Gidney, 1999).

### SECTION 3

This section discusses the research findings which answer the research question:

*What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?* This section is divided into five chapters, each of which is written as a narrative layered account about the significant changes that happened to Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1970 to 2012. A final chapter follows which provides a summary discussion about the findings, implications, and conclusions drawn from this dissertation.

## Chapter 5: THE EARLY DECLINE

By 1970, the environmental movement began to grow prolifically across North America and the globe. According to Carter and Simmons (2010), in October 1970, the Environmental Education Act became law in the United States. For the next five years, this act provided a national Office of Environmental Education and federal funding for the integration of environmental programming into state-run elementary and secondary school systems across the United States. Although this act would not be renewed after its 5 year lifespan, Carter and Simmons state that the impact of this act would provide the initial support required to establish influential non-governmental organizations such as the North America Association for Environmental Education. Carter and Simmons (2010) report, that in conjunction with these efforts, in 1972 the United Nations (UN) would hold its first international conference on the environment. This conference would set the stage for the 1975 United Nations International Workshop on Environmental Education that resulted in the *Belgrade Charter*, which provided an initial definition for environmental education. The definition for environmental education from the *Belgrade Charter* would be codified in 1977 at the UN's first Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education. The outcome of this conference produced *The Tbilisi Declaration*, which provided a document that defined the role and purpose of environmental education: (a) to foster awareness and concern about the social, political, economic and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas; (b) to provide all people opportunities to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment; (c) to encourage new behaviours among individuals and groups towards the environment (Carter & Simmons, 2010).



Just as the North American adventure education movement had garnered popularity throughout the 1960s (Hammerman et al, 2001; Martin et al, 2006; Raiolia & O’Keefe, 1999), throughout the 1970s environmental education garnered similar popularity both as a relevant educational methodology and an emerging pedagogical social movement. Consequently, while the environmental education movement would begin its attempts to change society, the Ontario government (like many other regional governments across Canada and the United States) began to sense that a potential economic recession may be looming on their political horizon (Gidney, 1999; Winfield, 2012). The provincial government quickly came to realize that the surpluses it had spent throughout the previous decade were no longer available (Gidney, 1999; Winfield, 2012). As the bulk of the baby boomer demographic transitioned from the elementary school system to the secondary school system, many school boards were left with numerous empty classrooms in hastily built, energy inefficient elementary schools in need of serious maintenance and repair. Built throughout the 1950s and 1960s, to accommodate a historically unprecedented number of students born after the Second World War, the costs of keeping many of these schools in operation began to burden the province and its school boards with unnecessary energy costs, which alongside other pressing needs, often forced administrators to defer maintenance costs (Gidney, 1999; Hansen, 1993; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1975a).

As the opulence of the 1960s faded at the beginning of the 1970s under the looming threat of a potential economic recession, public concern began to shift away from the environment and towards the economy (Paehlke, 2007; Winfield, 2012). At a time when the government was assuming 60% of the total cost of the public education

system, one of the first ways the Government of Ontario sought to avoid a recession was to reduce funding for education. To accomplish this funding reduction, the province first needed to take strategic action to curb the exponential increase in spending habits, that for the past decade it had encouraged school boards to engage (Gidney, 1999). In 1970, after the provincial Committee on the Costs of Education recommended that funds allocated to school boards by the Ontario Capital Aid Corporation be “reduced from \$202,000,000 in 1971 to \$159,000,000 in 1972,” with “further reductions planned for 1973” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1972, p. 18), the province announced that it was going to shift its mantra from one of spending to fiscal prudence. In 1972, the Ontario Ministry of Education, under the leadership of its new Education Minister Thomas L. Wells, imposed a five-year spending ceiling on its school boards to curb these spending habits. Wells declared that the days of improving the resources of the provincial education system through spending were over, and that the focus for the Ontario provincial education system, throughout the 1970s, would be to improve the quality of education by learning how to make the most effective use of its existing resources (Gidney, 1999). Consequently, as this decade would progress, this decision made by Minister Wells would significantly impact the status of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, as many of the experimental innovations of the 1960s would become “susceptible to failure without a strong, continuing network of advocates” who understood and shared a philosophy towards these innovative forms of education (Clausen, 2014, p. 85).

## **Ontario Teachers' Federation**

Following the 1969 endorsement of OE programming by Education Minister Davis, in the spring of 1970, the Ontario Department of Education and the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF), which was the umbrella professional organization representing all teachers employed in the province's publicly funded education system, held a provincial conference on the subject of OE at Cedar Glen Conference Centre. At this conference, a number of OE specialists, employed at school-board-operated OE centres across Southern Ontario, gathered to informally discuss the establishment of a professional body for themselves. In 1972, this group of practitioners would formally establish the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), and self-declare their organization the professional body which represents the interests of all outdoor educators across the province (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1971, 1976b).

As the financial prosperity of the 1960s began to fade in the early 1970s, from the autumn of 1970 to 1973 the Ontario Teachers' Federation released three OE manuals "designed to introduce Outdoor Education to the classroom teacher" (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1970, p. 2). Through the publication of the first manual, *Outdoor Education Manual Part 1*, the OTF provided Ontario teachers with a rationale for facilitating OE opportunities, a list of aims and objectives of OE programs, and a recommended code of conduct (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1970). The OTF's (1970) rationale for facilitating OE opportunities was guided by the ideology of conservationism and promoted the idea that children learn best about the natural world when they have opportunities to directly experience it. The OTF claimed that at the beginning of the 1970s, Ontario children had fewer opportunities to experience the natural world than their

parents because their lives were regulated by technological advancements such as school buses and television that distanced students from exploring and experiencing their local community surroundings. When students were provided with opportunities to learn biological concepts through first-hand experiences rather than books, the OTF argued that students also learned communication and social interaction skills which the OTF claimed were natural components of working in group settings and democratic living. Through this ideology, teachers were expected to promote the attitudinal characteristics of conservationism in their daily practice so that when students graduated from high school they would be instilled with conservation-oriented attitudes.

Through the OTF's (1970) code of conduct for designing and delivering OE opportunities, teachers were encouraged to carefully plan their trips by taking into consideration the values of environmental conservation, the appropriate use of educational funding, and the effective use of school time. Through this code of conduct, the OTF encouraged classroom teachers to design and facilitate OE opportunities within their local school communities. The OTF recognized that some teachers and students may

feel drawn to wild and remote places for their fieldwork. Attractive though these places are, their area is shrinking fast and what is left would soon be damaged or destroyed by too much educational use. There are almost always 'man made' habitats, less sensitive to trampling and collecting, available nearer to home, and on such ground a considerable portion of the time devoted to outdoor studies may be profitably spent. (p.

8)

Although by the 1970 publication of the OTF's first OE manual, several Ontario school boards were already operating their own OE facilities, instead of encouraging the further development of such facilities, the OTF instead encouraged school boards and teachers to redesign their immediate school grounds to make more effective use of the "great waste of valuable outdoor space in conventional playgrounds" (p. 25).

Acknowledging that camping excursions did provide educational opportunities for children to learn independence from family through experiences such as learning to live as citizens of a small community, the OTF argued that not all children could afford to participate in such experiences. The OTF openly discouraged the development of new school-board-operated OE centres, stating that "it is rather wasteful of tax dollars to build facilities when so many are available and idle" (p. 13). Through this manual, the OTF sought to redefine the concept of outdoor learning centres as designed spaces on immediate school grounds that "encourage children to develop their creative potential and free their great natural zest for living" (p. 24). Recommendations were provided in this manual by the OTF, to help school boards and teachers redesign their school grounds to provide students, in addition to traditional spaces for organized sports, a landscape where children could climb, swing, slide, and crawl through a variety of constructed spaces such as sand boxes and forested areas. Subsequently, in 1971 the OTF published *Outdoor Education Manual Part II*, where it openly encouraged classroom teachers to design OE opportunities to engage students in exploring their immediate local community through activities such as photography and sketch mapping (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1971). In 1973, the OTF published *Outdoor Education Manual Part III*, which provided classroom teachers with a comprehensive resource manual for

the design and facilitation of urban field study experiences (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1973). Through the publication of these two additional OE manuals, the OTF continued to promote the idea that OE opportunities were best facilitated by classroom teachers, who could make more effective use of students' time by using school grounds and the local school community.

### **The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario**

From 1970–1972, at the same time as the Government of Ontario began to strategize about how it could cope with a recession, and the OTF was striving to encourage school boards to redesign their school grounds and use local community areas to provide OE opportunities, specialists employed at school-board-operated OE centres across southern Ontario formed the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1971, 1976b).

In the spring of 1970 the Ontario Teachers' Federation conducted a Provincial Conference on Outdoor Education at Cedar Glen. It was evident that a significant number of the delegates were working full time in Outdoor Education, and an informal meeting of this group took place. They met again at the Toronto Island School and later at the MacSkimming Natural Science School in Ottawa. It was at this latter meeting that steps were taken to formalize the organization, and the name 'Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario' was selected. (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1971, p. 1)

In 1972, COEO was formed, and its members self-proclaimed this new organization as the representative body for all outdoor educators across the province.

### Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1972–1973

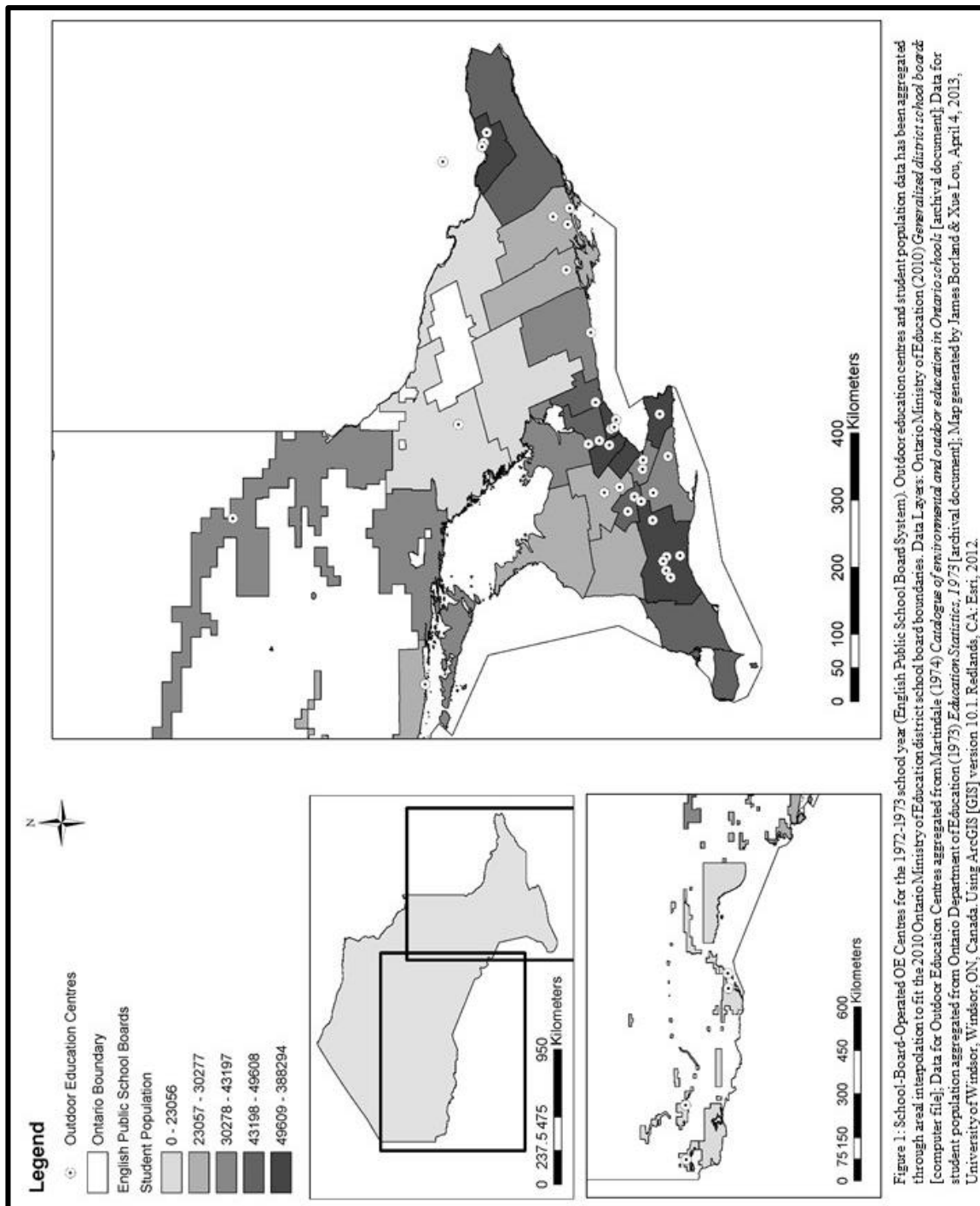
By the 1972–1973 Ontario school year, 33 (18.3%) of the province’s 180 school boards operated one or more school-board-operated OE centres, with a total of 48 facilities in operation across the province (Table 2). In September 1973, 180 school boards were in operation across the province, with a total of 2,018,276 students enrolled in the provincial education system (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1973). Approximately 741,224 (36.7%) of Ontario students attended school boards that operated an OE centre. Of the 33 school boards that operated OE centres, 26 (76.5%) of these boards operated one or more day-use facilities, 9 (26.5%) of these boards operated one or more residential facilities, and 6 (8.8%) boards operated one dual-purpose facility each.

Table 2: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973)

Category	1972–1973
<u>Ontario school boards</u>	180
<u>Boards with OE centres</u>	33 (18.3%)
Boards with day-use centres	26 (76.5%)
Boards with residential centres	9 (26.5%)
Boards with dual-purpose centres	6 (18.8%)
<u>Total number of OE centres</u>	48
Day-use facilities	35 (72.9%)
Residential facilities	7 (14.6%)
Dual-purpose facilities	6 (12.5%)
<u>Public system facilities</u>	39
<u>Catholic system facilities</u>	9

Data Sources: 1972–1973 school year data aggregated from Martindale’s (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools* [archival document].

As illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the highest prevalence of school-board-operated OE centres were located across the province’s southwestern to southeastern corridor, with 38 facilities in operation from the city of Windsor through Toronto and up to Ottawa. Ontario’s system of public school boards operated 31 of these facilities, while the province’s system of publicly funded Catholic school boards operated 7 facilities.





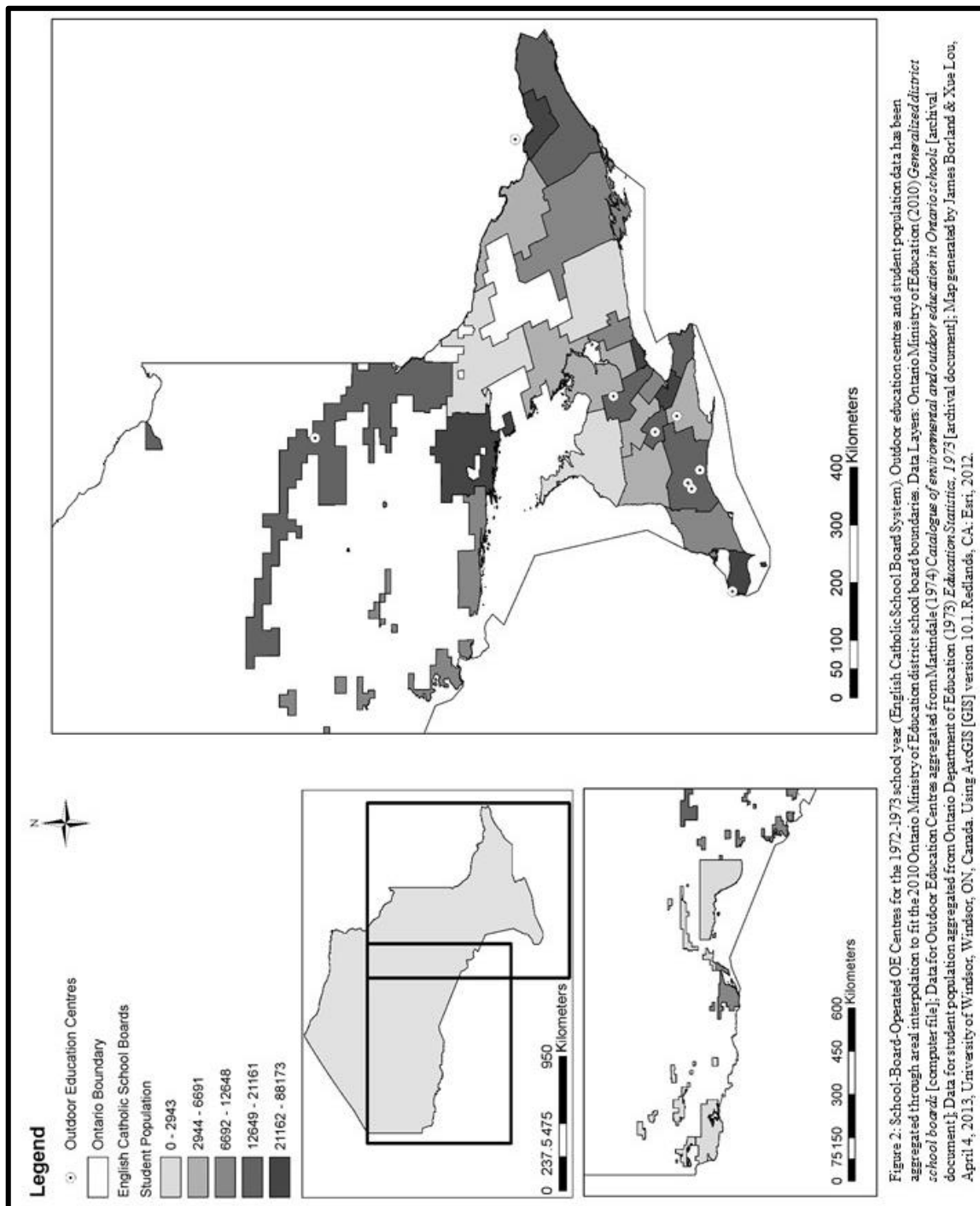


Figure 2: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1972-1973 school year (English Catholic School Board System). Outdoor education centres and student population data has been aggregated through areal interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school boards* [computer file]; Data for Outdoor Education Centres aggregated from Martindale (1974) *Catalogue of environmental and outdoor education in Ontario schools* [archival document]; Data for student population aggregated from Ontario Department of Education (1973) *Education Statistics, 1973* [archival document]. Map generated by James Borland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1. Redlands, CA: Esri, 2012.

Beyond the southern Ontario corridor, 10 school-board-operated OE centres were located in northern communities with 9 facilities in operation by public school boards, and one facility operated by a Catholic school board. In addition to school-board-operated OE facilities located within the province, the Carleton Board of Education and the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board each operated an OE centre in Quebec, near the provincial border.

When the location of school-board-operated OE centres are correlated with student enrolment populations, most school boards that operated a facility had student enrollments over 10,000 students, which correlates with the regulations set out in the 1965 amendment made to the *Schools Administration Act*. By consolidating the 1972–1973 student enrollment statistics for individual school boards through areal interpolation, upon fitting these statistics to Ontario’s 2010 *Generalized School Board Boundaries map*, GIS analysis illustrates that the location of most OE facilities are correlated with areas that have historically had high density populations, in school board jurisdictions responsible for large southern Ontario metropolitan cities, such as Windsor, London, Kitchener, Hamilton, Toronto, Kingston, and Ottawa.

School boards with student enrollments over 10,000 often either owned the property and facilities specifically designed for the delivery of OE programs or operated a specialized OE facility in partnership with a local conservation authority through a lease or special agreement. As reported by Martindale (1974), OE facilities that were owned and operated by public school boards ranged from the use of board-owned plots of land to the design and development of specialized facilities, with formerly closed schools

often being re-opened as OE centres. For example, the Lennox and Addington County Board of Education purchased 80 acres of natural wooded area adjacent to the North Addington Education Centre at Cloyne and 50 acres adjoining Ernstown Secondary School for its teachers to use for the provision of OE opportunities. The Board of Education for the City of Hamilton established an OE centre through the G. R. Allen Elementary School whose property adjoins the city's Royal Botanical Gardens. School boards that converted formerly closed elementary schools into OE centres include the Toronto Board of Education that had previously established the Island Natural Science School; the Wellington County Board of Education that established the Eden Mills Field Centre; and the York County Board of Education which established the Burlington and Vivian Outdoor Resource Centres. Specialized properties purchased with facilities specifically designed for the provision of OE programs included the Kingfisher Lake OE Centre operated by the Lakehead Board of Education; Pond Mills Natural Science School operated by the Board of Education for the City of London; Field Studies Centre operated by the Oxford County Board of Education; Blair OE centre and Wigley's Corners OE Centre operated by the Waterloo County Board of Education; Boyne River Natural Science School and High Park School for OE operated by the Toronto Board of Education; St. John's OE School established by the Dufferin-Peel County Roman Catholic Separate School Board; H.R. Frink OE Centre established by the Hastings County Board of Education; the Field Centre established by the Northumberland and Durham County Board of Education; and the MacSkimming OE Centre established by the Ottawa Board of Education.

School boards that chose to partner with local conservation authorities (CA) to either lease or operate an OE facility through special agreement included the Brant County Board of Education, which leased the Apps' Mill Field Centre from the Grand River CA; the Wellington County Board of Education, which leased the Belwood Lake Field Centre from the Grand River CA; and the Frontenac County Board of Education, which operated the Osprey School located in the Gould Lake CA, leased by the Cataraqui Region CA. Special agreements existed through the York County Board of Education and the Board of Education for the Borough of Etobicoke to use Metropolitan Toronto Region Conservation Authority property for the provision of OE programs; the Haldimand County Board of Education established a special agreement with the Grand River CA to operate the Taquanyak Nature Centre on a year-round basis; the Waterloo County Board of Education and its Catholic school board counterpart operated the Laurel Creek OE Centre together on Grand River CA property; the Middlesex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board and the Kent County Roman Catholic Separate School Board operated OE centres free of charge on property owned by the Lower Thames Valley CA.

Other special arrangements that existed between school boards and property owners included the use of municipal parks and the off-season use of private residential youth summer camps. For example, the City of Windsor Roman Catholic District School Board that operated the D. E. Brian Nature Interpretive Centre located in Ojibway Park, and the Carleton Board of Education that established the Haven and Ramsay Lake OE Centres in the National Capital Region's Gatineau Park, each established special agreements with local municipalities to operate OE centres on municipal park properties.

Some boards leased the facilities of residential youth summer camps during their off-seasons (fall, winter, spring) to operate as school-board-operated OE centres. For example, the Bolton OE Centre, which was operated on property owned by the United Church for a summer residential camp and conference centre, was leased for the operation of a residential OE program through a partnership between the school boards for Etobicoke, Borough of York, and Borough of East York. The residential youth summer camp Circle R Ranch, was leased for the provision of an OE centre by the Board of Education for the City of London.

Although most school-board-operated OE centres were operated by school boards, which governed jurisdictions with over 10,000 students, statistical and geospatial analysis illustrates that for the 1972–1973 school year, 11 school boards operated an OE centre within areas with total student enrollments below 10,000 students. Eight public school boards with enrolments between 2185 and 8183 students operated OE centres, with 2 facilities located in southern Ontario and 6 facilities located in northern Ontario. Three Catholic school boards with enrollments between 1837 and 3457 students operated an OE centre, with 2 facilities located in southern Ontario and one facility located in north-eastern Ontario. When the 1972–1973 student enrollment populations for these school boards were consolidated through areal interpolation to fit Ontario's 2010 Generalized School Board Boundaries map, GIS analysis illustrated that these facilities were located in jurisdictions with significantly larger geographic areas and lower student populations than boards that had over 10,000 students. A variety of arrangements supported the operation of school-board-operated OE facilities in these school boards. In Ontario's north, the East Parry Sound Board of Education operated an OE centre on a

school property which consisted of simply a pond and a forest; the Central Algoma Board of Education, located in Ontario's near north, operated a 130 acre site with a mix of farmland, bush, marshland, creek, and river environments; the Cochran-Iroquois Falls Board of Education, located in the far northeastern region of the province, operated a 600 acre tract of land; the Kenora Board of Education established a partnership with a local residential camp. In southeastern Ontario, the Lennox and Addington County Board of Education operated simple OE programs on two large tracts of land from 50 to 80 acres that adjoined school properties. Across southwestern Ontario, the Elgin County Roman Catholic Separate School Board partnered with the Elgin County Board of Education to use its OE centre; the Brant County Roman Catholic Separate School Board worked in partnership with the Brant County Board of Education to lease and operate the Apps' Mill Nature Centre located on property owned by the Grand River CA.

During the 1972–1973 school year, the structure of OE programs provided through school-board-operated OE centres continued to focus on the cultivation of the principles of conservation through science, history and geography lessons, outdoor pursuits, and pioneer crafts. Out of the 34 school boards operating an OE centre, 27 (79.4%) facilitated science-oriented activities which focussed on promoting greater knowledge of conservation principles and specific ecosystems located on OE centre properties. For example, the Brant County Board of Education facilitated activities, such as stream, forest, and meadow studies. Out of the 34 school boards operating an OE centre, 15 boards (44.1%) indicated that they facilitated outdoor recreation activities. Alongside camping, orienteering was identified as the most popular activity provided at school-board-operated OE centres, followed by snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and

canoeing. A small minority of 7 (20.6%) school-board-operated OE centres also indicated that they provided activities oriented towards the elementary social studies curriculum such as maple syrup harvesting demonstrations and simulations about life during the time of Ontario's pioneers.

Although several school-board-operated OE centres provided both science and outdoor recreational-based programs, these statistics indicate that during the 1972–73 school year, the predominant focus for the operation of school-board-operated OE centers was geared towards building students' scientific knowledge. Outdoor recreational experiences were often viewed as support activities, such as with the OE centre operated by the Lake Superior Board of Education, which facilitated half-day canoe trips for its secondary school students so that they could participate in unique science and geography lessons. Several staff working at school-board-operated OE centres designed programs in partnership with classroom teachers by first visiting their schools to meet with teachers and students, while a minority of these same staff either provided teachers with lesson packages that they could take back to their classrooms to facilitate follow-up lessons, or visited schools afterwards to facilitate such lessons themselves. Seven (20.6%) school boards operating an OE centre had staff that visited classroom teachers prior to visiting a school-board-operated OE centre, while only three or 8.8% of school boards provided some form of follow-up back in the school classroom after students had returned from their OE experience.

Although most school boards were able to describe to Martindale (1974) the structure of their programs and types of activities offered, only 13 school boards (39.3%) of the 33 boards that operated a school-board-operated OE centre described a

philosophical purpose for providing OE services. School boards which provided a philosophical rationale for operating an OE centre often varied in their intentions from extending classroom learning outdoors to encouraging students to develop a greater sense of environmental appreciation and awareness. For example, the Central Algoma Board of Education indicated that its philosophical purpose for operating a school-board-operated OE centre was to increase within its students their confidence in the natural environment through participation in outdoor pursuits. The City of Windsor Roman Catholic Secondary School Board (RCSSB), York County Board of Education, and Niagara South Board of Education each reported that they operated OE programs for the purpose of enhancing the regular classroom curriculum through outdoor study. The Middlesex RCSSB operated OE centres in partnership with the Thames Valley CA and sought to enhance classroom studies, while encouraging students to develop an understanding of the interrelationships between plants, animals, and people. The OE centres operated by the Ottawa Board of Education, the Board of Education for the City of Hamilton, the Frontenac County Board of Education, and the Toronto Board of Education each provided programs to broaden the environmental awareness of their students based on the assumption that children raised within the urban environments of its cities and suburbs needed to be exposed to the counties natural heritage “upon which all life depends” (Martindale, 1974, p. 72). The Waterloo County Board of Education indicated that they operated their OE Centres for the unique purpose that “teachers will eventually become less dependent on outings to the centres and gain the confidence to teach in the outdoors themselves, using areas closer to their schools” (Martindale, 1974, p. 56). Although 18.9% of all Ontario school boards now operated an OE centre,



approximately 60% of these boards did not describe to Martindale, a philosophical rationale for operating such facilities.

### **A Shift in Government Policy**

At the start of the 1972–1973 school year, the Ontario government would pass another amendment to the *Schools Administration Act*, permitting all boards to establish their own OE centres for the operation of a natural science school or other out-of-classroom program (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1972). Although, on the surface, this amendment appears to have been what many Ontario-based OE scholars, such as Passmore (1972), Martindale (1974), Birchard (1996), consider to have been a beneficial decision for the future development of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, a more critical analysis of its phrasing reveals that increased constraints were imposed through this amendment on the previous freedoms school boards were provided by the 1960 and 1965 amendments to this same act. While school boards with enrollments of over 10,000 students had previously been permitted, under the 1965 amendment to the *Schools Administration Act* the freedom to decide when they would purchase land and establish their own facilities, the 1972 amendment now only permitted school boards to engage in such actions upon “the approval of the Minister” (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1972, p. 408). School boards were now encouraged to “enter into an agreement with a conservation or other appropriate authority for the use of the facilities and personnel of such authority for the purpose of conducting such a program as directed by the board” (Ontario Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1972, p. 408). Since at this time, conservation authorities had a mandate to provide public education initiatives for the protection of local watersheds, this amendment could be

interpreted as a way to reduce costs to school boards, while maintaining a similar level of service. At a point in the province's history when the government was trying to curb school board spending and encourage its employees to make more effective use of their existing resources, it can be inferred from the amendment that, under the leadership of Education Minister Wells, school-board-operated OE centres were one of the first areas of the education system targeted by this political strategy.

Following the 1972 amendment to the Schools Administration Act, in 1973, the School Business and Finance Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education released a publication titled *Principles of Site Development: Elementary Schools K-6*. This publication focussed “attention on the various aspects of school programs that relate to outdoor use” (p. 4). The purpose of this publication was to help the government and school administrators “determine what facilities are needed to fulfil the objectives of modern education at the least possible cost” (p. 4). This document provided ideas to help schools revitalize the function of the outdoor learning areas of their existing school grounds “to supplement the students’ classroom experience by providing the opportunity of direct daily contact with nature” (p. 11). This document encouraged school boards to redesign school grounds to provide students with daily OE experiences that could be facilitated through a variety of representative ecosystems, such as woodlands, meadows, and marshes for the purposes of study and play. This document recommended that school grounds should be designed so that teachers could provide outdoor learning opportunities as a daily aspect of a students’ experience, and further advocated that teachers should extend outdoor learning opportunities into their broader school communities. By providing such opportunities, the Ontario Ministry of Education argued

that students could better learn about the natural and urban aspects of the places where they lived and studied, by carefully considering how appropriate sites close “to existing open space—such as natural valleys, areas between subdivisions, schools and residential complexes” could be utilized (p. 10). Through this policy document, the government took the position that it was advisable to design or re-design school grounds and local communities so that student learning could be enhanced through daily outdoor access to a variety of representative ecosystems.

Alongside this initiative to guide the (re)design of local school facilities, from 1973 to 1975, the Ontario Ministry of Education continued to follow the recommendations made in the Hall-Dennis report, revising the provincial curriculum to encourage classroom teachers to integrate OE as part of their daily pedagogical practices. In 1973, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced Environmental Science for both intermediate and senior secondary school divisions (Andrews, 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1973; Thompson, 2009). The Ontario Ministry of Education (1973) defined Environmental Science as the scientific study of the relationships between the atmosphere, the land, and life. The Environmental Science curriculum focused on studying the whole environment including people and human constructed landscapes. Through the lens of Environmental Science, the government argued that the environmental “domain becomes the world within reach of the student’s inquiries, a world that affects his life and is affected by him” (p. 1). The four aims of Environmental Science curriculum were to: (a) enhance the development of students; (b) help them find logical patterns to explain and understand their environment; (c) provide students with opportunities to use various equipment and practices to conduct field studies; and (d)

encourage students to become sensitive to environmental issues within their local communities. Environmental Science teachers were required to use the direct environment, such as the immediate neighbourhood of the school, as a regular source of information to guide student learning. Although the Environmental Science curriculum did not discourage teachers from using more distant environments as learning resources, stipulating that “at other times students will need access to less modified areas farther away, and longer class periods will have to be made available for them” (p. 1), the less modified areas that the Ontario Ministry of Education recommended teachers access included local woodlots, small brooks (for stream studies), agricultural, and urban landscapes. Encouragement to use school-board-operated OE centres was not promoted in this document; however, phrases such as “In Ontario it is relatively easy to find woodlots and forests that are natural, almost unmodified environments” (p. 7), encouraged secondary school teachers to use local community resources.

In 1975, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a new common curriculum framework called *The Formative Years: Circular P111* for its elementary school system. This framework set “out in a general way the learning opportunities that the programs in the schools should make available” for the Primary (K-3) and Junior (4-6) Divisions (p. 2). This framework permitted school boards and teachers to establish their own curriculum specific to the needs of their local communities. In conjunction with a focus on the skills of reading, writing, and mathematics, this framework mandated that teachers design curriculum for the creative arts (drama, music, and visual arts), physical education and health, and the values, attitudes and skills for the development of democratic Canadian citizens. To promote the development of democratic citizens, teachers were

expected to teach students an understanding of science and geography that focused on the past values of character development previously advocated by the conservation education movement. Specifically, upon completion of the Junior Division, students were expected to “understand the environment, both in terms of the nature of its parts and the patterns that characterize it as a whole” (p. 22). This meant that teachers were required to ensure that students understand basic concepts of science, including “*mass, force, energy, time, temperature, change, interdependence, growth, and development*” (p. 22, italics in original), and at a deeper level to develop within students an awareness about how the natural environment affects, and is affected by, human activities; an understanding of how natural and manufactured things shape the quality of life of human beings; and to foster the ability to perceive patterns and relationships between living things, structures, and materials.

Supporting the P1J1 curriculum framework, the Ontario Ministry of Education (1975) released an accompanying publication titled *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions*. This document provided a philosophical basis and rationale for how the program expectations set out in *The Formative Years* framework could be delivered through an integrated child-centred pedagogy. This document identified three critical areas that classroom teachers were mandated to focus their teaching upon: communication (which included language arts and mathematics), the Arts (music, drama, visual arts, and physical education), and environmental studies (health and *out-of-classroom studies*). In the environmental studies section, the government stipulated that “out-of-classroom activities should proceed throughout the year as a natural extension of classroom activity” (p. 102). Outdoor environments were identified as those within both

spheres of the natural and urban ecosystems. For example, this document stipulated that “a study can deal with a ravine, a meadow, a woodlot . . . a street, a factory, or a shopping plaza” (p. 103). Although school-board-operated OE centres were specifically acknowledged within this support document as properties that helped facilitate out-of-classroom studies, beyond a five-word acknowledgment, the Ministry emphasized that elementary teachers should use areas within their local school communities to provide students outdoor learning opportunities.

In 1976, the Ontario Ministry of Education published a policy booklet written by M. Gayfer called *Open Doors: A Community School Handbook*. Gayfer defined community education as “a way of providing more opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and interests to identify and solve common problems by using resources at hand in the community – including themselves – and to learn to develop their own skills and assets” (p. 9). In adopting the idea of re-envisioning schools as central community resources for both adults and children, the concept of community schools was implemented to promote the idea that a student’s local community is a “real-life extension of the curriculum” (p. 8) where applied learning can occur under the guidance of classroom teachers. School administrators, principals, and classroom teachers were encouraged by the government to develop partnerships with local community businesses to provide students with opportunities to learn through applied experiences beyond the walls of their classrooms in exchange for providing their school facilities during off hours to support local community events (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1976).

To support the concept of community schools, in 1977 the Ontario Ministry of Education released a *Formative Years* curriculum support document titled *Community*

*Study.* This document emphasized community study as the process of “bringing the child into direct contact with the community in which he or she lives. Through this direct experience, understandings, attitudes, and skills can be developed which enable the child to move into the unknown, the historical community” (p. 1). This document outlined several activities teachers could use “to help students gain a better understanding of their community and of their role as members of the community” (p. 1). Activities, such as mapping local community streets, interviewing community leaders, such as police officers, conducting cemetery studies, visiting local farms, and exploring historic sites were each identified as ways to promote critical thinking and analysis skills to help students understand and develop a closer relationship with the people, places, and natural surroundings within their local neighbourhoods.

### **COEO’s Code of Recommended Practices**

Although the Ontario Ministry of Education and the OTF both encouraged classroom teachers to use outdoor spaces within their local school communities to provide their students with OE opportunities, from 1973–1976, COEO would strive to encourage more Ontario school boards to establish new OE centres. In 1973, COEO began to investigate areas of concern for OE in Ontario. At this time, COEO established its central purpose which was to relay recommendations to school boards, the Ontario Ministry of Education, and the Ontario Ministry of Environment in order to make improvements to the delivery of OE in Ontario. COEO’s main goal was to promote the increased development and use of OE facilities throughout southern and northern Ontario school board jurisdictions (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1973). The development of new school-board-operated OE centres in northern Ontario was a

particularly important issue for COEO. In 1973, COEO's Representative for the province's North and Far North Regions reported:

This regional group felt that priority must lie in the area of facilities. The discussion centred around locating suitable facilities to be used for outdoor education, such as: (a) suitable types of land geographically and environmentally; (b) residential accommodation; what is available in the area, the cost and the accessibility to suitable outdoor areas. (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1973b, p. 7)

Following this report, in September 1974, COEO and the OTF co-sponsored a seminar for full time outdoor educators at the Leslie M. Frost Centre in Haliburton, Ontario, where they met to discuss the basics of outdoor curriculum, the operation of OE facilities, finances, and partnerships with other organizations (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1976b). This seminar led to the development of a COEO task force that began developing a provincial code of recommended practices for outdoor educators. Ralph Ingleton, Supervisor for the Forest Valley OE Centre, announced that COEO was partnering with representatives of the OTF and Ontario Camping Association (OCA) to develop a code of recommended practices for outdoor educators aimed at providing procedures for the approval and financing of trips, transportation, the supervision and safety of students, and issues of teacher liability. For the next two years the COEO task force would struggle to develop a code of recommended practices for outdoor educators.

In 1976, COEO would publish its *Code of Recommended Practices* and distribute it to all school boards across the province (Savoy, 1976). Although practitioners from southern Ontario, such as the Supervisor of the Forest Valley OE Centre Ralph Ingleton,



initially celebrated the development of this code of recommended practices, when teachers operating OE programs for Northern Ontario school boards discovered that such a publication had been created and distributed to their administrators without their consultation or consent, the self-proclamation that COEO represented the interests of all outdoor educators across the province was quickly challenged. In response to receiving this publication through his school board, OE Co-ordinator for the Atikokan Board of Education, Gord Savoy, in a letter to the editor of COEO's *Newsletter*, stated that COEO had chosen to impose southern Ontario values and standards upon practitioners from Ontario's far north by failing to notify and include them in the development of this publication. According to Savoy, while the COEO *Code of Recommended Practices* asserted that OE teachers should hold specialized certifications for the provision of OE activities such as canoeing, he argued that it failed to recognize that in Ontario's far north, hiring practices for outdoor educators were based on a person's level of outdoor skill and experiences, rather than what certifications a practitioner held. Savoy, who claimed to have been facilitating OE programs for his school board since the late 50s, argued that for himself, his school board, and his colleagues across the north, the most important aspect that made a good OE teacher was the amount of direct experience they had providing OE experiences to people, rather than the number of certifications a practitioner held. In response to COEO's new *Code of Recommended Practices*, he sent a copy of the standards booklet he had devised over a decade earlier for the Atikokan Board of Education. Most COEO charter members initially believed that their *Code of Recommended Practices* represented the interests of all OE practitioners across the province. Quickly, it became evident to the COEO executive and their constituents that

their *Code of Recommended Practices* privileged an urban Southern Ontario perspective. Four publications later, the Council of Outdoor Educators (1976c) acknowledged that, in the creation of its *Code of Recommended Practices*, it had cut itself off from the expertise of experienced outdoor educators working in Ontario's far north.

Similar sentiments were expressed by OE practitioners in Ontario's near north, such as the Coordinator of the Muskoka Out-of-Classroom Education program, Jim Wood (1977a), employed by the Muskoka Board of Education. In a letter to the editor of COEO's *Newsletter*, Wood argued that COEO did not represent the interests of outdoor educators across the province because it was too insular. Wood (1977a) referred to COEO as "a social club composed of persons with an interest in outdoor education" (p. 22). Wood (1977a) argued that as a social club, COEO only sought to express motherhood statements within documents such as its *Code of Recommended Practices* to reify its own existence instead of striving to become an educational organization that actually supported outdoor educators across the province. Wood (1977a) publicly questioned "how effective has C.O.E.O. been in helping establish standards of conduct, equipment and procedure in the high adventure activities . . . from the Ministry?" (p. 22). Wood (1977b) recommended that COEO shift its focus, from an organization that wished to designate itself as a provincial certifying body for outdoor educators, to an agency that focuses on promoting the ideals of high technical competency in the training of OE practitioners and the implementation of OE programs.

### **First Cuts**

In 1976, at a provincial cabinet meeting, Education Minister Wells announced that after the budget ceiling previously imposed upon school board spending had ended, in the

following year, cuts would be made to the provincial education budget (Gidney, 1999; Aikman, 1976). At this time, Ontario, like many other provinces across Canada, had entered into a major economic recession and the government was looking for ways it could reduce its costs while continuing to provide a quality education for Ontario students (Burke, 1986; Gidney, 1999). According to a COEO member and OE teacher from the Board of Education for the City of Hamilton, J. H. Aikman (1976), one of the first areas of education that Minister Wells identified for cuts was school-board-operated OE centres. In a letter to the COEO editor, Aikman (1976) contested Minister Wells' announcement, arguing that his decision did not make sense because over the last three years the government had invested thousands of dollars into developing guidelines to direct teachers to use outdoor and environmental education methods to teach the provincial curriculum. According to Aikman

one has only to look at such documents as 'The Formative Years', 'Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions', 'Environmental Science', and 'Physical Education guidelines, Senior Division', to see that outdoor and environmental education has become a major part of the curriculum.

(p. 6)

Aikman provided further support for his argument by noting that COEO's *Code of Recommended Practices* for Outdoor Education in Ontario, had been approved and adopted by the OTF, Ontario Camping Association, and the Ontario School Trustees Council. Although, alongside Aikman, many OE centre employees and their public supporters contested this announcement, these proponents did not provide school boards with any solutions to keep their facilities open. In response to this outcry, the

government passed legislation that permitted school board trustees to offset the costs of operating ancillary programs by allowing them the unrestricted freedom to raise their local education property tax levies to pay for such services. The government based this strategy on the belief that if local taxpayers were willing to pay for such programs, these constituents would allow the fulltime employed school board trustees they elected to raise their property taxes, or otherwise vote them out of office in the next municipal election (Gidney, 1999).

In 1977, Jim Wood wrote an article for the *COEO Newsletter*, discussing changes made to the Muskoka Out-of-Classroom program, operated by the Muskoka Board of Education. Wood (1997b) argued that school-board-operated OE programs should evolve alongside the political changes that were occurring within individual school boards and across the provincial education system. In his article, Wood described how the Muskoka Out-of-Classroom program had transformed itself in response to recent changes in the fiscal and curricular structure of the provincial education system. He argued that school board OE programs normally change through several generations, as staff confront and overcome different logistical and program issues. According to Wood, while the Muskoka Out-of-Classroom program began as a first generation OE program, when confronted with conceptual and organizational issues that required resolution it was transformed into a second generation OE program that sought to overcome logistical problems through the construction of a school-board-operated OE centre. Wood argued that by 1977, the Muskoka Out-of-Classroom program had transformed again, into a third generation OE program, where school board OE staff began to provide OE experiences within the local school communities of their students. Wood argued that although many

OE professionals do not realize the implications of being part of a service industry, by working out of the administrative offices of his school board, he claimed that the Muskoka Out-of-Classroom program was provided with direct access to secretarial, purchasing, policy, and logistical support, that enabled them to eliminate many of the previous problems they faced by being isolated at a remote field centre. By making the decision to bring OE equipment to schools, rather than always moving students to centres, his staff were now able to deliver a more sophisticated OE program specifically designed to meet the needs of a particular school or classroom teacher. Consequently, although Wood acknowledged that his school board continued to operate two OE centres, he ardently contended that these facilities were not used as “a low-caliber catch-all for every possible Out-of-Classroom endeavor, good or bad” (p. 41), which he claimed is indicative of first and second generation programs, but instead were only provided to teachers for the specific purpose of accessing a variety of unique ecosystems (Precambrian shield, forest, and three trout ponds) for Kindergarten to Grade 13 students to support environmental studies lessons and intensive residential OE experiences.

### **Refocussing on Adventure Education**

Although Wood (1977b) provided a description about how his program evolved in regards to the changing political climate of the provincial education system, throughout the remainder of the late 1970s, little discussion about school-board-operated OE centres would be published through COEO literature. In 1977, Don Harben (1979) and the COEO membership would endorse the ideals of adventure education as the primary pedagogical methodology of OE. Through the establishment of a new Task Force on Adventure Activities, the delivery of OE experiences were redefined by COEO

to support the following four criteria: safety, environmental behaviour, personal growth, and technical skill. Under the umbrella of safety, COEO defined environmental behaviour as the “development of an environmental ethic with accompanying practice, skill, and knowledge that is fundamental to the outdoor adventure experience” (p. 23). COEO members were encouraged to develop this behaviour among their students, through the use of key resources such as “the out-of-doors, which is usually a natural setting” where they contended that it is necessary for students “to understand and practice the actions required to minimize the impact of the activity on the environment” (p. 23). Personal growth was defined as the “maturation in behaviour of an individual . . . which is fundamental to adventure experiences” (p. 23). COEO members were told they could assess the development of personal growth by observing how students embodied “The ability to work well with others in a manner which accomplishes the task safely and addresses the human concerns of participants” (p. 23). Technical skill was defined as the principle “not to avoid the skill activities involving danger, but to prepare the participants with the appropriate progression in technical training, mental attitudes, and physical fitness to deal with risk safely and competently” (p. 23). As a result of COEO’s decision to promote Adventure Education as the primary focus of OE, influential scholars within its membership such as McMaster University Kinesiology Professor Bob Henderson (1979) began to publicly promote the idea that the use of the adventure activities should be the sole focus of OE programs at school-board-operated OE centres.

On April 20, 1979, COEO released the publication *Sharing to Lead, Leading to Share*, written by an Associate Professor in the School of Physical and Health Education at Laurentian University, Robert Rogers. Rogers’ (1979) COEO publication provided an

outline for training leaders in the facilitation of outdoor adventure activities such as backpacking, canoeing, rock-climbing, and camping. Rogers stated that “the out of doors is an attractive medium which has been effectively used for centuries to assist in the process of education” (p. ii). Rogers’ definition of education was affixed with a footnote that instructed his readers to “not construe the use of the word education in this instance to mean formal institutions of learning,” but instead to reinterpret the word education to mean “the process of personal growth which is not constrained by time spent in schools but can continue throughout our lives” (p. ii). Although the etymological root of education refers to systematic schooling and training for work (Harper, 2001), and the modern definition of education refers to “the knowledge, skill, and understanding that you get from attending a school, college, or university” (Merriam-Webster, 2013), on behalf of COEO, Rogers actively sought to redefine the meaning of education within this cultural sub-group of OE practitioners. Coincidentally, in this same year, Toronto area classroom teacher Dinny Biggs (1979) published a short request in COEO’s new practitioner newsletter *ANEE*, to all members stating that “as a classroom teacher in a large city, I have different concerns on outdoor education than a full-time teacher in outdoor education at a centre or residential school” (p. 22). Biggs stated that teachers located in the Greater Toronto Area were “interested in looking into organizing a Fall Workshop on the use of the schoolyard, city parks, lawns. . . by classroom teachers in the Primary Grades” (p. 22), and asked the COEO membership for help in organizing such an event.

## Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1978–1979

Table 3: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1978–1979)

Category	1972–1973	1978–1979
<u>Ontario school boards</u>	180	175
<u>Boards with OE centres</u>	33 (18.3%)	34 (19.4%)
Boards with day-use centres	26 (76.5%)	20 (58.8%)
Boards with residential centres	9 (26.5%)	11 (32.4%)
Boards with dual-purpose centres	6 (18.8%)	9 (26.5%)
<u>Total number of OE Centres</u>	48	49
Day-use facilities	35 (72.9%)	27 (55.1%)
Residential facilities	7 (14.6%)	13 (26.5%)
Dual-purpose facilities	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.4%)
<u>Public system facilities</u>	39	36
<u>Catholic system facilities</u>	9	13

Data Sources: 1972–1973 school year data aggregated from Martindale’s (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools* [archival document]; 1978–1979 school year data aggregated from the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (1979) *Catalogue of programs, personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document].

Although in the 1972–1973 school year, the province had a total of 2,018,276 students enrolled in its education system, by 1978–1979 school year, the number of students enrolled in the province’s publicly funded education system had declined by 7%, to a total of 1,871,195. In contrast to this decline in the student population, the total number of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres increased slightly by 2.1%, from 48 in the 1972–1973 school year, to a total of 49 centres in operation across the province in the 1978–1979 school year (Table 3). While the total number of school-board-operated OE centres increased slightly between these two school years, several facilities that were previously catalogued by Martindale (1974) as operational in the 1972–73 school year, particularly those located in Ontario’s far north, were not listed in the 1979 COEO *Catalogue of Programs and Personnel in Outdoor Education in Ontario*. A consolidation in the total number of school boards from 180 in 1972–1973 (which provided 741,224 (36%) of Ontario students with access to a school-board-operated OE



centre), to 175 school boards by the 1978–1979 school year, resulted in a 13.9% increase in the number of students enrolled in a school board that operated an OE centre. This change in number of school boards provided 935,440 (49.9%) of Ontario students with access to a school-board-operated OE centre.

Although by the 1978–1979 school year, more Ontario students were enrolled in school boards that now operated an OE centre, the composition of facility types had changed since 1972–1973 school year. In the 1972–1973 school year, 76% of school boards operated day-use facilities. By the 1978–1979 school year, the number of school boards that operated day-use facilities had declined by 17.2%, with only 20 (58.8%) school boards managing one or more day-use centres. At the same time, the number of residential OE centres in operation had increased by 5.9%, from 9 (26.5%) school boards in the 1972–1973 school year, to 11 (32.4%) school boards operating one or more residential facilities by the 1978–1979 school year. The number of dual-purpose facilities that provided both day and residential programs also increased by 9.6% percent, with 9 (18.4%) school boards operating such a facility by the 1978–1979 school year.

Alongside the 2.1% growth in the total number of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres by the 1978–1979 school year, in Figure 3 and Figure 4 GIS analysis illustrates that a significant contraction in facilities occurred in the north and southeastern regions of the province. Although eight school-board-operated OE centres had been in operation across Ontario's far north during the 1972–1973 school year, by the 1978–1979 school year 75% of these facilities in this region had been reduced to only two facilities: the Kingfisher OE centre operated by the Lakehead Board of Education in Thunder Bay,

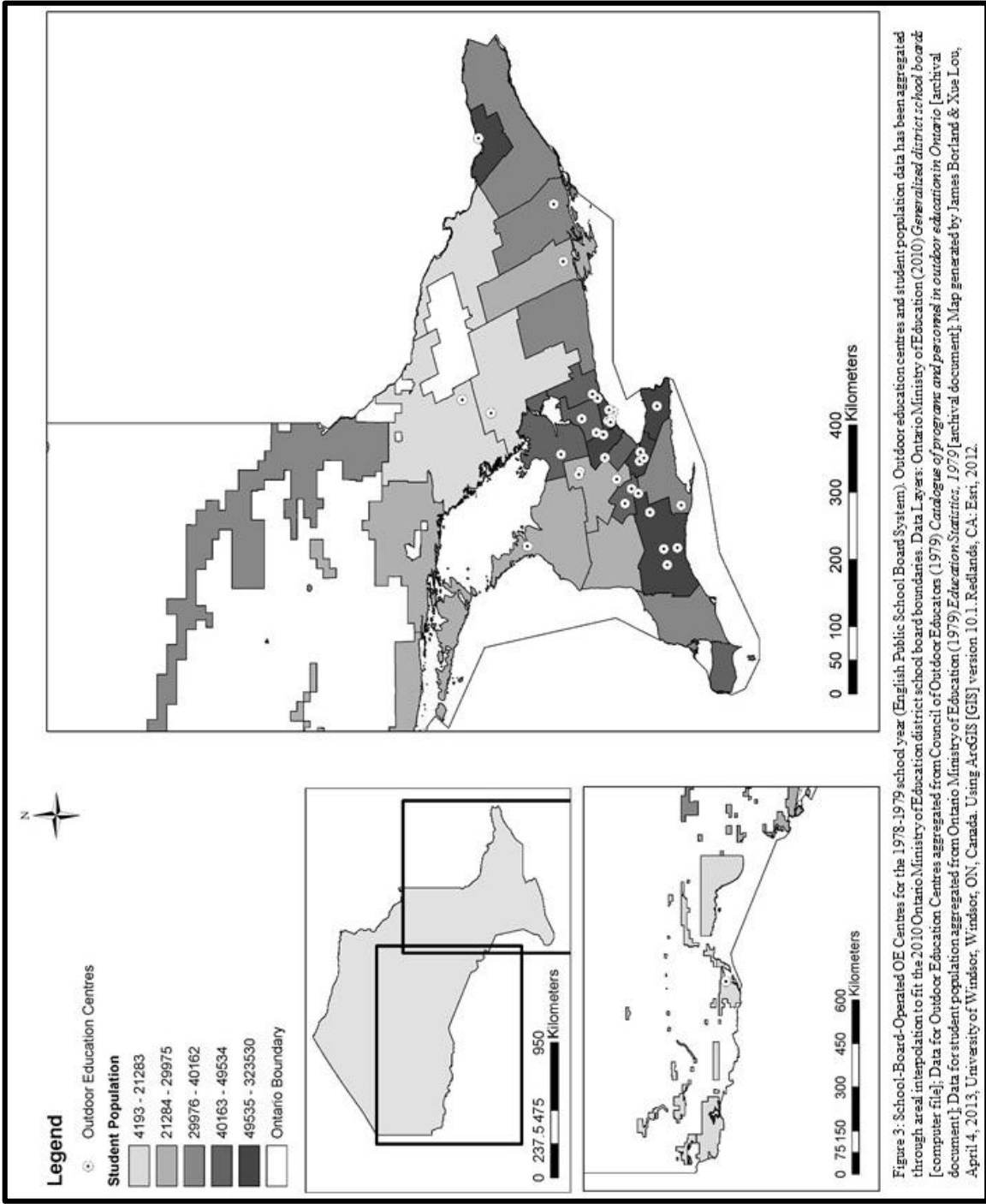


Figure 3: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1978-1979 school year (English Public School Board System). Outdoor education centres and student population data has been aggregated through areal interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school board* [computer file]; Data for Outdoor Education Centres aggregated from Council of Outdoor Educators (1979) *Catalogue of programs and personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; Data for student population aggregated from Ontario Ministry of Education (1979) *Education Statistics, 1979* [archival document]. Map generated by James Botland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1. Redlands, CA: Esri, 2012.

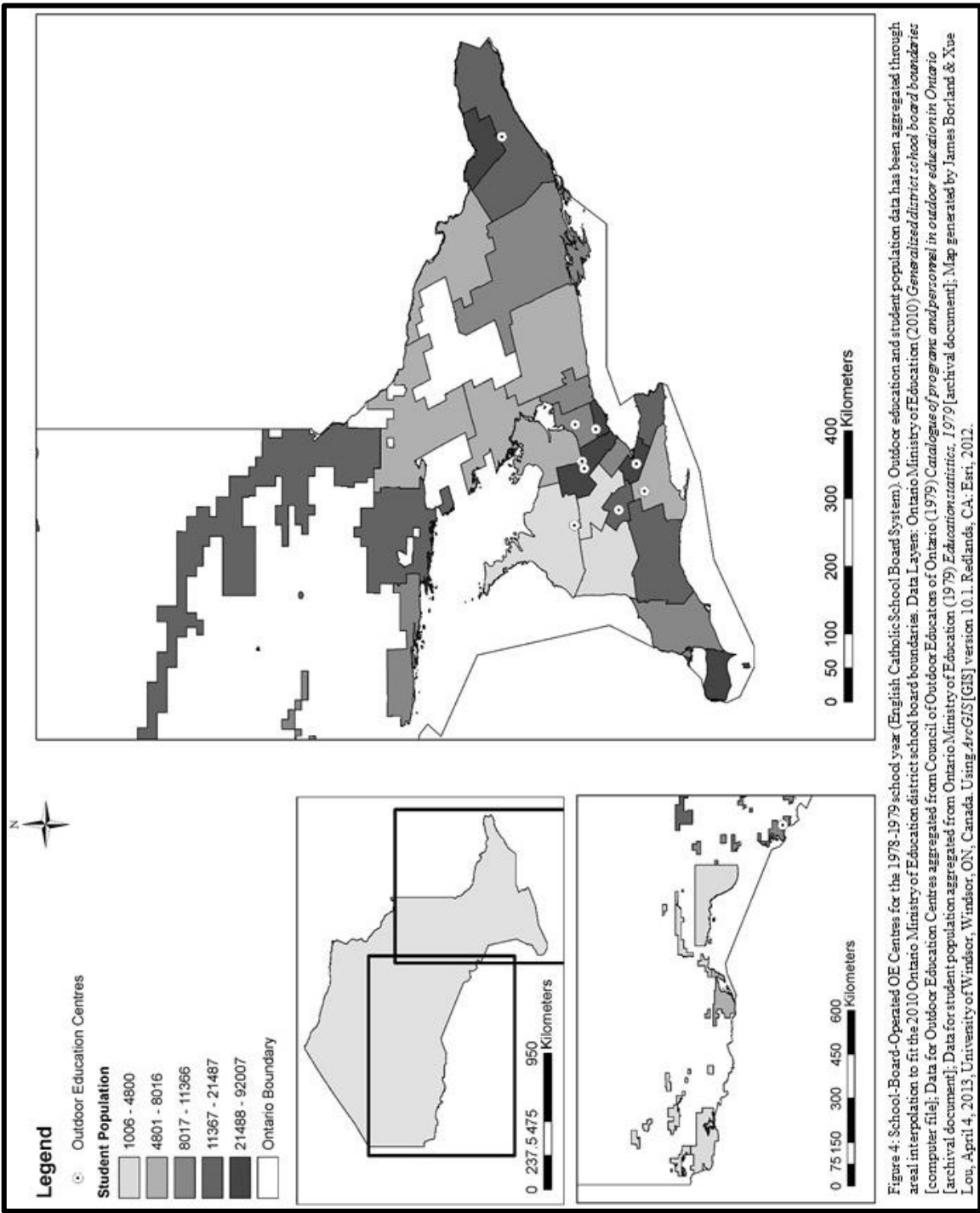


Figure 4: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1978-1979 school year (English Catholic School Board System). Outdoor education and student population data has been aggregated through areal interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school board boundaries* [computer file]; Data for Outdoor Education Centres aggregated from Council of Outdoor Education of Ontario (1979) *Catalogue of programs and persons in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; Data for student population aggregated from Ontario Ministry of Education (1979) *Education statistics, 1979* [archival document]; Map generated by James Borland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1. Redlands, CA: Esri, 2012.

and a new facility called Camp Korah operated by the Sault Ste. Marie Roman Catholic Separate School board (RCSSB) (Parkas, 1979). In southeastern Ontario, the two day facilities previously operated by the Lennox and Addington Board of Education, as well as the two day facilities operated by the Carleton Board of Education had each ceased to exist. The two OE facilities located in Quebec, operated by the Carleton Board of Education and Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board had also ceased to exist.

Although GIS analysis illustrates that a significant contraction occurred in the operation of OE centres in Ontario's north and southeastern regions, new facilities were established in Ontario's near north, with two facilities operated by the Muskoka Board of Education, called the Yearley Residential OE Centre and the Maw Resource Centre. The Scarborough Board of Education, responsible for serving students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), established a residential OE centre in Kearney, to provide students living in the GTA's Carolinian forest region, the opportunity to have a residential camping experience at a facility located in the Canadian Shield region. Along the Bruce Peninsula, the Bruce-Grey Roman Catholic Separate School Board, and the Bruce County Board of Education each established an OE centre. Although several new OE centres had opened since the 1972–1973 school year across the province's near north, the highest prevalence of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres was still located in southern Ontario, either near to, or within the densely populated urban areas along the 400 series highway system from the Greater London Area to the GTA.

In the 1978–1979 school year, the properties of school-board-operated OE centres continued to vary in scope from the use of municipal parklands to privately owned specialized facilities. In southern Ontario, the Hamilton Board of Education operated the

Glen Road OE Centre, which made use of the public grounds of Hamilton's Royal Botanical Gardens, where they provided students with opportunities to broaden their scientific understanding of ecology, and participate in outdoor recreational activities such as snowshoeing and tobogganing. Partnerships also existed between several conservation authorities (CA) and school boards to operate school-board-operated OE programs.

School boards such as the Hamilton Board of Education, leased lands from the Hamilton Region CA; the Waterloo County School Board and its Catholic school board counterpart continued to lease and operate the Laurel Creek OE Centre from the Grand River CA; the York Region Roman Catholic Separate School Board (RCSSB) entered into an agreement with the South Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority for use of the Professor E.A. Smith Natural Resources Education Centre at the Scalon Creek Conservation Area; the Frontenac County Board of Education continued to operate their OE Centre in the Gould Lake Conservation Area, through a lease with the Cataraqui CA; the Elgin County Board of Education established an OE centre on private property adjacent to the Catfish Creek CA forest; the Niagara South Board of Education continued to operate the St. John's OE Centre adjacent to the Niagara Peninsula CA property.

The structure of school-board-operated OE programs changed from the early 1970s to the late 1970s as OE centres began to focus more specifically on the provision of adventure education and outdoor pursuit-based programs. Although conservation education was still the dominant focus of most school-board-operated OE centres throughout the 1970s, a decrease of 8.8% occurred in the number of school boards which reported that they offered conservation education programs, from 27 school boards (79.4%) in the 1972–1973 school year, to 24 school boards (70.6%) by the 1978–1979

school year. Alongside this decrease in conservation education programs, there was also a slight decrease in school-board-operated OE centres offering social studies-based programs, from 7 school boards (20.6%) offering such programs in 1972–1973 school year, to 6 school boards (17.6%) offering such programs in the 1978–1979 school year. Although the prevalence of conservation education programs offered at school-board-operated OE centres had slightly decreased by the 1978–1979 school year, there was a 17.7% increase at these facilities in the provision of adventure education and outdoor pursuit-based programs, from 15 school boards (44.1%) offering such programs in the 1972–1973 school year, to 21 school boards (61.8%) offering such programs by the 1978–1979 school year. Outdoor pursuits such as orienteering, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and canoeing continued to be popular activities advertised by school-board-operated OE centres.

Although school boards were still able to describe the structure of programs offered through their OE facilities, there was a significant decrease of 20.6% from the 1972–1973 to 1978–1979 school years in the number of school boards providing a philosophical rationale for operating an OE centre. While 13 school boards (38.2%) out of 34 school boards provided a philosophical purpose for operating an OE centre in the 1972–1973 school year, by the 1978–1979 school year only 6 school boards (17.6%) out of a total of 34 school boards provided a philosophical rationale for operating such a facility. Although early 1970s the philosophical rationales for operating an OE centre often focussed on extending classroom learning outdoors to encourage students to develop a greater sense of environmental appreciation and awareness, the philosophical rationales that school boards reported to COEO became increasingly individualized by

the late 1970s. Rationales were simple, such as the York County Board of Education and the Peel Board of Education, which indicated that its OE centres were operated to extend regular classroom learning outdoors. The Ottawa Board of Education, the Niagara South Board of Education, and Toronto Board of Education oriented their programs towards promoting resource conscious citizens who demonstrated a positive attitude towards environmental conservation. More specifically, the Toronto Board of Education's Urban Studies Centre focussed specifically on using the city as a classroom to bring relevancy to its curriculum.

### **Summary**

In response to the research question, *what significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?* Throughout the 1970s, three significant changes happened to Ontario school-board-operated OE centres: (a) fiscal restraint imposed by the government on the public education system constrained school board spending; (b) a new curriculum focus promoted by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the OTF encouraged classroom teachers to design and deliver OE opportunities to their students within their local school communities; and (c) a political shift in the pedagogical approach of OE promoted by the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) narrowed its ability to support a diverse membership of practitioners. Through these three significant changes, a political climate was fostered where it became increasingly difficult for many outdoor educators employed at school-board-operated OE centres to support the education of Ontario students.

Although throughout the 1970s, the pedagogical popularity of environmental education and adventure education gained increasing support across North America, including in Ontario, provincial and state governments were forced to create new strategies to deal with an economic recession. Across Ontario, as the baby boomer generation began to enrol in secondary school, and then subsequently exit the public school system, it became evident to the provincial government that previous patterns of spending needed to change (Wilkinson, 1986). While the province of Ontario had previously assumed 60% of the cost of its publicly funded education system, by the 1970s an increasing surplus of empty classrooms and empty schools across the elementary division of the provincial education system began to impose unnecessary energy costs on school boards required to keep these facilities in operation. To curb school board spending and encourage administrators to develop strategies to make more effective use of existing board resources, in 1972 Education Minister Wells imposed a five-year spending ceiling, followed by a reduction of funding to the provincial education system. Through this process, unless school board trustees were fortunate enough to be able to raise their local property tax levy without threat to their future employment, they were forced to consolidate student populations, impose budget cuts to ancillary educational programs, and sell surplus school properties (Gidney, 1999).

Alongside the need to reduce the number of schools, the government targeted school-board-operated OE centres, declaring them ancillary school facilities where school board spending could be saved. By passing a legislative amendment, the development of new policy for school grounds, and the design of a new provincial curriculum, the government encouraged elementary and secondary school teachers to make a more



effective use of the surrounding outdoor spaces within their local school community, seeking to promote the importance of providing students more regular OE opportunities, instead of always relying on school-board-operated OE centres as catch-all facilities for the provision of OE opportunities. Following a similar trajectory, in the early 1970s the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) also sought to encourage its members to make more effective use of their local school communities for the provision of OE opportunities through the development of three OE manuals. Within the pages of the first manual the OTF openly discouraged school boards from spending taxpayer funds on the development of new school-board-operated OE centres, characterising such decisions as a waste of money. By 1976 these strategies supported global UN initiatives to promote the development of environmental education programs that foster awareness and concern about the social, political, economic and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas where students live and study.

In 1972, the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) was established by a group of educators employed at school-board-operated OE centres across southern Ontario. Self-proclaiming COEO as the representative body for outdoor educators across the province, in the midst of a province-wide economic recession, this organization actively lobbied Ontario school boards to establish new OE centres. One way COEO promoted the need for new school-board-operated OE centres, was by publishing a *Code of Recommended Practices* that was distributed to all school boards across the province. However, COEO members did not inform, nor consult OE practitioners across northern Ontario about their intent to design a province-wide *Code of Recommended Practices*. Upon receiving this document from their northern school board administrators, outdoor

educators from across Northern Ontario complained that this province-wide code sought to impose southern Ontario values on northern OE programs. Northern school boards, such as the Muskoka Board of Education, operated what Wood (1977b) considered third generation OE programs which made use of outdoor spaces within local school communities by bringing OE programs to local schools. Wood argued that COEO's calls for further province-wide establishment of new school-board-operated OE centres did not promote innovation in OE, but instead only served to stagnate the development of school-board OE programs at the stages of first and second generation solutions. Wood claimed that first and second generation solutions only focussed on the resolution of logistical problems through the use of school-board-operated OE centres, which were expected to serve as catch-all sites for OE programs. Although Wood acknowledged that school-board-operated OE centres could be used as specific pedagogical resources for particular aspects of the curriculum, he argued that the strict promotion of these facilities as catch-all sites only served to constrain the ability of school-board outdoor educators to change their programs so that they could better support Ontario students within a constantly changing provincial education system. In 1976, while the Ontario government announced that it would be reducing the amount of funding it allocated to the provincial education system in the following year, one of the first areas that Education Minister Wells identified where school board funding could be reduced was the operation of school-board-operated OE centres.

From 1977 to 1979, COEO established a Task Force on Adventure Activities that resulted in the publication of a booklet written by Rogers (1979) which advocated the development of outdoor adventure education leaders. As the government and the OTF

designed new educational policy that encouraged school boards, school administrators, and classroom teachers to use local outdoor spaces on school grounds and within their school communities as pedagogical resources to facilitate regular student learning, COEO responded by spatially reconceptualising how it interpreted education. By reinterpreting the purpose of education so that it could exclude the formal learning institutions from its focus, COEO adopted a new interpretation of education that focussed on a process of personal growth. By spatially reconceptualising how it defined education, COEO transformed itself from a self-proclaimed provincial body that its members believed represented the interest of all school-board-employed outdoor educators across the province, to a provincial body that focussed on the development of outdoor leaders involved in the delivery of outdoor adventure activities. Nevertheless, from the 1972–1973 to 1978–1979 school years, the number of school-board-operated OE centres grew by 2.1%. As GIS analysis illustrates, by the 1978-1979 school year, several facilities across far northern and southeastern Ontario that had previously been in operation had ceased to exist, while further facilities were established across near northern and southwestern areas of the province. As the province entered into the 1980s, the Progressive Conservatives would continue to introduce new legislation in an attempt to restrain the costs covered by the government for public education. As a result, many school boards across the province would be forced to make some difficult decisions. The continuing operation of several school-board-operated OE centres across the province would continue to be challenged.

## **Chapter 6: ECONOMY, RECESSION & GROWTH**

At the start of the 1980s, several Ontarians began to publicly express their discontent “with the state of the schools” (Gidney, 1999, p. 92). In the autumn of 1982, to tackle a provincial economic recession, accompanied by high inflation, the Progressive Conservative government introduced legislation that froze public sector wage increases to 9 percent for the 1982–1983 school year, and 5 percent for the subsequent school year. Due to this freeze on public sector wage increases, to ensure that classroom teachers continued to be paid their promised wages, school boards began to increase their local property tax levies to pay for a larger amount of educational services, such as school-board-operated OE centres. As a result of these decisions, many practitioners employed at school-board-operated OE centres struggled to keep their facilities in operation, as greater public scrutiny began to be cast upon school board spending and the delivery of the provincial curriculum.

One area of the provincial education system that, during the early 1980s, received a great deal of public criticism was the series of pedagogical changes made in the 1960s and 1970s to the provincial curriculum. Gidney (1999) reports that this iteration of the provincial curriculum was often blamed by many employers, post-secondary educators, and legislative members of the provincial government’s official opposition, for providing a lack of direction to elementary teachers now responsible for designing their own curriculum. These constituents began voicing concerns that Ontario public school graduates had inadequate skills to become productive members of society, and many began to call for a more conservative focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, promoting the idea that a return to the curriculum of the 1930s to 1960s would provide

the best solution. Despite all these concerns, little had actually changed since the early 1960s within many of the provinces' public schools. "When the ministry embarked on a provincial review of the primary years in the early 1980s it found that the P1J1 'philosophy' . . . was not evident in many primary classrooms" (Gidney, 1999, p. 93). Many elementary teachers who learned their craft in the 1950s and 1960s, had simply continued to use the traditional methods of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, that existed in the standardized curriculum prior to the introduction of the P1J1 curriculum.

To ensure compliance with the P1J1 curriculum and make the jobs of teachers easier, individual school boards began to organize teams of superintendents, principals, subject consultants, and teachers to write and field-test board-wide curriculum guidelines. Once implemented, school boards conducted benchmark testing (particularly in mathematics and English) to ensure that new board-wide curriculum guidelines were being met (Gidney, 1999). Although some more prominent members of the public expressed deep concerns about the state of the provincial education system, several polls indicated that during the 1980s, many parents approved of the quality of education their children were receiving. Studies illustrated that while some small gaps of concern did exist regarding how students were taught in the school system, students entering secondary schools and graduates entering the workforce or post-secondary education had the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to excel. As secondary schools were forced to confront a demographic bulge of students during the 1970s, many of whom would not have gone to high school in previous decades, secondary school teachers were forced to innovate new ways to accommodate a diverse demographic of learners. As these students began to graduate in the early 1980s, instead of innovating new strategies to deal with

these constituents, several employers and post-secondary educators now confronted with the same problems simply choose to declare the public education a failure, instead of themselves innovating new ways to adapt (Gidney, 1999).

As the demographic bulge of the baby boomer generation began to graduate from the public school system in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the school system began to quickly contract. Gidney (1999) reports that, to eliminate unnecessary costs in the midst of an economic recession, school boards implemented several strategies including cutting the jobs of probationary teachers, promoting the attrition of permanent staff through early retirement packages, slashing subject options with small enrolments, and closing under-used school facilities to sell their properties. Early in the 1970s, the province “paid 60 per cent of the costs of elementary and secondary education. By the mid-1980s the provincial share had dropped down towards 45 per cent” (Gidney, 1999, p. 116). “With grants capped in this manner, school boards turned to their only other source of revenue, the local property tax, to meet their obligations” for services that school board trustees conceived as the educational needs of their communities (Gidney, 1999, p. 116). As school boards increased their reliance on local property taxes to fund school facilities and programs, academic inequities began to widen between school boards located in more affluent areas of the province as opposed to its less affluent areas. As a result, some school boards were able to afford to continue to operate specialized educational facilities such as OE centres, while other school boards were forced to impose budget cuts and close facilities, so they could keep their teachers employed and school doors open.

### **Tensions of the Early 1980s**

During the economic recession of the early 1980s, tensions expressed throughout the pages of COEO's practitioner publication, *ANEE*, illustrate that a rift began to emerge between COEO members, classroom teachers, and the Ontario Ministry of Education. Although a minority of COEO members advocated the need to closely link the use of school-board-operated OE centres and their programs to the curriculum, its more prominent members simply chose to express their disdain with classroom teachers and the Ontario Ministry of Education, calling for further investment in the establishment of new school-board-operated OE centres. Consequently, while several of these COEO members were busy criticising classroom teachers and the Ontario Ministry of Education, very few solutions were being provided by COEO to help its members employed at school-board-operated OE centres resolve several of the economic and curriculum issues these practitioners were now confronting.

In 1980, classroom teacher B. L. Richardson argued in an article published in *ANEE*, that school teachers needed ideas for offering outdoor activities on school grounds. Richardson contended that although providing students with opportunities to engage in adventure activities such as camping and rock climbing experiences away from their schools did provide students with positive personal growth experiences, it had to be recognized that school board employees presently "concerned about tight budgets, loss of credibility about the value of the education system, declining and shifting enrolment, school closings, split systems, the needs for 'special' education, changes in students' attitudes" (p. 3), wanted outdoor experiences they could provide on school grounds. Supporting Richardson's call, classroom teacher Sue Brown (1983) reported that Outdoor

Education Consultant Audrey Wilson, of the Northumberland-Newcastle Board of Education, had decided to shift the focus of her OE program towards helping teachers use their school grounds and local communities. According to Brown, as increasing costs reduced school board funding for all speciality programs, OE Consultants such as Wilson were now focussing on providing curriculum-linked OE programs. These programs provided natural science and pioneer-focussed social science lessons to students through the use of both their school-board-operated OE centre and the use of local amenities within individual school communities.

Classroom teacher R. Vinson called on school-board-employed outdoor educators to rectify unfavourable public opinion towards the use of their facilities and programs.

According to Vinson (1980):

As budgets tighten and as the 'public' examines the need for 'frills' in education, it is not unlikely that any new undertaking in the public school system is going to be questioned and made accountable. For outdoor educators, such must be acknowledged and planned for. Showing happy students working in the outdoors or learning interesting recreational skills such as canoeing is not enough. Sunny faces and glowing reports on evaluation forms are not sufficient evidence for the concerned taxpayer and community at large. Outdoor educators must be prepared to show that the methodology and content with which they concern themselves is not just part of a 'special' area in education, but part of a total in the student's journey through the public school system.



We must be able to demonstrate that education outdoors can reinforce, enrich, and support more traditional methods of learning. (p. 12)

Vinson recommended that OE centre staff network with their internal school board community (students, teachers, and principals) and their broader community (parents, taxpayers, special interest groups, government, and industry) to garner public acceptance and support for their programs. By asking classroom teachers for regular feedback on the use of school-board-operated OE centres, Vinson argued that facility administrators could better address how their facilities and programs could strategically support school-board-designed curriculum. By crafting monthly reports that addressed these changes and providing regular tours of their sites, Vinson stated that OE centre administrators could improve the image of their facilities and advance fundraising initiatives for their programs.

Recreation and Leisure Studies Professor Claude Cousineau (1980) from the University of Ottawa did not agree with the messages promoted by classroom teachers such as Richardson and Vinson. Cousineau contended that school-board-employed outdoor educators did not need to align themselves more closely with their classroom colleagues, but instead claimed that it was classroom teachers and school board administrators who needed to more closely align themselves with the use of outdoor adventure activities as a pedagogical resource. Cousineau argued that “Adventure education does not need teachers, it needs leaders capable of setting an appropriate learning atmosphere where the student will experience what learning is all about rather than be a spectator of the ‘art of teaching’” (p. 15). He stated that adventure education was based on the philosophy of experiential education which required its leaders to act as

facilitators of learning, instead of being a teacher who needed “to ‘teach others’ in order to build his own ego and . . . feel good about having ‘covered’ the ‘subject’” (p. 15). Cousineau claimed that most outdoor adventure activities could be learned by simply providing students the opportunity to participate, and through a process of problem-solving, students would eventually discover the best way to engage in these activities. From this perspective, he declared that it is the responsibility of outdoor adventure leaders to provide students with feedback that focussed on the positive points of a students’ performance which “make the student feel good about himself” (p. 15). Through the construction of this argument, Cousineau promoted the idea among COEO members that adventure education was a more effective way of teaching students, stating that “In this era of apathy among teachers, it takes. . . a teacher who is committed to teach students rather than a subject matter” (p. 16).

Clarke Birchard (1983), past president of COEO and Director of the Bruce County OE Centre, took a similar position to Cousineau, arguing that the province and its school boards needed to more closely align themselves with the use of school-board-operated OE centres. In another article written in *ANEE*, Birchard called on the Ontario Ministry of Education to provide new funding for school-board-operated OE centres, based on an argument that “twenty years of experience has shown that to develop a solid, continuing comprehensive program . . . support of recognized sites, buildings, and specialized support people are essential” (p. 16). Birchard supported his argument by stating that although:

No one knows how many school boards now have sites. . . .Programs are diverse and public acceptance and support is broad, every

curriculum document revised in the last fifteen years has a direct requirement of outdoor experience or an indirect encouragement of outdoor education where appropriate. (p. 13)

Beyond Birchard's comments, no examples were provided to substantiate his argument that the province should provide further funding for the development of new school-board-operated OE centres.

By 1984, a photocopy of a newspaper report published by *Ottawa Citizen* news reporter Wendy Warburton was published in *ANEE* under the title *Reaction Please*. When the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) released a preliminary report proposing that conservation authorities stop providing free OE programs to school boards, Warburton's report indicated that the Ontario Progressive Conservative government was planning on making further cuts to OE services across the province. Within this report, the government stated that education should be the sole responsibility of school boards and the Ministry of Education. Warburton argued that by cutting OE funding provided to each conservation authority, the province would only save \$4000 for each authority. Conservation authorities reported that they would have to charge user fees of \$150 dollars per program, if such cuts were imposed, which CA employees argued could influence schools to look for less expensive OE experiences to provide to their students. By 1985, as the province began to pull itself out of another provincial recession, the Ontario Progressive Conservatives were replaced by the Ontario Liberals as the governing party of the provincial legislature. First governing the province as a minority government from 1985–1987, the Liberals would win a majority mandate in 1987, and govern the province until 1990.

## Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1985–1986

Table 4: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1985–1986)

Category	1972–1973	1978–1979	1985–1986
<u>Ontario school boards</u>	180	175	161
<u>Boards with OE centres</u>	33 (18.3%)	34 (19.4%)	27 (16.8%)
Boards with day-use centres	26 (76.5%)	20 (58.8%)	16 (59.3%)
Boards with residential centres	9 (26.5%)	11 (32.4%)	7 (26%)
Boards with dual-purpose centres	6 (18.8%)	9 (26.5%)	11 (40.7%)
<u>Total number of OE facilities</u>	48	49	44
Day-use facilities	35 (72.9%)	27 (55.1%)	23 (52.3%)
Residential facilities	7 (14.6%)	13 (26.5%)	9 (20.4%)
Dual-purpose facilities	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.4%)	12 (27.3%)
<u>Public system facilities</u>	39	36	39
<u>Catholic system facilities</u>	9	13	5

Data Sources: 1972-1973 school year data aggregated from Martindale's (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools* [archival document]; 1978-1979 & 1985-1986 school year data aggregated from the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (1979, 1986) *Catalogue of programs, personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document].

By the 1985–1986 school year, the number of students enrolled in the province's publicly funded education system had dropped by 11% since the 1972–1973 school year, with a total of 1,796,244 enrolled in the province's publicly funded education system. Alongside this decline in the total student population, the total number of school boards in operation had again been reduced through consolidation from 175 for the 1978–1979 school year, to 161 by the 1985–1986 school year, with a total of 27 (16.8%) school boards operating an OE facility (Table 4). Although the consolidation of school boards for the 1978–1979 school year had resulted in an increase in the jurisdictional scope of students who were enrolled in a board which operated an OE facility, by the 1985–1986 school year the continued consolidation of school boards resulted in a 2.6% decline in the jurisdictional scope of school boards that operated an OE centre. As a result, for the 1985–1986 school year, 708,422 (39.4%) Ontario students now attended a school board that operated an OE facility.

Along with this slight decline in the jurisdictional scope of school boards operating an OE facility, a total of 44 school-board-operated OE centres were listed in operation during the 1985–1986 school year, representing a 10.2% decline since the 1978–1979 school year (Table 4). In conjunction with the 75% contraction in the number of school-board-operated OE centres across the provinces' far north, which occurred from the 1972-1973 to 1978-1979 school year. These statistics directly challenge Eagles and Richardson's (1992) conclusions, who state that from the 1960s to the 1988-1989 school year, "the use of environmental education centers has had a long, slow, but steady, growth in Ontario schools over the last three decades" (p. 14). The composition of these 44 school-board-operated OE centres included: 23 (52.3%) day-use facilities, 9 (20.4%) residential facilities, and 12 (27.3%) dual purpose facilities. These statistics indicate that the number of day-use OE facilities in operation had declined by 8.2% since 1978–1979 school year, representing a total decline of 34.3% since the 1972–1973 school year. The number of residential OE centres, that almost doubled from the 1972–1973 to 1978–1979 school year, had now declined by 30.8% in the 1985–1986 school year. The number of dual purpose facilities had doubled since the 1972–1973 school year. It can be inferred that these statistics may be attributed to the strategic measures implemented by several school boards in the early 1980s to reduce the cost of staffing and facilities during the economic recession. School-board-operated OE centres within the public school branch of the provincial education system were predominantly located in school boards that had student enrolments over 18,000 students (Figure 5), while facilities operated within the Catholic branch of the provincial education system were not correlated to a particular scope of student population (Figure 6). Consequently, the greatest density of facilities

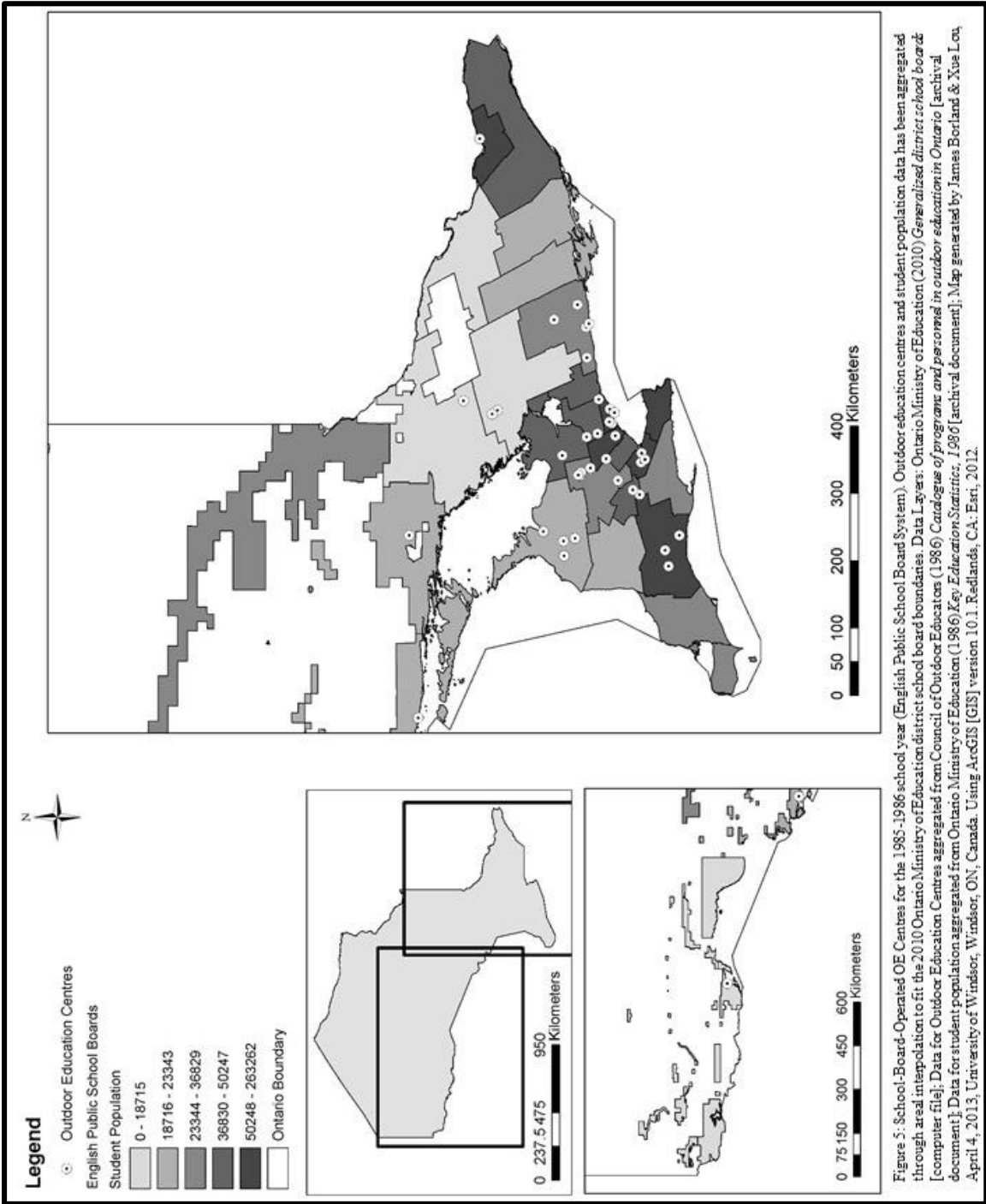


Figure 5: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1985-1986 school year (English Public School Board System). Outdoor education centres and student population data has been aggregated through areal interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school board* [computer file]; Data for Outdoor Education Centres aggregated from Council of Outdoor Educators (1986) *Catalogue of programs and personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; Data for student population aggregated from Ontario Ministry of Education (1986) *Key Education Statistics, 1986* [archival document]. Map generated by James Borland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1. Redlands, CA: Esri, 2012.

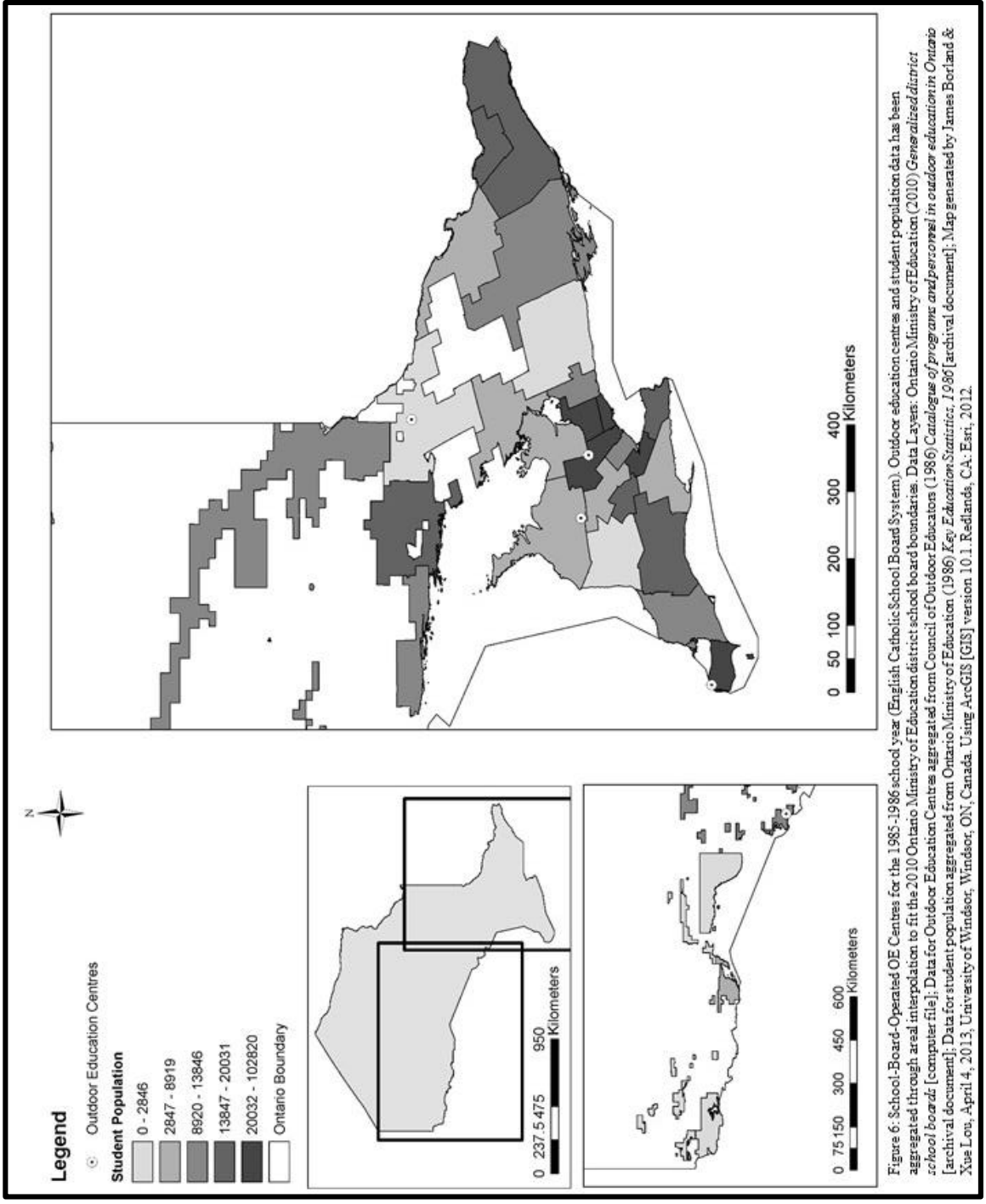


Figure 6: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1985-1986 school year (English Catholic School Board System). Outdoor education centres and student population data has been aggregated through areal interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school boards* [computer file]; Data for Outdoor Education Centres aggregated from Council of Outdoor Educators (1986) *Catalogue of programs and personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; Data for student population aggregated from Ontario Ministry of Education (1986) *Key Education Statistics, 1986* [archival document]; Map generated by James Borland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1. Redlands, CA: Esri, 2012.

was still clustered in jurisdictions located close to, or within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), where the highest property taxes and student enrolment numbers existed.

Facilities located in less densely populated areas appear to be located in regions that have traditionally operated an OE centre, such as the Kingfisher OE centre located in Thunder Bay, the Bruce County OE centre located in Wiarton, and the Yearly Residential OE Centre located in Muskoka.

### **The Provincial Liberals: 1985–1990**

By 1985, as the economic growth of the province began again to increase at 4 per cent per year, student enrolment also began to increase as the children of baby boomers (commonly called the echo generation) began to enter into the public school system (Gidney, 1999). Along with a sharp rise in Canadian immigration to major urban centres across southern Ontario, the Liberals began to make large capital investments in construction of new schools and the expansion of existing facilities. Although, in the 1960s education had constituted one of largest expenditures for the province, claiming 33 per cent of every dollar spent by the provincial government, “by the time the Liberals took office that figure had declined to 20 per cent and it remained at that level until 1992-1993” (Gidney, 1999, p. 170).

Under the governance of the Liberals, school board trustees continued to increase their levies on local property taxes to fund specialized facilities and programs they believed their students needed to succeed (Gidney, 1999). Since the late 1970s, when Education Minister Wells implemented legislation that permitted school board trustees the freedom to raise their jurisdictional property tax levies to pay for ancillary facilities and programs, the perpetuation of this pattern saw “spending on Ontario’s public schools



rise from just over \$6 billion in 1985 to \$9 billion in 1993” (p. 192). While property taxes were used to provide new programs and resources such as English as a Second Language courses for new immigrants, Junior Kindergarten, French immersion, and classroom computers (Gidney, 1999), Eagles and Richardson’s (1992) study shows that significant investments in school-board-operated OE centres, particularly across southern Ontario, were also made at this time. After school-board-operated OE centres had declined to their lowest prevalence in the 1985–1986 school year, under the governance of the Ontario Liberals by the 1988–1989 school year, as reported by Eagles and Richardson (1992), the total number of school-board-operated OE centres across Ontario had almost doubled twice, increasing by 195% to a total of 130 facilities (Table 5).

Table 5: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1988–1989)

Category	1972–1973	1978–1979	1985–1986	1988–1989
<u>Ontario school boards</u>	180	175	161	172
<u>Boards with OE centres</u>	33 (18.3%)	34 (19.4%)	27 (16.8%)	46 (27%)
Boards with day-use centres	26 (76.5%)	20 (58.8%)	16 (59.3%)	42 (24.7%)
Boards with residential centres	9 (26.5%)	11 (32.4%)	7 (26%)	20 (11.8%)
Boards with dual-purpose centres	6 (18.8%)	9 (26.5%)	11 (40.7%)	Not Assessed
<u>Total number of OE facilities</u>	48	49	44	130
Day-use facilities	35 (72.9%)	27 (55.1%)	23 (52.3%)	88 (67.7%)
Residential facilities	7 (14.6%)	13 (26.5%)	9 (20.4%)	42 (32.3%)
Dual-purpose facilities	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.4%)	12 (27.3%)	Not Assessed
Public system facilities	39	36	39	Not Assessed
Catholic system facilities	9	13	5	Not Assessed

Data Sources: 1972-1973 school year data aggregated from Martindale’s (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools* [archival document]; 1978–1979 & 1985–1986 school year data aggregated from the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (1979, 1986) *Catalogue of programs, personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; 1988–1989 school year data aggregated from Eagles and Richardson’s (1992) study [archival document].

By the 1988-1989 school year 172 school boards were in operation across the province (Eagles & Richardson, 1992). Eagles and Richardson report that “in the year of study, 1,867,431 students attended a publicly funded school” and “a total of 384, 921”

Ontario students attended a school-board-operated OE centre (p. 13), indicating “a 26.7% participation rate” (p. 11), with a total of 46 school boards (20.6%), operating such a facility. Interestingly within Eagles and Richardson’s 1992 report, they cite an internal University of Waterloo occasional paper written by Eagles and Richardson (1990), that they indicate served as one of two key data sources used within their study to assess the prevalence of facilities across southern Ontario. A deeper examination of Eagles and Richardson’s (1990) occasional paper indicates that the data reported in this paper was compiled from surveys conducted by undergraduate honours students Storey (1988) and Richardson (1990), both who were supervised by P. F. J. Eagles. Although an archival copy of Storey’s (1988) undergraduate thesis is not available on microfiche in the University of Waterloo archives, Richardson’s (1990) honours thesis is available. Richardson (1990) claims with her thesis to provide “a comprehensive statistical base” that represented for the 1988-1989 school year, the current status of board-offered OE centres across the province (p. 1).

Although Richardson (1990) defines a Board-offered OE centre as “an outdoor education centre, day-use or residential, that a board of education owns, leases or staffs” (p. 148), a review of the individual survey results reported by school boards included in this thesis, displays some possible inconsistencies in Richardson’s reported findings. For example, while Richardson claims to provide a comprehensive list of school-board-offered OE centres, several influential and successful school-board-operated OE centres such as the Kingfisher OE centre, the Island Natural Science School, and the Urban Studies Centre were not reported in this survey. Several OE programs offered by Conservation Authority (CA) staff, at local conservation areas are identified as board-

offered OE centres (including areas operated by the Essex Region CA, Upper Thames CA, and Cataraqui CA), even though the school boards who use these programs reported in the survey that the programs offered at these facilities were operated by local CA staff. The Prescott-Russell County Board of Education reported in Richardson's (1990) survey that "the Board does not own an outdoor education centre due to the small size of the board" (p. 113), yet two facilities are listed for this school board. One facility is listed for the Carleton Roman Catholic School Board, even though the school board reported that the board did not own an outdoor education centre due to lack of appropriate funding. Three facilities are listed for the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board, even though this board reports that "board-offered outdoor education centres not yet developed—budgeted for in 1990" (p. 119). Regardless of these inconsistencies, Richardson's conclusion that school-board-operated OE centres "are most often offered by those boards with large urban populations" (p. ii), is consistent with the conclusions made by Martindale (1974), and is illustrated through the statistics and GIS data analyzed for the previous school years (1972-1973, 1978-1979, 1985-1986) selected for analysis in this dissertation.

By the 1988-1989 school year, in urban areas such as Toronto, Kingston and Ottawa, because of their more affluent property tax base, school boards were able to raise higher amounts of funding to expand existing OE centres and establish new facilities. For example, the Board of Education for the Borough of Scarborough decided to expand the capacity of the Scarborough Outdoor Education School (Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 1983); the Mono Cliffs OE Centre operated by the Board of Education for the Borough of York was established in 1986 (Zarzour, 1986); "Trustees

on the Frontenac, Lennox and Addington County Roman Catholic Separate School Board agreed to spend about \$100,000 to build the outdoor education centre's 'base camp' at Sacred Heart Separate School on Wolfe Island" (Campbell, 1988, p. 1); the Carleton Board of Education opened the Bill Mason Outdoor Education Centre, operating on 77 acres of wilderness and wetland property, as an extension of the West Carleton Secondary School program (Egan, 1988); the Peel Board of Education established a demonstration farm and outdoor education centre called the Old Britannia Farm House (Funston, 1988); the North York Board of Education expanded the Mono Cliffs Outdoor Education Centre, building a \$3.5 million dollar addition to the facility (Ainsworth, 1989a). The accounts of each of these facilities corroborate Eagles and Richardson's (1992) conclusion that urban school boards have historically been more involved in the operation of OE facilities in contrast to their rural counterparts.

Although the significant increase in the prevalence of school-board-operated OE centres reported by Eagles and Richardson (1992) cannot be succinctly explained by the HGIS analysis conducted for this dissertation, archival evidence does indicate that a possible correlation could be made to the employment of new teachers in the 1980s, who upon graduation from one of Ontario's several Faculties of Education, were trained to teach towards the 1975 P1J1 curriculum, and the environmental studies component of the *Teaching in the Primary and Junior Years* document. As a result, the curricular innovations of the 1960s and 1970s had now become accepted as the mainstream way to teach by new teachers. At this time, school-board-operated OE centres had regained a place of priority among teachers who perceived that these facilities provided the best way for them to meet the environmental studies component of the P1J1 curriculum by

providing students with opportunities to observe and participate in out-of-classroom experiences. For example, the Sheldon Centre for OE, operated by the East York Board of Education, operated a Pioneer Crafts program that provided students with an opportunity to experientially study the pioneer heritage of the area, as presented by their classroom teachers back in their home schools. According to a Sheldon staff member, J. Thompson (1985), as part of the East York Board of Education's school curriculum, "At the primary, junior and intermediate levels, students learn of the tenacity and self-reliant nature of the men and women who opened up the bush to settlement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in all parts of the province" (p. 13). The objective of the program was to encourage students to develop an appreciation for the lifestyle of Canadian pioneers through cemetery studies, studies of local ruins, and participating in a simulation game involving the use of pioneer skills and cooperation. Although out-of-classroom activities were supported within the PIJ1 document, Ontario OE pioneers such as Bessel VandenHazel (1986), continued to assert that classroom teachers needed to become more involved in the design and delivery of their own OE lessons, instead of depending solely on the use of school-board-operated OE centres. VandenHazel advocated that "it is at field centres that they (teachers) acquire and develop the attitudes and skills needed to utilize community resources such as parks, museums, zoological gardens, theaters, prairies and quarries in the school curriculum" (p. 25).

Although prominent Ontario-based outdoor educators such as VandenHazel advocated that classroom teachers use school-board-operated OE centres as sites to acquire the skills and attitudes to deliver their own OE programs, at this time, a second wave of public support for the environmental movement had emerged (Paehkel 1997;

Winfield, 2012). Newspaper reports began to associate the operation of these facilities with the provision of environmental education programs. For example, newspaper reporter A. Duffy (1986) published a report on the Scarborough Board of Education's Hillside Outdoor Education Centre, pointing out that programs such as the predator game, stream studies, and cemetery studies, provided through this facility, supported the environmental studies component of the Ontario elementary curriculum, by encouraging students to develop a greater "respect and appreciation for nature" (p. E1). Patrick Slack, Superintendent of Schools, for the Frontenac, Lennox and Addington County Roman Catholic Separate School Board, indicated that the board's goal of building an outdoor education centre on Wolfe Island, was to help "every student in our system become more aware of the environment and increase respect for the environment" (Campbell, 1988, p. 1). The establishment of the Bill Mason Outdoor Education Centre was touted by Egan (1988), as one of the latest modern educational tools to emphasize environmental studies mandated in the province's P1J1 curriculum.

### **Summary**

*What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?* For school-board-operated OE centres, the 1980s is a decade that was significantly influenced by two critical factors: (1) the state of the economy, and (2) the ability of school boards to exponentially acquire additional local funding for ancillary services through unrestrained local property tax levies. Each of these factors contributed to the constraint of facilities during the first half of the decade, and subsequently a significant system-wide expansion in the second half of

the decade, which impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students.

In the first half of the 1980s, while the provincial government continued to struggle with a provincial recession, school boards were forced to take strategic action to reduce costs by imposing cutbacks, including closures to school facilities. At this time, school board trustees regularly engaged in the practice of raising local property taxes to fund their school boards. In response to increases in local property taxes, school board spending and the quality of curriculum delivery came under greater public scrutiny. Many elementary classroom teachers largely ignored the pedagogical approaches mandated through the P1J1 curriculum, instead opting to continue to provide a more conservative curriculum that focused on literacy and numeracy skills learned prior to the new curriculum. Although school board jurisdictions with less affluent property tax bases (located predominantly in rural areas of the province, particularly in northern Ontario) were forced to impose cutbacks and closures to several school-board-operated OE centres, school board jurisdictions which were privileged to service densely populated metropolitan areas with a higher property tax base maintained their ability to operate OE centres, fostering greater academic inequities within the provincial education system.

As the province began to pull itself out of its provincial recession, and economic growth returned in the second half of the 1980s, school board spending began to increase. Since many elementary teachers had opted to retire early during the first half of the 1980s, which was one strategy school boards used to reduce costs through the attrition of staff, new teachers recently graduated from one of the provinces' several faculties of

education openly adopted the pedagogical approaches prescribed through the 1975 *P1J1 curriculum* and *The Formative Years* policy documents. While at this time the provincial Liberals increased spending on the development of new schools and the expansion of existing school facilities to accommodate a demographic increase in the number of students. Coinciding with the emergence of a second continental wave of public support for the environmental movement, and support for the implementation of the environmental studies component of the P1J1 curriculum, school boards significantly invested in the development of numerous new OE centres and the expansion of existing facilities. Promoted by the popular news media, the spatial use of these facilities quickly came to be conceptualized as one of the sole places where classroom teachers could accommodate the environmental studies component of the elementary curriculum and foster the development of environmental awareness. However, as the province entered the 1990s, the government would again find itself in another provincial recession. In the provincial legislature, Ontario voters would replace the Liberals with the New Democratic Party. New economic circumstances and political action would again threaten the state of school-board-operated OE centres across the province.



## Chapter 7: THE ONTARIO NDP GOVERNMENT

As the world began to shift towards a broader global economy, it became increasingly difficult for Ontario's industrial manufacturing sector to compete financially with other industrial manufacturing sectors that could offer a supply of human labour at significantly lower wages (Bone, 2005; Gidney, 1999). This trend was amplified by the impact of the 1988 Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement. As major manufacturers began to relocate their operations outside of Ontario, provincial unemployment quickly rose from 5 to 10 percent (Bone, 2005). Upset with the *big spending* fiscal management of the province by the Liberal Party of the late 1980s, in 1990 Ontarians replaced the Liberal majority in the provincial legislature with a neophyte Ontario NDP party. Promising to end the provincial recession, from late 1990 to 1991 the NDP attempted to combat the recession through tax hikes and government stimulus. Their plan failed miserably (Gidney, 1999).

On January 15, 1991, the Director of the Toronto Board of Education OE centres, Mark Whitcombe, gathered with his staff, other school board residential outdoor educators, and COEO members from across the GTA to discuss the role of OE in the provincial education system. In a report published in COEO's new practitioner publication *Pathways*, Whitcombe (1991) reported that, after meeting for two days, his group had successfully settled on a definition for OE as "a method of learning outdoors to achieve goals" (p. 5). Consequently, what specific goals these practitioners may have identified to support this definition were not discussed by Whitcombe in this article. To support this definition, Whitcombe instead recounted that, as a group of practitioners, they acknowledged that OE was a method that:

began in the 1930's with an emphasis and focus drawn from youth camps and conservation authorities applied in an educational setting. It has moved from being traditionally youth-oriented to including more adults, cultures and languages. It has traditionally been leader-centered with the teacher not necessarily being the expert, but it is now moving toward more student centred activities. Historically, outdoor education involves experiential, experimental and recreational activities. It is now placing greater emphasis on process as well as content. (p. 5)

After establishing this broad definition for OE, Whitcombe states that practitioners in attendance at this meeting produced a bulleted list of future trends that they felt would be important to consider in regards to the operation of their school board facility. In the midst of another provincial recession, practitioners at this meeting predicted that school board spending would increase across the province throughout the 1990s. Of particular interest was the call by practitioners for the development of curriculum-fitted programs which they assumed would result in their school boards allocating further funds to their facilities. No strategies were developed at this meeting to help OE practitioners address how the present provincial recession may affect the financial operation of school boards and, in conjunction, school-board-operated OE centres.

As unemployment continued to grow across the province throughout 1991, provincial tax revenues plummeted further. By late 1991, the NDP government realized that their provincial stimulus plan was not succeeding, and that their plan had only increased the fiscal debt of the province. In 1992, the NDP implemented a complex plan that sought to reduce public spending by forcing civil servants, including public school

teachers, to take scheduled days off as unpaid leave. These days quickly came to be known as *Rae Days*, based on the name of the Premier, Bob Rae. The government also froze the fiscal growth of provincial transfer grants for education at 1% for 1992 and 1993, and then constrained the growth of these grants to only 2% for 1994 and 1995. This freeze on the growth of provincial grants constrained the amount of operational funding school boards had previously anticipated they would receive (Gidney, 1999). These cuts came at a time when student enrolment was again increasing, as the echo generation and the children of many new Canadian immigrants began to enter the provincial education system. School board administrators across the province were forced to confront the reality that 73% of its school buildings were beginning to deteriorate because many schools had outlived their life expectancy (Hansen, 1993). In the midst of a difficult recession, when many elected full-time school board trustees were reluctant to incur the wrath of their constituents by raising the local property tax levy to keep their schools in operation, a number of boards chose to reallocate existing funds by imposing cuts on services they deemed ancillary to the daily education of their students, such as school-board-operated OE centres.

### **Scope of Outdoor Education Centres: 1992–1993**

By the 1992–1993 school year, the total number of school-board-operated OE centres in operation across the province had declined by 67.7% since the 1988-1989 school year. With 2,087,544 students enrolled in Ontario's publicly funded education system during the 1992–1993 school year, only 28 school boards now operated an OE centre (Table 6). As a result, only 874,903 (41.9%) students of the total student population attended a school board that operated a specialized OE facility. At this time,

28 (17%) school boards operated one or more OE centres, with 21 (75%) of these school boards operating day-use facilities, with 27 day-use properties in operation; 10 (35.7%) school boards operating residential facilities, with 9 facilities in operation; and 4 (14.3%) school boards operating dual purpose facilities, with a total of 6 facilities in operation.

Table 6: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 1992–1993)

Category	1972–1973	1978–1979	1985–1986	1988–1989	1992–1993
<u>Ontario school boards</u>	180	175	161	170	165
<u>Boards with OE centres</u>	33 (18.3%)	34 (19.4%)	27 (16.8%)	46 (27%)	28 (17%)
Boards with day-use centres	26 (76.5%)	20 (58.8%)	16 (59.3%)	42 (24.7%)	21 (75%)
Boards with residential centres	9 (26.5%)	11 (32.4%)	7 (26%)	20 (11.8%)	10 (35.7%)
Boards with dual purpose centres	6 (18.8%)	9 (26.5%)	11 (40.7%)	Not Assessed	4 (14.3%)
<u>Total number of OE Centres</u>	48	49	44	130	42
Day-use facilities	35 (72.9%)	27 (55.1%)	23 (52.3%)	88 (67.7%)	27 (64.3%)
Residential facilities	7 (14.6%)	13 (26.5%)	9 (20.4%)	42 (32.3%)	9 (21.4%)
Dual- purpose facilities	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.4%)	12 (27.3%)	Not Assessed	6 (14.3%)
<u>Public system facilities</u>	39	36	39	Not Assessed	36
<u>Catholic system facilities</u>	9	13	5	Not Assessed	6

Data Sources: 1972-1973 school year data aggregated from Martindale's (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools* [archival document]; 1978–1979, 1985–1986 & 1992–1993 school year data aggregated from the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (1979, 1986, 1992) *Catalogue of programs, personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; 1988–1989 school year data aggregated from Eagles and Richardson (1992) [archival document].

As illustrated in Figure 7 and Figure 8, the geographic distribution of OE centres across the public and Catholic branches of the provincial school system were predominantly correlated to school board jurisdictions responsible for southern Ontario's major urban centres, where a higher density of students across a smaller jurisdictional area were enrolled. OE centres predominantly clustered around jurisdictions located within or near to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), where it was easier for school boards

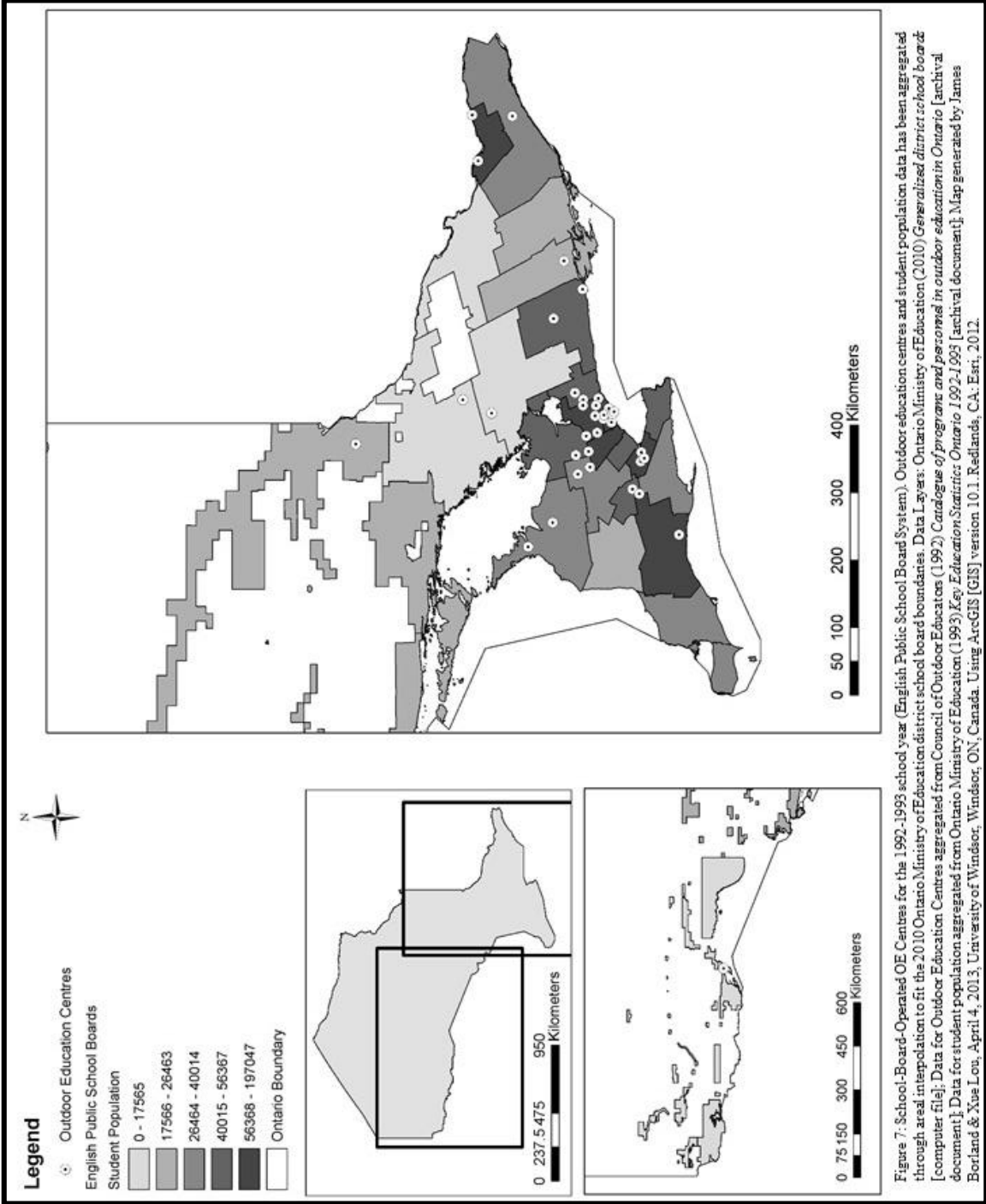
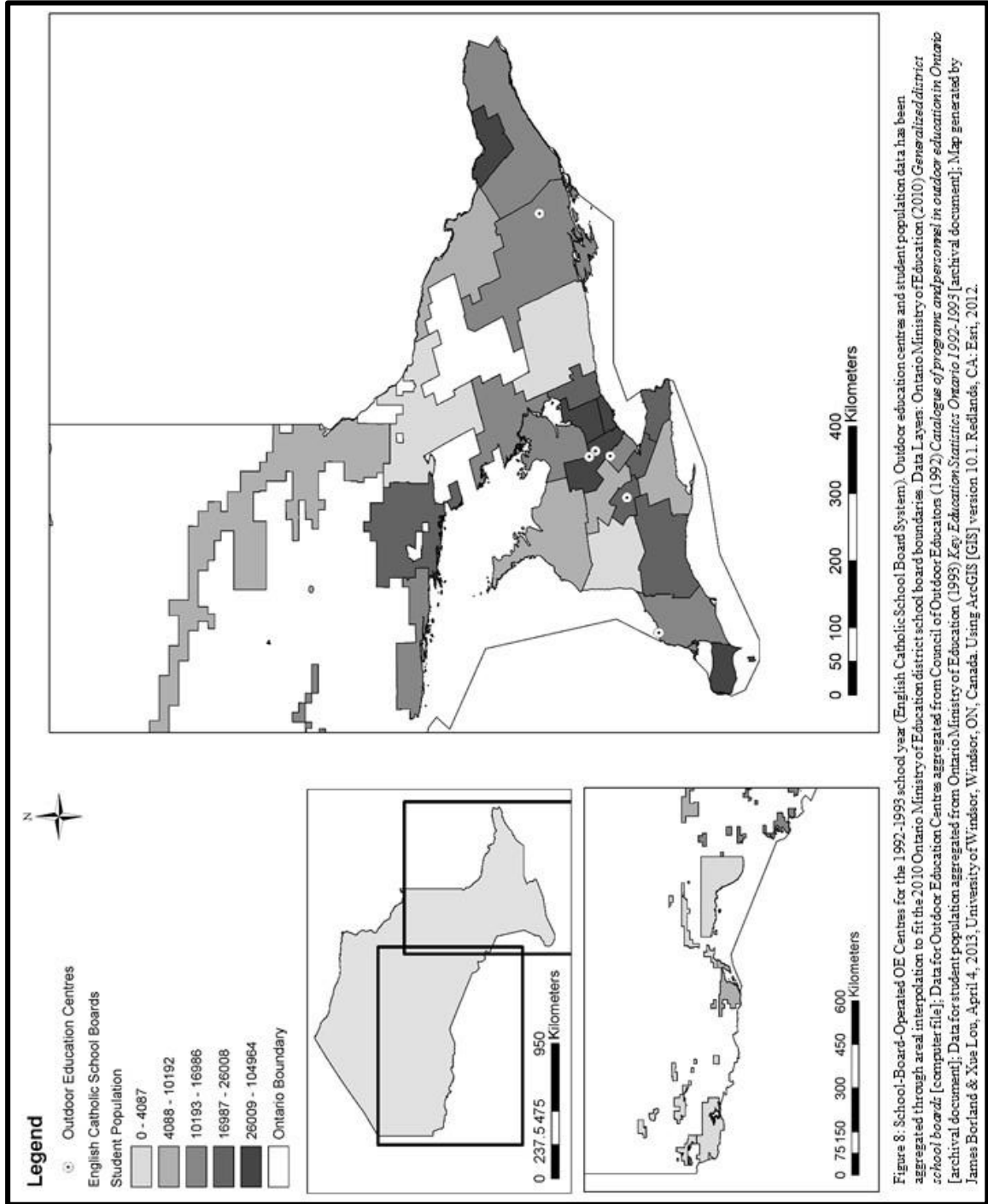


Figure 7: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 1992-1993 school year (English Public School Board System). Outdoor education centres and student population data has been aggregated through area interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school board* [computer file]; Data for Outdoor Education Centres aggregated from Council of Outdoor Educators (1992) *Catalogue of programs and personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; Data for student population aggregated from Ontario Ministry of Education (1993) *Key Education Statistics Ontario 1992-1993* [archival document]. Map generated by James Borland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1, Redlands, CA; Esri, 2012.



to continue operating OE facilities because of their access to a more affluent property tax base from which they could raise a greater amount of funding.

### **The Economic Realities of Early 1990s**

By the spring of 1992, COEO members Henderson and Whitcombe would publish an article in COEO's practitioner publication *Pathways*, reporting that school board budget cuts had resulted in cutbacks and closures to numerous school-board-operated OE centres. Providing a sample of eight school boards that these authors stated they had personal contacts in, Henderson and Whitcombe warned COEO members that OE services were undergoing significant changes across the province. Henderson and Whitcombe reported that the London, Wentworth, and Frontenac Boards of Education had each decided to reduce their OE teaching staff, choosing to return teachers to the classroom or eliminate positions through attrition. Transportation budgets were reduced by the London, Wentworth, and Peel Boards of Education, limiting the number of possible field trips to school-board-operated OE centres. Program funding was cut for the London, Wentworth, Peel, Temiskaming, and Dufferin County Boards of Education, as well as the Hamilton and Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Boards. Although OE staff were successful in influencing school board trustees in the Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board and the Dufferin County Board of Education to continue to operate their OE facilities at an 11% reduction in costs, similar proposals made by OE staff in the London Board of Education were ignored. Meanwhile, the Peel Board of Education OE team were provided an ultimatum to operate their four facilities and eight staff on a \$250,000 budget cut from September to December, and either demonstrate by November to trustees the educational relevancy of

their programs or face facility closures. Leases with private residential youth camps were cancelled by the Wentworth, and Timiskaming Board of Education, while the Hamilton Roman Catholic Separate School Board cancelled its day use programme with the local conservation authority. The Dufferin-Peel RCSSB decided to close one of its three facilities to save \$160,000 annually, while the Frontenac Board of Education decided to close its only facility.

In April of 1992, regardless of the existing ultimatum that the Peel Board of Education OE team was being forced to address, the *Toronto Star* reported that this school board closed its two largest OE facilities: the Jack Smythe and G. W. Finlayson Field Centres. By 1993, the Peel Board of Education closed its other two OE facilities (Raffan, 1993; Shaw, 1994). After a large public outcry by parents, former OE teachers, and the general public, the Peel Board of Education re-opened their school-board-operated OE centres on the suggestion by these people “that staff could be reduced but programming maintained by using students from secondary school co-op programs” (Shaw, 1994, p. 13). Although the former OE teachers assumed that the Peel Board of Education would return them to their positions at their field centres to provide program support for co-op students, school board trustees chose to follow the suggestion of these practitioners literally. The positions of OE teachers were replaced by outdoor recreation technicians and university co-operative education students, who were willing to work on seasonal contracts at significantly lower, non-unionized wages (Borland, 2009; Shaw, 1994).

In 1993, when the Carleton Board of Education decided to cut \$20 million from its budget, the Bill Mason OE Centre became a proposed area where cuts could be made



(Mangiacasale, 1993). According to the Director of the Bill Mason OE Centre, Ron Williamson (1994), although several senior administrators and trustees had fought to retain the current operational status of this facility, following suit with the Peel Board of Education, the Carleton Board of Education decided to return its OE teachers to classroom positions, replacing their OE centre staff with outdoor recreation technicians who were willing to work on seasonal contracts at significantly lower non-unionized wages. By April of 1995, the Ottawa Board of Education OE centres had also become a target of school board trustees and taxpayers who contended that “students can learn just as much by visiting. . . a park” (Spears, 1995, p. C1). According to Spears, school board trustees argued that the MacSkimming OE centre should become self-sustainable by charging user fees to Ottawa students for \$5 a visit and \$10 dollars for students from other school boards.

While larger boards across southern Ontario struggled to keep their facilities in operation, the Timiskaming Board of Education, located in northeastern Ontario, decided to close their OE facility called the Earth Awareness Education Centre, after only establishing this centre two years earlier in 1990. In response to the closure of this facility, the Director of the Earth Awareness Centre, J. Jordinson (1992) stated “small school boards in the north are more dramatically affected by budget cuts than the larger southern ones” (p. 17). While Timiskaming school board trustees had recognized and supported the educational worth of the OE program offered through this facility, which sought to teach children basic survival skills for living in Ontario’s north, including how to build a survival shelter to protect themselves in minus 30 degree weather (Murphy, 1991). When the NDP government froze grant increases, to keep their schools open, the

board was forced to implement budget cuts to speciality programs including its OE centre (Jordison, 1992).

As budget cuts and facility closures impacted school-board-operated OE centres across the province during the first half of the 1990s, OE practitioners such as Jordinson (1992) from the Temagami Earth Awareness Centre, and Morris and Fatkhoulina-Reddick (1993) from the East York Board of Education, began to encourage COEO members to lobby their school board trustees and government to change their perceptions that OE, as a teaching method, was an ancillary frill to the daily education of Ontario students. Jordinson (1992) encouraged outdoor educators and COEO to do more to emphasize to schools, school boards, administrators, and trustees the value of OE. Morris and Fatkhoulina (1993) argued that one way OE practitioners could change the perceptions of school board trustees and government was by publishing excerpts in newsletters sent to school board stakeholders that showed how students expressed enjoyment in participating in OE experiences offered at school-board-operated OE centres. According to Morris and Fatkhoulina, “if we are to succeed in changing this perception, we need to lobby on our behalf. No one says it better than satisfied students – so use those letters – send copies to your trustees and higher-ups. Finally, outdoor educators can listen to and learn from the letters’ messages” (p. 6). Beyond showing that students enjoyed their programs, no clear examples were discussed in this article about how practitioners could illustrate to school board trustees or the government how the operation of these facilities benefitted the academic growth of Ontario students.

In a subsequent article published in *Pathways*, Morris (1993) acknowledged that in the face of increasing budget restrictions OE centre staff were “frequently being asked

to specify how their programs support the boards of education's stated learning objectives and their current curriculum initiatives" (p. 18). Morris contended that, "outdoor educators have to realize that the benefits of an outdoor experience that seem so self-evident still need to be convincingly demonstrated to others" (p. 18). He acknowledged that current Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum documents such as the 1988 science curriculum focussed on promoting knowledge about the interrelationships between human communities, environmental change, and the need for conservation. Morris contended that outdoor educators should strive to design school-board-operated OE centre programs that support such knowledge and the development of the scientific skills of observation, classifying, measuring, inferring, and interpretation, also mandated to be taught through the provincial science curriculum. Through such actions, Morris argued that school-board-operated OE centre staff could better promote how their facilities supported school board and government curriculum expectations. In conclusion, Morris warned outdoor educators employed at school-board-operated OE centres that if they failed to make an effort to connect their programs to the provincial curriculum, school boards would continue to make cuts to their OE programs.

Other COEO members such as the Co-ordinator of OE for the Waterloo County Board of Education, Frank Glew (1994), and retired Supervisor of the Forest Valley OE Centre, Ralph Ingelton (1994), each advocated the need for COEO members to actively redesign their OE programs to support the provincial curriculum. Ingelton stated that while many OE practitioners may deliver OE programs at their facilities that promote an environmental message, he argued that during the harsh economic times of the 1990s, practitioners needed to promote how the natural resources located at their facilities can be

used to support the study of curriculum subjects. Glew argued that school-board-employed outdoor educators could raise the profile of their profession, programs, and facilities if they more specifically aligned and clearly explained to classroom teachers, principals, and school board trustees how the programs they facilitated supported the learning expectations identified within curriculum documents. According to Glew (1994) if OE practitioners wished to align their OE programs to support the provincial curriculum, practitioners would also have to stay up to date on Ontario Ministry of Education policy and educational research. By maintaining a current understanding of provincial education policy and research, Glew argued that OE practitioners could be better prepared to develop strategies to ensure that their OE programs supported all subject areas of the curriculum, rather than facilitating activities that classroom teachers perceived as recreational add-ons they could select for fun.

By 1995, Morris published another article in *Pathways*, announcing that the 1991 meeting hosted by Mark Whitcombe, where school board OE employees and COEO members from across the GTA had gathered, was an abject failure. Morris contended that outdoor educators employed by GTA school boards had failed to recognize, acknowledge and respond in an effective way to ensure the educational relevancy of their facilities. He argued that “it is one thing to look into the future; it is quite another to respond to it” (p. 3). Morris stated that while classroom teachers across the province were facing severe financial constraints, OE practitioners should have realized that “We are subject to many of the same challenges that face classroom teachers. . . as educators who profess to be preparing students for the future, it is also incumbent upon us to prepare ourselves for the same future” (p. 3). Morris encouraged the practitioners who

had attended Whitcombe's meeting to focus on developing a more realistic vision for OE that engaged practitioners in action, rather than predictions.

Morris' (1995) message was supported by outdoor educators such as Clark Birchard (1995), Director of Bruce County Board of Education OE Centre, and Anne Bell (1995), a staff member of the Waterloo County Board of Education, Wrigley's Corners OE centre. Birchard and Bell each stated to COEO members that outdoor educators should not assume that all outdoor learning can, or should, take place at school-board-operated OE centres. These two OE centre practitioners both contended that classroom teachers should be encouraged to design and facilitate outdoor learning opportunities within their local school communities, so that students may have a better chance of developing a greater understanding of curriculum concepts taught at school-board-operated OE centres. Bell (1995) argued that the same programs provided through their facilities which taught basic ecological concepts mandated in the curriculum, could also be delivered and reinforced by classroom teachers through the use of school gardens or naturalization areas designed on local school grounds. Birchard (1995) contended that by providing repeated opportunities to engage directly with nature beyond the single half-day to day-long experiences offered at his school-board-operated OE centre, students can be provided with more frequent opportunities to learn, practice, and retain the knowledge of scientific curriculum concepts.

Although the articles by Bell (1995) and Birchard (1995) both made it appear that classroom teachers were not providing OE opportunities on school grounds or within their local communities, throughout the 1990s classroom teachers, such as Robert Briehl (1990) from Chisholm Public School in Oakville, were already providing outdoor

learning opportunities for their students through the use of local community areas, such as the woodlot adjacent to Briehl's school. Through the provision of public grants, and the development of partnerships with the local municipal Department of Parks and Recreation, and neighbourhood associations within his local school community, Briehl regularly engaged his students in stewardship activities to clean and maintain this woodlot as an outdoor educational resource for his school. According to Briehl, the use of the woodlot next to his school enabled him to provide his students with "an outside lab for stream studies, sketching and creative writing" (p. 13).

Although some experienced OE centre practitioners such as Morris, Glew, Ingelton, Bell and Birchard publicly advocated the position that OE opportunities should be extended beyond the use of school-board-operated OE centres, new short-term contract staff members, such as S. Jewell (1995), only sought to focus on the differences that working at school-board-operated OE centre provided for her personally. For Jewell, teaching in what she defined as the natural environment, at the Etobicoke Board of Education Field Studies Centre, provided her a moral landscape where she felt free from the restraints presented by what she described as *the female classroom teacher costume* (nylons, dress and heels) and a classroom schedule. Jewell stated that in contrast to working on a classroom schedule, the teaching day started at the Field Studies Centre with the arrival of the bus and ended with its departure. Jewell's argument only focussed on her personal interests in choosing to teach as a temporary employee at a school-board-operated OE centre. Based on Jewell's commentary it can be inferred that many new employees such as herself, who were now responsible for operating many school-board-operated OE centres, lacked an awareness, skill, or ability to redesign the programs

offered at their facilities to make them more educationally accountable to school boards and the province.

### Summary

Returning again to the research question, we ask: *What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?* The statistical and archival evidence reported in this chapter, corroborates Potter and Henderson's (2004) account that "starting in the early 1990s many school board outdoor education centres closed, shifting to a privately funded centres on a user-fee basis" (p. 80). At the start of the 1990s, outdoor educators across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) overlooked the importance about how another provincial recession would impact the state of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. In the midst of a provincial recession, instead of assuming that school board spending would significantly contract during this period, these school-board-employed outdoor educators and COEO members predicted that school board spending on OE facilities would increase. Consequently, while the measures imposed by the NDP government would modestly reduce the provincial deficit by 1995, by freezing the growth of provincial grants, this provincial government forced many school board trustees from 1992 to 1995, to cut funding to ancillary services, including school-board-operated OE centres.

Although the economic circumstances of most school boards made it significantly difficult for these school-board-operated OE centres to operate, what this financial crisis pushed school-board-operated OE staff and COEO members to realize was that how they

operated the programs at their facilities, particularly across the GTA, did not directly support the provincial curriculum. For those facilities whose teachers were returned to the classroom and replaced by lower paid non-unionized seasonal outdoor recreation technicians, their lack of pedagogical knowledge and skill in the delivery of the provincial curriculum would make it very difficult for these new employees to address the concerns raised by experienced outdoor educators such as Morris, Bell, Glew, Birchard, and Ingelton. At this same time, accounts were being published in practitioner journals which illustrate how school teachers, such as Briehl (1990), were already providing OE experiences through the use of local spaces, such as natural woodlots, within a student's immediate school community. As a result, as Spears illustrates, by 1995 school-board-operated OE centres continued to be identified by school board trustees and taxpayers as targets for budget cuts. Much like the OTF and the Progressive Conservatives in the 1970s, and several local taxpayers in the 1980s, by the mid-1990s some school board trustees from the Greater Ottawa Area began to promote the same idea, that "students can learn just as much by visiting . . . a park" (Spears, 1995, p. C1).

In response to the financial cuts and closures that impacted many school-board-operated OE centres during the first half of the 1990s, as time progressed into the second half of the 1990s, more school-board-operated OE centre practitioners began to advocate to their colleagues that they needed to do a better job of supporting the academic education of Ontario students. These outdoor educators would continue to advocate to their colleagues that by showing school boards how their programs benefitted the academic education of Ontario students, and by connecting these programs to the curriculum, such efforts would prevent further cuts and closures to their programs. What



lessons may have been learned during the first half of the 1990s would be quickly forgotten as the NDP government was replaced by a new Conservative majority in the provincial legislature, who would make significant structural changes to the financial and curricular operation of the provincial education system.

## **Chapter 8: THE COMMON SENSE REVOLUTION**

In 1995, the Ontario Conservative Party won a majority mandate to govern the province. Led first by Premier Mike Harris (1995-2002), and subsequently by Premier Ernie Eves (2002-2003), the Ontario Conservative Party governed from 1995-2003. Guided by a party platform called the Common Sense Revolution, the Conservatives successfully reduced the provincial deficit of the 1990s by significantly reducing provincially funded services. Education was one area the Conservatives identified as needing to be fundamentally dismantled and restructured (Ibbitson, 1997). Through this process, the Conservatives claimed that they were striving to create a more equitable education system by ending school board property tax levies and regulating all education funding through the province. Through this process of financial restructuring, the provincial education system would experience cuts to the sum of one billion dollars for out-of-classroom expenditures, such as administration and teacher preparation time, while in-classroom expenditures, such as the salaries of classroom teachers and textbooks, would be protected (Gidney, 1999). As the Conservatives made significant changes to the status quo, in southern Ontario metropolitan school boards in both the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the Greater Ottawa Area, where school board employees had greater access to provincial news media-outlets, teacher discontent about the restructuring of the provincial education system would be amplified across the province.

### **Provincial Restructuring**

In regards to school-board-operated OE centres, prior to making cuts to Ontario's public education system, from 1995 to 1996, the first major legislative step the

Conservatives completed was to pass Bill 26, the Savings and Restructuring Act. Although widespread in its impact, the purpose of this bill was simple: change 47 different acts governing the province's public services to give provincial Ministers the legislative powers to consolidate services and facilities they deemed superfluous (Caledon Institute, 2001). At the same time many public service professionals across the province contested these changes. Outdoor educator Anne Bell (1996) reported to COEO members that Bill 26 would download the legal responsibility for Conservation Areas (CA) from the provinces onto the municipalities. Bell argued that this change would threaten the existence of several school-board-operated OE centres that were run on CA properties. Bell stated that, as the provincial government downloaded more responsibilities onto the municipalities, such as social welfare, municipalities would need to find new ways to acquire more funding to cover these new costs. As a result, she argued that eventually, municipalities would choose to either charge school boards higher fees to operate facilities on their CA properties, or choose to sell CA properties to raise capital to pay for other municipal expenses, which would threaten the status of several school-board-operated OE centres.

### **Curriculum Restructuring**

After passing Bill 26, the Conservatives began to focus on making cuts to the provincial education system. Many Ontario school board employees reacted unfavourably to this decision and criticized the Ontario Conservative Party for making changes to the provincial education system without a thorough understanding of how the education system functioned. As Ibbitson (1997) and Gidney (1999) report, Premier Harris and his government had five Ministers who were not neophytes to the education

system, but instead serious insiders who had a lot of experience working in the provincial education system. The Premier himself had been a classroom teacher for several years in North Bay throughout the 1960s. Nonetheless, the first Education Minister, John Snobelen, did not have any experience. Beyond being a high school dropout, Snobelen was a successful businessman. His motions to reform the education system were guided by the expertise and support of the following Ministers of Provincial Parliament:

Labour Minister Elizabeth Witmer, former chair of the Waterloo Board of Education; Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Dianne Cunningham, once chair of the London Board; Minister Without Portfolio Cam Jackson, who sat as a trustee on the Halton Board; and finally the Premier himself, a former board trustee and chair, and once head of the northern association of trustees. (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 222)

At the time of the election of the Ontario Conservatives, the Ontario education system was not inspiring confidence (Ibbitson, 1997). Prior to 1995, Ontario had exceeded every other province in per capita spending on education, except Quebec. “At the elementary-school level, the 1994–1995 education budget represented an expenditure of \$7,556 for every student. British Columbia, by comparison, spent \$6,955, Alberta spent \$6,222, Newfoundland spent \$5,794” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 222). Driven by a system of 129 major school boards “that combined a maximum of authority with a minimum of accountability” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 222), the general public did not consider the province’s school boards fiscally responsible administrators of public funds, but instead lavish spenders of taxpayers’ money. Although school board administrators had previously justified the need to increase local property tax levies to provide the services

they argued were required to produce the best academic results, several international tests had recently proven that the performance of Ontario students was mediocre compared to many of its international and provincial counterparts.

A 1992 science test conducted by the International Assessment of Education Progress (IAEP) testing service found Canadian thirteen-year-olds ranked ninth out of fifteen countries. Worse, while Canada as a whole rated slightly below average (behind, among others, Korea, Switzerland, the Soviet Union, and Israel), Ontario ranked well below the Canadian norm. Thirteen-year-olds in Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba all surpassed their typical Ontario counterparts. . . in a 1996 international math test of Grade 8 students, Ontario placed at the bottom, tied with New Brunswick and behind Newfoundland. In science the province was all alone in last place. A further study, released in June 1997, revealed similar results. (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 223-224)

These tests provided statistical confirmation that supported the emergent criticisms that persisted since the early 1980s, which contended that despite its immense costs and large bureaucracy, school boards only offered a second-rate education, particularly since “the gap between Ontario’s performance and those of the top-ranked provinces (Alberta and British Columbia) appeared to be widening” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 223-224).

By 1995, Ontario was one of the only provincial jurisdictions across the globe still practicing a curriculum called child-centred learning that was introduced in 1968 by the Ontario Progressive Conservatives in their *Living and Learning* report (Ibbitson, 1997).

“Child-centred learning seeks to bring each student along at his or her own pace, imparting new skills in the various disciplines only after the student has mastered the previous set of skills” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 224-225). For several years, teachers and administrators had resisted public calls for change, defending the curricular strengths of the child-centred approach in reducing the stigma attached to students who learned at a slower pace. By 1995, what had become apparent to the Ontario Conservatives and other members of the public, was that Ontario students were not always graduating to the next grade with the required knowledge, but instead were simply “advanced to the next grade even if they hadn’t mastered everything from the previous grade” (Ibbitson, 1997, p. 225).

For the Conservatives, the child-centred curriculum was disproportionately supported by school boards from the major metropolitan areas of Toronto and Ottawa who had created their own independent curriculum, which except through adherence to vague provincial standards failed to share commonalities with other county school boards. Metropolitan school boards, such as Toronto, were privileged with such autonomy because these school boards had historically been excluded from receiving equalization grants from the Ontario Ministry of Education, due to the fact that these school boards could adequately fund their institutions solely on what they could generate by levying property taxes on some of the provinces’ most expensive properties. As previously stated, since these urban boards were privileged with the ability to levy a greater amount of property taxes from a high density population living within a smaller geographic area, these boards were able to provide a greater diversity of services to their students than other school boards. This privilege included the provision of school-board-

operated OE centres, which created academic disparities between the benefits provided to students from less affluent areas of Ontario compared to their more affluent southern counterparts.

As the Conservative government emphasized concerns that children educated through the child-centred curriculum were often being graduated to the next grade without mastering all the curriculum expectations of the previous grade, opposing sentiments were emphasized by high-school vice-principal John Bowyers (1996) and East York Board of Education Outdoor Educator Mike Morris (1997), who contended that school board trustees were now being forced by the provincial government to impose cutbacks and closures to educational services which did not support the present provincial curriculum. Ontario school-board-operated OE facilities continued to run the risk of cutbacks and closures if they failed to align their programs to teach the skills, values, and concepts identified within the curriculum. Bowyers (1996), Vice-principal for Ajax High School in the Durham Board of Education, advocated that board-employed outdoor educators should begin to think more critically about making their programs support the curriculum. Bowyers argued that it was counterproductive to the education of Ontario students, when practitioners employed at school-board-operated OE centres solely focused on facilitating activities that capture the enthusiasm of students and teachers. Acknowledging that it was often unintentional, he cautioned that such activities could be counterproductive to helping students learn the knowledge mandated within the curriculum. Bowyers stated that “unfortunately, we often allow these activities to drive our curriculum, without thinking about the underlying values that may be inherent within these activities. . . once activities are established into an outdoor education program they

become familiar, and the people who access the program expect that they will be offered. . . which is difficult to stop” (Bowyers, 1996, p. 14). Bowyers emphasized that for activities which focus on collecting environmental samples, such as pond studies, it is important to identify and ensure that there are learning outcomes that “state what the skills, values, or content, students who visit an Outdoor Education Centre will be able to demonstrate at the end of that experience” (p. 15). Bowyers argued “if outdoor education is just viewed as a series of fun activities, then it will never get the recognition it deserves” (p. 15). By being able to explain and demonstrate learning outcomes, when school boards examine ways to save money, Bowyers argued that outdoor educators could show those who make budget decisions why funding their facilities is a worthwhile pursuit. Morris (1997) echoed similar concerns, which challenged the arguments of board-employed OE practitioners such as Jordison of the now defunct Temagami Earth Awareness Centre. According to Morris, Jordison publicly expressed opinions that teaching children the scientific nomenclature of different organisms could turn children away from developing an interest in nature. Morris contended that it was important to teach students the names of different plants and animals because many prominent ecologists encourage this activity as a way to get children to better understand and enhance their knowledge of local ecosystems. Learning such knowledge was part of the provincial science curriculum mandated by the provincial government.

To address these academic inequities in the Ontario curriculum and reduce what the Conservatives considered superfluous school board spending, the provincial government decided to redesign the elementary and secondary school curriculum to better support what they called *in-the-classroom learning* (Gidney, 1999). Throughout



this process, the government eliminated the optional fifth year of high school called Ontario Academic Credits (OAC's) that students seeking entry into university programs were previously required to complete. To eliminate the fifth year of high school, the Ontario Ministry of Education, revised both the elementary and secondary curriculum to ensure that essential knowledge previously taught in higher grades would be covered in earlier grades. Puk and Belm (2003) state that, through this process of curriculum revision, in 1998 the government decided to eliminate several elective courses, including a set of secondary school courses called Environmental Science. At this time, the Education Minister, Janet Ecker, indicated to Puk and Belm that the government would integrate environmental science concepts into the new compulsory core science and geography curricula. After conducting two surveys with high school and elementary classroom teachers from across the province, Puk and Belm (2003), and Puk and Makin (2006) discovered that under the new curriculum, classroom teachers reported that they spent almost no time teaching basic ecological concepts within their classrooms. The predominant reason why classroom teachers claimed that they did not teach basic ecological concepts was because they were no longer included within the curriculum. With a plethora of new expectations that were previously not covered at their particular grade level, classroom teachers reported that they did not have the time to teach concepts now deemed extracurricular to their mandated curriculum. As a result of these changes, most teachers also reported that they now spent almost no time providing outdoor learning experiences for their students.

In 1998, the Ontario Conservatives released a new *Science and Technology* curriculum for elementary students from grades 1–8. Within this science curriculum, two

key strands out of five strands called *Life Systems* and, *Earth and Space Systems* specifically mandated teachers to cover basic ecological concepts with their students, and also indicated that teachers should take their students outside to learn these specific concepts. According to this new curriculum:

The Life Systems strand combines the study of traditional topics in life science or biology (e.g. animals, plants, ecosystems, and cells) with technology as it relates to basic human needs (e.g. the need for food, shelter, and clothing). Students begin their study of life systems with aspects that are familiar to them (e.g. animals and plants in their environment, their own bodies) and gradually move on to study global or abstract aspects, such as ecosystems, and less readily visible aspects, such as the microscopic world of cells. Of particular importance in the Life Systems strand is the investigation of interactions between living things and their environment. (Ontario, 1998, p. 14)

The Earth and Space System strand deals with the science and technology of our planet and of space. As with other strands in the curriculum, students begin with aspects of the topic that are most familiar to them – the cycles of the days and seasons, the local soil and rocks, the particular features of their region of the province, the observable constellations of the night sky – then progress towards those with which they are less familiar or that are more complex. (Ontario, 1998, p. 88).

Although many elementary teachers reported to Puk and Makin (2006) that they no longer taught basic ecological concepts covered in previous curricula, when the responses

of these teachers are compared with the government's revised science curriculum, it could simply be inferred that these elementary teachers may not have been fulfilling their mandate as scripted within the revised Science and Technology curriculum.

Although teachers also reported to Puk and Makin (2006) that they spent almost no time outdoors, this does not necessarily mean that the Conservative government had discouraged the use of outdoor spaces as pedagogical resources. There are several points within the Conservative's revised science curriculum where students were still mandated to learn through direct investigations within outdoor environments. For example, within the grade three *Life Systems* strand titled *Growth and Changes in Plants*, the Ontario Ministry of Education stipulated that "students will observe and investigate a wide variety of local plants from trees to mosses, in their natural environment" (Ontario, 1998, p. 19); in the grade 4 *Earth and Space Systems* strand titled *Rocks, Minerals, and Erosion*, students were mandated to "conduct their investigations of the outdoor environment in a responsible way and with respect for the environment" (p. 96). Although the new Conservative curriculum was different from the PIJ1 curriculum because it was standardized across the province, and scripted specific learning expectations that all classroom teachers were mandated to teach, the publication of a new science curriculum did not mean that the Conservatives did not support the use of outdoor spaces as a pedagogical resource. In fact, the Conservatives mandated through specific expectations, particular times when teachers should take their students outside to learn particular skills and concepts identified within the curriculum. This did not mean that the government was intentionally trying to constrain classroom teachers from using outdoor spaces to teach skills and concepts identified within the provinces' new

curriculum documents. Consequently, as Gidney (1999) recounts, just as it took over a decade for teachers to adopt the P1J1 curriculum, it could be inferred that at the elementary school level, the lack of time spent teaching outdoors may be correlated to the reluctance of classroom teachers to teach towards the revised curriculum.

### **Financial Restructuring**

Alongside the changes to the provincial curriculum, to bring more accountability and fiscal equality to Ontario's provincial education system, in 1996, Minister Snobelen argued that systemic academic inequities existed between the province's less affluent school boards in the north, as opposed to the ability of school boards from wealthier regions such as the Greater Toronto Area, who could provide a greater diversity of educational opportunities for their students because of their access to a more affluent property tax levy. To resolve these spending issues, the government proposed to make cuts to the school board operating grants for 1996 by slashing \$400 million, or 9%, from the government grants; amalgamate its 129 school boards to 72 district school boards, thus reducing the need for a larger number of school board trustees and the positions of several school board administrators, and subsequently eliminating the jobs of 1200 board trustees; cap the salaries of school board trustees to \$5000 dollars, making these positions only tenable for people who would wish to volunteer their time to the administration of new district school boards; and cut preparation time for classroom teachers. By 1997, Education Minister Snobelen introduced new legislation titled Bill 160 that would accomplish these proposals by shifting the majority of decision-making powers from the province's school boards to the Education Minister (Barclay, 1998; Fallis, 1997; Gidney, 1999; Ibbitson 1997).

Bill 160 represented a complete restructuring of the provincial education system. Since the mid-1970s, when school boards had been permitted by Education Minister Wells and Premier Davis the freedom to raise their property tax levies to pay for additional services not covered by provincial grants, according to the Harris government, such actions had created social disparities between the province's less densely populated school boards in the north, and its high-density populated boards in the urbanized south (Gidney, 1999; Ibbitson, 1997). While Minister Wells and Premier Davis of the previous Progressive Conservative Majority government, from 1971–1985, promoted the belief that during times of economic recession, constituents living within the jurisdiction of a school board would determine through their votes what services school board trustees could justify as important enough to fund through tax increases, the Harris Conservative government thought differently. Although rarely acknowledged by the southern Ontario metropolitan news media, school board administrators, or classroom teachers, Premier Harris was the Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for the northern Ontario riding of Nipissing. In contrast to former Davis Progressive Conservatives, Peterson Liberals, and Rae NDP governments, that had each been governed by Premiers who were MPPs representing major urban ridings across southern Ontario's GTA and southwestern regions (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.), Premier Mike Harris, represented what Bone (2005) describes as the north/south faultline in Ontario politics, where historically the majority of the province's wealth has been spent on developing and maintaining services in its heavily populated urbanized south, while leaving the province's natural-resource-rich north underfunded and underdeveloped. Although Bill 160 would meet significant public opposition across southern Ontario, the rationale provided by the Harris

government for restructuring how the provincial education system was financed, stated that it was a way to establish greater academic and financial equality between the services provided to students across the province's north and south. Within Bill 160, the government indicated that it would restructure the provincial education system by first eliminating the ability of school boards to levy property taxes, and instead regulating school board funding through the Ministry of Education. Regulation of school board funding would be provided upon a base rate for each student enrolled within a school board jurisdiction. School board funding provided through this new funding structure, would be provided in addition to the continuance of conventional provincial transfer grants, to meet the needs of individual school boards.

### **The Response to Bill 160**

The introduction of Bill 160 incited panic across the province, as many school board employees and stakeholders of the provincial education system feared the uncertainty created by the restructuring plans of the Ontario Conservative government. Within the field of OE, the most vocal opinions emerged from the Greater Toronto Area, where the highest density of school-board-operated OE centres were located. High school teacher John Fallis (1997), who had been the former Vice-Principal of the Boyne River Natural Science School for over a decade, began to warn practitioners that under the guise of equity and accountability, the Ontario Conservatives would ultimately render the ability of metropolitan boards, such as Toronto and Ottawa, powerless to provide OE programs to their students. According to Fallis, in 1997, Metropolitan Toronto spent approximately \$1300 more per student over the provincial average. He forewarned that “if the province ignores the unique needs of large urban communities and goes to a fairly

uniform funding model (i.e. take money from Metro and spread it out in the province) Metro Toronto could lose \$530 million (dollars), a reduction of 24%” (p. 36). As a result, Fallis contended that the existence of 13 school-board-operated OE centres currently being run across the GTA, would be threatened, because the operation of these facilities had been established “on the premise that taxpayers wanted/needed these programs and were prepared to pay for them through their taxes” (p. 36).

Although advocates for school-board-operated OE centres, such as Fallis (1997), promoted the message that taxpayers were willing to pay for these services, several newspaper reports and letters to newspaper editors illustrate that some members of the general public did not share the same sentiments, and had not since the late 1970s. For example, in 1978 some taxpayers living within the metropolitan Toronto jurisdictions of the North York Board of Education, York Board of Education, and the Scarborough Board of Education, had told their trustees to stop purchasing properties or paying rent for the operation of school-board-operated OE centres. Taxpayers such as Shirley Scaife, president of the North York home and school group stated that “North York is blessed with numerous ravines and public parks. We don’t need an expensive site; the children would learn as much from our own ravines” (p. 4). Taxpayer Neil Straus, told the *Globe and Mail* that “It’s too much of the taxpayers’ money to spend. There are a lot of good free public sites around” (p. 4). These taxpayers argued that the use of school board funding for such purposes was a waste of money, because each of these areas had local parks that could be used for free by classroom teachers to provide the same experiences (The Globe and Mail, 1978, March 1). In 1980, *Globe and Mail* reporter Julia Turner wrote that a group of constituents from the Borough of York had opposed their school

board's decision to purchase the Pine River OE centre for \$2,500,000, stating that taxpayer money should be better spent on the education of its students within the classroom. On March 21, 1997, similar sentiments were echoed within the southern Ontario newspaper *The Kitchener Record*, that published an opinion column written by an anonymous author, advocating that in an era of funding cuts, the Waterloo County Board of Education should consider closing its OE centres that annually cost the board \$545,000. This anonymous author argued that the decision to use school-board-operated OE centres was an act that promoted the ideology of a consumerist society, which serves to disconnect children from developing relationships with nature, because "we think children can know and experience nature better if we spend money on outdoor education centre buildings or specialized staff. It's almost like taking them to a theme park" (p. A18). According to this author, like the GTA critics of the past, "there are in this region many green places that are still in a natural state. . . These places, as much as board-run nature centres, await busloads of inquisitive school kids. In our effort to teach nature, we forgot one of the lessons nature teaches. It is, in the word of Thoreau, to 'simply, simplify'. This is a chance to simplify" (p. A18).

In response to Bill 160, GTA OE centre supervisors Kingsmill and Whitcombe (1997) published a letter in *Pathways*, a copy of which they indicated that they had sent to the Ontario Ministry of Education, on behalf of all the supervisors of the residential centres of the six boards located in the GTA, including the Boyne River Natural Science School, Island Natural Science School, Sheldon Centre for Outdoor Education, Bolton Outdoor Education Centre, Etobicoke Field Studies Centre, Lake St. George Conservation Field Centre, Mono Cliffs Outdoor Education Centre, Pine River Outdoor



Education Centre, Boyd Conservation Field Centre, Albion Hills Conservation Field Centre, Scarborough Outdoor Education Centre, and Kearney Outdoor Education Centre. While Kingsmill and Whitcombe describe each of these facilities as school-board-operated residential OE centres, the 1992 COEO *Catalogue of Programs and Personnel in Outdoor Education* listed the Lake St. George Conservation Field Centre and the Albion Hills Conservation Field Centre as facilities operated by the Metropolitan Toronto Regional Conservation Authority, not school boards; and the Bolton Outdoor Education Centre (also known as Cedar Glen) provided both day and residential programs. Kingsmill and Whitcombe (1997) argued that the depth and breadth of the relationship between OE and the formal curriculum was “well documented” (p. 29), which they claimed proved that OE and residential experiences at school-board-operated OE centres provide many benefits for the education of Ontario students. The benefits Kingsmill and Whitcombe listed included: (a) providing a setting for the development of the whole person; (b) direct experiences which enable learners “to make connections by actively constructing knowledge through direct interaction with the elements” (p. 28); (c) providing an interdisciplinary environment where different school subjects could be learned together in one environment; and (d) providing learners with a vehicle for higher-level thinking that encourages students to apply the skills learned in the classroom to real-life contexts. Kingsmill and Whitcombe concluded that grade 5 to 8 students from Metropolitan areas should have an opportunity to participate in a residential OE centre experience, because these “experiences are essential components of a learner’s education that help build a solid foundation for future learning. . . that goes beyond what is achievable within four walls” (p. 27-28). Kingsmill and Whitcombe did not support their

argument with any empirical examples from their “well documented” points, but instead chose to state that “positive learning outcomes do not occur in the classroom because learning occurs in the real world” (p. 29).

As a result of Bill 160, on January 1, 1998, the six public school boards in the GTA were forced to amalgamate into a mega board called the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) (Andrews, Keith, Kingsmill, Moore, Stille, & Whitcombe, 1998; Gidney, 1999; Morris, 2000). According to Morris (2000), after the amalgamation of the TDSB, the supervisors of school-board-operated OE centres within this new school board formed an alliance called the Toronto Outdoor Education Schools (TOES). The first act of TOES was to emphasize to TDSB administrators how the programs provided through school-board-operated OE centres supported the curriculum and classroom learning. In a five-page article written by Andrews, Keith, Kingsmill, Moore, Stille, and Whitcombe (1998), these supervisors explained that students in the TDSB participated at all grade levels in OE programs starting on the school grounds and within the local community. These experiences were subsequently extended to programs at day centres, then expanded in grades 6-8, to provide students opportunities to spend 2 and a half days at a residential OE centre, before participating in a combination of such programs throughout a student’s secondary school career. In support of this grade progression and learning process that these TOES employees claimed to facilitate through the use of school-board-operated OE centres, these authors argued that their programs were important because they promoted environmental learning. Andrews, Keith, Kingsmill, Moore, Stille, and Whitcombe, supported their claims that the school-board-operated OE programs and centres they ran promoted environmental learning, by providing excerpts of letters written by students and

teachers who indicated how much they enjoyed the programs offered at these facilities. None of the excerpts from these letters actually demonstrated any type of environmental learning. Although the words *curriculum*, *environmental learning*, and *providing a balanced program* were used by these school-board-operated OE centre supervisors to support their argument, these practitioners could have strengthened their argument if they had included empirical examples about what curriculum concepts were taught or learned through the OE programs delivered at their facilities.

### **The Curriculum, It's Only a Trend**

At the 1998, September keynote address of the annual COEO conference, Whitcombe (1999), now supervisor for the Sheldon Valley OE Centre, declared:

We've had many trends in our outdoor education past. One of the early trends was natural history, then out-of-doors skills, group dynamics, the environment, and with curriculum being one of the current trends. But consistently, our core and essential value has been and continues to be active learning. (p. 7)

By declaring the provincial curriculum only a trend, Whitcombe contended that OE was one of the only ways to reconnect people to nature. "One of the powerful characteristics of outdoor education is that we focus on and develop the inherent natural connections between knowledge. It's not science, it's not math, it's not history, it's not language – it's reality. When we integrate those things, we bring them together" (p. 7). Whitcombe emphasized that OE focusses on the curriculum in the broadest sense by promoting a connection between knowledge, values and attitudes. Whitcombe's disregard for the provincial curriculum only seemed to substantiate Bowyers' (1996) concerns that outdoor

educators, particularly from the GTA, continued to make their school-board-operated OE facilities susceptible to budget cuts by failing to consider how they could redesign the activity focussed programs they offered through their facilities, so they could better support classroom teachers in the delivery of the curriculum.

By October 1998, the impact of Bill 160 resulted in a provincial teacher's strike. Snobelen was replaced by Dave Johnson as Education Minister. Throughout this process both the new Minister of Education and the Finance Minister, Ernie Eves, maintained that operating grants for in-the-classroom expenditures such as the salaries of classroom teachers would be spared, but imposed on these district school boards the responsibility to reduce costs attributed to out-of-classroom expenditures. Under the governance of the new district school boards, trustees would identify, for deep cuts, the positions of several board administrators and programs deemed ancillary such as libraries, swimming pools and school-board-operated OE centres (Borland, 2009; Gidney, 1999; Ibbitson, 1997).

In response, Mark Whitcombe (1998) argued that as the effect of Bill 160 "becomes clearer, as the funds for education are re-distributed around the province . . . outdoor education is in danger" (p. 2). Although Whitcombe acknowledged that at this time, there were some optimistic signs for Ontario-based OE programs, such as the establishment of a new school board facility in Killarney, he warned practitioners that

The outdoor education pond is shrinking – and friend may be turned against friend, colleague against colleague. . . . In Toronto, one of the world's hotbeds of outdoor education, the whole outdoor education programme is in jeopardy, as funds are slashed and the freedom to define the 'classroom' is tightly 'sweatered'" (p. 2).

To provoke discussion among COEO members regarding the financial restructuring of the provincial education system, Whitcombe challenged COEO members to consider whether OE is simply an ideal of rich Toronto school boards or an educational approach of provincial scope. Encouraging COEO members to read Baird and Eagles (1998) program evaluation of the Durham Forest Outdoor Environmental Education Centre, published in the same edition of *Pathways*, Whitcombe put forth a “list of possible criteria against which to measure outdoor education programs” such as “out-of-doors opportunities for every child in both urban and rural natural environments”, the “cost-effective delivery of programmes”, and even “revenue generation possibilities” (p. 2). As Morris (1995) had previously criticised COEO for, Whitcombe’s goal to stimulate discussion only served to engage COEO members in predicting what may happen to the future of Ontario-based school board OE programs, instead of encouraging OE practitioners to take action to ensure the educational relevancy of their school-board-operated OE centres.

In this same publication of *Pathways*, Baird and Eagles (1998) published a report about a program evaluation survey they implemented, using student opinions to measure whether the programs delivered at the Durham Forest Outdoor Environmental Education Centre fulfilled the approved set of 10 objects for environmental and outdoor education programs established by the Durham Board of Education. A survey instrument was designed to test the program objectives, which was “administered to 299 students in 12 grade 8 classrooms in 7 schools in the cities of Whitby, Oshawa, and Pickering, Ontario” (p. 6). Students were asked to respond whether they *strongly disagreed*, *disagreed*, *do not remember*, *agreed*, or *strongly agreed* with a set of 47 questions about their two and a

half day residential experience at Durham Forest in grade six. Baird and Eagles reported that Durham Forest fulfilled the following 8 of their school board's 10 objectives for environmental and outdoor education programs:

Durham Forest helps students develop an ecological consciousness (Objective 1). Students develop an understanding of the inter-relatedness and interdependence of living and non-living factors in the environment (Objective 2). The opportunities for personal and social growth are grasped by the majority of students (Objective 3). Students strongly agreed that Durham Forest provides first-hand, quality out-of-doors learning experiences (Objective 5). Personal interest is inspired at Durham Forest . . . (Objective 6). Durham Forest is effective at the development of understandings necessary for developing values and decision making that relate to environmental issues (Objective 7). . . . A strong majority of students feel that the Durham Forest programmes were effective teaching approaches (Objective 8). A majority of students developed their skills in observation, investigation and data organization (Objective 10). (p. 11)

Although Baird and Eagles (1998) argue that Durham Forest fulfills Objective 8, which is "to promote and facilitate the use of outdoor and environmental education as a teaching technique" (6), they also discovered that the majority of students they surveyed indicated that they did "not remember their classroom teachers using the outdoors . . . as a teaching element in the regular classroom" (p. 11-12). Baird and Eagles reported that "Many former students are unable to recall having their existing school curriculum enriched at Durham Forest (Objective 4). The integration of the school curriculum into

the Durham Forest programme is an area that students see as weak” (p. 12), especially in regards to Objective 9, “To integrate many aspects of the school curriculum (art, science, language) etc., in a situation where they can be interrelated” (p. 6). To ameliorate these issues, Baird and Eagles recommended that a focus by Durham Forest employees, “on post-activities and programmes at the home school would further develop the promotion of outdoor and environmental education as a teaching technique” (p. 12). To resolve Objective 9, Baird and Eagles recommended that “the Durham Board of Education needs to work on improving the curriculum relationships between the environmental education programme and the regular classroom” (p. 12). In conclusion Baird and Eagles acknowledged that since OE

is a non-mandated programme in Ontario schools, meaning there is no legal or policy requirement for its operation. . . . The Durham Forest programme has been under consideration for further budget cuts. . . . This case study shows that all programmes and especially those that have a political, legal or policy weakness, must show continuous and long-term effectiveness if they are to survive in a competitive education environment. (p. 12)

Echoing previous comments made by Morris (1993), Glew (1994), and Ingelton (1994), Baird and Eagles (1998) concluded their article by stating “it is recommended that Durham Forest re-evaluate its role with the classroom teacher in regards to the integration and enrichment of the existing grade 6 curriculum” (p. 12).

In 1999, Trillium Lakelands District School Board Teacher, Dennis Eaton completed his Master of Education, at the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education.

Within his Masters' thesis, Eaton claimed that program changes, budget cuts, and facility closures experienced by board-employed outdoor education staff, had come as a result of the historical path chosen by these outdoor educators themselves. A path which Eaton contends had contributed to their decline. According to Eaton, throughout the 1960's and 1970's, the purpose of OE was to support classroom learning by using the outdoors to enrich the cognitive areas of the school curriculum, primarily in the fields of science, geography and history. Eaton argued that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the focus of OE programs had shifted towards "the development of positive environmental attitudes, positive social interaction and leadership skills" (p. 4), which made the cognitive development of students "secondary to what was perceived by society. . . as the need to change inappropriate attitudes and behaviours" (p. 4). Eaton argued that while popular activities such as cross-country skiing, rock climbing, and initiative tasks have become the mainstream focus of many school-board-operated OE facilities, as school budgets are trimmed and accountability concerns increase, these programmes are "the first to be eliminated or downsized" (p. 4).

Eaton believed that OE programs could be revitalized across the province if outdoor educators focussed on offering programs that both complemented and enriched the classroom curriculum. In his Master of Education thesis, completed through the University of Toronto, Eaton conducted a survey study of twelve classes of students from grades 4 to 6, who participated in a lesson about beavers. For his study, Eaton compared six classes that attended a school-board-operated OE program to visit a beaver pond, with six other classes that learned about beavers in the classroom. Based on the findings of his study, Eaton reported that although OE programs facilitated at school-board-operated OE



centres may have no effect on changing the attitudes of Ontario students, nonetheless these programs do have a significant effect on increasing their cognitive learning through direct experiences in natural environments. As a result, Eaton advocated that school-board-operated OE centres show how their programs promote cognitive learning in relation to the curriculum, instead of making claims about how their programs promote attitudinal development. He concluded that the longer school-board-operated OE centres do not address the issue that their OE programs may not actually promote attitudinal development, the state of OE will continue to decline because school board trustees are no longer willing to support ancillary programs that fail to empirically demonstrate the personal claims of practitioners.

By 2000, through the TOES alliance, outdoor education staff working for the TDSB began to organize and write “formal curriculum and policy to justify the existence of their programs” (Morris, 2000, p. 3). In May 2000, TOES submitted their report to the TDSB budget committee, which emphasized the unique aspects that each of their OE centres could provide for the education of TDSB students. However, these practitioners chose to emphasize the unique aspects of their facilities, instead of how their programs supported the classroom delivery of the provincial curriculum. In March 2001, TDSB trustees implemented a new staffing model that reduced the number of teachers at these facilities, while expanding the use of paraprofessional outdoor recreation specialists and university co-operative students (Borland, 2009; Morris, 2001). As a result, just like had happened previously in the Peel Board of Education and the Carleton Board of Education, in September 2001, most OE teachers employed by the TDSB were forced to return to classroom positions (Morris, 2000).

## **Equality in Education**

On May 9, 2002, in its Speech from the Throne, the government announced that a new group called the Education Equality Task Force would review the Ministry's new focused funding formula and make recommendations for the 2003-2004 school year on ways to improve the equity, fairness, certainty, and stability in funding of the province's students and schools. Appointed as the head of this task force, Dr. Mordechai Rozanski, was asked to review six aspects of the new funding formula: (a) the effectiveness of the funding model in distributing funds between rural and urban boards; (b) the question of whether the structure of cost benchmarks for per pupil funding reflected the appropriate costs per pupil; (c) the extent of flexibility that school boards should have in spending local expenditures; (d) school maintenance and renewal approaches; (e) the effectiveness of the funding formula for special education in meeting the needs of its students; and (f) the best ways to maximize funding for student transportation to take advantage of opportunities for shared busing services between boards that serve the same communities. Rozanski and the task force were required to ensure that their recommendations promoted the principles of the new funding mechanism, improved the stability of the education system, respected the legislative and constitutional framework for all school boards within Ontario, and took into account the fiscal situation of the province. To compile the recommendations for its final report, the task force scheduled public meetings to acquire feedback and recommendations from education system stakeholders and the general public.

In response to the cutbacks, on behalf of COEO, the new Director of TOES Mark Whitcombe, and OE employee Gyemi-Schulze (2002), wrote a letter to the Ministry of

Education Equality Task Force, lobbying the government to reverse its decision and allow school boards to raise funds through local property tax levies. According to COEO

The centralization of education funding through Bill 160 stripped school boards of the possibility of responding to local needs through local education taxation. Programs responding to the specific needs of students must be allowed again through control of significant local taxation possibilities. (p. 4)

Recounting that under the governance of Conservative Premier Bill Davis in the 1960s and 1970s, the government had enacted legislation to allow school boards to purchase properties beyond their local jurisdictions to operate natural science programs, Whitcombe and Gyemi-Schulze indicated that

Since education funding has been cut back, there have been serious losses across the province in these programs. The provincial funding formula is now undermining these community initiatives. One by one, boards have been cutting their now unfunded outdoor education programs. Fewer than half of the formal outdoor education programs are offered today compared to ten years ago. Every one of the remaining outdoor education programs is now in jeopardy because the control of the local taxation base has been removed, and the boards are no longer able to support community initiatives. (p. 6)

Whitcombe and Gyemi-Schulze concluded that

Education funding must reflect that the classroom extends into the whole environment of the student. Those who are responsible for

proper financing must recognize that there is a considerable body of learning that best happens through direct experience beyond the confines of four concrete walls. (p. 6)

As previously noted, the Education Equity Task Force (2002) was required by the government to make recommendations within the constraints of the existing per pupil funding formula. Within the final report of the Education Equality Task Force (2002), it acknowledged COEO's written submission, and reiterated the government's position that before 1998, the previous funding structure for the provincial education system was inequitable, "since boards with large property tax bases were able to raise more money than boards with access to small tax bases. . . . Boards no longer have the authority to determine education tax rates" (p. 9).

On August 21, 2002, TDSB trustees took a stance against the Conservative government and decided to report a deficit for the new board's budget. Under provincial law, as stipulated within the Ontario Education Act, school boards were required to present annual balanced budgets (Kalinowski, Bennan & Brown, 2002). In response to this protest, the Conservative government took temporary control of the board's budget. An outside auditor named Al Rosen recommended to Education Minister Elizabeth Witmer that 73.6 million of the board's 2003 \$912 million dollar budget could be saved through cuts to out-of-classroom expenditures including through the closure of the TDSB's 12 OE centres. While teachers claimed that these facilities represented a priority area for teacher support, Rosen indicated that the board had failed to adapt to the government's new direction for education. He stated to newspaper reporters: "Any claims that expenditures are student and/or classroom focused must be closely

scrutinized. It is not entirely clear why the trustees have chosen to direct a disproportionate share of its budget to non-classroom expenditures” (Kalinowski, Bennan & Brown, 2002, p. A08). Subsequently, the Ontario Ministry of Education appointed Paul Christie as the new supervisor of the TDSB, who announced plans to reduce \$90 million dollars from the board’s budget (Kalinowski et al. 2002). As the supervisor of the TDSB, Christie implemented plans that cut 100 board office jobs, closed 84 school-board-operated pools and all 12 of the TDSB’s OE centres. In conjunction with his plans to close all 12 school-board-operated OE centres, Christie also cut \$4 million from the TOES \$10 million dollar budget. After a large public outcry to keep all of the TDSB OE centres open, nine centres remained open, while the Pine River, Noisy River and Boyne River OE centres were closed.

### **New Outdoor Education Centres**

Although it is easy to place blame on the Conservative government for imposing cutbacks and closures to TDSB OE facilities, it is important to recognize that these issues received major news media coverage because they occurred in one of Canada’s largest cities. While metropolitan school boards such as the TDSB were finally forced to make difficult budgetary decisions that many smaller school boards had struggled with for several decades, some school boards actually established new OE facilities during the provincial governance of the Mike Harris/Ernie Eves Conservative majority. In 1996, the Waterloo Region Board of Education, Waterloo Region Separate Board of Education, and the City of Kitchener formed a partnership to create a 200-hectare naturalization area in the middle of the city called the Huron Naturalization Area, for local schools to use as a site for study and the general public use for recreation. Part of a reclaimed industrial

site, this 200 hectare property contains wilderness areas representative of the typical Grand River bio-region, including a first class wetland. The development of this area was planned to provide an urban area that could be used to engage people in the promotion of environmental values, participate in outdoor recreational activities, and build students' knowledge, skills, and values addressed in the curriculum. By engaging students in stewardship projects focussed on the re-naturalization of the property and surveying the health of its aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, it was the plan of public school board OE Coordinator Frank Glew (1996), to provide students the opportunity to develop an understanding of the local ecosystems they depend on for their daily subsistence.

In 1998, as the proposed financial restructuring of the provincial education system was inciting fear among OE practitioners across Ontario's urbanized south, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board established the Killarney Experiential Education Program (KEEP), which provided elementary and secondary students curricular learning opportunities within a residential wilderness setting. According to Lori Biscoe (1998), KEEP Program Co-ordinator, while southern Ontario boards had historically benefited from having the funding and access to operate school-board-operated OE centres for their students, "in short, northern Ontario school boards, whether they are in urban, rural, or isolated settings, are forced to accept some of the tightest restraints on access to innovative technologies and outdoor education programs" (p. 20). The justification for the development of the KEEP facility came as a result of the realization that "transportation costs alone to southern Ontario natural science schools and field centres can run into hundreds, if not thousands of dollars per trip" (p. 21). Through the new per-

pupil funding structure, the centre provided equitable services for students from district school boards located in northeastern Ontario, an opportunity to study the “unique Precambrian geology, geography, aboriginal history, and community studies” (p. 21) of the province’s north.

In 2002, at the height of the government cutbacks to OE in the TDSB, the “District School Board of Ontario North East (DSBONE), which manages education from Temagami to Hearst, signed a ten-year agreement. . . to use Camp Bickell as a site for outdoor education” (Jordison, 2003, p. 17). Operating as a non-profit organization run by a board of directors and funded by a regular endowment from three different foundations, including the Bickell Foundation, the Board established a curriculum-designed residential program for 60 students to attend for two and a half days between the months of May to June and September to October, when the summer camp was not in operation. A board-organized curriculum committee designed the program called Eco-Camp Bickell, which engaged students in six core units interspersed with outdoor recreational activities. Students are taught how to use a compass through orienteering, conduct a tree study and pond study, make a nature craft to bring home, learn survival skills such as shelter and fire building, as well as how to collect wild edibles and capture small game.

### **The Scope of OE Centres: 2002-2003**

While it is well documented that during the 2002-2003 school year, 3 out of the TDSB’s 12 school-board-operated OE centres were closed as a result of the implementation of a plan to balance the school board’s deficit by Conservative appointed TDBS supervisor Paul Christie, it is rarely acknowledged that throughout the governance

of the province by this Conservative Party, that from 1996-2002 three other school boards opened new OE facilities. Consequently, for this time, few publicly accessible archival or secondary scholarly sources have been discovered to conduct an accurate empirical assessment the prevalence of school board OE centres throughout this era of provincial Conservative governance. Unlike the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, from 1995 to 2003 no scholars, nor COEO, collected or published data about the provincial scope of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres. While a lack of data sources for this time could be attributed to the systemic changes that occurred to the provincial education system in 1998, when the Ontario Ministry of Education consolidated the province's 129 school boards into 72 district school boards, and implemented a new financial structure for the provincial education system (Gidney, 1999). A comparison of the prevalence of facilities reported in the 1992-1993 and 2011-2012 school years was analyzed to provide greater insight into the possible status of school-board-operated OE centres during this era.

Table 7: Status of OE centres 1992–1993 to 2011–2012 school years

Category	1992–1993	2011–2012
<u>Total number of OE Centres</u>	42	54
Facilities no longer identified in operation		17
<u>Total number of Public system facilities</u>	36	48
Public system facilities no longer identified in operation		12
<u>Total number of Catholic system facilities</u>	6	6
Catholic system facilities no longer identified in operation		5

Although a lack of data sources presently exists to accurately assess the prevalence of school-board-operated OE centres during the administration of the Harris/Eves provincial government, to support this comparative analysis an online appraisal of 55 community newspaper articles from the OurOntario.ca (2012) *Community Newspapers Collection*, and 39 newspaper articles from the Proquest (2014) *Canadian*



*Newsstand Major Dailies* database was conducted. Between the 1992-1993 and 2011-2012 Ontario school years, the total number of school-board-operated OE centres facilities increased by 28%, from 42 to 54 facilities. By the 2011-2012 school year, out of a total of 54 school board OE centres in operation, 36 had also been in operation during the 1992-1993 school year. After 1992–1993 school year, out of the 42 school board OE centres reported in operation, by the 2011–2012 school year 17 of these facilities (12 public, 5 Catholic) were no longer identified in operation (Table 7).

Although 17 Ontario school-board-operated OE centres closed between the 1992–1993 and 2011–2012 school years, the online appraisal of newspaper articles from across the province could only confirm that the 2002 closure of three TDSB school-board-operated OE centres (the Boyne River, Pine River, and Noisy River OE centres) occurred during the provincial governance of the Harris/Eves Conservatives. The online appraisal revealed that from 1995 to 2003, the financial sustainability of 2 school-board-operated OE centres in the greater Ottawa area, and 12 facilities operated throughout the greater Toronto area dominated media reports. According to Ottawa area newspaper reporters such as Spears (1995, 1998), Dube (1996), Laucius (1998, 1999), Wake (2001), Reevly (2002), Hughes (2002), Randall (2003), the MacSkimming and Bill Mason school-board-operated OE centres faced regular budget cuts and threats of closure since the early 1990s. By the 2011-2012 school year, both the MacSkimming and Bill Mason OE centres were still reported in operation by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. According to Toronto area newspaper reporters such as Kalinowski (2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b), Schmidt (2002), Leong and Alcoba (2002), James (2002), McCabe-Lokos (2002), Brown (2002), Kalinowski and Brown (2002), Fowlie (2002), and Kuitenbrouwer

(2003), from May 2002 to June 2003, the TDSB's 12 OE centres faced significant budget cutbacks, and all its OE facilities were threatened to be closed as this school board was forced to implement \$90 million dollars in cuts to make up for board-incurred provincial funding losses.

While scholars such as Sharpe and Breunig (2009) contend that from the 1990s to early 2000s “numerous board-run outdoor and environmental education centres were closed” due to “a shift in the educational climate away from innovation and change and toward greater accountability, fiscal efficiency, standardization, a ‘back to basics’ curriculum, and a conservative educational ideology that emphasizes scripted instruction” (p. 299). Although archival evidence does support Sharpe and Breunig’s statement that there was a critical shift in educational climate of the provincial education system during the provincial governance of the Ontario Conservatives, the existing archival evidence from 1995-2003 which documents the prevalence of school-board-operate OE centres only illustrates that three TDSB facilities were closed at this time. The possible closure of the 17 facilities from between the 1992-1993 and 2011-2012 school years, at this time, cannot be attributed to the governance of a specific political party, since events could have also occurred during the previous governance of the provincial NDP from 1990-1995, or the subsequently governance of the province by the Ontario Liberals from 2003-2012, who will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Summary for the Common Sense Revolution**

Again, we review the research question: *What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario*

*students?* Although the Ontario Conservative government from 1995–2003, fundamentally dismantled and restructured the financial structure of the provincial education system, which in the process upset many school board administrators and teachers across the province, the Conservatives did have a reason for making such changes. Confronted with a provincial deficit created by the NDP, and an education system which permitted schools boards in the province's metropolitan south to provide privileges for their students, which northern school boards were predominantly unable to afford, the Conservatives strived to create a more equitable education system by ending school board property tax levies and regulating all education funding through the province. Although these changes were not well-received by many school-board-employed outdoor educators across the GTA, what these changes did was spread education funding more equitably across the province. While to prevent an illegal deficit, the TDSB was forced struggle with the imposition of provincial control over the development of their school board budget, the Conservative process of financial restructuring actually made it possible for two school boards in northern Ontario to open school-board-operated OE centres. School board facilities that northern outdoor educators such as Brisco (1998) state, that under the previous funding structure would not have been possible. The Conservative financial restructuring of the provincial education system, made it possible for a greater diversity of students to access services provided through school-board-operated OE centres that had previously not been possible under the province's most socially progressive provincial government, operated by the NDP.

Although TDSB employees across the GTA, including school board outdoor educators, were forced to confront a reality that their budget was cut by hundreds of

millions of dollars which impacted the scope of education services that could be provided to the province's highest per capita density of students, several previously less affluent, geographically larger rural school boards saw their funding increase. Another factor that made the establishment of new school-board-operated OE facilities such as the KEEP program, Eco Camp Bickell, and the Huron Naturalization Area, possible at this time when school-board-operated OE centres were struggling across the GTA, was the effort that the creators of these programs put into clearly communicating to their school boards and the broader public how their programs supported the curricular education of Ontario students. For example, Glew (1996) stated that the Huron Naturalization Area provided students the opportunity to develop an understanding of the local ecosystems they depend on for their daily subsistence; Brisco (1998) reported that the KEEP facility provided students an opportunity to study the "unique Precambrian geology, geography, aboriginal history, and community studies" (p. 21) of the province's north; while a board-organized curriculum committee designed the OE program for Eco-Camp Bickell. These actions followed the advice of several school board administrators, principals, scholars, and outdoor educators, who across the present and previous decades had each recommended that Ontario-based OE practitioners should redesign their programs, so they were more accountable to school board curriculum, or continue to face the fate of budget cutbacks and facility closures (Bell, 1995; Birchard, 1995; Bowyers, 1996; Eaton, 1999; Glew, 1994; Ingelton, 1994; Morris, 1993, 1995, 1997; Richardson, 1980; VandenHazel, 1986; Vinson, 1980).

Although the anecdotal statements made by scholars such as Breunig and O'Connell (2008) and Sharpe and Breunig (2009) indicate that the state of Ontario

school-board-operated OE centres continued to decline significantly during the provincial governance of the Ontario Conservative Party from 1995 to 2003, unlike the 67.7% decline of 88 school-board-operated OE centres that occurred from 1990-1995 under the provincial governance of the NDP, archival evidence presently only shows that three facilities closed during the reign of the Harris/Eves government. Although it is now documented that 17 school-board-operated OE centres closed between the 1992-1993 and 2011-2012 provincial school years, it would be inaccurate to attribute the closure of these facilities specifically to the governance of the Harris/Eves Ontario Conservatives, since the operational status of several of these facilities could have also changed during the governance of the provincial NDP from 1990-1995, or the subsequent governance of the provincial Liberals from 2003-2012, who will be discussed in the next chapter.

In 2003, the Conservatives would be replaced by the Liberals as the governing party in the provincial legislature. Three years later, after the publication of a prominent newspaper report written by Gillespie and Kalinowski (2006, October 10) published in the *Toronto Star*, titled: *Why some kids expect to see whales in Lake Simcoe: Ontario falling behind in 'eco-studies'; Outdoor programs seen as expendable*, OE would again be declared an important pedagogical component of the provincial education system. Just as the government had sought to appease widespread environmental concerns during the 1960s, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the midst of the global environmental crisis of climate change, the government would strive once again to use the provincial education system to as a public communication vehicle for the environmental movement. OE would again be identified as a critical pedagogical method for the delivery of environmental education.

## Chapter 9: THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

In 2003, the Ontario Liberal Party won a majority mandate to govern the province, then were re-elected in 2007 (Winfield, 2012). In 2011, the Liberals would win again, but this time only as a minority provincial government. At the beginning of the new Liberal mandate, cuts and threats of closures to school-board-operated OE centres continued. At this time, a third wave of public environmental concern had started to emerge as the global scientific community began to call on national and international governments to begin addressing the crisis of climate change (Winfield, 2012). In 2005, a New York Times journalist, Richard Louv, published the book *Last Child in the Woods*, in which he coined the term nature-deficit disorder. Louv (2005) contended that children were becoming disconnected from nature because they were spending more time indoors due to a variety of factors, such as the attraction of electronic devices. As a result of such factors, Louv theorized that children were becoming ecologically illiterate because they were disconnected from nature. Although Louv acknowledged to his readers that nature-deficit disorder should not be considered a diagnosable medical disease, he did argue that nature-deficit disorder was causing increases in childhood health issues such as attention deficit disorder, depression, and obesity. Louv postulated that through the design of green school grounds, the creation of urban wilderness areas, and the provision of OE programs, children could be provided *new opportunities* to reconnect with nature. In 2006, *Toronto Star* newspaper reporters Gillespie and Kalinowski published an article, arguing that a lack of access to Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, imposed over the past decade by budget cuts and facility closures, had created a generation of ecologically illiterate citizens. From 2007 to 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education

would propose, and then release a new policy framework for environmental education, that mandated classroom teachers from across all grades and curriculum subjects, to facilitate more regular OE opportunities for their students within their local school communities (Working Group on Environmental Education, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

### **Shift 2003–2006**

Upon the 2003 election of the Liberals as the governing party of the provincial legislature, several rural and metropolitan school boards were already in the midst of either participating in, or devising new community/corporate partnerships to operate new OE centres. In Waterloo Region, its two school boards had partnered with the Corporation of the City of Kitchener, to open a new shared OE facility on city property (Glew, 1996); the District School Board of Ontario North East, partnered with a corporate charitable organization to use its summer residential youth camp in the offseason as a school-board-operated OE centre (Coté, Jordinson, Kent & Kleinhuis, 2003); community members from Toronto and Ottawa-Carleton regions formed the corporate charitable organization called Friends of Lasting Outdoor Education (FLOE) which helped raise funding for school-board-operated OE centres (FLOE Staff, 2003; Veit, 2004); in Bruce County, the Bruce-Grey Public Education Foundation was established, and subsequently purchased the school-board-operated OE, so that this property could be protected in perpetuity from school board budget cuts (Greig & Wollerm 2004); the Greater Essex County District School Board established a corporate partnership with the BASF Chemical Company, located in the Detroit-Windsor region, to operate a natural science school on BASF's Fighting Island property, located in the

Detroit River (Bradd & Bachmeier, 2004). Each of these school boards has helped create a new model for the operation of school-board-operated OE centres, where the financial and social responsibility for these facilities is shared between school boards and local corporate entities.

Although several school-board-operated OE centres remained in operation, either through continued support provided by their school board or through new partnerships developed with local corporate entities, in 2004, the Liberals decided to close the widely popular Leslie Frost Centre, operated by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Frost Centre provided several different programs sponsored by the province, including day and residential OE programs for Ontario elementary and secondary students. This decision to close the Frost Centre was made to save the province annually \$1.2 million dollars (Ball, 2004, Blefry, 2004; Harries, 2004a, Harries, 2004b; Rienhart, 2004). While the Liberals were elected on a platform to focus on improving health care and education, newspaper reporters like Harries (2004b), claimed that the closure of the Leslie Frost Centre contradicted the government's election platform. Natural Resources Minister David Ramsay contested such arguments, stating that education is not a responsibility of the Ministry of Natural Resources (Borland, 2009; Harries, 2004b; Rienhart, 2004).

In 2005, as the President of COEO, and an employee at the Norval Outdoor School, which is privately owned and operated by Toronto-based private school Upper Canada College, Grant Linney challenged outdoor educators to stop blaming the recent Conservative government for the closure of numerous OE centres, and instead reflect on the collective history of their attitudes, behaviours, and actions as a profession. Linney argued that it was time for OE professionals across Ontario to acknowledge that



numerous school-board-operated OE centres had begun to close as early as the 1980s, long before the Ontario Conservative Party Leader, Mike Harris, became Premier of the province. Linney recounted in his article that:

Back then I remember Cathy Beach (Peterborough Board) and John Aikman (Hamilton Board) offering a session at our annual COEO conference about the closure of centres in their boards, and warning the rest of us that it would happen elsewhere. . . and I remember not believing them. (p. 3)

Linney (2005) claimed that the closure of numerous school-board-operated OE centres across the province had not been the domain of a single political party, acknowledging that since the early 1980s, facility closures had occurred during the governance of four different political parties. Linney proposed that the reason why many school-board-operated OE centres had been closed since the 1980s was the result of many full-time outdoor educators striving to define OE too narrowly. Linney contended that by choosing to focus solely on the use of specialized facilities and staff, as a necessity for the delivery of school-board-operated OE programs, that practitioners presently “do not give enough recognition to the possibilities and realities of outdoor education in its many other forms, including programs that can be run in schoolyards and neighbourhood parks” (p. 3). Linney contended that:

It is not enough for us to lay blame for cutbacks on our politicians and other decision-makers. We need to make our case based on evidence. We need to realize that the future public funding of outdoor education, in whatever forms it takes, is dependent upon ongoing, credible, and

varied research that compellingly supports the outcomes we claim on its behalf. (p. 3)

In 2006, OE teacher Walter Speic reported to COEO members that cutbacks had continued to threaten the state of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres, announcing that the Algonquin District Catholic School Board had proposed a plan to cut staff at the Msgr. J. S. Ryan Centre on Wolfe Island. According to Speic, his facility specialized in teaching students about environmental sustainability through the delivery of a curriculum-linked energy unit that demonstrated to students several different forms of sustainable energy production, such as the use of the OE centre's solar and wind power generators. Although Speic stated that he objected to the cutbacks, as he indicated in his article, the majority of the lessons taught about energy occurred within the centre's portable classroom through the use of a school board activity kit. When describing his OE program to COEO members, Speic acknowledged that students only ventured outdoors to observe the solar and wind generators, as well as play during their lunch hour. While Speic stated at the end of his article, that his school board should change their position so that OE programs continued to be offered through his facility, he argued that the proposed cutbacks to this facility demonstrated the relevancy that school board trustees felt about the quality of the OE programs funded by his school board.

On October 10, 2006, newspaper reporters Gillespie and Kalinowski published a report in the *Toronto Star*, titled: *Why some kids expect whales in Lake Simcoe: Ontario falling behind in 'eco-studies'; Outdoor programs seen as expendable*. In this article, Gillespie and Kalinowski reported that during a school trip to the Sibbald Point OE centre with a class of grade 4 students from York Region that these students expected to see

whales in freshwater Lake Simcoe. According to Gillespie and Kalinowski, due to the previous cuts made to school-board-operated OE centres across the province:

Ontario is turning out a generation of ecological illiterates. Once a leader in the field, Ontario is now the only province with no formal environmental science curriculum. Some passionate teachers champion ecology and environmental issues in their classes, but there is nothing in the system that compels students to study the subject. (p. A1)

On March 27, 2007, newspaper reporters Brown and Rushowy reported that Education Minister Kathleen Wynne, had announced that “music classes, art, gym and nature studies—often forgotten as ‘frills’ in Ontario’s push for the 3 Rs—will get a \$35 million boost to give children a more well-rounded education” (p. B7).

### **An Official Environmental Education Policy Framework**

In this same year the government released a report titled *Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future: Environmental Education in Ontario Schools*, written by the Working Group on Environmental Education, chaired by Canadian Astronaut Roberta Bondar (Working Group, 2007). Commonly referred to as the Bondar report, this publication proposed that the province should develop a new environmental education policy framework that could be implemented across all curriculum subjects and grades. Acknowledging that over the past decade the global health of the environment had now become a prevalent political concern, the authors of the Bondar Report declared that “schools have a vital role to play in preparing our young people to take their place as informed, engaged, and empowered citizens who will be pivotal in shaping the future of our communities, our province, our country, and our global environment” (Working

Group, 2007, p. 1). Within this report, environmental education was defined as “education about the environment, for the environment, and in the environment that promotes an understanding of, rich and active experiences in, and an appreciation for the dynamic interactions” (p. 6) of the planet’s physical and biological systems; the dependency of social and economic systems on natural systems; scientific and human elements of environmental problems; and the intended and unintended consequences of interactions between human systems and natural systems. It was acknowledged within the Bondar Report that “the reorganization of curriculum in the late 1990s significantly reduced the opportunities to study the subject of the environment as a result of eliminating optional courses in environmental science,” while “environmental expectations embedded in some courses or subjects remained” (Working Group, 2007, p. 2). To support this vision proposed in the Bondar report, the government identified OE as a critical component of environmental education “concerned with providing experiential learning in the environment to foster a connection to local places, develop a greater understanding of ecosystems, and provide a unique context for learning” (Working Group, 2007, p. 6).

During this same year, COEO released a report written by Foster and Linney (2007) titled *Reconnecting Children through Outdoor Education: A Research Summary*. Within COEO’s report, Foster and Linney revised the term outdoor education, changing it to outdoor experiential education (OEE), which they defined as relating curricula to real-life situations. Foster and Linney stated that “OEE is a vital learning methodology for today’s children and young people” that benefits education for curriculum, community, character, wellbeing, and the environment (p. 2). To support this statement,

Foster and Linney argued that their “summary is a compelling synthesis of a wide variety of current outcomes-based research” which, “offers concrete evidence as to why OEE should become an essential and publicly funded part of education for the future” (p. 2). In regards to the use of school-board-operated OE centres, within this report these scholars stated that “at a time when our children desperately need to be re-engaged with their natural surroundings,” that “financial constraints and a ‘back to the basics’ movement have led to many of these centres being closed over the past couple of decades, with the remaining ones in constant jeopardy” (p. 23). Arguing that “government funded OEE programs are invaluable in that they ensure equity of access for all students and they function outside the limitations that govern traditional teaching and learning in schools” (p. 23), Foster and Linney referenced a scholarly study by Australian OE scholars McLeod and Allen-Craig (2004), who evaluated the effectiveness of an OE program operated through an all-boys private school. Based on this evidence, on behalf of COEO, Foster and Linney recommended that the provincial government should provide school boards with further public funds for the establishment of new OE centres and programs to ensure that elementary students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 can receive a minimum of two one-day OEE programs and one five day residential OEE program.

Shortly after the release of the Bondar report and COEO’s Research Summary, City of Toronto Recreation staff member Crawford (2007) published an article in *Pathways* arguing that many people involved in OE across Ontario continue to cling to the status quo of being dependent on the operation of school-board-operated OE centres. Crawford stated to COEO members that:

We can no longer expect to move to another organization or create a new education centre. Our ivory towers (our field centres) are in ruins having sucked away a disproportionate amount of our collected funding. Once we were many but now we are few. There are only a few centres left with sufficient sustainable resources to continue providing traditional outdoor education. (p. 32)

Crawford contended that OE practitioners needed to stop assuming that school boards can afford the huge costs to transport students to OE facilities so they can participate in environmental education programs predominantly taught by volunteers. Crawford argued that the increased use of volunteers for the delivery of OE demonstrated to the school boards and the general public that it is not worth paying for OE. To promote change, Crawford encouraged practitioners to change how they deliver OE programs to Ontario students, by developing partnerships with schools and classroom teachers to provide OE opportunities within local school communities.

Following the release of the Bondar report, the Ontario Ministry of Education published a revised science curriculum for both the elementary and secondary grades, which included environmental education as a central pedagogical focus. At the elementary level the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) released a new science curriculum for grades 1–8 that provided an “increased emphasis on science, technology, society, and the environment (STSE)” and called on “teachers to integrate environmental education effectively into the curriculum” (p. 36). Stipulated within this new curriculum, teachers were encouraged to regularly “take students out of the classroom and into the world beyond the school, to observe, explore, and investigate” (p. 36). In particular,

teachers were encouraged to facilitate scientific outdoor learning opportunities that focussed on fostering among students a stronger sense of place and knowledge about the impact of human activity on the environment. At the secondary level the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008a, 2008b) released a revised science curriculum for grades 9 and 10, and 11 and 12. Within both of these curriculum documents, the government reiterated word for word the Ministry's new focus on STSE stipulated in the grades 1-8 science curriculum, and reintroduced environmental science as an elective for grade 11 students.

In 2009 the Ontario Ministry of Education released a document titled *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools*. Within this policy framework, school boards, schools, and classroom teachers were now asked to “enrich and complement students’ classroom learning by organizing out-of-classroom experiences and activities” (Ontario, 2009, p. 17). Although, prior to the publication of this document, several school boards had predominantly relied on the use of school-board-operated OE centres to support them in delivering out-of-classroom experiences, within this new framework the Ontario Ministry of Education now stipulated that school boards should develop broader “partnerships with community organizations (such as non-profit organizations, businesses, farms, and industries) to help extend engagement in and responsibility for environmental education to the broader community” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 17).

### **Curricular Criticism**

In response to the publication of this policy framework, COEO published two articles in its practitioner journal *Pathways*, which criticized the government for failing to

support OE across the province. According to COEO's Past President, and now private school outdoor educator, Grant Linney (2010), although "In *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, the Ontario government makes a few scattered references to the value of local outdoor experiences for the purpose of environmental education. . . it inexplicably limits these experiences to the confines of the schoolyard" (p. 21). Linney proceeded to argue that as a group, outdoor educators share an assumed tenet that OE should occur away from a students' local school community, at school-board-operated OE centres. Identifying four key costs that limit schools from participating in the use of school-board-operated OE centres (including the financial cost of busing; the environmental cost of transportation; the frequency of OEE experiences; and the potential for a limited transfer of learning), Linney recommended that outdoor educators should start teaching within close proximity to schools.

I am not saying that we should close existing outdoor education centres, but let's face it: we're not about to get many more of these relatively expensive facilities. So, let's get our outdoor educators to assume more of a resource role for classroom teachers through a gradual progression of outdoor experiences and the supervisory assistance of well-prepped parents to take their students outdoors at least six times a year. Let's get our students to realize that the life support systems of the planet are all around them and that *up close and personal* can occur locally, repeatedly, relatively inexpensively, and in powerful ways that really bring home connections with themselves, their classmates, and their natural surroundings. (p. 21)



Although Linney claimed that the government had now confined environmental education to school grounds, he conveniently omitted from his critique of the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2009) new environmental education framework that as a strategy to "Provide leadership support to enhance student engagement and community involvement" (p. 16), that schools and classroom teachers were now expected to "enrich and complete students' classroom learning by organizing out-of-classroom experiences and activities" (p. 17). He did not mention that school boards were now mandated to "share links and partnerships with community organizations (such as non-profit organizations, businesses, farms, and industries) to help extend engagement in and responsibility for environmental education to the broader community" (p. 17); nor that the Ministry of Education had now committed itself to providing support for such initiatives by helping to "develop implementation tools for principals to support a school culture that encourages student participation and cooperation in environmental activities in the community" (p. 16).

Another critique of the Bondar report and *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, written by COEO member Bruce Pardy (2010), argued that "Outdoor educators should find little to like in the Ontario government's new policy framework for environmental education" (p. 22). According to Pardy:

The document defines environmental education as 'education for the environment, about the environment, and in the environment' (p. 4). This sentence is as banal as they come. It is interesting only for what it omits: environmental education, apparently, is not education from the environment, which is the business that outdoor educators are in. Instead

environmental education is a ‘deliverable,’ to be provided within the four square walls of a classroom, an environment that teaches a covert curriculum: children belong inside, sitting down, being still. The students’ role is to respond to instructions, not to explore but to receive what is delivered to them. The policy framework does not apply to the values of outdoor education. (p. 23)

Interestingly, Pardy’s critique omitted the second half of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2009) definition of environmental education which states that environmental education promotes active experiences in the planet’s physical and biological systems. Although Pardy (2010) condemned this framework by stating that “the message of this policy framework is that schools will imbue children with conformist environmental beliefs and keep curriculum basically the same” (p. 23), he failed to mention to COEO members that within this policy document school boards, schools, and classroom teachers were now mandated to “enrich and complement students’ classroom learning by organizing out-of-classroom experiences and activities” (Ontario, 2009, p. 17).

Although these two COEO members sought to criticise the efforts of the Ontario Ministry of Education for taking the initiative first to encourage classroom teachers to provide more frequent outdoor learning opportunities within their local school communities, research by Puk and Stibbards (2011, 2012), and Stibbards and Puk (2011), illustrated that a more pressing problem may limit the government’s future ability to encourage its schools and teachers to successfully implement its new cross-curricular environmental education policy framework. Through a multiyear study, measuring the

ecological knowledge of Pre-Service Education students who would become qualified to teach intermediate and senior level environmental science courses upon graduation, Puk and Stibbards discovered that upon beginning their training to teach this specialization, candidates did not have the requisite knowledge to define in their own words basic ecological concepts such as fossil fuels or photosynthesis. Puk & Stibbards (2012) concluded that the Ontario Ministry of Education should not assume that new teachers will have the requisite knowledge to support the integration of environmental education across all curriculum subjects. It is conceivable that based upon this evidence illustrated by Puk and Stibbards that these researchers provided a possible reason why the Ontario Ministry of Education continued to proceed with the implementation of their environmental education framework.

### **Scope of Outdoor Education Centers: 2011–2012**

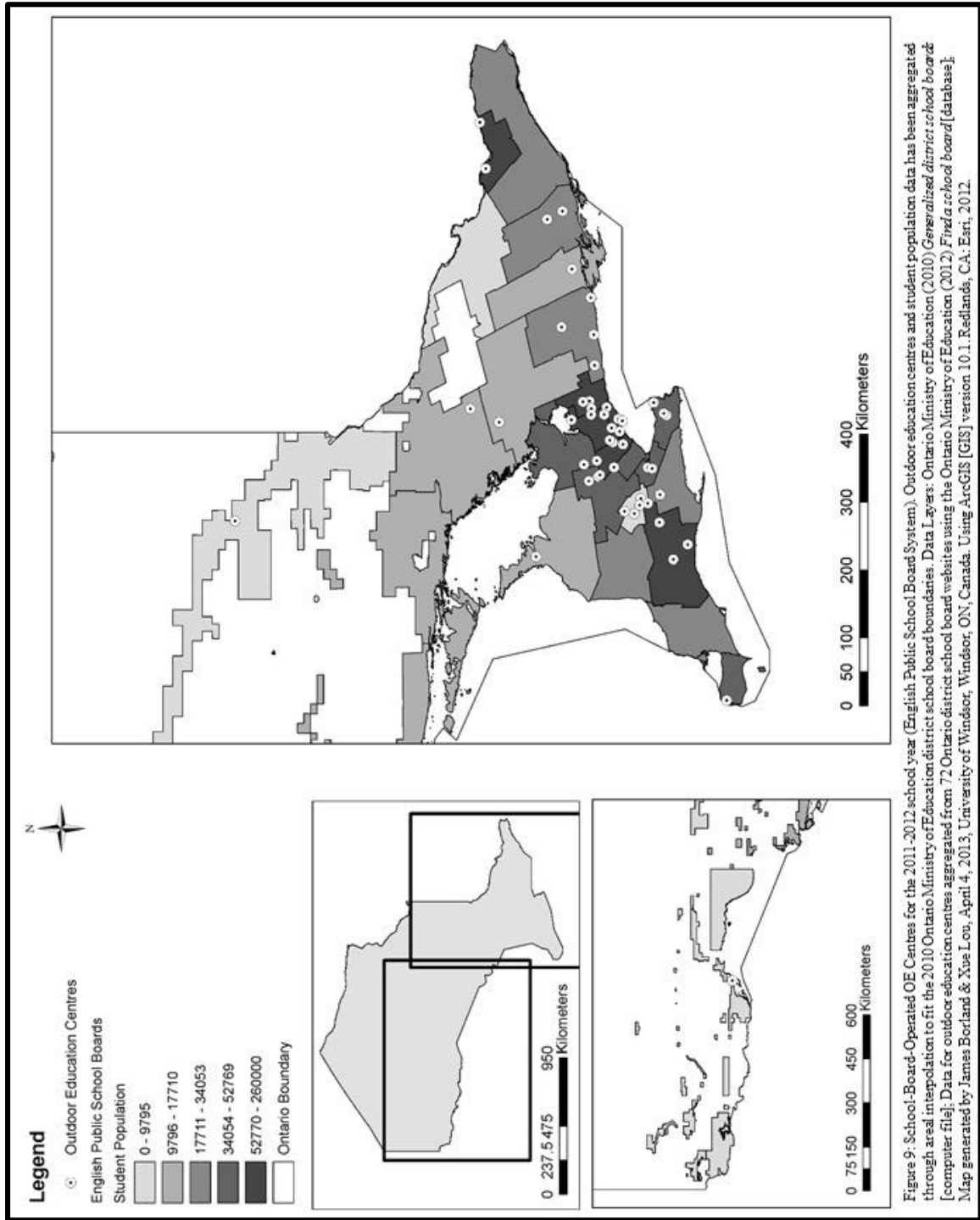
By the 2011–2012 school year, 2,043,117 students were enrolled in Ontario's publicly funded education system across 72 district school boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). A total of 24 district school boards (33.3%) operated one or more OE centres, providing 1,205,382 (59%) of the student population with access to a school-board-operated OE centre. A total of 54 school-board-operated OE centres were in operation across the province with 17 (70.8%) of the boards operating one or more day-use facilities, with 42 day-use properties in operation; 3 (12.5%) school boards operating residential facilities, with 7 facilities in operation; and 5 (20.8%) school boards operating dual-purpose facilities, with a total of 5 facilities in operation (Table 8). By the 2011–2012 school year, the total number of facilities had grown by 3.8% above its previous peak in the 1972–1973 school year.

Table 8: School-Board-Operated OE Centres (1972–1973 to 2011–2012)

<u>Category</u>	1972–1973	1978–1979	1985–1986	1988–1989	1992–1993	2011–2012
<u>Ontario school boards</u>	180	175	161	170	165	72
<u>Boards with OE centres</u>	33 (18.3%)	34 (19.4%)	27 (16.8%)	46 (27%)	28 (17%)	24 (33.3%)
Boards day-use centres	26 (76.5%)	20 (58.8%)	16 (59.3%)	42 (24.7%)	21 (75%)	17 (70.8%)
Boards with residential centres	9 (26.5%)	11 (32.4%)	7 (26%)	20 (11.8%)	10 (35.7%)	3 (12.5%)
Boards with dual-purpose centres	6 (18.8%)	9 (26.5%)	11 (40.7%)	Not Assessed	4 (14.3%)	5 (20.8%)
<u>Total number of OE Centres</u>	48	49	44	130	42	54
Day-use facilities	35 (72.9%)	27 (55.1%)	23 (52.3%)	88 (67.7%)	27 (64.3%)	42 (77.8%)
Residential facilities	7 (14.6%)	13 (26.5%)	9 (20.4%)	42 (32.3%)	9 (21.4%)	7 (13%)
Dual-purpose facilities	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.4%)	12 (27.3%)	Not Assessed	6 (14.3%)	5 (9.2%)
<u>Public system facilities</u>	39	36	39	Not Assessed	36	48
<u>Catholic system facilities</u>	9	13	5	Not Assessed	6	6

Data Sources: 1972-1973 school year data aggregated from Martindale's (1974) *Catalogue of Environmental and Outdoor Education in Ontario Schools* [archival document]; 1978–1979 & 1985–1986 school year data aggregated from the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (1979, 1986) *Catalogue of programs, personnel in outdoor education in Ontario* [archival document]; 1988–1989 school year data aggregated from Eagles and Richardson's (1992) study [archival document]; 2011–2012 school year data aggregated through public access from 72 Ontario district school board websites using the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) *Find a school board* [database].

In the 2011–2012 Ontario school year, the geographic distribution of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres had again increased across both northern and southern Ontario since the 1992–1993 school year. GIS data illustrated in Figure 9 and Figure 10, show that public school boards within Ontario's publicly funded education system were the predominant operators of OE, while the Catholic school board branch operated only four centres, with three facilities located in the province's south and one located in its north. School-board-operated OE centres within both branches of the provinces' publicly



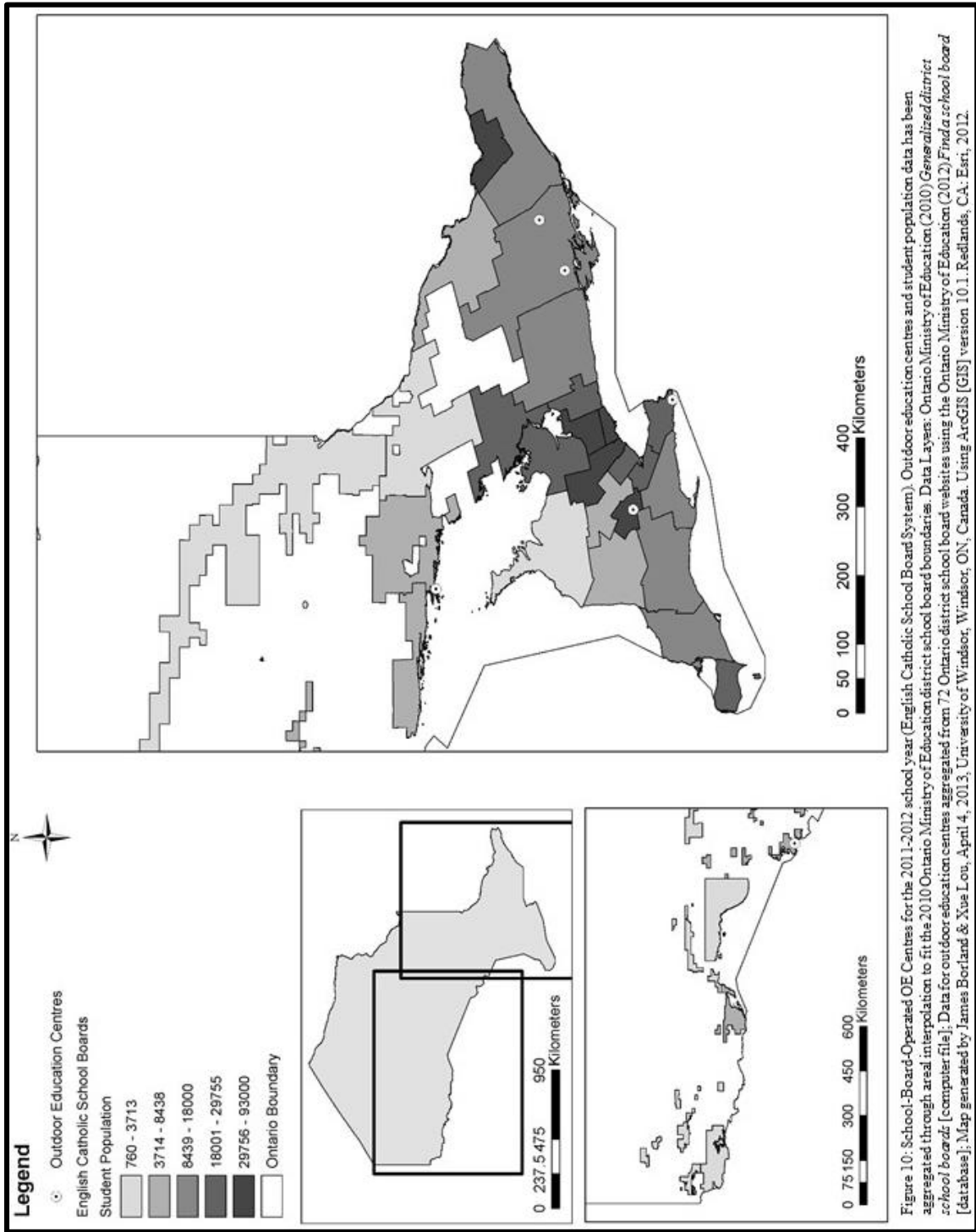


Figure 10: School-Board-Operated OE Centres for the 2011-2012 school year (English Catholic School Board System). Outdoor education centres and student population data has been aggregated through areal interpolation to fit the 2010 Ontario Ministry of Education district school board boundaries. Data Layers: Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) *Generalized district school board*; [computer file]; Data for outdoor education centres aggregated from 72 Ontario district school board websites using the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) *Find a school board* [database]; Map generated by James Borland & Xue Lou, April 4, 2013, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada. Using ArcGIS [GIS] version 10.1. Redlands, CA: Esri, 2012.

funded education system were operated by a diversity of school boards that had enrolments which ranged from 9700 students to 260000 students. Across Southern Ontario, school-board-operated OE centres continued to cluster in and around the GTA, where the highest density of Ontario students was enrolled. Beyond the GTA, school-board-operated OE centres once again expanded in distribution across southern Ontario since the 1992–1993 school year. Where previous facilities had disappeared during the 1978–1979 to 1992–1993 school years, new facilities had now been established to support the education of Ontario students, including in the Greater Essex County District School Board, the Thames Valley District School Board, District School Board of Niagara, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, and the Limestone District School Board.

Six facilities were operated between both public and Catholic branches of the public education system within the province's northern jurisdictions. Facilities which were established in the 1970s such as the Kingfisher OE Centre operated by the Lakehead District School Board, and the Yearley Residential OE Centre continued to be operated by northern district school boards, while the Scarborough Residential OE Centre, previously operated by the Scarborough Board of Education, was now operated by the TDSB, in the jurisdiction of the Near North District School Board. The OE facility of Camp Korah, now operated by the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board, had been reopened since the 1992–1993 school year. New facilities such as Eco Camp Bickell, operated by the District School Board of Ontario North East, and the Killarney Shebanoning OE Centre (formerly the KEEP Centre), operated by the Sudbury Catholic District School Board, also opened after the 1992–1993 school year. Although student

enrolment densities indicate that since the 1992–1993 school year, the number of students enrolled in these northern school boards has declined, based on this data, it can be inferred that the per pupil funding formula introduced in 1997 by the Conservative majority government, may be a factor that has enabled these school boards to support the operation of an OE centre during the 2011–2012 school year.

For the 2011–2012 school year, school-board-operated OE centres were managed either through sole private ownership by individual school boards, or run through a variety of different partnerships with conservation authorities, municipalities, and/or corporate organizations (charitable and/or business corporations). School boards which own exclusive properties for the operation of an OE centre were often associated with geographically smaller, more densely populated urban jurisdictions such as the Toronto District School Board (n.d.), Peel District School Board (n.d.), York Region District School Board (2012), Huron-Superior Roman Catholic District School Board (n.d.), and the Lakehead District School Board (n.d.). Several of these school boards, such as York Region, also operated one or more of their facilities either adjacent to, or on the properties of provincial parks or conservation authorities.

School boards, such as the Greater Essex County District School Board (Bradd & Bachmeier, 2004), the District School Board of Ontario North East (Coté et al., 2003), and the Bluewater District School Board (Greig & Woeller, 2004), operated OE centres through unique partnerships with local corporate entities. The Greater Essex County District School Board operated a field centre on Fighting Island, which is owned by the BASF Chemical Company. The District School Board of Ontario North East operated Eco Camp Bickell, on a residential youth camp property, owned by the charitable



corporation called the Bickell Foundation. The Bluewater District School Board operated the Outdoor Education Institute through a partnership with the Bruce-Grey Foundation, which is a corporate charitable organization that owns the property, while the school board staffed the facility for its students. For each of these school boards, the partnerships with corporate entities made it possible to provide students access to school-board-operated OE centres during the 2011–2012 school year.

School boards which operated more than one OE centre during the 2011–2012 school year often supported their facilities through a mixed group of relationships. For example, the Huron Naturalization Area was operated on City of Kitchener property, through a joint partnership between the city, Waterloo Region District School Board (n.d), and its Catholic counterpart. The York Region District School Board (n.d.) operated its four facilities through a mix of facilities privately owned by the school board, and facilities operated on conservation and provincial parkland property. Through the management of a mixed group of relationships between different organizations, it can be inferred that these school boards were willing to develop unique partnerships and arrangements to ensure their students had access to a school-board-operated OE centre.

### **School Board Outdoor Education Policy**

For the 2011–2012 school year, out of the 24 district school boards which operated an OE facility, less than half of these school boards had an official OE policy posted on their website. School board OE policies varied in depth from providing a simple definition of OE, to outlining the responsibilities of principals, classroom teachers, parents, and students. These OE policies posted on school board websites outlined a variety of policy directions that dictated how classroom teachers were permitted to access

and use outdoor spaces as a pedagogical resource. School boards that did have an official policy, predominantly, either chose to emphasize the use of their OE facilities as the primary site for the provision of OE, or the exclusive site for the delivery of OE opportunities.

Some district school boards which operated an OE centre, but did not have an official OE policy posted on their website, such as the Huron-Superior Catholic, Kawartha Pine Ridge, Greater Essex County, and Hastings and Prince Edward, still provided space on their website to explain the purpose for operating an OE centre. The scope and quality of information available through each of these school boards varied. Although this information could not be characterized as an official policy, it could be inferred that this information played a strong role in influencing how teachers within their school boards may interpret the use of outdoor spaces as a pedagogical resource.

Camp Korah, operated by the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (n.d.), provided a basic document which outlined the purpose of Camp Korah, and stipulated that this site provided students with access to a 180 acre property for the purpose of building skills in the following adventure activities: orienteering, wilderness survival, and cross country skiing. The school board also described this OE centre as a space where students were provided the opportunity to study a variety of natural habitats so they could gain a greater understanding of the flora and fauna that existed within the city limits of Sault Ste. Marie. Program booking and transportation costs, as stipulated on the school board website, were identified as the responsibility of classroom teachers. Consequently, the brevity of information available on the school board website for this facility defined the use of this facility as predominantly a site for the provision of

adventure education opportunities, rather than as a site that focuses on curriculum-based programming.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (n.d.) website, described the use of its four school-board-operated OE centers in a similar way as the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board, but instead of providing a brief two-page document to advertise its programs, this school board provided a 24-page online program guide that teachers were expected to use when planning a visit to one of its facilities. The mission statement for this school board stipulated that “The Kawartha Pine Ridge Outdoor Education program strives to provide curriculum connected experiences designed to help students establish positive, respectful relationships with nature and each other in a hands-on stimulating environment” (p. 1). Staffed by a naturalist employed at each facility, this school board expected the specialist to collaborate with classroom teachers to facilitate predesigned activities that have been identified as “directly related to the expectations identified in the Ontario Curriculum documents” (p. 1). This program guide provided a list of environmental education activities such as stream studies, and outdoor recreational activities such as orienteering that teachers were expected to individually choose. This list identified which Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum document was linked to each individual activity, but did not identify what learning expectations or outcomes students would learn by engaging in these activities. Based on this information, it appears that the use of outdoor spaces facilitated through these school-board-operated OE centres also focused on the delivery of activity-based experiences, rather than curriculum-based OE programs.

The Greater Essex County District School Board, and The Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board, each operated OE centres for the delivery of focussed curriculum-based programs. The Fighting Island Field Centre, operated by the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB), provided a curriculum-based science program for students in grades 7, 8 and 10. This program was advertised by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) through their online publication *Ready, set, green! Tips, techniques, and resources from Ontario educators*, as an example of “environmental education in action” (p. 15). This facility was not advertised on the GECDSB website, but was provided to its teachers through hardcopy curriculum-based program packages. Through the Fighting Island program, students participated in the observation and measurement of the environmental conditions on the island, which was undergoing an environmental restoration project. Student products were assessed and graded by classroom teachers to evaluate what science curriculum expectations students mastered through their visit to this facility (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007; Bradd & Bachmeier, 2004). The Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (2011a), which operated the H. R. Frink Centre, provided teachers and students with access to approximately 500 acres of diverse ecosystems such as a pond, drumlin, forests, and marsh. The variety of ecosystems on this site was used to support curriculum-based unit programs for Kindergarten through Grade 8 students, for the following subjects: Science, Math, the Arts, Social Studies, and Health and Physical Education. Curriculum-based lesson plans were provided on their school board website for teachers and the general public to access, which identified the overall and specific subject expectations that students were expected to learn through the experiences provided at this facility. These

online lesson plan packages outlined both pre-visit and post-visit lessons that teachers were expected to use to help introduce and assess what skills and concepts students learned during their visit. Unlike the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board, and the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, whose school-board-operated OE centres served primarily as outdoor spaces where students could participate in a variety of disparate outdoor activities, the Fighting Island and H. R. Frink Centre each transformed their outdoor spaces into pedagogical resources where students were provided with focussed, curriculum-based programs designed to support the academic development of the students within its school board.

Two district school boards that operated OE facilities in the 2011-2012 school year, had short, simple OE policies. These school boards did not identify school-board-operated OE centres as a requirement for the provision of OE programming. The Bluewater District School Board (1998) stated that it “believes that the continued development of environmental awareness through outdoor experiential learning is essential to the development of all students” (p. 1). The Waterloo Region District School Board (2005) stipulated that it was their policy “to endorse student participation in well-planned off campus and outdoor educational projects consistent with financial resources available” (p. 1). OE was defined as “a holistic method of education used to enrich the school curriculum through effective utilization of the environment” (p. 1). Classroom teachers were encouraged to provide their students with opportunities “to learn through practical experience and observation outside the classroom, as well as in the classroom” (p. 1). These policies relied on the ability and discretion of classroom teachers to

identify, access, and use a variety of different outdoor spaces as pedagogical resources which supported the province's new policy framework for environmental education.

For the 2011–2012 school year district school boards such as York Region, Trillium Lakelands, and Peel, each had policies which emphasized that the use of school-board-operated OE centres should serve as the primary site for OE opportunities. Classroom teachers were still permitted to use their own discretion to access other outdoor spaces as pedagogical resources. The policy of the York Region District School Board (2008) emphasized that their OE facilities served as the primary sites for the delivery of OE programs, but did “not preclude outdoor experiences for students in other natural spaces” (p.1). Natural spaces were defined as “those areas for the study of ecology and conservation that are located on lands that may be privately owned” or “may also be parklands that are adjacent to schools” (p. 1). The OE policy for the Trillium Lakelands District School Board (n.d.) indicated that structured OE programming was facilitated through its Outdoor Education Resource Department. This department was responsible for assisting teachers in the design and facilitation of curriculum-based OE programs for the purpose of increasing student appreciation of, and knowledge about, nature. Although the Yearley OE Centre, operated by this school board, was described as the ideal location for students to experience *the outdoors*, the policy of the Trillium Lakelands District School Board did not restrict teachers to sole use of this facility for the provision of OE programming. The Peel District School Board (2013) indicated that while it operated day and residential programs through its field centres, it also provided in-school and community-based programs for its schools. Although each of these policies emphasized the use of their school-board-operated OE centres as the ideal or primary

sites for the delivery of OE programs, these school boards still permitted teachers to use their discretion to access and use other outdoor spaces as pedagogical resources.

District school boards such as the TDSB, and Lakehead District School Board, specifically stipulated within their OE policies that OE experiences were restricted to the use of their school-board-operated OE centres. The TDSB (2012) advertised that it had a commitment to providing outdoor learning experiences for students at its OE facilities, which cannot be replicated within the classroom. Although the TDSB defined OE as an educational methodology that “brings learning to life and connects students to the built and natural world around them,” it specifically stipulated that OE opportunities are only “available to students across the board through 11 programs at its five overnight and five day centres” (Toronto District School Board, 2012). The Lakehead District School Board stipulated that it was their policy “to support the participation of students and teachers in outdoor education and environmental programs at the Kingfisher Lake Outdoor Education Centre under the auspices of the Kingfisher staff” (Lakehead District School Board, 2003, p.1). Although these school boards had official policies that supported the facilitation of OE experiences for their students, it could be inferred that by restricting the provision of OE opportunities to these specific facilities, these school board policies constrained the ability of classroom teachers to use their own pedagogical discretion to identify, access and use other outdoor spaces within their local school communities.

### **In Memorandum**

On July 20, 2012, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a memorandum to the Directors of Education and the Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities titled: *\$20M Funding for Outdoor Education* (Gallagher & Clarke, 2012, July 20). This \$20

million in funding was announced for the 2012-2013 school year, as a Program Enhancement Grant “to support outdoor learning activities for students provided by school boards or by third party organizations, such as not-for-profit or community groups” (p. 1). Although this funding was allocated to help school boards cover the costs of student user fees and transportation to participate in OE programs, school boards were restricted from using this funding for: “staffing; costs associated with board outdoor education facilities, e.g., repairs, equipment; the purchase or development of learning resources” (p. 2). On October 19, 2012, while visiting the Bluewater Outdoor Education Centre, Ontario Education Minister Laurel Broten, publicly applauded the Bluewater District School Board for the unique partnership it had created with the Bluewater Education Foundation (previously known as the Bruce-Grey Public Education Foundation), where since 2004, the ownership of the facility had been financed and operated by this community-based foundation, while the school board provided the staff and OE programs for its students (Henry). Following the July 20, 2012 memorandum, on December 3, 2012, the Ontario Ministry of Education sent another memorandum to the Directors of Education and Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities titled: *Outdoor Education and Community Partnerships* (Gallagher & Clarke). This memorandum, “encouraged school boards to collaborate with community agencies where possible to develop connected programming within their local communities” (p. 1). It advised school boards that a number of community organizations had been informed about “the opportunity to partner with school boards” (p. 1). The Ministry encouraged its school boards “to liaise with local organizations to foster these partnerships” (p. 1). These memorandums sought to encourage school boards to take action to support the goals



outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2009) environmental education framework, which encouraged school boards, schools and teachers to design and deliver regular curriculum-based OE opportunities for their students within their local school communities, instead of relying as some had in the past, on the sole use of school-board-operated OE centres as catch-all facilities for outdoor learning.

### **Summary**

Again, we reference the research question: *What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?* Two significant changes happened to Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 2003 to 2012 that impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students. Upon the election of the Liberals in 2003, a third wave of public environmentalism, spurred by the emerging issue of climate change (Winfield, 2012), and the publication of books such as Louv's (2005) *Last Child in the Woods*, pushed the general public to call on the government to focus more intently on environmental issues. On October 10, 2006, newspaper reporters Gillespie and Kalinowski published a report in the *Toronto Star*, titled: *Why some kids expect whales in Lake Simcoe*. On March 27, 2007, Education Minister Kathleen Wynne announced that "music classes, art, gym and nature studies-often forgotten as 'frills' in Ontario's push for the 3 R's-will get a \$35 million dollar boost to give children a more well-rounded education" (Brown & Rushowy, 2007, p. B7).

Just like the Progressive Conservatives had done in the 1960s, the Liberals decided to use the provinces' publicly funded education system as a vehicle to support

the environmental movement, stating that “Environmental education is a vital tool that helps young people understand the nature and complexity of environmental challenges and builds their capacity to take appropriate action” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 3). In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education published a report by the Working Group on Environmental Education which supported the development and implementation of a cross-curricular environmental education framework. By 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a new cross-curricular environmental education framework, to be implemented across all grades and curriculum subjects. Within this document the government encouraged classroom teachers to design and deliver regular curriculum-based OE opportunities for their students, by making use of outdoor spaces located within their local school communities.

Although OE was identified within the Bondar report as an important pedagogical methodology, which would play a critical role in the implementation of the province’s new cross-curricular environmental education framework (Working Group on Environmental Education, 2007), instead of encouraging school boards to develop new school-board-operated OE centres for the exclusive delivery of OE opportunities, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) chose to encourage its school boards to establish new partnerships with local community organizations to provide OE opportunities. On behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Education, Gallagher and Clarke (2012a) announced new funding for school boards to provide OE opportunities. While this funding was specifically designated to cover the costs of transportation and user fees, school boards were specifically restricted from using this money to cover costs associated with school-board-operated OE centres. To ensure school boards would begin to develop unique

partnerships with community organizations for the delivery of OE opportunities, the Ministry of Education contacted potential partners located within individual jurisdictions. The government then announced these efforts through another memorandum, in which school boards were encouraged by the Ministry of Education to develop such partnerships (Gallager & Clarke, 2012b).

During the development of these events, on behalf of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), Foster and Linney (2007) published a research summary, in which they recommended that the provincial government should provide further funding for the establishment of new school-board-operated OE centers. Although Foster and Linney argued that government funded OE programs are critical to ensure the equitable education of Ontario students, they chose to support such claims based on evidence from a study about the effectiveness of an OE program offered through an all-boys private school. Although no new funding for the development of school-board-operated OE centres was provided by the provincial government, upon the 2009 release of the Ontario Ministry of Education's policy framework for environmental education, COEO members Linney (2010) and Pardy (2010) each published critiques of this framework within COEO's practitioner journal *Pathways*. Both Linney and Pardy addressed the COEO membership, asserting the claim that this framework would constrain the delivery of OE opportunities to school grounds. Neither of these critics reported to the COEO membership that through this new framework, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) was now encouraging schools and classroom teachers to develop partnerships with community organizations for the provision of OE opportunities within their local school communities.

Although Linney (2010) and Pardy (2010) warned COEO members that the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2009) new environmental education framework would constrain the delivery of OE opportunities solely to school grounds, by the 2011–2012 school year the prevalence of school-board-operated OE centres had grown slightly beyond its previous peak posted in the 1972-1973 school year. Just as school-board-operated OE centres had been broadly distributed across the province throughout the 1960s and early 1970s when the government had been covering 60% of the total costs for the public school system. By the 2011–2012 school year, these facilities were again broadly distributed across the province, although many school-board-operated OE centres were now operated through a diverse group of partnerships with corporate charities, municipalities, and conservation authorities. While these partnerships made the operation of some school board OE centres possible, the greatest prevalence of facilities continued to cluster within the GTA and its adjacent jurisdictions, where school boards continued to operate OE centres through exclusive ownership.

Although the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) did acknowledge that school-board-operated OE centres could be used as one of many sites for the provision of OE opportunities, this new policy framework for environmental education now pushes school boards, schools, and classroom teachers to look beyond the sole use of these specialized educational facilities for the provision of outdoor learning opportunities. Consequently, while some school boards such as the TDSB continue to insist that the sole use of school-board-operated OE centres is important for the provision of OE opportunities, such constraints may simply make it difficult for classroom teachers within those jurisdictions to effectively support the government's new environmental education initiative. As

stated three decades earlier by Jim Wood (1977a), it could be argued that the policy framework introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2009, supports the development of *third generation* OE programs, where school-board-operated OE centres serve as sites that support the delivery of focussed curriculum-based OE programs, instead of serving simply as catch-all facilities for the provision of all outdoor learning opportunities. Now outlined through an official policy framework published by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009), the future of school-board-funded OE opportunities are no longer conceptually chained to the exclusive use of school-board-operated OE centres, but instead once again encourage classroom teachers to use their own pedagogical expertise to identify, access, and use appropriate local outdoor spaces for the education of Ontario students.

## **Chapter 10: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

This dissertation provides the first empirical account about how Ontario school-board-operated OE centres have evolved from 1960 to 2012. It has been guided by the central research question: *How have Ontario school-board-operated OE centres evolved since the establishment of the first facility in 1960?* This dissertation illustrates that the design and use of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres is historically predicated on a system of values promoted by the former North American Conservation movement whose influence continues to shape how many contemporary North Americans perceive their spatial relationships to the natural world. It challenges the conclusions of Eagles and Richardson (1992), who reported that from 1960 to the 1988-1989 school year, that the use of these specialized facilities has experienced, “a slow, but steady growth in Ontario schools” (p. 14). This dissertation illustrates that from 1960 to 2012, the state of Ontario school-board-operated outdoor education centres underwent several waves of growth during periods of economic prosperity, and decline during periods of economic recession. Based on the research findings reported through this dissertation, stakeholders involved in the development of new policy and/or are responsible for making decisions regarding the operation of school board OE centres, are recommended to seriously consider how the development of new facilities or the decision to continue operating an existing centre benefits the education of Ontario students.

### **Revisiting the Research Problem**

The design and operation of specialized learning facilities is not a neutral process, but a process that is always embodied within a system of values promoted by specific social movements (Burke and Grovensor, 2008). By acknowledging how the ideology of

the former Conservation movement continues to influence how present-day Ontarians conceptually perceive their relationships to nature, stakeholders involved in the operation of school board OE centres are challenged to confront how the use of these facilities has taught many people to artificially segregate themselves from the surrounding natural world. Some scholars (Andrews, 2003; Potter & Henderson, 2004; Foster & Linney, 2007; Breunig & O'Connell, 2008; Sharp & Breunig, 2009), several members of the southern Ontario news media (Kalinowski, 2003, January 28; Linney, 2002, November 21; Payne, 2008, April 1; Spears, April 22, 1995), and numerous classroom teachers (Tan & Pedretti, 2010) continue to spatially promote the idea that school-board-operated OE centres are essential for the proper moral development of Ontario students because they provide one of the only spaces where children can still be exposed to nature. Through the promotion of these ideals, these stakeholders overlook the fact that the use of these school facilities, like any other school facilities are finite. Although stakeholders invested in specific educational issues often assume that school facilities exist as stable sociological givens, this dissertation provides an empirical account which illustrates the opposite—that the sustainability of school facilities are susceptible to political change.

### **Revisiting the 1960s**

To discover the ideas and purposes that lay behind the development of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres during the 1960s, the following research question was asked: *What were the official policy goals for Ontario school-board-operated OE centres in the 1960s, and how well did these early facilities meet these goals?* The initial reason why most school boards decided to get involved in the operation of OE centres, was because the Ontario Department of Education made it an official policy to encourage

school boards to establish and operate their own OE facilities. This strategy, on behalf of the government, was guided by the underlying ideas and values of the conservation education movement. Upon the emergence of the North American environmental movement in the 1960s, which conflicted with the provinces' growing natural resource and manufacturing industries, the promotion of conservation education through the use of school-board-operated OE centres, enabled the government to frame itself as a supporter of environmentalism, while allowing it to evade public calls to increase environmental regulations on industry. By passing the 1965 amendment to the *Schools Administration Act*, which permitted school boards with enrolments of 10,000 or more students to develop their own OE centres, the government was able to target school boards in urban ridings to appease public sentiment where the environmental movement was garnering its greatest support. The initial development and use of school-board-operated OE centres excelled in promoting the values of conservationism, by spatially framing the use of school-board-operated OE centres as the best way teachers could expose their students to a variety of *natural ecosystems*. Therefore, the provincial government was able to embed within the public ethos the idea that these facilities served as one of the few moral landscapes where Ontario students could develop an appreciation of *nature*.

By promoting the idea that the use of school-board-operated OE centres would help prepare the provinces' present students to become the future leaders of society who would resolve the environmental concerns of the 1960s, the Ontario government successfully offloaded responsibility for environmental issues onto the shoulders of its school boards and the provinces' next generation of eligible voters. Over time, the implementation of this strategy made many classroom teachers dependent on the use of



these facilities for the provision of all outdoor learning experiences (Eyres, 1973). As a result, many teachers began to place very little emphasis on educating Ontario students about the natural components located in their local urban, suburban and rural school communities (Eyres, 1973; Martindale, 1974; Wood, 1977b). This served to disconnect several generations of Ontarians from developing a broader understanding about the role that nature plays as a regular aspect of our daily material surroundings.

### **Revisiting 1960 to 2012**

By the 1970s, as the political climate began to shift, the ways school boards were managed changed, including the operation of school board OE centres. As Ontario school boards progressed through several periods of economic recession, how the government supported OE programs, how school boards operated their OE centres, and how teachers accessed outdoor spaces, also underwent a number of changes. To develop a greater understanding about how these changes influenced the operation of school-board-operated OE centres, the following research question was asked: *What significant changes happened with Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from the 1960s to 2012, and how have these changes impacted the ability of these facilities to support the education of Ontario students?*

From 1960 to 2012, the state of Ontario school-board-operated OE facilities underwent several waves of growth and decline. Although, throughout the 1960s, the provincial government had openly encouraged school boards to establish their own OE centres, upon the onset of a provincial recession in the 1970s the scope of school-board-operated OE centres began to contract, particularly across rural and northern Ontario. As the decades progressed, Ontario school boards became increasingly burdened by issues

which required more immediate attention, such as the need to reallocate funding to address the deteriorating state of many school buildings built during the 1950s and 1960s (Gidney, 1999; Hansen, 1993; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1975a). To address these issues, many school board trustees reallocated funding from their ancillary educational services, including the operation of school board OE centres. As a result, some school-board-operated OE centres experienced significant budget cuts, while several other facilities were closed.

Since the 1960s, what historically allowed some Ontario school boards the ability to establish and continue to operate OE centres often were the privileges afforded to a particular board because they were located in a high density urban area that provided school board trustees with access to a more affluent property tax base from which they could levy further funding for the operation of non-mandated programs and services. From 1960 to 1997, these circumstances promoted systemic academic inequities between students enrolled in the provinces' more affluent southern and urban school boards who had access to a greater number of academic services, while students enrolled in the provinces' less affluent rural and northern school boards often did not have access to such services. After the Ontario Conservatives changed the financial structure of the provincial education system in 1998, several school boards developed innovative partnerships with local corporate organizations to fund the operation of their OE centres. In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education chose to encourage the development of such partnerships, by stipulating through the province's new environmental education framework, that school boards were now expected to develop new partnerships with local organizations to provide more regular community-based OE opportunities.

Since the 1970s, as the state of school-board-operated OE centres has changed, several prominent members of the COEO have openly criticized the Ontario provincial government for failing to provide support for OE services (Aikman, 1976; Birchard, 1983; Foster and Linney, 2007; Linney, 2010; Pardy, 2010; Whitcombe & Gyemi-Schulze, 2002). Since the amendments were made to the Schools Administration Act, and legislation was passed in 1976 which permitted school board trustees the unrestricted freedom to raise their local property tax levy to cover the cost of ancillary services, the precedent has been established that the decision to fund and operate school board OE centres is made at the jurisdictional discretion of individual school boards. No archival evidence was uncovered through the construction of this dissertation which illustrates that any public funding has ever been specifically provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education for the specific purpose of helping school boards continue to operate existing OE centres or develop new facilities.

Although more recent COEO members such as Linney (2010) and Pardy (2010) continue to criticize the government for failing to provide support for OE services, over its 50 year existence, the COEO has only provided two solutions to resolve this problem (Aikman, 1976; Birchard, 1983; Foster & Linney, 2007; Kingsmill & Whitcombe, 1997; Linney, 2010; Pardy, 2010; Whitcombe & Gyemi-Schulze, 2002). The first solution proposed by Whitcombe and Gyemi-Schulze (2002) calls on the government to re-establish the right of school boards to levy property taxes to pay for such facilities. This solution supports the perpetuation of systemic inequalities across the provincial education system. The second solution proposed by Foster and Linney (2007) recommends that the government provide further funding for the establishment of new OE facilities and

programs. This latter solution obfuscates the fact that since the 1960s, it has been the jurisdictional responsibility of individual school boards to decide whether or not to operate an OE centre. In contrast to the social incongruities embodied within these two solutions, based on the research findings reported through this dissertation, new implications can be drawn from this historical narrative that stakeholders should consider when designing future policy governing the operation of school board OE centres.

### **Implications**

In response to the final research question of this dissertation: *based on these findings, what are the implications for future educational policy related to school-board-operated OE centres in Ontario?* Three key implications can be drawn from this historical narrative that stakeholders involved in the future design of policy related to school-board-operated OE centres could use to better inform their decisions. These three implications are: (a) the development of clear rationales to justify the operation of specialized facilities; (b) the development of broad-based community partnerships with specific schools, classroom teachers, and local organizations; and (c) the acceptance by school communities of the finite nature of some school board facilities. Upon consideration of these three implications, it is postulated that stakeholders involved in the design of policy and the operation of school board OE centres will be better prepared to make informed decisions regarding the feasibility of funding a school-board-operated OE centre.

**Develop clear rationales.** To stay relevant during times of economic constraint, Wood (1977b) contended that school-board-operated OE centres should evolve in line with the political changes that occur within individual school boards and across the

provincial education system. As demonstrated through this dissertation, it is important that stakeholders involved in the operation of school-board-operated OE centres, effectively articulate clear rationales for why their school boards should fund their facilities (L. Glassford, personal communication, July 28, 2014). To accomplish this goal, stakeholders should consider how the programs offered through specialized education facilities support changes in the provincial curriculum, as well as the unique ways present services provided through school-board-operated OE facilities could be redesigned to more effectively support classroom learning. As Bowyers (1996) states, stakeholders involved in the operation of school board OE centres should be able to show and communicate what curriculum learning outcomes students should be able to demonstrate by the end of an OE experience. Stakeholders who are able to show school board administrators and trustees, the people who make budget decisions, why funding their OE facilities is a worthwhile pursuit, will be better prepared to weather the ongoing tides of economic change, particularly when school boards examine ways to save money.

Baird and Eagles (1998) state that since there has never been a policy or legal requirement that school boards operate an OE centre, the use of specialized educational facilities that have “political, legal, or policy weakness, must show continuous and long-term effectiveness if they are to survive in a competitive educational environment” (Baird & Eagles, 1998, p. 12). In a competitive education environment such as the Ontario provincial education system, where essential school board programs and facilities receive budgetary priority over ancillary services such as school-board-operated OE centres, one solution that several outdoor educators have repeatedly recommended to their colleagues is to (re)design OE programs so that they support and enrich the classroom curriculum

(Baird & Eagles, 1998; Brown, 1983; Eaton, 1999; Glew, 1994; Ingelton, 1994; Morris, 1993; Vinson, 1980; Wood, 1977b). While scholars such as Sharpe and Breunig (2009) contend that numerous school-board-operated OE centres were closed because of a conservative shift during the 1990s to early 2000s in the educational ideology of the provincial government, such interpretations promote a simplified view of history. During this period, the Harris/Eves Conservative government did financially restructure the provincial education system, which changed the status quo in how school boards were funded within the provincial education system. This pushed several southern Ontario metropolitan school board trustees to impose budget cuts on out-of-classroom expenditures, including the closure of three TDSB OE facilities. Nevertheless, in the midst of the reign of this same government, it should be acknowledged that three school boards opened new OE facilities. A key factor that made the establishment of these new OE facilities possible, at a time when school-board-operated OE centres were struggling across the GTA, was the effort that the designers of these programs put into ensuring they clearly articulated to all their constituents within their school board community how the programs offered through their facilities would support the direct delivery of the classroom curriculum.

Over several decades, numerous OE centre practitioners, classroom teachers, and school administrators have repeatedly warned their colleagues who work at school-board-operated OE centres, that they would continue to face the fate of budget cutbacks and facility closures unless they redesigned the use of their facilities to more effectively support the direct delivery of the provincial curriculum (Bell, 1995; Biggs, 1979; Birchard, 1995; Bowyers, 1996; Eaton, 1999; Glew, 1994; Ingelton, 1994; Morris, 1993,

1995, 1997; Richardson, 1980; VandenHazel, 1986; Vinson, 1980; Wood, 1977b). Since the late 1970s, several prominent COEO members have published commentary which promoted resistance to taking such action. For example, during the early 1980s, in the face of province-wide school board budget cuts to OE services COEO members such as Cousineau (1980) and Birchard (1983) contended that schools and classroom teachers should more closely align themselves with the use of school-board-operated OE centres. By the 1985-1986 school year, the number of school-board-operated OE centres had continued to decline by 10.2 percent. In 1998, TDSB OE practitioner Mark Whitcombe (1998) declared that the provincial curriculum is only trend. By 2000, upon becoming new Director of TDSB OE centres, Whitcombe's position on the curriculum did not prevent significant cuts and the closure of three school-board-operated OE centres within this school board. In 2010, COEO members Linney and Pardy each criticized the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) for introducing a new environmental education policy framework which they claimed would constrain outdoor learning to immediate school grounds. This policy framework actually encouraged school boards to provide more regular OE opportunities through a students' local school community. When the government announced on July 20, 2012, that it would provide \$20 million dollars in new funding "to support outdoor learning activities for students" (p. 1), it is interesting to note that in light of Linney's and Pardy's critiques the government restricted school boards from using this funding to cover "costs associated with board outdoor education facilities" (p. 2).

**Develop partnerships.** Another way stakeholders involved in the operation of school-board-operated OE centres could further demonstrate how the use of their

specialized facilities supports the delivery of the classroom curriculum would be to forego the dependency on the strict use of OE centres as the sole sites for outdoor learning, and instead develop partnerships with schools and classroom teachers to deliver OE programs within their local school communities (Brown, 1980; Crawford, 2007; Eaton, 1999; Vinson, 1980; Wood, 1977b). As Wood (1977b) describes, upon the onset of the provincial recession in the 1970s he redesigned his school board OE programs so that his staff travelled to their board's schools to facilitate outdoor learning experiences, instead of always moving students to their specialized facilities. As a result of making such changes, Wood reported that his staff now felt they were better able to deliver OE programs specifically designed to meet the academic needs of a particular school or classroom teacher. Upon making such changes, Wood reported that his school board was able to refocus the pedagogical rationale for operating their two OE centres. Rather than continuing to be used as catch-all facilities for the facilitation of all outdoor learning opportunities, the purpose of these two facilities was re-conceptualized to provide classroom teachers with access to unique ecosystems (not available within their local school communities) for the specific purpose of facilitating site-dependent environmental studies lessons and the delivery of residential OE experiences.

At a broader scope, for school boards still interested in continuing to operate existing OE centres, or considering the establishment of a new facility, to ensure a greater scope of financial sustainability for these facilities, stakeholders should explore the possibility of developing partnerships with local private and charitable corporate organizations (Bradd & Bachmeirer, 2004; Glew, 1996; L. Glassford, personal communication, July 28, 2014; Jordison, 2003). Although curricular programming is an



important aspect which may be further enhanced when using school-board-operated OE centres, history demonstrates that for most school boards it is not financially sustainable to operate an OE centre solely upon the assumption that a board will be able to perpetually allocate budgetary funding for these non-mandated facilities. After several decades of contraction in the prevalence of school-board-operated OE centres, and upon the passing of Bill 160, several school boards developed unique partnerships with local corporate organizations to operate existing facilities, or establish new school-board-operated OE centres. Partnerships developed between organizations such as the District School Board of Ontario North and the Bickell Foundation, the Bruce-Grey Public Education Foundation and the Bluewater District School Board, and the Greater Essex County District School Board and the BASF Chemical Corporation, provided each of these school boards with a greater sense of financial sustainability. It is important that scholars develop a greater understanding of these unique partnerships so that they can help broaden our understanding of the many ways school boards can fund school-board-operated OE centres.

**Accept the finite nature of school facilities.** Although some school-board-operated OE centres have successfully been able to continuously adapt to political changes within the provincial education system and continue to provide a benefit for the education of Ontario students, it is just as important for the stakeholders involved in the operation of these specialized facilities to recognize when particular facilities have served their time and need to be closed so that other programs and facilities better suited to address the current and future needs of Ontario students can be funded. As previously stated, in the 1960s the development of school-board-operated OE centres provided many

schools with a quick logistical solution for the delivery of OE experiences to a historically unprecedented number of students. However, as the research findings presented through this dissertation indicate, upon the onset of a provincial recession in late 1970s and again in the 1990s, some of these specialized facilities started to drain funding from school boards struggling to keep their schools in operation. For school boards in such positions, it was no longer feasible, nor logical to operate OE facilities and other ancillary educational services at the operational expense of schools. Although several stakeholders involved in the operation of school board OE centres continue to contend that these spaces are essential for ensuring the proper moral development of Ontario students, it is important for these stakeholders to recognize that past practitioners such as Wood (1977b), Audrey Wilson (Brown, 1980), Bell (1995) and Birchard (1995), as well as the implementation of past initiatives by the Ontario Teachers' Federation (1970, 1971, 1973), Ontario Progressive Conservatives (Gayfer, 1976; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1975b, 1975c, 1977), and the present Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) environmental education policy framework, empirically prove that such contentions are factually incorrect. The delivery of school board OE programs does not require the use of specialized facilities, but instead the pedagogical ability on behalf of outdoor educators and classroom teachers to make effective use of surrounding outdoor spaces in the delivery of the provincial curriculum. Although some school boards may continue to choose to use school-board-operated OE centres for the provision of specific OE experiences, it is important to recognize that such sites should not be operated as catch-all facilities for all outdoor learning opportunities, because outdoor educators and classroom

teachers are just as capable of facilitating many OE experiences through the use of spaces within their local school communities.

### **Future Areas of Research**

Based on the conclusions that can be drawn from this dissertation, there are three key areas where scholars who specialize in the study of specialized educational facilities can focus the direction of future research. For scholars interested in issues related to OE, this dissertation demonstrates that there is a need for further research regarding how the pedagogical design of OE experiences can support the delivery of curriculum within regional education systems. For educational researchers interested in addressing the historical and geographic problems of education systems, the research methodology of historical geographic information science (HGIS) presents new opportunities for scholars to discover innovative insights and challenge previously taken for granted assumptions. At a broader scope, this dissertation illustrates the important need for scholars to develop a deeper understanding about the role that the political negotiation of space plays in shaping the design of school facilities, the pedagogy of teachers, and the experiences of students.

Although Scholars such as Potter and Henderson (2004), Breunig and O'Connell (2008), and Sharp and Breunig (2009), advocate the proliferation of specialized semester-long four-credit High School Integrated Curriculum Programs (ICP's), as a solution for the closure of numerous school-board-operated OE centres, this solution is limited in its ability to improve the state of OE within the Ontario provincial education system and other regional education systems, because these programs are only available for small groups of secondary school students. Since the implementation of the Ontario Ministry

of Education's (2009) recent environmental education policy framework which now encourages all schools and classroom teachers to provide regular outdoor learning opportunities for their students, research into alternative programs which can be used to support the education of *all* students, including elementary school students is required. While pedagogical resource books such as Chiarotto's (2011) *Natural Curiosity: Building Children's Understanding of the World through Environmental Inquiry* are beginning to fill such gaps, further research needs to be conducted, and pedagogical resources produced, to support delivery of OE programs for Ontario elementary school students.

Since this dissertation shows that the prevalence of school-board-operated OE centres has historically grown during times of economic prosperity, and contracted during periods of economic recession, further research now needs to be conducted to document, discuss, and help resolve issues regarding the financial operation of these unique educational facilities. A greater understanding of both the capital and operational costs associated with the management of school-board-operated OE centres remains an untouched topic within the scholarly literature. Now that this study illustrates how the prevalence of school board facilities is dependent upon cyclical changes in its regional economy, a greater understanding about the financial operations of school-board-operated OE centres within the academic literature, could provide stakeholders currently involved in the operation of such facilities, and those interested in establishing new facilities, with a better understanding about the common financial issues associated with the management of school-board-operated OE centres.

This dissertation also illustrates how the methodology of HGIS can be used for uncovering new insights about the ways we understand how regional education systems

function. Through the creation of a HGIS research design, this dissertation was able to integrate the use of conventional archival research methods with statistical and GIS analysis. Through the use of these multiple forms of data collection and analysis, a greater understanding about how complex historical and geographic factors have influenced the development, operation, and use of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres was discovered. This dissertation demonstrates that the future application of HGIS research designs within the academic discipline of Educational Studies holds great promise for addressing present issues and challenging current assumptions about how history and geography influence the administration of regional education systems.

Finally, this dissertation provides further evidence for educational historians that substantiates recent research in this sub-field, which asserts that the design and operation of specialized learning facilities is not a neutral process. Burke and Grovensor (2008) contend school facilities should not be assumed to be passive containers which serve as backdrops where students and educators meet to participate in the facilitation of the curriculum and the process of learning. The design and prescribed uses of school facilities are always created through particular systems of values that are promoted by specific social movements. As social and political values change over time, so does the relevance and use of particular school facilities. Based on Burke and Grovensor's premise and the evidence presented in this dissertation, school facilities should be considered active agents that influence the pedagogy of educators and experiences of students. Although the initiation of this doctoral dissertation sought to assess the historical state of Ontario school-board-operated OE centres from 1960 to 2012, at a broader scope the findings of this study reveal that the long term financial sustainability

of school facilities should not be assumed by social science researchers to be stable sociological givens. Greater acknowledgement about how school facilities are susceptible to political change should be included in future education-based research studies, including the operation of school-board-operated OE centres.

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**APPENDIX A**

## Percentage rate of change of Ontario School-Board-Operated OE Centres

<u>School Year</u>	<u>1978-79</u>	<u>1985-86</u>	<u>1988-89</u>	<u>1992-93</u>	<u>2011-2012</u>
1972-73	2.1%	-8.3%	63%	-12.5%	12.5%
1978-79		-10.2%	165.3%	-14.3%	10.2%
1985-86			195.5%	-4.1%	22%
1988-89				-67.7%	-64%
1992-93					28%

- Positive numbers indicate growth, negative numbers indicate decline

**APPENDIX B**

### Consent to Publish and Copyright Agreement

I understand that my chapter “Sustainability of Ontario School Board-Operated Outdoor Education Centres” will be published in the electronic book entitled *Sustainable Well-Being: Concepts, Issues, and Educational Practices* to be published by the Education for Sustainable Well-Being Press (ESWB Press).

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