Collaborating Towards an Alternative High School for Wells, BC: Exploring Rural Education and Community Development in Place

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Abstract

Rural high schools are often the heart of rural towns, as they can have significant social, cultural, and environmental contributions to community life. The absence of a high school can impact students' mental, physical, and social health and the entire community's social and economic well-being. This research used Community-Based Participatory Research to examine rural education and community development processes using place-responsive approaches in the rural town of Wells, BC. Wells is a unique, dynamic, artsy community in the BC interior and does not currently have a high school. Results suggested that a lack of a high school in Wells had reverberating social and economic effects on individual and community life. Understanding these effects can allow community members to target unique opportunities that counter impacts. Community approaches to alternative education integrated place-responsive, community-, outdoor, and art-based education that reflected community values. These values can be incorporated into educational models and programs to respond to context-specific community desires and needs. Research results can be referred to when determining future directions for local education in Wells and inform more global applications of educational and rural place-based community development policy and practices.

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- **ABE** – Art-Based Education
- **BC** – British Columbia
- **CBE** – Community-Based Education
- **CBPR** – Community-Based Participatory Research
- **CIA** – Cortes Island Academy
- **DWOE** – Dominant Western Outdoor Education
- **EE** – Experiential Education
- **LBL** – Land-Based Learning
- **LNT** – Leave No Trace principles
- **OE –** Outdoor Education
- **PBE** – Place-Based Education
- **PRE** – Place-Responsive Education
- **SD 28** – School District 28
- **SEEC** – Saturna Ecological Education Center
- **UNBC** – University of Northern British Columbia
- **WILD** – Wells Integrated Learning Destination High School

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Introduction

Students from rural communities may not have the same educational opportunities as those from urban communities, and typically have few alternatives if the local high school is deemed inadequate by parents or guardians (Cross & Murphy, 1988; Zimmerman & Weible, 2017). Families will often relocate to pursue educational opportunities for their children, causing youth outmigration or a declining youth population from rural areas (Sullivan et al., 2018). Outmigration is one of the biggest threats to rural communities, and rural outmigration and formal education are intimately linked (Corbett, 2007). A declining student population in an area can result in a downward spiral where less funding is allocated for education, and outmigration increases (Domina, 2006, as cited in Freeman, 2014). In addition, the students who leave rural communities are often rewarded with better educational opportunities in urban communities than the students who stay in their rural communities (Freeman, 2014). In this way, the success of a rural community is linked with the success of its high school (Applegate, 2008).

High schools are particularly crucial in rural communities (Applegate, 2008; Malhoit, 2005). High schools can be a central link to the community, providing significant social, cultural, and environmental contributions to community development and growth (Barter, 2008). High schools can be community gathering places, hosting events that many community members can participate in and creating connections and meaningful relationships between teachers, parents, students, and other community members. These relationships can create a family-like atmosphere that can lead to a sense of shared responsibility for student learning among community members (Peterson et al., 2018). School buildings become a community resource for all community members, rather than just physical buildings for teachers and students to congregate in. School as a community resource is often more feasible for smaller rural schools

and communities than their larger urban counterparts (Barter, 2008). The closeness of community members and the unique rural settings can also provide opportunities for alternative forms of learning, such as community-based learning, land-based learning, and place-responsive learning that emphasize sustainability and encourage environmental forms of learning (Barter, 2008; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Schools and their rural communities, or the place the school is situated in, are closely connected (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). Education policies and curricula in BC are typically applied equally across rural and urban communities (Government of British Columbia, 2022b). These types of policies ignore the variation between types of geographies, communities, and the socio-economic status of community members. Adaptation of school curricula to reflect local setting is up to the teaching staff and their respective pedagogical philosophies, even as resources differ dramatically between rural and urban communities, and possible educational assets and opportunities, particularly in terms of sustainable education, in rural areas go unrecognized and underdeveloped (Azano & Biddle, 2019; Schafft & Biddle, 2014; Sullivan et al., 2018).

Policy makers, including the United Nations, have emphasized concerns about sustainability and the importance of environmental education, and advocate using environmental education to combat climate change (*UNESCO*, 2021). Sustainability education can address environmental issues, note different perspectives, and blur traditional subject boundaries (Orr, 2017; Somerville, 2010). Western education systems have increasingly focused on standardized testing and narrow curricula (Blazer, 2011; James & Williams, 2017; McInerney et al., 2011). The British Columbia provincial curriculum, however, has been redesigned to meet essential 21st-century learning requirements, such as sustainability and transferable learning approaches (Government of British Columbia, 2022b).

Additionally, outdoor education (OE) is often brought forth as an extension of school curriculum and justified by the assumption that OE can address concerns of sustainability and/or reconnect students with nature by getting them outside, even as it may not integrate multiple subjects or engage with complex social or environmental realities and issues locally (Dring et al., 2020; Gilbertson et al., 2006; James & Williams, 2017; O'Connell, 2002). Blenkinsop & Scott (2017) recommended a "change in our fundamental way of thinking about and enacting our relationship to the natural world" (p. 468) through philosophical and educational responses to the environmental crisis, which include intentional approaches to pedagogy that recognize the more-than-human world as having agency, and an increase in outdoor learning. Outdoor learning can be adapted into different subjects, beyond the typical physical education and biology, to result in meaningful learning experiences (Beames et al., 2012). Nevertheless, education systems have been slow to integrate using the outdoors as a space for learning and curricula (Banack, 2018). However, the flexibility of the redesigned BC curriculum allows for alternative approaches to student learning that focus on concept-based, competency-driven strategies rather than a more traditional focus on standardized testing outcomes (Government of British Columbia, 2022b).

This project concerns a small rural community called Wells, located in northern British Columbia. Without a high school, Wells is a community struggling to grow and prosper. Certain interested community members voiced their desire to create a functioning high school in Wells that focuses on integrating the cultural and geographical significance of the area into student programming and increasing students' knowledge of local and global sustainability. By partnering with the University of Northern British Columbia, we (certain community members and I) hoped to create a detailed vision of an outdoor and place-based high school focused on

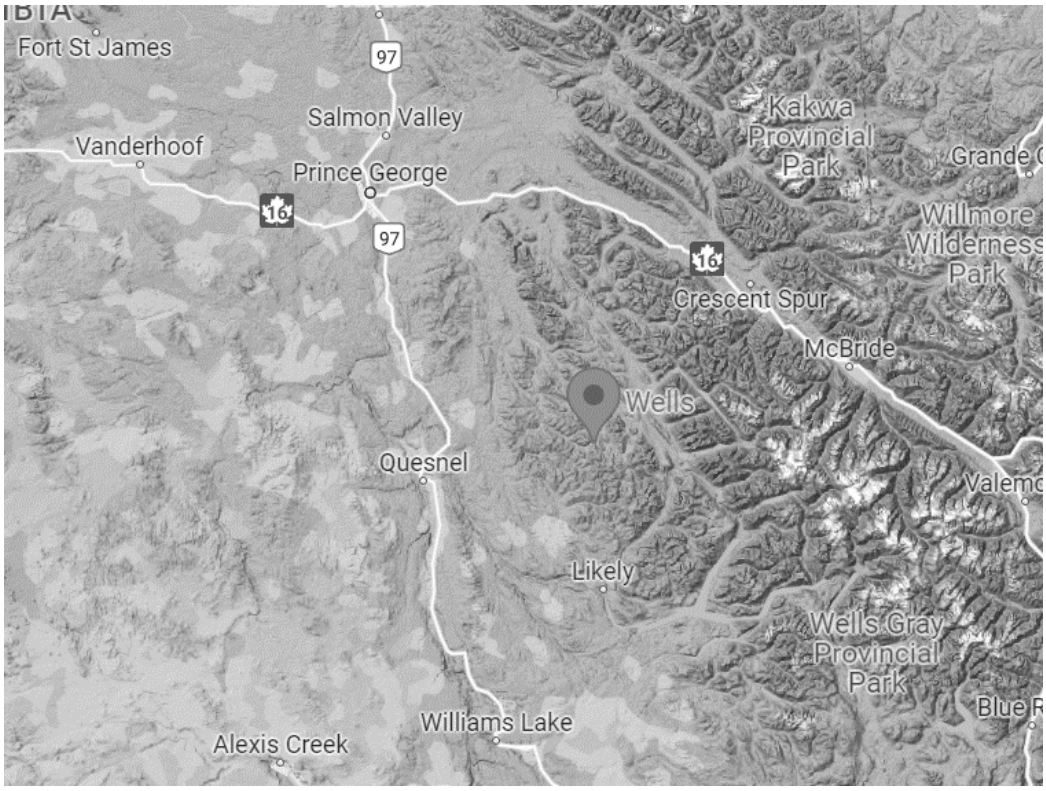
environmental and sustainability for high school children in Wells and the area. This thesis is the report on that collaboration.

Research and Project Context

The rural community of Wells, British Columbia offered an opportunity to learn about and engage with a community exploring creative educational alternatives for high school students. The community is a rural Northern BC town located near the base of the Cariboo Mountains, known for its natural resource history in mining, arts culture, and access to outdoor pursuits (*District of Wells*, n.d.). By road, the town is only accessible via the Barkerville highway, located off Highway 97, (Figure 1). Wells was originally a company town founded by Fred Wells in the 1930s during the gold rush era (Brown & Ash, 2009). At the height of the gold rush in the 1930s, the population of Wells peaked at 4500 residents, and in the 1940s, the population was larger than in Prince George, which is now currently the biggest city in northern BC (*District of Wells*, n.d.). The gold mine closure in 1967 caused dramatic changes to the population and economy of Wells (Brown & Ash, 2009). As of 2021, Wells has a population of 218 permanent residents but can see upwards of 10, 000 tourists pass through between May and September due to the surrounding outdoor recreation opportunities and dynamic art culture in the town (Government of Canada, 2022b; Lovegrove, n.d.). According to Statistics Canada (2022), in the 2021 census, 35 children were living in Wells between the ages of 0-14, and there were 0 kids between the ages of 15-19. It is not unlikely that this absence of a demographic could be due to constraints on families as their children reach high school age in a town with no high school.

Figure 1

Map of Wells and Area



Note. The community of Wells is identified with a pin. Map shows location and isolation of Wells in comparison to other small towns along highway 16 and highway 97. In the top left corner Prince George is included. Adapted from [Wells, BC], by Google, n.d. (http://surl.li/hbtbs). Copyright 2023 by Google.

A new gold mine project by Osisko Development Corporation and Barkerville Gold Mines Ltd. has recently been approved for the Wells area and is expected to impact the town and surrounding area. The proposal includes a mine life of 11 years, requiring approximately 70 construction workers and 333 operational employees (Morgan et al., 2019). The new mining workforce will likely change the town's demographics if approved, as workers may choose to live in the community, or at the nearby work camp. The absence or presence of a high school will also likely influence who will relocate to the area to work at the mine. If there was a high

school in Wells, it may help workers with families with their decision to relocate to the area, as there would be adequate educational opportunities for their children.

In addition to mining, the primary economic industries in Wells are forestry and tourism (*District of Wells*, n.d.). In the area, there is a National Historic Site called Barkerville, as well as the Bowron Lake Provincial Park that hosts a world-famous canoe circuit. There is also a vibrant visual and performing art culture in Wells that is important to community members. In a town of only 214 people, there are two art galleries and opportunities for artists in residence, where artists travel to Wells to showcase their work. Different forms of art programs are regularly offered to community members, including elementary school students. The Wells Barkerville elementary school students regularly participate in programs run by organizations such as Island Mountain Arts and the Sunset Theatre. Figure 2 portrays important places in the community. Pre-covid, the town also held a yearly festival, ArtsWells, that focused on art and music and drew folks from all over the country and beyond (Island Mountain Arts, n.d.). In 2018 (the 15th year for the festival), ArtsWells featured 116 different art experiences, and was attended by 1,333 participants, as well as 905 artists, volunteers, guests, and vendors (Northern Development, 2023). The research project aimed to incorporate these unique aspects and opportunities of the community into the vision for an alternative learning destination for high school students.

Figure 2

Map of Wells Townsite

Note. Map details important places in the community, such as the Wells Barkerville Elementary (the academic cap), the green space beside the school, the Community Hall (the music notes), and the Sunset Theatre (the masks). From [Wells Barkerville Elementary School], by Google, n.d. (bit.ly/3W4FPTk). Copyright 2023 by Google.

Schooling in Wells

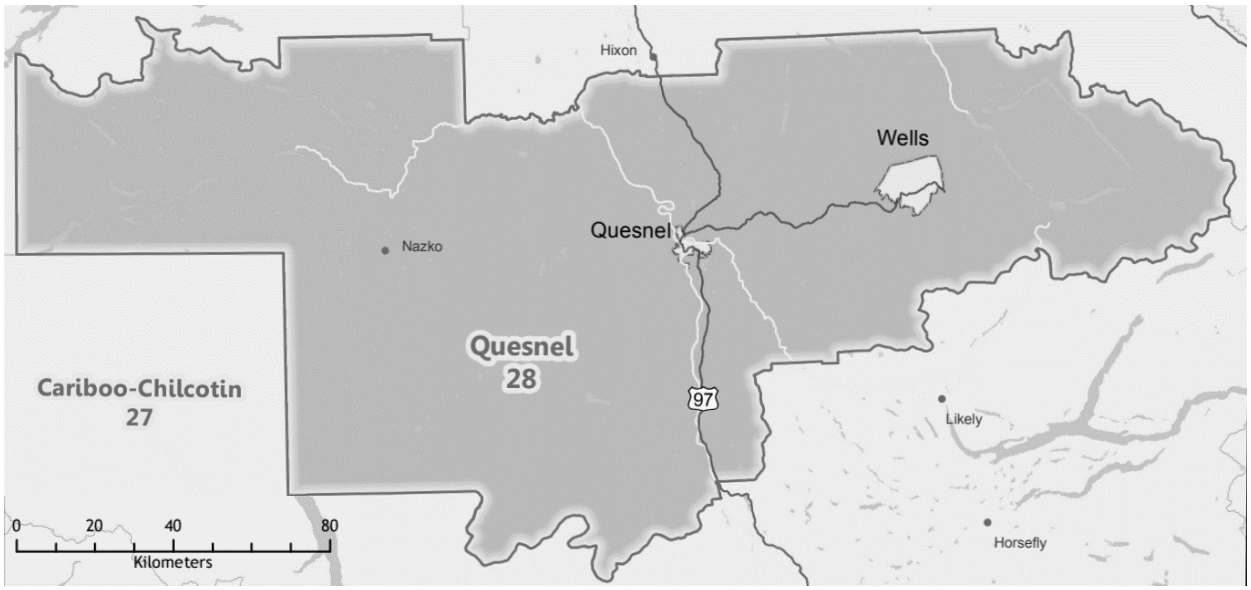
School District 28 (SD 28) encompasses the Wells community and area, (Figure 3). Wells has not had a high school since the mid-1980s when it was closed by SD 28 due to budget

concerns and a declining population (BC Rural Centre, 2018). The Wells school building, originally built to accommodate over 100 students from kindergarten to grade 12, remains for the Wells-Barkerville Elementary School program, and is currently only partially occupied. According to Azano and Biddle (2019), school boards in North America tend to consolidate schools in rural school districts. In 2002, SD 28 voted to close the elementary school in Wells due to the costs of operating and maintaining the program for a small number of students. In the same year, SD 28 administrators received a significant salary raise totaling $120,000 (BC Rural Centre, 2018). The vote to close the school prompted a community-led protest that included a hunger strike from multiple community members, such as Chamber of Commerce vice president Claire Kujundzic, and 71 year old Mayor Dave Hendrixson (Claire Art, 2002). Residents, including elementary students, campaigned outside of the SD 28 office in Quesnel in addition to the hunger strike (Claire Art, 2002). A CBC article noted the mayor also posed for a nude fundraising calendar to help finance the community campaign (Trumpener, 2019). In 2003, after a year of protesting, the elementary school was reopened, following an agreement between SD 28 and the community. The School Board agreed to pay the same amount to educate children at the Wells school as it would to teach them in Quesnel, and the community must pay the difference, or about $100,000 a year (Claire Art, 2002). The district of Wells purchased the school building from SD 28 for $1, and to this day, the district of Wells maintains and operates the building while the school district provides teaching staff (BC Rural Centre, 2018). According to these past events, the typical institutional model for schools, as determined by SD 28, was declared unsustainable for Wells, and the community responded with passion and innovation, allowing their elementary school to continue to operate in the town. Parents who have children in elementary school in Wells reported that they appreciated the small class sizes, multi-year

classrooms, and focus on mentorship within the program (L. Kay, personal communication, July 7, 2022). According to A. Galbraith, a former teacher in the community, the elementary school is heavily integrated into the community, working in partnership with different organizations such as the Wells Barkerville Community Forest and Island Mountain Arts to provide students with many different educational programs, and opportunities to learn outdoors in the surrounding area (personal communication, September 12, 2022).

Figure 3

Area of British Columbia Quesnel School District 28



Note. Wells within Quesnel School District 28, denoted by the dark grey shaded area. Quesnel 28 within the dark grey shaded area depicts the name of the district, Quesnel School District 28. Adapted from *School District Boundaries,* by the Government of British Columbia, 2011. (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/geographic-data-services/land-use/administrative-boundaries/school-district). Copyright 2011 by the Government of British Columbia.

Although the elementary school in Wells remained open, kids and their families still face a difficult choice after Grade 7 (12 years old) and for the next five years for high school options. For grades 8-12 (from 13 to 17 years old), they can drive 1.5 hours by bus each way (3

hours/day, weather dependent) to the high school in Quesnel (the next larger town over), billet there during the school week, remain in Wells and homeschool, or leave Wells altogether. The continued absence of a high school in Wells is an issue for some children, parents, and other community members.

The Wells community began to initiate a plan for a potential high school in 2017 by conducting a feasibility study of this high school with interested community members and parents of children living in the area. Understanding the impacts caused by the current absence of a high school can help the community members dictate the direction of the community development process to mitigate these impacts best. Developing a high school in Wells began as a grassroots initiative driven by a core group of concerned community members committed to drawing on the unique strengths and opportunities within the geography and culture of the town. Two local organizations, the Wells and Area Community Association and the Wells Barkerville Community Forest have been working in partnership, and most recently developed a draft proposal for what they have tentatively called Wells Integrated Learning Destination (WILD) high school (Wells and Area Community Association, 2017). The Wells Barkerville Community Forest have invested in community buildings, developed a teaching forest, built easily accessible boardwalks and trails from the school to the forest, purchased residential land, and have been in close consultation with organizations and stakeholders such as the Barkerville Historic Park, Island Mountain Arts, Sunset Theatre, and Troll Ski Resort to build momentum for a local high school. More recently, these partners approached Drs. Wright and Mullins from the University of UNBC about assistance and collaboration, which led to the current community-based research project. After contacting Dr. Mullins and learning about the project, I instantly became enamoured with the idea of an alternative high school in Wells.

My background is in outdoor recreation and tourism, and I have a love of rural areas. I graduated with an undergraduate degree in an outdoor-based tourism and leadership program in Calgary, Alberta, where I was born and raised. Between completing my bachelors degree and starting my masters, I worked in the tourism industry for the past 5 years in remote areas throughout British Columbia and Alberta. My passion for the outdoors and my belief in the opportunities of outdoor learning led to my engagement with the project. Having spent my undergraduate years studying in an outdoor collegiate program and graduating with a degree in Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership, I have personal experiences with the benefits and pitfalls of these programs. I benefited from the work and efforts already done by the Wells community, and I brought my expertise in outdoor education and recreation to help collaborate with community members as they pursued this project.

The WILD draft proposal, created by the Wells community, was modeled after Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) on Saturna Island, an experiential place-based program (*Saturna Ecological Education Centre*, n.d.). At SEEC, student complete credits in grades 10 and 11 as they participate in unique and context-specific learning experiences that promote critical thinking, social responsibility, and personal growth while integrating Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, and Language Arts (*Saturna Ecological Education Centre*, n.d.). Classes are taught with a mix of both traditional classroom time, field trips, and fieldwork. Other alternative outdoor-based high schools include The Boundless School in Ontario and the Cortes Island Academy (CIA) pilot program, which operates on Cortes Island. CIA is a collaboration between School District 72 and Cortes Island Community Foundation. The CIA program offers students 20 weeks of immersive, experiential, project-based learning that awards them credits in English,

Science, Physical Education, etc. (Campbell River School District 72, n.d.). These alternative models show the feasibility of alternative education in localized contexts.

Similar to the listed alternative schools above, the WILD school proposal also suggests initiative and desire for creating an integrative, interdisciplinary, place-responsive high school that is rooted in the community of Wells. Integrated refers to the connection of diverse subjects and knowledge into a curriculum (Brady, 1996). An integrative approach opens an opportunity for students, parents, teachers, and community members to help create high school programming that reflects the place and values of the Wells community and area. The WILD high school has initially been envisioned as an interdisciplinary outdoor education high school using place-responsive, project-based, and experiential education to integrate arts, environmental science, and standard BC curriculum requirements (Government of British Columbia, 2022b).

This grassroots initiative is rooted in the local community of Wells, with the goals of attracting new students to the area, serving diverse learners, encouraging local families to stay in the community, and providing students with valuable perspectives on global and local issues such as climate change, evolving resource economies, sustainability, and conservation while achieving high school credits. The work done by local community groups and the pedagogical approach outlined in the WILD proposal provided direction for collaborating through Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to further develop plans for a pilot project, while also learning more about community development and place-responsive outdoor education when positioned as foundational to a school. Potential stakeholders and organizations that are interested in being involved in the high school include the Wells and Area Community Association, District of Wells Mayor and Council, Wells Barkerville Community Forest, Barkerville Historic Site, Troll Ski Resort, Wells and Area Trails Society, Wells-Barkerville

Elementary School, Whitegold Adventures, Wells Barkerville School Parent Advisory Committee, the Sunset Theatre, and Island Mountain Arts. These organizations have been involved in past discussions and work to envision an alternative high school unique to Wells and its needs.

Research Questions

As co-researchers using CBPR, we (Wells community members and I) are bringing together and sharing diverse knowledge and experiences from academia and lives lived in Wells and area to work towards and learn from a grassroots project for community change, in the form of a proposed alternative high school. This study is concerned with a) the group of concerned citizens and organizations collectively working towards this school and b) how the proposed school might come to incorporate and respond to attributes of place (i.e., Wells and area) using community-based and innovative forms of outdoor education that align with and integrate the BC curriculum. The project will a) draw on past research to further inform this ongoing community effort by b) engaging in a collaborative process aimed at advancing the high school project, to c) elaborate learning that results for the academic disciplines brought to bear. The following three research questions follow this path of multi-directional learning and contribution.

1. With the loss of its high school, what lessons from community development and place-responsive outdoor-based education might apply to and serve the context and community of Wells, BC?
2. Through community engagement and collaboration, what form might a place-responsive and community-based high school take in Wells?

3. Following this collaborative process, how can the experience of a group of concerned and dedicated citizens inform understandings and practices of place-responsive high school education and rural community development?

This research was interwoven in ways that are intended to be mutually beneficial and served the community in their efforts to develop an alternative high school.

In order to address the research questions, I provided a literature review to further explain relevant terms and practices relating to this project, including community development, rural communities and rural education, and alternative forms of education. Next, I shared my research approach, outlining the methods I used to obtain my data. Lastly, I provided a section on the key findings and analysis that help to understand the results of the study. The results of this research aim to help forward and encourage collaboration within the community of Wells, BC, to share knowledge between community and academic partners, help give shape and support to an eventual pilot project for a new high school, and contribute to the development the health and wellbeing, and, ideally, the future prosperity of Wells.

Literature Review

This chapter shows how high schools are important to rural communities, and how rural communities can also offer unique settings for alternative forms of education. Outdoor education is reviewed, defined, and critiqued for the ways in which dominant Western forms of outdoor education position landscapes and rural livelihoods. This literature review also focuses on realities for high school in BC and relates to the BC Curriculum. Alternative forms of outdoor education, such as community-based and place-responsive education, I argue, can serve to overcome these problems. This chapter concludes by explaining that rural communities have opportunities to take advantage of alternative forms of education.

Successful Rural Communities and Rural K-12 Schooling

In addition to rural success and community development processes, the well-being of a rural community is often directly linked with the well-being of its high school (Applegate, 2008). High schools are important for rural communities because high schools offer a centralized location for students to learn valuable life and academic skills for future pursuits, a place for students, families, and community members to build and define community, and provide significant social, cultural, and environmental contributions to rural community development and growth (Applegate, 2008; Barter, 2008; Malhoit, 2005). High schools can create spaces in which many community members can participate, creating a connection and important relationships between teachers, parents, students, and other community members that can create a family-like atmosphere, leading to a sense of shared responsibility for student learning among community members (Peterson et al., 2018). This tight-knit community aspect can provide an opportunity for community-based learning in rural schools, and may not be feasible for high schools in urban communities (Barter, 2008). Nonetheless, there is a prevalent notion within rural education

policy throughout Canada that rural schools need to be urbanized in order to improve educational experiences for students (Corbett, 2014). Typically, educational resources such as educational funds, teaching forces, and teaching resources, flow in one direction from urban areas to rural areas (Sun & Li, 2023). This widespread phenomenon exists throughout Canada even as each province is responsible for their own organization, assessment, and delivery of education (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2023). The importance of schools to rural areas and the opportunities for education that exist in rural areas have often been ignored by policy-makers in British Columbia (Corbett, 2014; Haynes, 2022).

One of the biggest threats to the well-being of a rural community is outmigration, and one of the most common reasons for outmigration in rural youth populations is to pursue educational opportunities (Sullivan et al., 2018). In this way, rural outmigration and formal education are intimately linked (Corbett, 2007). Rural communities are also distinct from their urban counterparts. Rural schools require distinct approaches that highlight strengths and target challenges that are unique to rural areas in order for educational policy to better meet the needs of rural communities (Barter, 2008; Malhoit, 2005; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). However, definitions of rural communities vary and can fall short of recognizing the diversity of contexts (Applegate, 2008). Perceptions of rural areas frequently include a juxtaposition of idyllic and utopian small towns surrounded by nature, and primitive, conservative areas that are slow to incorporate the more progressive and technological advances of their urban counterparts (Kneis, 2019). Generally, rural communities are regarded as more connected with the natural world (Taylor, 2022). However, rural community dwellers typically draw meaning from their rural surroundings through their everyday experiences and relationships with their surroundings (Lee, 2020). Corbet (2007) observed that there are various types of rural communities in Canada, such

as farming towns, active, inactive, and declining natural resource communities, fishing villages, isolated northern communities, and tourism destinations. Within these diverse types of communities, there are variations in economies, labour markets, settlement contexts, population numbers, and demographics (Barter, 2008; Corbett, 2007; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Neustaeter (2015) wrote:

> Rural and rurality are defined by functional, imagined, and experienced factors laden with values, beliefs, and cultural images associated with human community, development, and modernization. The changing and dynamic nature of rural communities exists in conjunction with constructions of rural communities espousing social harmony and homogeneity that ignore significant concerns and issues regarding gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and class. (p. 103)

Simplified and uniform schooling standards across BC, and elsewhere in Canada, likely overlook the range of contexts within different areas that are considered rural and suggest the need and value of assessing the distinct educational opportunities and challenges of rural communities. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (2018) recommends that community development processes in rural communities value the importance of rural and small schools, and focus on understanding local opportunities and challenges when considering education in that area.

Successful rural communities have been defined as communities that have the ability or the opportunity to deal with their own key challenges and possess the ability to pursue community development projects that enhance the quality of life for community members (Parliament Secretary for Rural Development et al., 2016). Community development approaches "require that residents and community development practitioners focus on the community, even when an effort or program is directed at a specific problem (Bridger & Alter, 2006, p. 15).

Community, then, "emerges in places and is place-oriented" (Theodori, 2008, p. 92). Recognizing the interconnections between place processes, such as local geographic, environmental, social, and economic forces, and the relationships between local and global processes and global contexts is essential for successful rural development.

Many community development projects are intended to advocate for a rural town's local identity (Nordberg et al., 2020). Successful community development projects often focus on the potentials and limits of a community, prioritizing actions that are achievable by local community members (Qu et al., 2022). Projects that originate with local community members can elicit a strong local response, and strong local organization, setting the stage for future steps in the project (Nordberg et al., 2020). Networks, norms, and trust are context dependant. Social networks are not free-floating; they are bounded by space and time" (Bridger & Alter, 2006, p. 8). The collaboration between community members, and between community members and others who are involved in the community development project is recommended to come from "organically developed, grassroots relationships" (Provinzano et al., 2018, p. 91). The vision for a high school in Wells aims to capitalize on the unique opportunities in the area, while countering the effects stemming from an urban focused educational policy.

Diversity and Opportunities of Rural and Remote Regions

Rural areas are defined by Statistics Canada (2001) as areas outside the zone of larger urban center's with a population of 10,000 or more, and make up the majority of Canada's landmass. In British Columbia, 634 976 people live in rural areas out of a provincial population of around 5 million (Government of Canada, 2022a). The development of colonial rural British Columbia as it is known today has been tumultuous, beginning with a Westernized shift from a trade economy to a staples-based economy (Markey et al., 2012). Resource-based towns like

Wells, can experience employment instability due to fluctuating global market demands for natural resources (Halseth & Sullivan, 2002). This employment instability directly impacts population numbers (Ryser et al., 2019). Rapid social, political, and economic change reinforces the need for rural towns to transform, and local community capacity and leadership are needed to mitigate present-day challenges and take advantage of new opportunities (Halseth, 2016). Community collaboration, such as coalitions, partnerships, alliances, grassroots organizations, etc., have become the backbone of community development (Christens & Inzeo, 2015). Schweigert (2002) defined community development as efforts that aim to enhance or strengthen life in a community, and noted that the complexities of the relationships between society and community cannot be ignored. Grassroot endeavours towards community development engage residents of the community in efforts to investigate and address concerns of the community (Stoecker, 2008). Community development is place-specific, and relies on local capacity and community-relevant information (Markey et al., 2010). Central to grassroots efforts at community change is resident involvement (Christens & Inzeo, 2015). Issues, such as the absence of a high school, affect community members in different ways, however, the knowledge and experiences of community members are integral to understanding the issue and implementing more effective efforts to achieve change.

The diverse and unique settings of rural communities and landscapes distant from major urban and suburban centres offer opportunities for integrated place-responsive education models that include aspects of outdoor learning. Localized outdoor learning can address concerns of sustainability and environmental education, while connecting to most curriculum areas (Beames et al., 2012). At the same time, such communities, along with approaches to outdoor learning, can challenge dominant Western forms of outdoor education that have tended to focus on risk,

adventure, and ideas of wilderness in opposition to urban settings (Cure et al., 2018; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Remington & Legge (2017) acknowledged the Māori people of New Zealand as the first people to live and embody outdoor education, as they relied on outdoor skills and knowledge to travel, exist, and thrive. Although this origin is also true for Canadian outdoor education with respect to Canada's Indigenous Peoples, this paper will focus on outdoor education pathways that have been westernized to reflect Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies. The next section will describe and critique dominant Western approaches to outdoor education, especially in relation to rural communities.

Dominant Western Outdoor Education

There is no universal definition for outdoor education (OE). Potter and Henderson (2004) viewed OE as a broad concept that encompasses both environmental and adventure education. Other scholars define OE as organized learning that occurs outdoors (Asfeldt et al., 2020). Definitions are often contested because outcomes, locations, pedagogies, and structural design of OE are widely varied throughout Canada and are program specific, which makes defining OE especially difficult (Dyment & Potter, 2015). Other authors proposed that defining OE is impossible and undesirable because assigning a universal definition can limit and restrict programs' potential structures, practices, and desired outcomes (Nicol, 2002; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Nevertheless, if the benefits of OE programs are not communicated coherently, then OE risks being invalidated or even cut as an extension of school curricula (Bauder, 2005).

In recent decades, many scholars have critically analyzed what had/have become typical, relatively universalized forms and practices of outdoor education, and have begun the important process of self-critique and innovation (Beames et al., 2012; Lowan-Trudeau, 2009; Lugg, 2007; Nicol, 2002). There has been a dominant form and approach of outdoor education internationally

among the United States and commonwealth nations born out of British imperialism and colonialism and informed by the anti-modern wilderness ideals of the romantics and transcendentalists, even as it finds somewhat different expressions nationally (Loynes, 2010; Mullins et al., 2016). I use the term *Dominant Western Outdoor Education* (DWOE) to recognize the form and content typically assumed to simply be 'outdoor education.' DWOE is rooted in Western ideals of wilderness and can be concerned with adventure, risk-taking, teamwork, physical ability, and conquest or connection to Nature through short-term travel/visitation. Landscapes are framed as remote environments/settings that are natural, pristine, dangerous, risky, and challenging, but not inhabited. Ignoring rural areas, this form of OE has relied on and reinforced Western dichotomies between civilization/cities and wilderness as well as nature and culture, even as it tries to encourage social and environmental change (Mullins & Maher, 2007). Rural landscapes and livelihoods present both a challenge and an opportunity for outdoor education. Moreover, the DWOE distinction attempts to recognize and make room for other diverse forms, traditions, and possibilities of outdoor learning such as outdoor learning, land-based learning, place-responsive learning, and community-based learning, which are important to the vision of the Wells school.

Some studies have tried explicitly to characterize 'Canadian' outdoor education relative to international variants and styles of outdoor education, such as Asfeldt et al., 2020; Henderson & Potter, 2001; Passmore, 1972; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019, and found it difficult to articulate their guiding philosophies and the pedagogies that influenced the development of their OE programs and teaching styles. However, Asfeldt et al. (2020) reported four aspects of an outdoor program, which they coined "philosophies" (p. 9), that are characteristic of dominant approaches to Canadian OE. They are experiential learning, holistic and integrated learning, journey through

the land, and an influential person (a person whose goals and values shaped and inspired the program). The first review of Canadian OE in the 1970s found five common goals among educators nationwide: enhancing ecological knowledge, developing social and cultural values, stimulating students' interests and enhancing technical skills, and providing challenging and adventurous outdoor learning for personal growth (Passmore, 1972). The most recent studies on Canadian DWOE by Purc-Stephenson et al. (2019) and Asfeldt et al. (2020) found these same goals, along with an additional goal of incorporating people and place consciousness into programs. The people and place consciousness aspect has most likely emerged over roughly a decade following significant critiques of Westernized wilderness and risk-centric forms of OE (Beavington, 2021; Clement, 2019; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). This literature on OE in Canada tends to focus on DWOE forms of education.

The underlying philosophies and common goals of Canadian DWOE educators result in similar program characteristics, even as educational policy is provincial (Asfeldt et al., 2020). Typical programs are short-term and self-propelled expeditions between 2 and 30 days (Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Common activities include canoeing, camping skills, kayaking, skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking. The particular activities chosen often reflect the skills and interests of the program leader (Asfeldt et al., 2020; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). The activities are chosen to present learners with risks and challenges to be overcome, orientated toward personal growth. Personal growth examples included increased resilience and motivation, and decreased stress and depression (Beames et al., 2020; Shellman & Hill, 2017). Students are taken to remote locations to reconnect with and learn about landscapes and environments (Potter & Henderson, 2004). DWOE programs in high schools are either an extension of physical education classes, or offered as an extracurricular activity for students, where an outsider is hired to provide expertise in the

activity with little to no connection to the students, the curriculum, or the school (Henderson & Potter, 2001; Keeble, 2021).

Commonly described benefits of DWOE approaches include technical skill development that allows students to gain a sense of accomplishment by overcoming personal doubts, and increased confidence when taking on challenges (Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Other reported positive outcomes of OE include increased motivation, focus, attention, self-awareness, and self-confidence (Beames et al., 2020; Gilbertson et al., 2006; James & Williams, 2017), increased resilience, and decreased stress and anxiety among students (Beames et al., 2020; Shellman & Hill, 2017). Braun and Dierkes (2017) described students exhibiting more behaviours of environmental stewardship if there was a focus on increasing environmental awareness and feelings of connection with nature within OE programs. OE is commonly expressed as being particularly helpful for students who struggle in formal education structures, and have an indifferent view on learning (James & Williams, 2017).

OE is often a flexibly designed course open to different pedagogical interpretations by course practitioners, resulting in diverse models and practices within provinces and across Canada (Asfeldt et al., 2020; Henderson & Potter, 2001; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Most OE programs are driven by the vision and skill of a local teacher. Activities chosen, program structures, and meaningful learning outcomes are influenced heavily by the values, beliefs, and personal qualities of the instructor (Henderson & Potter, 2001). Teachers are not typically taught how to administer alternative forms of learning to students during their teacher education (O'Connell, 2002), so individual teachers rely on their own skills and motivation to execute outdoor education initiatives (Asfeldt et al., 2020). Teacher motivations can include valuing nature and sustainability, community building, and social development (Dring et al., 2020).

These motivations may be reflective of dominant narratives of Nature. Due to the lack of formal training, these teachers tend to operate in tradition and, therefore, repeat what/how they learned, reflecting common approaches (Asfeldt et al., 2020).

Outdoor educators often use certain stories about the past to guide the narratives of their programs (Henderson & Potter, 2001). The popular stories and legends told about the history of Canada helped to form a dominant settler national identity and were typically used to differentiate the settler community from the colonial parent country, and create a distinction between Europe and North America (Francis, 1997). The myth of the 'North' is one of Canada's most distinguishing elements of identity (Potter & Henderson, 2004; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Early settlers used the Canadian winter to separate the weak from the strong, by believing "that the struggle to survive in a northern climate created a set of national characteristics, including self-reliance, physical strength, stamina, and virility" (Francis, 1997, p. 154). DWOE programs can involve taking kids to remote northern landscapes so educators can "move their students from the imagined wild and pristine 'North' to the experienced 'North', where moose, beaver, windblown white pine, rustic cabin and loon are real, not cultural icons on coffee mugs" (Potter & Henderson, 2004, p. 76). Urban students are taken from their local communities to experience the 'North' and gain a better understanding of the formidable experiences early explorers and settlers endured (Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). This dominant approach to OE depends largely on a particular concept of the land as wilderness, and positions students' every day lives relative and in opposition to that wilderness narrative.

Wilderness is often central to DWOE programs, stemming from the conservation and environmental movement that followed WWII and is conceptualized in opposition to modernism (Cronon, 1996; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Canadian outdoor educators may perpetuate ideas

of pristine and untouched wilderness by ignoring evidence of modernism that occur during their class excursions, such as planes flying overhead (Potter & Henderson, 2004), and adopting traditional methods of travel, gear, and camp crafts (Henderson & Potter, 2001). Pristine wilderness tends to be advertised as uncorrupted, unnamed, unspoiled, and unpeopled (Henderson & Potter, 2001). Physical challenges in DWOE approaches in Canada are often centered around the 'wildness' and unpredictability of nature, and aim to reconnect students to a rugged, settler ancestry (Henderson & Potter, 2001; Potter & Henderson, 2004; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). The risk and challenges associated with outdoor experiences in DWOE are said to create comfort with hardships, as those challenges and hardships are "inherently tied to being in the wilderness. That is, nature should not be feared if it is understood and respected" (Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019, p. 373). The DWOE planning, approaches, and applications are typically crafted for students in urban communities in Canada because urban students fit in the DWOE narrative of humans and cities being disconnected from wilderness (Asfeldt et al., 2020; Henderson & Potter, 2001; Passmore, 1972; Potter & Henderson, 2004; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Rural communities, however, present a different context along with unique opportunities and challenges (Braun & Dierkes, 2017).

Critiques of Outdoor Education

Due to the lack of clarity on what constitutes OE, many claims have been made about the impacts and effectiveness of programs on students, such as personal and social development, skill development, leadership, and environmental stewardship (Breunig et al., 2015; M. Brown & Fraser, 2009; Cure et al., 2018; O'Connell, 2002; Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Wolfe & Samdahl, 2005). DWOE educators tend to use their chosen activity as the base for accomplishing student learning outcomes when constructing OE programs, and risk is accepted as a central focus to

differentiate outdoor education from indoor learning (Cure et al., 2018). Adventure discourse in DWOE may be coupled with the belief that by taking risks, students will benefit from positive effects (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). The assumptions are that students have the ability to deal with or learn to deal with risk, and that the students are able to recover from potentially negative situations (Wolfe & Samdahl, 2005). Wattchow & Brown (2011) critiqued the use of risk-focused pedagogies in DWOE as a means of pushing students out of their comfort zones, because doing so places all responsibility on individuals for their own learning and often ignores the hidden historical and socio-cultural contexts inherent to risk and adventure and social positionality, which includes identities such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. (Clement, 2019). Rose and Paisley (2012) remarked:

> Simplified and generalized, privileged people may appreciate many of the traditional challenges and pedagogies of [outdoor] education because we are more likely to live free from many everyday structural challenges, such as institutionalized racism, sexism, ghettoism, classism, ageism, and similar forms of othering taking place through discourses surrounding various minoritized and marginalized populations. (p. 144)

When dominant approaches to risk and challenge are incorporated into OE programming, there is an underlying assumption that challenge is absent from students' regular day, that challenge is good, and tends to ignore students who face multiple challenges every day just to survive (Clement, 2019). This idea presumes a significant amount of privilege, and it tends to speak to the lives and concerns of White suburban families, and not recognize the realities and challenges lived by people of colour, and Indigenous communities. The dominant discourse around risk and challenge can also perpetuate narratives that favour certain people [and, therefore, alienating others from] the outdoors because they have the ability, resources, and security to take risks

(Qian, 2018). Contemporary OE literature calls for a shift away from risk-centric OE programs and an increased focus on theoretical foundations that are more relevant to students in the 21st century (Beames et al., 2012, 2012; Brown & Fraser, 2009; Mullins, 2014a; O'Connell, 2002; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

DWOE programs center around the activity, individual skill development, and social aspects among participants, while students' awareness of their surroundings remains limited and related to their personal experience (Baker, 2005). Baker (2005) stated:

> Even on a month-long course in a wilderness setting, students' awareness of the land can be limited to its direct impact on their immediate experience (i.e., the weather, a pretty sunset or a breathtaking view). Likewise, they may relate to the landscape solely in terms of negotiating it, whether through route finding, river crossing, or campsite selection… the upshot is that landscapes may become interchangeable and the unique aspects of a particular place, along with any potential connections to it, may be lost. (p. 269)

In addition, the way land is physically interacted with is meaningful. Leave No Trace (LNT) principles tend to be used in OE programming. LNT advocates for people to have minimal to no impacts on natural environments and put the burden on individuals for environmental degradation. This individual responsibility ignores societal systems that support outdoor culture (Turner, 2002), as well as the collective environmental advocacy in typical day to day life (Clement, 2019; Mullins, 2018). This approach to land is dependent on urban relationships, economies, and cultures that, in many ways, insulate travellers from different meaningful embodied interactions with the land that may be familiar and commonplace for rural inhabitants (Mullins, 2014b, 2018). Refocusing programs from concentrating on the outdoor activity to concentrating on the place can encourage students to achieve an ongoing personal familiarity

with certain areas (Baker, 2005). The ability for repeat visits to an area is also important (Brown & Beames, 2017). The areas surrounding rural communities can offer unique opportunities for place-centered programs.

Contemporary OE scholars have critiqued urban approaches to wilderness-centric outdoor education (Clement, 2019; Mullins, 2009; Wattchow & Brown, 2011), and advocated for wilderness to be decentralized within outdoor education curricula (Beavington, 2021; Mullins, 2014b; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). According to Cronan (1996): "wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural" (p. 17). Wilderness is a culturally constructed idea that marks a separation or distinction between humans and non-humans (Qian, 2018). Beavington (2021) argued that by simply being outside or in wilderness settings, humans can increase physical and mental health and decrease depression and obesity, which ignores all more-than-human elements and mirrors a Western capitalistic view where humans can exploit natural areas for their own benefit.

The focus on pristine wilderness in DWOE also creates a narrative where students are taken from their supposedly 'toxic' urban environments to a landscape that is pure and untouched, which enforces the idea that urbanization is inherently 'bad' (Clement, 2019). Clement (2019) goes on to note that "wilderness is racialized as pure and white, and urban areas are racialized as non-white and, therefore, less than pure" (p. 9). Rural communities typically fall within the culturally constructed definitions of wilderness locations, and can be either deemed uncultured and uncivilized or idealized as an authentic escape from globalization (Peeren, 2019). In addition, wilderness narratives that present land as something that should be pristine and untouched by humans generally do not make space for recreational, agricultural, forestry, mining, and other economic land uses that sustain rural communities, and upon which urban

lifestyles also depend. If the surrounding areas of a rural town are deemed wilderness and human land use is condemned, a loss of historical experience, cultural knowledge, local identity, and economic opportunities can occur (Höchtl et al., 2005). When alternative land uses are discouraged, conflicted meanings of place that stem from deeper socio-economic and socio-cultural processes are silenced, and meanings of place are hierarchized (Zimmerman & Weible, 2017).

Wilderness is conceptualized in a way that separates and overlooks the construction of its own history, where Indigenous peoples were forcibly and violently removed from their lands to create the image of pristine and untouched areas (Qian, 2018). Beavington (2021) suggested that holding a romanticized view of nature is a privilege and tends to favour detached Eurocentric ideologies. Clement (2019) stated that "celebrating wilderness erases Indigenous history… to celebrate wilderness and public lands without even an acknowledgment of why we regulate those lands in the first place is to celebrate a lie" (p. 9). In this way, wilderness can become a White space of privilege, with little to no room for Indigenous peoples, erasing their and other minority groups' contributions and histories (Qian, 2018). Brown and Ash (2009) noted the towns in the Cariboo region of British Columbia were the "first truly multiracial communities in the province and the first not dominated by the British elite element" (p. 28). The demographics in the town of Barkerville and Wells in the 1930s and 1940s included American, British, Canadian, and Chinese backgrounds, as well as Indigenous communities who used summer camps near Quesnel Lake to the South (Brown & Ash, 2009). Social constructs of Wilderness that adopt a romantic view of nature may serve to erase important contributions from certain populations to the history of Wells.

Planning, approaches, and applications of DWOE are typically crafted for students in urban communities in Canada (Asfeldt et al., 2020; Henderson & Potter, 2001; Passmore, 1972; Potter & Henderson, 2004; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019), because the narrative, concerns, and meanings of DWOE resonate and have positive connotations for urban students. In this research, urban refers to relatively affluent, and largely (but not exclusively) white populations that reside in cities. Rural communities, however, present a different context along with unique opportunities and challenges (Braun & Dierkes, 2017). Furthermore, DWOE programs in Canada tend to be extensions of physical education classes, which do not integrate diverse disciplines into students learning (Henderson & Potter, 2001). The WILD high school proposal presented an opportunity to develop and explore alternative forms of outdoor education and integrated interdisciplinary learning.

Alternative Forms of OE

Contemporary OE literature calls for a shift away from risk and wilderness-centric OE programs and an increased focus on theoretical foundations that are more relevant to students in the 21st century (Beames et al., 2012; Brown & Fraser, 2009; O'Connell, 2002, Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Alternative forms of OE are on the rise in OE and elsewhere as a way of overcoming problems of wilderness, universalizing knowledge, and providing the opportunity for education to be grounded in community (Beames et al., 2012; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Place-responsive education has many forms and expressions, such as community-based education, arts-based education, and land-based learning. These alternative forms of education attend to human experiences and social and environmentally relevant issues (Barter, 2008; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Rural communities can take advantage of outdoor, place-responsive forms of education to offer unique high school models to rural community members and beyond

(Barter, 2008). In this section, I review emerging forms and examples that extend outdoor education and are particularly relevant to Wells.

Place-Responsive Education

Place-responsive education (PRE) can be embedded in environmental education and OE curricula in schools (McInerney et al., 2011). PRE has been brought forth in response to the standardization and mass-produced curricula that have reduced student connection to their local communities (Inwood, 2008). DWOE has been critiqued for promoting a separation between students and their natural environment by a focus on remote wilderness and activities that occur far from home (Mullins & Maher, 2007; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Sobel (2004) argued that students need hands-on, real-world learning experiences rooted in their local communities. PRE responds to these critiques, and different strands of PRE have emerged (Waite, 2013). Defining PRE and what is included can be problematic in that it includes more than just a focus on place (McInerney et al., 2011).

Place-based curriculum is typically experiential, integrated, and cross-disciplinary and includes repeat visits to local sites to increase a student's knowledge and awareness of local communities and environments (Waite, 2013). Opportunities for repeat visits to certain sites can result in learners acquiring a sense of familiarity with a landscape, and beginning to notice subtle changes in the landscape (Prins & Wattchow, 2020a). A focus on the local area surrounding a community can allow students to explore the interconnections between society, economic, and environmental issues (Mullins, 2011). McInerney et al. (2011) suggested that PRE "seeks to re-establish connections between learners and their neighbourhoods in which they live" (p. 30), making curricula more relevant to students, and making students care more for their community. Beavington (2021) suggested DWOE wrongly assumes student behaviour operates linearly, with

environmental awareness leading to responsibility and stewardship. Instead, Beavington (2021) suggested revising educational institutions using place-based and eco-centric pedagogies in order to change student behaviour.

PRE provides an opportunity for curricula to be integrated and interdisciplinary (Marpa, 2020; Mettis & Väljataga, 2021). The term *interdisciplinary* tends to refer to bringing multiple courses or disciplines together to explore or answer a particular question or issue (Pring, 1973, as cited in Webber & Miller, 2016, p. 1065). PRE provides opportunities for interdisciplinary learning within and between all subject areas (Christie et al., 2016). There is mostly unrealized potential for outdoor education to include interdisciplinary and integrated subject learning (Marpa, 2020; Mettis & Väljataga, 2021; Son et al., 2017). For example, an OE program can include science content in a way that meaningfully applies the content to students' everyday lives by teaching snow science through skiing (Son et al., 2017).

Place-responsive pedagogy helps educators create valuable environmental education experiences by assembling people, places, and distinct activities (Mannion et al., 2013a). Place-responsive curricula integrate geographical and historical aspects of the students' surroundings into their learning (Waite, 2013). McInerney et al. (2011) argued for critical perspectives in PRE that would:

> encourage young people to connect local issues to global environmental, financial, and social concerns, such as climate change, water scarcity, poverty, and trade. It invites teachers and students to question the established order, to view how things are from the position of the most disadvantaged, and to work for the common good rather than self interest. (p.11)

Place-responsive pedagogies can and should include multiple meanings of place to encourage students to acknowledge different perspectives and worldviews (Waite, 2013).

Student agency within PRE programs can invite learners to become stewards of the land by creating opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and political action through engaging and acknowledging global issues (McInerney et al., 2011). Focusing on local communities in an educational context does not dissociate students from global processes, and "beginning within the local context, it is possible to expose students to their community's connections to the global landscape – through exploration of where things, people, and traditions within the local environment intersect with global phenomena" (Holohan, 2018, p. 80).

Arguments for PRE include providing students opportunities for participating in engaging experiences, civic participation in democratic institutions, ethical environmental stewardship and sustainability, and allowing students to understand local economic, social, and environmental pressures (Smith & Sobel, 2010). PRE can be incorporated in both indoor and outdoor environments, as well as existing curricula, particularly in rural contexts (Christie et al., 2016). PRE can strengthen relationships between students, schools, and community by increasing student ownership, identity, and feelings of belonging (McInerney et al., 2011). According to Mannion et al. (2013a), a teacher that utilizes a place-responsive pedagogy aims to facilitate student experiences in a way that remains flexible and creative, and recognizes differences in ecological and social domains. A place-responsive pedagogy is often used with so-called slow learning and program design, where dynamic activities such as skiing and canoeing are decentralized (Mannion et al., 2013a; Payne & Wattchow, 2008). Other authors advocated for educators to focus on activities that encourage learners to understand, improve, and develop human and environmental relationships(Jukes & Reeves, 2020; Mullins, 2014b). Reported

benefits of PRE programs include student agency and enhanced course meaning, increased critical thinking skills, and decreased transportation and program costs (Christie et al., 2016). Using a place-responsive approach to the high school in Wells recognizes the unique opportunities in the community and tackles the challenges stemming from the lack of a high school, which are typically not goals in a dominant Western approach to an outdoor education program.

Community-Based Education

Community-based education (CBE) has often been used in conjunction with place-responsive education to increase the relevance and meaning for students by situating education in local and familiar contexts (Breunig et al., 2015; Cole, 2010). CBE is typically used in rural communities (Webber & Miller, 2016). CBE programs can also be an extension of school or extracurricular after-school programs that aim to facilitate educational equity (Baldridge et al., 2017; Cole, 2010). Schools tend to rely on partnerships within the local community to connect curriculum to local people, landscapes, culture, and politics and depend on local community projects in which students can participate in interdisciplinary and inquiry-based education (Cole, 2010; Webber & Miller, 2016). Sobel (2004) defined CBE as the "process of using local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum" (p. 7).

Through CBE, students can understand global issues through their connection to local contexts (Holohan, 2018). Benefits of CBE initiatives are increased student engagement, meaningful and relevant experiences in the community, and opportunities for students to develop personal and interpersonal skills (Breunig et al., 2015). Improving student learning and community engagement can help students succeed in real-life situations (Powers, 2004). CBE,

being rooted in place, can also help to build sustainable cultural and economic relationships with surrounding communities (Holohan, 2018). Where place-responsive learning uses different learning styles and promotes accessibility, CBE builds on this by aiming to reject relationships of hierarchy and domination, and to acknowledge sustainable ways of living by identifying relationships with other human and more-than-human elements within the community (Holohan, 2018; Webber & Miller, 2016). Breunig (2015) argued that if community connections provide open, inclusive, and supportive environments for students, then their critical thinking and reflection skills can be enhanced, and their acceptance of different perceptions and opinions increased. The high school in Wells aims to emphasize community integration and collaboration to recognize the benefits of CBE.

Experiential Education

Experiential education (EE) is defined as learning that revolves around an intentional experience within an educational institution or setting (Joplin, 1981). Joplin (1981) further insisted that EE must include a reflection process, typically called the action-reflection cycle, to be called experiential education. Seaman (2008) argued that step-by-step action-reflection cycles "inadequately explain the holistic learning processes that are central to learning from experience… complex cultural, social, and physical processes during experience and learning are reduced to a rational, excessively cognitive, individual phenomenon" (p. 3). This action-reflection cycle, however, is still often used to describe the difference between EE and other alternative forms of learning (Roberts, 2016). EE is not "simply about how we learn experientially but rather how we create such moments through the systematic process of experiential *education*" (Roberts, 2016, p. 25). Literature concerning EE has had many discussions on its exact definition and value, similar to other forms of alternative learning

models and pedagogies (Seaman et al., 2017). Origins of EE began as a way to describe relationships that exist and are formed between experiences and learning (Kolb, 1984), and were greatly influenced by John Dewey (see Dewey, 1958, and 1986). Seaman et al. (2017) argued, though, that Dewey may have never used the term EE in his own work. Additionally, Blenkinsop et al. (2016) contended that EE should go beyond Dewey's notion that experiences are centered around physical activity, and should incorporate the view that both the mind and body are intertwined and equally important in programming. Experiential education in Wells would allow students to gain valuable and tangible awareness of their community.

Student-centered learning is imperative to EE paradigms and is best achieved when the learners themselves are involved in processing educational experiences (Estes, 2004). Matriano (2020) stated, "experiential learning literally is making meaning from direct experience. It plays a vital role in facilitating the process of creating knowledge, sense-making, and knowledge transfer in teaching, training, and development" (p. 215). Experiences include social, cultural, and physical feedback to the student's senses that are encountered together (Prins & Wattchow, 2020a). Experiential learning occurs when students are able to ask questions and follow lines of inquiry, and share stories about the events they participate in (Woods & Davids, 2021). Experiences are context-specific (Quay, 2003). Dewey (1958) said, "experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience; it is constantly fed from these springs" (p. 40). Quay (2003) advocated for EE approaches to integrate context, including context-specific opportunities and issues. Proponents of EE programs declare that students may experience improved engagement with course material (Otaki et al., 2022; Whidden & Main, 2022). EE can cultivate a supportive school culture, because students feel connected to and safe with their peers and teachers, and a better understanding of course content

is attained, leading to effective learning communities (Speicher, 2021; Whidden & Main, 2022). Furthermore, Blenkinsop et al. (2017) advocated that by immersing students in the natural world, in addition to using intentional language, silence, reflective time, and thoughtful activities, can result in a shift "away from the colonial view of nature as something to be exploited, and towards more engaged, even equitable relationships and perhaps an ecocritical anti-colonial position" (p. 363). According to Telford and Beames (2015), redefining approaches to landscapes and outdoor education programs that are free from colonial narratives and social constructions can allow for alternative and often ignored views on outdoor spaces and recreation. Students in Wells could learn through experiential approaches to education to begin to understand important environmental, social, and economic connections between themselves and their community on both a local and global level.

Arts-Based Education

Given the importance of the arts to the town and culture of Wells (the Sunset Theatre and Island Mountain Arts have been integral to elementary school programming and in the WILD school project), art-based education (ABE) is an essential aspect to the vision of the high school. ABE is described as "planning and applying educational processes reflecting the association in the effort of experiencing nature and expressing the feeling of this experience with artistic ways to aesthetic experience process" (Sesigür & Edeer, 2021, p. 98). Peer-reviewed academic research regarding arts-based education (ABE) is limited, and tends to fall within the realm of ecological and environmental education curricula and goals for elementary and primary students (Davis, 2018; Inwood, 2008; Schneller et al., 2021; Sesigür & Edeer, 2021). Typical environmental science pedagogies can detach students from the natural world by teaching students in a limited, problem-centered way, where kids focus explicitly on climate change and

pollution and ignore positive aspects of the earth (Song, 2008). A problem-centred approach encourages reactive rather than proactive action to prevent further environmental impacts (Song, 2008). Arts can be a powerful tool for creating embodied and multi-sensory learning in students, which can engender greater nature awareness and attachment (Gray & Birrell, 2015). Traditionally, art curricula focused almost explicitly on technical skills, but failed to recognize that well-planned art programs can increase critical thinking, communication, literacy and leadership skills in students, as well as encourage students to engage and think about complex social issues (Kindelan, 2010). Traditional forms of art education may not allow students to use art to express or understand themselves or their communities, or ways in which art can be used as a tool to bring about social change (Inwood, 2008).

ABE is often used in conjunction with place-based pedagogies, and can target students who have not been successful in typical formal schooling pathways because the local community can be used as a source of imagery and inspiration, which can help to facilitate meaning and interest in students (Inwood, 2008; Schneller et al., 2021). ABE can foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in students and connect concepts to specific bioregions (Schneller et al., 2021; Ward, 2014). Inwood (2008) argued that art can be used as a creative, affective, and sensory approach to environmental education, which can increase the power and relevancy of student learning. Orr (1992) was one of the first scholars to argue for the integration of ecological literacy in different subject areas, such as the arts. Still, there is a need for an increase in arts-based approaches to environmental education (Davis, 2018).

An arts-based approach coupled with student-centered outdoor learning encouraged stronger personal creativity and group connection, and increased stewardship, as well as an emotional bond with the environment (Gray & Birrell, 2015; Sesigür & Edeer, 2021; Song,

2008). Art education can be used to increase student engagement (Inwood, 2008) as well as commitment to meaningful environmental action (Davis, 2018). Possibilities for including art in teaching environmental education and other subjects are numerous, and can aid in improving student knowledge on complex environmental subjects (Schneller et al., 2021). ABE can make learning personal, and can increase a student's creative problem solving, critical thinking skills, and can encourage self-reflexive learning, which can in turn, create healthy and happy communities (Inwood, 2008). ABE can emphasize the value of a students' local areas by emphasizing art approaches and giving students the ability to notice and understand their daily life and the environment they belong to (Sesigür & Edeer, 2021; Song, 2008). Art-based approaches, in conjunction with experiential learning, can be integral to student success and knowledge gather (Gray & Birrell, 2015; Schneller et al., 2021).

Additionally, ABE used in conjunction with place-based pedagogies can be a tool to connect students and inspire them to be stewards of their place, resulting in changes in environmental attitudes and behaviours that would increase the health of communities (Inwood, 2008; Song, 2008). Through the creation of a visual language, students can explore, discover, and experience the natural environment while utilizing creative materials that express relations between natural objects and artistic elements (Sesigür & Edeer, 2021). Inwood (2008) advocates for a focus on collaboration among students instead of an individualistic approach to ABE. ABE is an important approach to consider in Wells given the strong art culture within the community.

Land-Based Learning

Indigenous worldviews and ways of being are diverse, dynamic, and fluid, and describing meanings of well-being, learning, and teaching as simply 'Indigenous' is an oversimplification (Luig et al., 2011). These generalizations represent "tendencies rather than fixed traits…

generalizations must be recognized as indicative and not definitive" (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, pp. 10–11). In addition, the word 'land' is capitalized in some contexts to honour certain Indigenous worldviews of Land as sentient (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2020; Marker, 2018).

The BC curriculum, revised in 2016, encourages the inclusion of Indigenous voices in the education system, including the presence of Indigenous languages, cultures, and histories being seen in provincial curricula; and leadership and informed practice being provided (*Curriculum | Building Student Success - B.C. Curriculum*, n.d.). Decolonizing pedagogies, philosophies, and education systems can help address the separation of individual and collective perspectives and facilitate healing (Rangel, 2016). Indigenous expertise is required to integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, which are integral to the historical and contemporary foundations of BC and Canada, and to ensure the validity of the information being portrayed (*Curriculum | Building Student Success - B.C. Curriculum*, n.d.). Decolonizing epistemologies are needed to inform classroom dialogue, and create connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachings (Rangel, 2016). Classroom pedagogies and discourse should include the goal of providing opportunities for students to learn, understand, and respect their own cultural heritage and other cultural heritages (*Curriculum | Building Student Success - B.C. Curriculum*, n.d.). However, Indigenous scholars have been critical of far-reaching educational goals in curriculums, and encourage pedagogies that go beyond integrating Indigenous perspectives and topics as an addition to already existing courses (Battiste, 2005). Land-based learning (LBL) has been brought forth as a response to these critiques and has foundations in Indigenous epistemology (Luig et al., 2011).

Place-responsive and community-based education is often cited in research on Indigenous education (Webber & Miller, 2016). There are various definitions of what constitutes LBL; however, a common theme is Land and connection with Land (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2020). Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, a Kanaka Maoli scholar, understands land-based literacies as enacting "intimate connections with and knowledge of the land" (Goodyear-Ka'opua, 2013, p. 36), making LBL programs site-specific (Marker, 2018). LBL literature tends to include themes of Land as first teacher, relationality, holism, reflection, and Indigenous resistance to colonial structures (Bowra et al., 2021). Community leadership, youth involvement, traditional language, and sustenance practices are common goals and initiatives of LBL programs (Bowra et al., 2021).

Indigenous relationships with Land and all of creation are at the core of LBL, which can be a powerful decolonizing tool (Bowra et al., 2021). A pedagogy of Land understands the "interconnectedness and interdependency of relationships, an understanding of cultural positioning, as well as subjectivities that extend beyond the borderlands of traditional mainstream conceptualizations of pedagogy" (Styres, 2011, p. 722). This idea extends beyond pedagogies of place and place-based education because it recognizes Land as a living, fundamental being and directly connects to Indigenous Knowledge (Bowra et al., 2021). Simpson (2014) advocated for Land as a teacher, and using Land as a pedagogy. Referring to colonized lands, Styres et al. (2013) wrote:

> In [a persons' or groups'] fulsome recognition or acknowledgement of whatever places they live and occupy (rural or urban) exists on *Land* in relation to Indigenous peoples' territories – legally, spiritually, emotionally, and historically… In this way, newer stories

> are created that build upon and become part of the stories that have existed and continue to persist on Land since time before time. (p. 42-43)

Leadership, governance, and community processes are integrated into everyday actions and are understood through Land and water relationships (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019). Indigenous knowledge comes from the Land, which is emphasized in LBL programs (Simpson, 2004).

Stories and storytelling are integral to Indigenous knowledge, and re-storying classic interpretations of history counters the continued erasure of Indigenous people through present-day colonization (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019). Myths can effectively persuade large groups of peoples' perceptions and worldviews. Settler and colonial inscribed myths currently dominate language and stories, and tend to shift power in favour of some groups over others (Reid, 2018). Reid (2018) continued:

> Neoliberal mythical speech, for example, represents competition as an essential aspect of human relations, citizens as mere consumers, and the acquisition of personal wealth as a reward for efficiency while the rich acquire their wealth solely through their own merit – a myth that ignores both the exploitation of works and the advantages bequeathed to the elite, relating to education, class, race, and gender, that secure their privilege. The decolonial project must actively engage in counter-mythologization of the neoliberal myths of capitalist coloniality that have for so long convinced so many that the way things are now is the way they are naturally meant to be. (p. 135)

Formal education, including environmental education, is rooted in industrial capitalism and can further distance humans from the natural world, but Indigenous understandings of human and more-than-human processes on Land can be a process of reconciliation and transformation within current educational structures (Skilbeck & Stickney, 2020). Stories and storytelling can be

used as a pedagogy to encourage developing relationships with Land, engage with, remember, and challenge colonial narratives and tell different stories in the future to assist in decolonization (Hampton & DeMartini, 2017).

Environmental science education may not connect to Indigenous Knowledge or to a specific geography (Styres et al., 2013). Science program discourse tends to idealize the past as a time of ecological pristineness, the present as a time of environmental destruction, and the future as a place where morals will have to be weighed against urban development (Somerville & Hickey, 2017). However, LBL denotes practices that include fluid forms of knowledge and land as animate (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Fluidity refers to the interconnectedness "between time, space, and life on Earth with the Sun, Moon, Planets, Stars, and constellations" (Cajete, 1994, p. 206). LBL can teach students about topics such as environmental and science education, in addition to teaching about lifelong learning, traditional intergenerational wisdom, and respect for all Land (Datta, 2018).

Land-based learning practices include collaboration, relations, respect, and spiritual learning and teaching (Datta, 2018). LBL "puts Indigenous epistemological and ontological accounts of land at the center, including Indigenous understandings of land, Indigenous language in relation to land, and Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism" (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 13). LBL rejects a separation between humans and nature, as well as formal Western education customs of separating disciplines from one another, and conceptualizing notions of past, present, and future that exist simultaneously (Datta, 2018; Somerville & Hickey, 2017). LBL also dismisses gendered land practices common to Western and colonial cultures, such as calling the earth 'mother nature,' that can inhibit relationships between self and land by identifying certain bodies and natural processes that are better at being regulated and disciplined (Spillett, 2021).

When integrating LBL practices into formal schools, teachers [elders] need consistent access to students, courses, and curriculum (Datta, 2018). The inclusion of local Indigenous language, culture, and history is crucial, as well as redefining relationships between students and the more-than-human world (Somerville & Hickey, 2017). LBL supports all peoples in (re)defining and (re)making relationships with Land and more-than-human processes, and critically analyses heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity in formal and informal education pathways (Spillett, 2021). LBL practices align with forms of PRE and CBE that aim to recognize layered and often conflicted meanings of place as well as acknowledge continually changing socio-cultural-environmental processes that tend to be ignored in DWOE. The BC Ministry of Education highlights the importance of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the redesigned BC curriculum (Government of British Columbia, 2023). LBL, designed and taught by local Elders and Indigenous community members, should be a strong element to a place-responsive, community-based school in Wells.

Conclusion

Rural schools require distinct approaches that highlight strengths and target challenges that are unique to rural areas in order for educational policy to better meet the needs of rural communities (Barter, 2008; Malhoit, 2005; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). However, definitions of rural communities vary and often fall short of explaining the diversity across contexts (Applegate, 2008). The diverse and unique settings of rural communities offer opportunities for integrated place-responsive education models of education that include aspects of outdoor education (OE), but also can challenge dominant forms of western outdoor education (DWOE) that tend to be focused on risk, adventure, and wilderness narratives (Cure et al., 2018; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Place-responsive education has many forms and expressions, such as

community-based, art-based, and land-based education, that attend to human experiences and social and environmentally relevant issues (Barter, 2008; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). Rural communities can take advantage of outdoor, place-responsive forms of education to offer unique high school models to rural community members and beyond (Barter, 2008). Wells can integrate place-responsive education, community-based education, experiential education, art-based education, and land-based learning into their school model and pedagogical approach to the high school to reflect local contexts and to help students understand global connections.

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods of this research, including an overview on the guiding ecological paradigm and place-responsive conceptual approach. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is explained, along with a rationale for using CBPR alongside community members. Methods of recruitment, data generation, and analysis are detailed. An inductive analysis of the transcripts generated themes that reflected the nuance and meanings offered by the co-researchers. Findings were derived iteratively from re-reading and summarizing these themes. The chapter explains how rigour and quality were assured in the research process, including a section on positionality and reflexivity. Lastly, the limitations of the research are discussed.

Paradigm

This research used an ecological paradigm. Ecological paradigms seek to understand processes such as education within their emergent and relational contexts and recognize these processes to be intricately linked and connected to environmental and social realities and justice (Clarke & Mcphie, 2014; Mullins, 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2020). According to Ingold's (2000) description of inhabitation, humans and their social relations belong in this world as a subset of ecological relations connected to all aspects of life on Earth. Through an ecological paradigm, landscapes, places, and people are co-emergent and have an active and reciprocal role with each other (Beringer, 2004; Clarke & Mcphie, 2014; Lynch & Mannion, 2016; Mullins, 2009, 2020, 2020; Mullins & Maher, 2007). All human activities are embedded in relationships (Beringer, 2004). Additionally, Ingold (2000) described humans and landscapes as shaping and being shaped by flows or processes (i.e., humans, animals, air, water, goods, labour, and traffic). Drawing on Ingold, Mullins (2020) added that people "come to know and shape places through

the ways in which they move about them and the landscape" (p. 376). In this research, all Wells community members were recognized as co-creators of knowledge. The project and approach recognized Wells not just as a location, but as a place with existing history and meanings. The history and meanings were brought into the conversation and used towards developing a high school and its eventual form.

Conceptual Approach

An initial school proposal was based on the Wells and Area Community Associations' WILD school proposal (Wells and Area Community Association, 2017). That proposal came from, and is an expression of, the Wells community, and it gave rise and shape to the beginnings of this project. The proposal envisioned providing Wells with an integrated, interdisciplinary, place-responsive, outdoor-oriented high school. Community members first brought forth the idea of creating a high school guided by a place-responsive pedagogy. Due to the importance of place – the physical location and the social, cultural, economic, and environmental relationships between community members and community processes – this research used a conceptual approach that is place-responsive by collaborating with community members and recognizing the inter- and intra-relation between community social, environmental, and economic processes. A place-responsive conceptual approach applied to curriculum generation and educational planning requires holistic attention to place, which includes different experiences and perspectives gained over time by others in the community (Mannion et al., 2013b; Towers & Loynes, 2018). This research was socio-materially located in the town of Wells. To theorize the importance of place in such a way also draws attention to the uniqueness of Wells as a physical and cultural phenomenon and the fact that this school would not be possible anywhere else. As Hill and Brown (2014) suggested, these place relationships were integrated into the research design and

the data generation methods to reflect the local conditions and were rooted in relationships between actors.

To raise critical consciousness and awareness of the situation and data, the research involved intimate connections with participants as co-researchers. Through the co-researchers, we learned and understood the histories, stories, meanings, and connections of place within the data collected (Karulkiyalu Country et al., 2020). Engaging local community members interested in local education in Wells incorporated different perspectives with an understanding that contextual learning arises from emplaced processes in social and material worlds (Mannion, 2020). As co-researchers, and not just participants in this research, Wells community members were recognized for their significant involvement.

The research approached the community and setting of Wells as more than a physical backdrop for a school building or institution. Instead, Wells was recognized as a place rich in local meanings and significance, active in creating itself and its future. The community-based effort to redesign a school, including pedagogy and learning, included an array of knowing, being, and living in Wells, including the different activities, settings, and ways of life (Karulkiyalu Country et al., 2020). Collaborative research helped draw lessons from experiences in Wells regarding the community development impacts of not having a school, as well as develop an alternative place-responsive form for the high school specific to Wells.

Research Design

I used Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) for this inquiry. CBPR partners with community members as co-researchers. Co-researchers included interested members of the Wells community generally, as well as local community organizations such as the Wells Barkerville Community Forest, Wells Community Association, The Sunset Theatre, Island

Mountain Arts, and the Barkerville Historic Site. Treating participants as equal partners in the research process is a core tenant of CBPR (Caine & Mill, 2016; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Hacker, 2013; Johnson, 2017a; Mackinnon, 2018; Strand et al., 2003). CBPR is different from traditional academic research, frequently critiqued as rigid, assumed to be objective, and undermining community development efforts by exploiting community members and removing community autonomy (Strand et al., 2003). CBPR believes that research should be a community-academic exchange of knowledge, including life experiences, with the overarching goal of developing democratic and reliable research methods (Bastain et al., 2017; Springer & Skolarus, 2019). Everyone who is included in the process shares ownership of the research (Pain, 2004). CBPR builds a foundation for the research on strengths and resources in the chosen community (Johnson, 2017a). Similar methodologies and variations aim to engage participants in the research process, including participatory research, popular education, empowerment research, community-based research, and community-engaged research (Kindon, 2021; Mackinnon, 2018; Parker et al., 2020; Strand et al., 2003). All these research methodologies seek to bridge a gap between academia and actual world practices and projects (Hacker, 2013). This thesis project used the term CBPR because it encompassed community members' importance, participation, and valuable knowledge in the research design and process, and resonated with my idea of collaboration and community connection in qualitative research.

CBPR aims to “decentralize knowledge creation and question the legitimation of knowledge by ‘experts’ operating outside of research subjects’ subjective experience, through moving towards a distributed democratic, transparent process” (Bastain et al., 2017, p. 3). CBPR typically originates from a research topic that comes from and is crucial to a specific community (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). CBPR was a suitable methodology for this research because

of the substantive community drive for a high school, which led to involvement from the University of Northern BC. There is no high school in Wells, and dedicated community members expressed the significant effects this has had, and continues to have, on youth, families, and other community members. These dedicated community members then approached the University to form a partnership, meaning there was already an existing collective community drive to establish an alternative, place-responsive high school in Wells prior to the beginning of this research process.

Community in CPBR refers to a geographic location and shared experiences and relationships (Caine & Mill, 2016). Members of a geographic community can share similar values and interests (Springer & Skolarus, 2019); however, it is important to note that people can belong to more than one community at once, and communities are dynamic (Caine & Mill, 2016). In this research context, *community* referred not only to the physical location of Wells but to the complex and dynamic subcommunities within the geographic location. People in these subcommunities can have different and diverse experiences that are not shared with other individuals in Wells. *Participatory* typically refers to participants playing an active role in the research process (Kindon, 2021). This methodology was participatory because it recognized the importance of the Wells community members to the high school project and their relationships with space, place, and environment (Pain, 2004). Participatory research is context-specific, and local conditions and local knowledge is essential, and may result in thick descriptions of place (Pain, 2004). The community and the researcher worked together to create bi-directional learning, where the community as co-researchers learn or enhance their expertise in research processes as well as be able to continue their cause/future projects (Springer & Skolarus, 2019). Participatory research includes the co-production of knowledge, which refers to minimizing the

historical divide between the researcher and the researched, to move from research 'on' to research 'with' participants to engage with fellow enquirers (Bastain et al., 2017).

The attitudes and behaviours of outside researchers are noted as one of the most critical aspects of participatory work, as these attitudes and behaviours will affect the relationships with community members and the outcomes achieved (Kindon, 2021). In the past, research on communities has often been extractive, and the researcher tends to engage in unequal power relations with community members (Strand et al., 2003). I was motivated to help to produce something of value for the Wells community that I hoped would assist them as they continued forward with their high school project. CBPR allows researchers and community members to recognize and understand the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of the community of Wells. I ensured I was transparent, equitable, and culturally sensitive with co-researchers (Springer & Skolarus, 2019).

Creating change is a crucial aspect of CBPR, and CBPR can result in long-lasting and fundamental institutional change (Kingsley & Chapman, 2013; Strand et al., 2003). Working with co-researchers resulted in valuable data that can be used to help implement a high school in Wells. Partnerships are important to a participatory process, and it is essential in CBPR to develop positive relationships between community members and researchers (Springer & Skolarus, 2019). Essential aspects of partnership development involve trust development, capacity, mutual learning (self and collective reflection), power acknowledgement, contextual importance of place, the role of institutions and damaging institutional policies, and the role of education as a pathway for capacity building, and building on culture (Belone et al., 2016). I demonstrated my commitment to the community by putting time and effort into building positive relationships with the co-researchers. CBPR intends to focus on the experiences of community

members, and positions Wells community members and their collaboration at the forefront of the research.

Limitations of CBPR

My awareness of critiques and challenges associated with CBPR allowed me to try to mitigate these limitations. One of the biggest challenges with CBPR in an academic context is the time necessary to develop relationships. Most master's programs take two years on average. Building trust, rapport, and relationships with co-researchers is important and can be a timely process (Johnson, 2017a; Springer & Skolarus, 2019). I was transparent with co-researchers about my timeline and put time and resources into building strong relationships throughout the research process (Kindon, 2021). The high school planning and implementation process will continue after I complete my master's degree. My commitment to this potential high school project extends beyond completing the research process, and I have voiced my intent to attend future meetings where the community sees fit. Researchers from academic backgrounds "have an ethical obligation to equip the community with the tools needed to sustain an intervention or become successful change agents beyond the project period" (Springer & Skolarus, 2019, p. 48). This research focused on collaboration and co-learning with co-researchers to enhance learning outcomes. The community members involved in the research brought valuable knowledge, and I brought valuable knowledge which came together to help continue the high school project and helped me to complete my thesis. The high school project is also a community-driven initiative; the passion for this project came from the community. The emphasis on co-learning between all researchers will be significant to the continuation of this project.

An additional challenge within CBPR can happen when research that actively avoids exploitative or extractive methods on community members results in higher levels of

involvement with co-researchers, such as long-term relationships or even friendships, which can be problematic (Kindon, 2021). Support from outside networks can help ground the research and avoid problematic situations (Bingley, 2002, as cited in Kindon, 2021). These potentially close relationships were also challenging, considering the nature of my master's program, which required me to leave the community after two years of working closely with the co-researchers. I devoted time at different parts of the research process to discuss any sensitive and appropriate leaving strategies with co-researchers, which helped to manage expectations and navigate potential changes to my relationships with co-researchers. Kindon (2021) illustrated examples of appropriate leaving mechanisms, which included formal meetings, celebrations, feedback sessions, visits, or even an exchange of gifts. I discussed leaving strategies with co-researchers to determine the appropriate mechanisms for my departure. We decided to have an open celebration with community members, where we will congratulate each other on the work we have all put into the project. I am also aware of any ethical considerations that may arise when my status goes from co-researcher to friend. After my degree, I will be clear about how I can contribute or how much I can commit to these new relationships with old co-researchers.

One of the main goals of CBPR, as noted above, is to empower community members and to minimize power divides between academic researchers and community members (Pain, 2004). Empowerment and power can be problematic. Empowerment in CBPR has been critiqued as a notion that implies a paternalistic relationship between community and researcher, which questions the extent that community members can empower themselves (Leyshon, 2002). Acknowledging these limitations led to an emphasis on creating, designing, and adapting research methods with the co-researchers to suit diverse contexts rather than using a

predetermined formula for methods, and focusing on community collaboration from the beginning of the process.

Methods

The methods used in this research include forms of recruitment, data generation, and data analysis that are consistent with CBPR protocols. The co-researchers were recruited with help from the main point of contact with the community, hereby called a community champion, and through various social media groups connected to the Wells area. Experienced educators were identified and contacted through their public website domains. Data was collected through a series of six community workshops as well as through interviews with interested community members and experienced educators. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Detailed descriptions of the recruitment, data generation, and data analysis methods are described in detail in the following sections.

Recruitment

Research participation was open to any community member living in or with connections to Wells, BC. Once community members were included, they became co-researchers in the project. Other participants included experienced educators, such as current or past teachers, school administrators, and principals, with valuable knowledge and experience in Canadian public and private schools. Table 1 summarizes participants recruited into the study, Appendix A further lists co-researchers by number.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Co-Researchers	**Number**
General community member	15
Youth/Child	8
Guardian/Parent with school-aged children	5
Guardian/Parent with children done school	4
Total Co-Researchers	32
Experienced Educators	**Number**
Teacher	2
Administrator	6
Total Experienced Educators	8

Note. Those indicated as parents/guardians in subcategories have self-identified as such.

Potential key participants for each workshop were identified in partnership with the Wells and Area Community Association and in conjunction with the community champion. Participants for workshops were also recruited for workshops through posters displayed on the town bulletin board and in various community Facebook groups. Experienced educators with experience in alternative and rural education were identified through public web pages attached to their schools. An introductory meet and greet was held before any data generation. At the introductory meet and greet, there was a brief introduction to the research and a chance for interested community members to ask questions and get to know the study. Providing an opportunity for initial contact between myself and the co-researchers helped strengthen the relationships essential to a CBPR process and encouraged increased participation in the workshops (Springer & Skolarus, 2019). Invitations to the meet and greet were sent out through connections with the Wells and Area Community Association, through the community champion, displayed on a poster on the town's bulletin board, and various local Facebook groups. The meet and greet provided context to the research process and encouraged those interested in participating in the upcoming workshops. Community participants for unstructured interviews were identified

through a partnership with the Wells and Area Community Association. Additional interviewees were identified through workshops, where interested participants with valuable perspectives connected with the project. These recruitment methods encouraged participation from any community members interested in being a part of this research. Figure 4 provides an example of a recruitment poster that was used for a community workshop. Participants were required to sign a consent form before being allowed to participate in the project. Co-researchers under the age of 19 had to assent along with having their parent/guardian permission to participate.

Figure 4

An Example of a Recruitment Poster Used for a Community Workshop

Note. This figure represents a recruitment poster for Workshop #5 that was advertised in various locations throughout Wells and on local social media groups.

Co-researchers who participated in this study included teachers, members of various local organizations such as the Wells Barkerville Community Forest Board, Wells and Area Community Association, and local businesses such as Island Mountain Arts, the Sunset Theatre, and the Frog in the Bog. Co-researchers included community members, families, and children who are currently living in Wells. Some of the people were currently in elementary school or high school, or were long-term residents of Wells. Experienced educators were teachers, administrators, or principals of alternative schools in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. The different voices that were included in this research represent the different stages and perspectives that are relative to the project. Unfortunately, and most likely due to timing and availability constraints, there is a noted absence of Indigenous voices in this research project. This limitation should be addressed in future research on place-based and place-responsive community schools. Future research should incorporate more emphasis on land-based learning principles and emphasize direct involvement with Indigenous Elders, community members, and scholars.

Data Generation

Community members as co-researchers shared their experiences and perspectives concerning living and going to school in Wells and rural education generally through workshops and interviews. Together, we (my co-researchers and I), also wanted and needed to hear about the experiences and perspectives of experts who work in rural and alternative education. Data was collected using community workshops and unstructured interviews. Workshops were facilitated using semi-structured approaches, including brainstorming sessions and using prompts (Honey-Rosés et al., 2020). Unstructured interviews were used and allowed for personal

discussions with people, such as experienced educators, with keen perspectives on the project (Dunn, 2021).

Community Workshops. Community workshops provided a space for groups of people to come together to provide input, insights, organization, and creativity into theoretical and practical understandings surrounding the potential high school, including aspects of the problem, the high school vision, or steps to move forward with change (Israel et al., 2013; Parker et al., 2020; Stanfield & The Institute for Cultural Affairs, 2013). Specific participants were contacted directly depending on their experience with the workshop topic, but each workshop had open attendance for any community members who wished to participate (Chris et al., 2015). I facilitated the workshops with help from the community champion to help support workshop attendees. Our approach to facilitation was semi-structured (Honey-Rosés et al., 2020). At the beginning of each workshop, we provided a brief introduction to the background research, as well as a description of the workshop theme (Ellis et al., 2005). The community champion and I created a list of prompts to guide the discussion during each workshop. I kept a field notes journal and took point form notes during each workshop and spent time afterwards writing more in-depth accounts of what happened (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Appendix A provides a detailed description of the prompts used in each workshop. Each of the six workshops was about 3-5 hours in length (Huntington et al., 2006). Due to the time commitment and intensity of each workshop, community members were free to come and go as they pleased. Workshops had anywhere between 8-20 attendees. Additional details of the workshops can be found in Appendix B and C.

Unstructured Interviews. In addition to community workshops, unstructured interviews were utilized to gather more in-depth information about the high school processes (Given, 2012).

These interviews were conducted in person and over Zoom and covered topics related to the project (Dunn, 2021). These interviews gained specific insight from someone knowledgeable in certain areas. Interviewees had perspectives relevant to the project, and topics focused on a specific area of expertise or knowledge that is in service of the school project (Gubrium, 2009). Interviewees included experienced educators and co-researchers who were interested in sharing more in-depth perspectives related to the project. Having a data generation method that provided an opportunity for individual input allowed for alternative ways participants could contribute to the research that may be more comfortable (Kindon, 2021; Pain, 2004). Interview transcripts were sent to interviewees for member checking after each interview (Salway et al., 2020). I kept a field notes journal, where I took small notes during each interview and spent time afterwards writing more detailed accounts of what happened (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

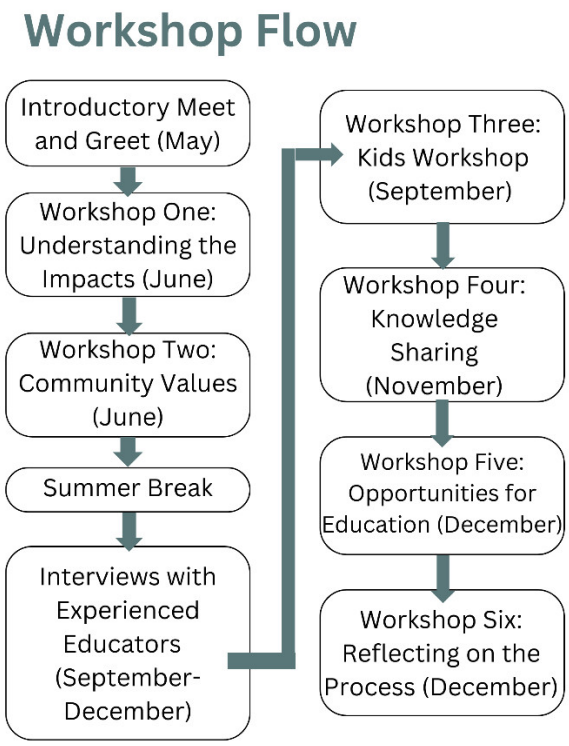
Timeline and Unfolding of Methods

Each workshop contributed to an overall flow and process (Figure 5). Although the community champion and I facilitated each workshop, the group supplied most of the content (Fang et al., 2016; Stanfield & The Institute for Cultural Affairs, 2013). The first workshop focused on establishing a deeper understanding of the impacts that the absence of a high school has had on the community. The second workshop discussed the values that are important and unique to community members to understand the context and locality of place. Workshop two included a walk throughout the community, as a way to understand the connections between the co-researchers and social, material, and discursive processes in the community (Lynch, 2019). Co-researchers could point out and explain important places within the town. Walking with co-researchers in their community served as a "mobile method sensitive to the relational view of place and the mobile nature of knowledge bound up in the sites of practice" (Lynch, 2019, p.

211). The first two workshops set the base for understanding the possible impacts of a high school along with the values and realities that could guide place-responsiveness in Wells.

Figure 5

Workshop Flow (2022)



Note. This figure demonstrates the flow and timing of the workshop series throughout the research process.

The third workshop was with the community's kids. After the first two workshops, the co-researchers (mostly adults) suggested having a workshop dedicated to the children of the community, so they could talk about going to school and living in Wells. Although all workshops were open attendance, and, therefore, kids could come to any of them, the co-researchers thought a workshop directed towards kids would provide them with a specific and comfortable place to share their valuable ideas and perspectives. A workshop was added for kids

under the age of 19 based on co-researchers' request. This workshop was co-facilitated with the community champion of the high school project, with whom the kids were familiar.

Interviews with teachers and educators with experience in similar alternative high school models began after the first three workshops. Initially, I had wanted to conduct a workshop with experienced educators in which they could share valuable perspectives and ideas for creating an alternative high school in Wells. However, time constraints meant that separate interviews worked better for the experienced educators. I identified and read about similar alternative high schools, such as the Saturna Ecological School, Cortes Island Academy, Take a Hike Burnaby, Coast Mountain Academy, the Boundless School, the Alberta Green Certification Program, and the Pacific School of Innovation. Appendix D provides the list of prompts used in the semi-structured interviews.

The fourth workshop discussed educational opportunities, potential school partnerships, and shared knowledge between experienced educators and community members. The experienced educators, community members, and interested organizations were invited to collaborate in attendance. Co-researchers had a chance to ask questions, receive advice, and relate the learnings from experienced educators into contextual knowledge directed towards their own potential high school. The analysis of interviews with experienced educators was also incorporated into workshop four, allowing for a form of member checking with the co-researchers.

The fifth workshop focused on the details of the Wells place-based high school. This workshop brought together knowledge and themes uncovered in the first four workshops and included a detailed analysis of what community members envisioned as the potential high school. The fifth workshop was co-facilitated with an experienced educator involved in the

previous workshops who had ties with the Wells community. This educator was interested in being involved with the potential high school project in Wells beyond just an interview, so they became a great resource in this research. The facilitation method in the fifth workshop included attendees writing an imaginative letter home from the perspective of a future student going to the high school. The letter was pre-written, but contained blank spaces for participants to fill in regarding logistical, structural, and theoretical applications and details of the school. Each blank was numbered, and corresponded with a number on the instruction page. Small groups discussed how to fill in the blanks in the letter, and then the letters were shared with the larger group. After each group completed a letter from home, a second singular letter summarized all of the data into one place, and was written from the school's perspective to prospective parents. Appendix C provides a detailed description of this facilitation method.

The sixth and final workshop served as a form of member checking and reflection (Salway et al., 2020). I combined all the key findings and insights from the preceding workshops, and then reviewed them with co-researchers. The co-researchers had a chance to see the overall process, and those who could not come to specific workshops or events could see key themes and insights provided.

Once my thesis is published, we will gather for a final farewell celebration at the community hall. This meeting will allow me to be transparent with co-researchers and thank them for their dedicated work, celebrating the milestone completed. During this last meeting, the community will also be presented with a copy of my thesis and a community report summarizing key themes and insights from the workshops and interviews and providing some direction for the next steps.

Data Analysis

Data from the workshops and unstructured interviews included recordings and the transcripts from each recording. The recordings allowed me to reflect on content generated during each workshop and a way to add content to following connected workshops. Recordings also allowed me to identify group dynamics and acknowledge which attendees were participating in the discussion and how much they were participating in the research process (Bryman, 2012; Pain, 2004). Recordings were fully transcribed, omitting filler words (McLellan et al., 2003). Although it was difficult to guarantee confidentiality due to the nature of CBPR, participants were assigned a numerical code and were not named in the transcriptions (Flodén, 2019). The transcriptions were used as a way to inform or answer my research questions by allowing careful and detailed attention to be given to each co-researchers contribution, and amalgamate their perspectives and experiences. Audio recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai, a software that takes audio recordings and automatically translates them into text, saving hours of work for researchers. Transcriptions were then manually checked, cleaned, and corrected. Interviewees were sent the transcripts for member checking (Dunn, 2021). Post-workshop and interviews, the products of the workshop were consolidated, refined, and summarized so that data was more useable for the school project and, when applicable, for the next workshop.

This research process was descriptive and exploratory due to the data being the experiences of interested community members and experienced educators, so an inductive analysis method was appropriate (Guest et al., 2012). The inductive analysis used the data as a starting point for interpreting and identifying meaning instead of using existing theoretical concepts or theories to answer research questions (Braun et al., 2015). Although a researcher always has some bias (Cartwright, 2023), I aimed to let the data guide the research's meaning. In

this research, the data was heavily nuanced, which required me to analyze it in a way that allowed me to condense the data but still preserve the meaning. Thematic analysis was a method for data analysis that allowed me to consolidate the large amount of data produced in the audio recordings (Mills et al., 2010). Data included roughly 24 hours of audio recording with community members and 12 hours with experienced educators. Interview and workshop audio transcriptions were uploaded to NVIVO12, where they were read through one by one (Spiers & Riley, 2019). Using thematic analysis, I searched the workshop and interview transcripts for recurring and relevant themes and coded them accordingly (Wheeler, 2023). Codes were understood in relation to different contexts (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Contexts included the social, environmental, and economic realities in Wells. As raw data was heavily nuanced, it was important to keep whole sentences and sometimes paragraphs together when coding to keep the quality of the information (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Themes "are usually inductively developed by the researcher who has fully familiarized themselves with the data through immersive and repeated reading" (K. Wheeler, 2023, p. 4). Due to the nature of transcribing, member checking, and the fact that I was involved in the data generation event, I was very familiar with the transcription documents. I became even more familiar with the data after each read-through. Familiarity was important for understanding the nuance and complexity in the data, and how it contributed to encompassing the diversity of experiences in Wells (Braun & Clarke, 2021)

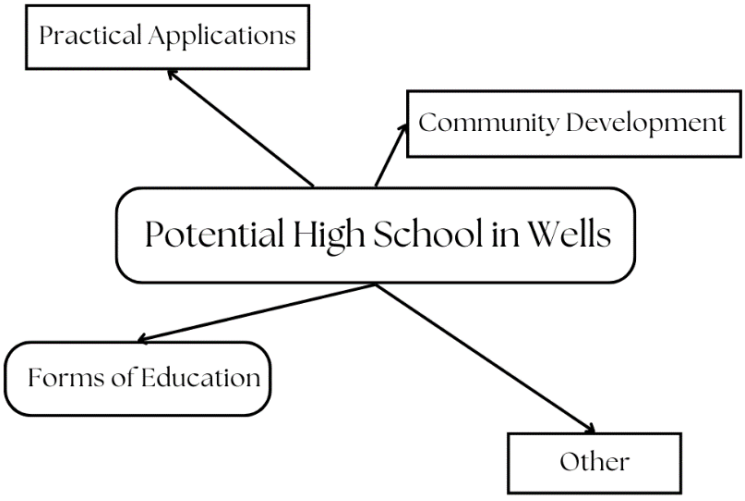
Thematic analysis was used as a tool for research dissemination. Although there are many approaches to thematic analysis, I used an appropriation of Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step method: 1. Become familiar with the data; 2. Generate the initial codes; 3. Search for themes within the codes; 4. Review the themes you find; 5. Discuss the themes; and 6. Write down your

findings. During each step in the analysis, I kept careful notes about my process, thoughts, and reflections (Netzer & Chang, 2016). These reflections helped me move forward with reporting findings and the discussion.

Transcribing the audio recordings from the interviews and workshops was an intensive process. After each transcription, I reread the full transcript in conjunction with the field notes I took during the live data-gathering process, which allowed me to familiarize myself deeply with the project (Cartwright, 2023). As suggested by Damsa et al. (2021) and Graneheim and Lundman (2004), knowledge of the data and the research questions guided the initial development of codes, which included community development, forms of education, and practical applications of the ideas of the community members and experienced educators. An 'other' category was added for data that did not fit these initial topics (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Initial Codes

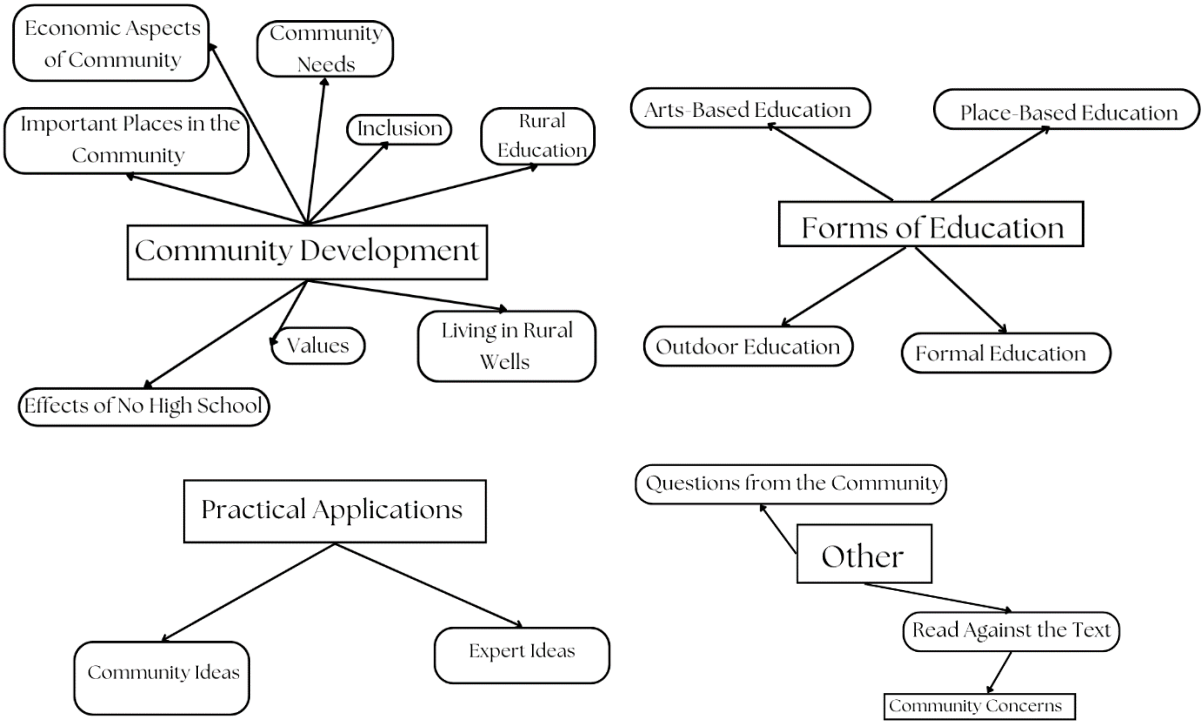


Note. This figure represents an adaptation of initial codes following step one in of Bruan and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis.

After reading the transcripts multiple times, sub-codes were created based on key and/or repeating insight from the data. Figure 7 depicts how the initial codes were further split into sub-codes. The information coded was read multiple times in search of themes within the data (Guest et al., 2012). Although 'theme' has multiple definitions, in this thesis, a theme is defined as "an underlying meaning through codes or categories, on an interpretative level… A theme can have various levels or sub-themes" (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 107). After each round of reading the transcripts, I would then refer back and organize my codebook, separating the codes into themes. I repeated steps three and four multiple times to further interpret the data, refining and interpreting the codes to search for and review themes (Spiers & Riley, 2019). I used NVIVO, a software that helps sort through qualitative data, to assist with organizing my codes and interpreting themes. Appendix E details an example of how a code in NVIVO was used to sort statements, and how a theme was uncovered using the coded data and my field notes. Software such as NVIVO separates data into distinct codes, where it can be difficult to see connections (Paulus et al., 2017). To mitigate this limitation, I included large sections of text in each code to attempt to capture the nuance and context behind the statement (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). I also used my field notes journal in conjunction with the software (Sohn, 2017). I also avoided "unsubstantiated claims of a relationship between [NVIVO] use and improved quality (Paulus et al., 2017, p. 35).

Figure 7

Codes Split into Sub-Codes



Note. This image represents an adaptation of step two in Bruan and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis.

Although the frequency of statements was important, the meaning behind each statement was more important for finding and naming the apparent themes in the data and required my interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith & Fieldsend, 2007). I further interpreted these themes as my findings, which are further discussed in the writing process. During bi-weekly meetings with the community champion, I went over the themes and codes to ensure member checking was consistent throughout the analysis.

Positionality and Reflexivity

In terms of positionality, I identify as a white, cis-gendered female. My identity and socialization as a privileged person, my academic history in outdoor recreation, and my former employment in the outdoor recreation and tourism sector influenced how I approached, interpreted, and analyzed issues. I am an outsider to the community of Wells. As an outsider, I was cautious of power dynamics and gatekeeping of information and reflected on these aspects throughout the research process. Being an outsider, I could also be of service. In facilitating research aspects such as the workshops and initiating unstructured interviews, I helped to create a space where people could voice their perspectives and opinions. My knowledge and experience in outdoor recreation and outdoor education was also an asset. These aspects contributed to multi-directional learning between me, community members, and various experienced educators. I also brought in fresh perspectives that were not integrated into community processes. My research role was to bring outside knowledge to the community. I was cautious of academic constraints that arose, and I was transparent with the co-researchers, participated in member checking, and underwent constant reflection. I worked closely with the community of Wells as the co-researchers on this project, which influenced the results and analysis of the data.

Reflexivity is important in qualitative research, particularly in CBPR (Kindon, 2021). Giving space for research participants, including myself, to pause and reflect on our positionality and identity about this project was important because such positionality can influence our fieldwork and analysis (Hay & Cope, 2021). Reflexivity includes thinking about how researchers came to the research and asking how various actors are represented (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). This thesis section positions me in relation to the co-researchers (Catungal & Dowling,

2021). As the research progressed, I continually returned to this positionality section as more insights into my position were uncovered.

The WILD school project was conceptualized before I applied to UNBC, and I was brought together with the project through my Master's supervisor. This research combined my academic background in tourism and outdoor leadership and my practical experience working in the outdoor adventure recreation industry. These practical experiences helped to shape my view of wilderness and outdoor activities. My academic background in an outdoor education degree helped shape my view of what constitutes outdoor education. This project piqued my interest because of its ties to outdoor education. The WILD school project proposal noted a need for a place-based outdoor education high school, which was my first introduction to place-based education. Learning about place-based education began challenging my ideas of wilderness and outdoor education. This project was also deeply engrained in the K-12 education system of BC, which I have not had previous experience with. In acknowledging my scope and limitations as a researcher, the significance of including other, more knowledgeable educators and co-researchers became integral to the success of this project. In addition, I was an outsider to a project deeply engrained in a specific community. While I brought valuable perspectives on outdoor education and the research process, understanding my limitations as a researcher and being an outsider to a community project was why using CBPR as a methodology was helpful for data generation. Using CBPR allowed co-researchers and me to fill in any gaps and utilize our strengths when conducting our research.

Rigour and Quality

The rigour and quality of a research design help to discourage bias and allow valid conclusions from research data (Crooks et al., 2013). Different research aims affect research

design, data generation and analysis, and knowledge creation or generation. In alignment with participatory research, this research was intensive because the co-researchers and I were creating and shaping data (Hay & Cope, 2021). Rigour was considered from the beginning of the research process (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). There are different perspectives about what constitutes rigour in CBPR, and definitions of quality research designs and implementations may vary across disciplines (Kingsley & Chapman, 2013). In this inquiry, co-researchers and I aimed to understand what it means to be a part of the Wells community(ies), how the absence of a high school impacted the community, and contribute resources, knowledge, and perspectives that can help address this problem creatively. In seeking these understandings and changes, "it is crucial to think in nuanced ways about people's identities and ways of being in the world, because we are never *just* an age, a gender, or a member of a specific ethnic, racial, religious, socio-economic, or other group – always, we are complex beings. That complexity needs to be accounted for if rigour is to be maintained" (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, para. 5). Theories of place-responsiveness and the questions asked in this inquiry were interrelated and influenced me and the co-researchers. As I approached this research within a theory of place-responsiveness, I was open to other people's stories of place and other aspects of place beyond merely the social (Cameron et al., 2004). I was aware of distinctive elements of place, including people-people, people-more-than-human, and people-flow interactions, and incorporated these aspects into the research process and dissemination (Mannion et al., 2013b). I also aimed to acknowledge and understand how these aspects influenced my work. These themes of place-responsiveness were explored in the positionality, reflexivity, and limitations sections of this thesis. These sections remained flexible to change and were continually reflected upon throughout the research process to help establish rigour, acknowledge bias, and increase validity of results.

Two additional ways I demonstrated rigour in this research were 1) to focus on establishing trustworthiness with the co-researchers and 2) by documenting each stage in the research process to better communicate my work with the co-researchers and committee members (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). From the beginning, I documented my work in the form of field notes as thoroughly as possible, including my motivations for participating in the project and my philosophical, theoretical, and political dispositions (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). This documentation allowed co-researchers to member-check my work and either approve or make changes to the research process, especially the interpretation of meanings and the evolution of thoughts that came from the data. Only on two occasions did interviewees want to change their statements.

Trust is also a large part of CBPR projects and processes, and I worked on cultivating positive relationships with Wells community members. Rigor and CBPR value orientation are often seen as inseparable, highlighting the importance of democratic relationships with co-researchers (Kingsley & Chapman, 2013). In addition, transparency was a guiding principle for my work with the community, which helped to continue the trust and rapport-building process with the co-researchers (Kingsley & Chapman, 2013). Setting these aspects up as the foundation of our work together, co-researchers member-checked each aspect of the research.

Randomization as a participant selection process tends to be an accepted guideline for rigour; however, for school-based and community-based programming, randomization creates ethical issues (Crooks et al., 2013). I aimed to involve many different community members and all who wished to be involved in the project, consistent with the aims of CBPR. In a school-based community study by Crooks et al. (2013), randomization was deemed unethical because the students, parents, and other stakeholders determined their participation in the project as

important and wished to be more involved. In CBPR, each participant has unique identities, values, and agencies, which effected and were affected by the research (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). Because I used CBPR as my research design, co-researchers and I had to justify why we wanted to be involved in the research – and identify who we are, our perspectives, behaviour, practices, identities, personalities, and motivations for wishing to be involved in the project (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). Workshops as a data generation method allowed many community members to participate as co-researchers on this project and allowed their ideas and perspectives to come together in a central location.

Lastly, I continuously checked my work with other sources, including other research, with colleagues, supervisors, the grad committee, and the co-researchers in the Wells community (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). Working together with the Wells community as co-researchers, we defined and co-constructed understandings of doing CBPR in a way that reflects quality and rigour (Kingsley & Chapman, 2013). Co-researchers and I worked together and gained new skills, which enhanced our understanding of community needs and assets, leading to improved internal validity of results (Hacker, 2013). These strategies utilized for rigour and quality counter typical errors in qualitative research, increasing reliability of the results (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2015). Specific results from this research, however, may not be generalizable due to the importance placed on context-specific findings, though the results may benefit other communities with similar issues, and the transparency of the research design and process could lead to enhanced understandings of what generalization may suit other circumstances.

Findings

This chapter presents findings resulting from my analysis of the data from the series of community workshops and individual interviews with interested community members and knowledgeable educators with experience in rural and alternative forms of education towards responding to the research questions. The research questions were:

1. With the loss of its high school, what lessons from community development and place-responsive outdoor-based education might apply to and serve the context and community of Wells, BC?
2. Through community engagement and collaboration, what form might a place-responsive and community-based high school take in Wells?
3. Following this collaborative process, how can the experience of a group of concerned and dedicated citizens inform understandings and practices of place-responsive high school education and rural community development?

The findings are presented in two sections. Section one comprises Findings 1 and 2 which communicate the lasting impacts of losing a high school. Section one responds to question 1 by detailing the constraints on community development a rural community may face when a high school is closed due to educational policy. Section two reports findings 3-6. Section two elaborates on co-researchers' vision for a high school that draws on unique opportunities for place-based development and the well-being of their community, answering research question 2. Alternative rural education professionals' experiences validate co-researchers' motivations and provide advice for future decisions and pathways. In this way, section two responds to research question 3.

Finding 1: Significant community impacts.

A pattern that clearly presented in the data was that the absence of a high school has limited population growth in Wells, creating a cyclical effect where certain resources can only be accessed with a bigger population in town, but people keep leaving town because of a lack of resources. The co-researchers understand resource allocation in Wells (both educational and economic resources) as following a demand and supply system - not having a high school has decreased the population in the town as families move away to pursue educational opportunities for their children, resulting in fewer resources allocated to the community. The cyclical effect has been compounded throughout multiple generations of families that live or want to live in Wells. Co-researcher 3 summed up the spiral effect during a workshop:

> We're continually losing families as a result of not having high school because it's just really hard on the children taking the bus every single day. So we struggle, we struggle getting resources to our school, extra teaching support, EA support, because we just don't have the numbers. And we just don't really have the opportunity for the numbers to grow. Because once the children reach high school, they tend to leave the community or, not always, but I would say probably 50% of the time, and then siblings go with them. So my daughter who's going into grade six next year will be leaving the Wells school to attend the Quesnel school. And so we're decreasing our numbers again. So we can't really ever get to that magic number that gives us another teacher with the lack of a high school. I can also talk on a different perspective, not as a mother but with some of the work that I'm doing in the community around housing. So I'm really trying to support the housing initiative for single-family homes so we can get more families to grow those numbers in the school. But the challenge with recruitment and retention, of course, is the lack of the

> high school. Families don't want to move to a community when they're just going to have to potentially relocate in the future.

Data continually indicated that an absence of a high school in Wells affects the community's economic well-being by impacting the number of student/youth workers and professional/skilled workers in town. According to an interview with a co-researcher, the current economic system in Wells is set up for people to be in Wells for a short time, reinforcing the transient nature of the town. The data described that the absence of a high school further augments this transient nature. The lack of a high school results in a lower student population as many students move away to pursue educational opportunities elsewhere. Fewer teenagers are present to fill typical student roles, such as summer/seasonal positions and minimum-wage jobs. Co-researcher 21 stated:

> The museum, I'm on, when you live in Wells you are on like 100 non-profit societies, and so the Historical Society, we couldn't open the museum this year because we could not find a student. Not one applied in Barkerville. Sometimes they get like, two or three students, last year I think they got one. And they felt really lucky to get one. But that was so sad, the first year the museum wasn't open. It's so sad.

In addition, if a family decides to move, then the town may also lose one or two skilled professionals that may work at various businesses across the community, thus further reducing community vibrancy. The absence of a high school also tends to deter potential families from relocating to Wells to fill job vacancies and contribute to the community, which was exemplified by Co-researcher 3, who said:

> There's two families that I was working with that worked at the mine, and you know, I did everything I could to try and convince them to move here with their children, but they

> had one child that was in high school. So they flew in and flew out. So they would come here for two weeks, stay in camp and leave for two weeks. Those are kids that we could potentially have in our community, but the lack of a high school, you know, forced their families to be on that camp rotation.

People, including families with children and parents/guardians who are skilled workers, can be dissuaded from moving to Wells because there are fewer educational opportunities for their children, impacting the economic potential of the community, according to some co-researchers.

The economic impacts in Wells, particularly concerning the resurging mining industry, may be further augmented due to the absence of a high school. Some co-researchers say without a high school, the proposed mine will have difficulty enticing mining families to relocate and participate in the community. How the proposed mine will contribute to or impact the community in Wells is still being determined. The mine, which wants to bring more people (as workers) into the area, will have trouble attracting families who want to stay in Wells and raise their kids in an area without a high school. Instead, mine employees with families will likely choose to be on a camp rotation instead of being a part of the community, as shown by the conversation between two community members below.

> **Co-researcher 7:** And then there's this gold project, which might double the population of people here. Chances are they would be pretty young, possibly that type [young adults] of age, right? are the ones going to have the families that come up here?
>
> **Coresearcher 6:** Yeah, unfortunately, without the school I see it bringing a lot of people in, but you're gonna lose those people with high school-aged kids because they just simply can't move to us because there's no school for them, you know?

The absence of a high school impacts opportunities for community development, especially concerning economic processes within the town. The absence of a high school also means that students who are in high school are often absent from the community.

Finding 1. A: An entire demographic is missing from the community because of the lack of a high school, affecting kids, families, and community dynamics.

During the research process, co-researchers discussed the absence of high school kids in the community, illuminated by the exchange between two community members below:

> **Co-researcher 21:** Once they go to high school, they kind of leave the town and, and just I don't know, it just feels like… you know they have to go on that long bus ride, I live across the street from the school, and the bus comes at some ungodly hour, like 530 or six, and they get on the bus and then they're gone all day. So they're really not a part of it [the community], it just feels like all of a sudden they're just gone.
>
> **Co-researcher 5:** And [teenagers] are a part of the fabric of the community… They're not here to add to the community. And that's, that's one of the biggest strengths of this community. There's just so many far-reaching implications of cutting out a whole demographic of people in the community. And it's not just that demographic. It's everything that goes along with it like community events and programs for teenagers.

For families who decided to stay in town while their children are in high school, co-researchers saw the bus as a better option than billeting in Quesnel for the week (something students had to do in previous years, according to community members), illustrated by the exchange between Co-researchers below:

> **Co-researcher 9:** When the school deteriorated, or I don't know if that's the right word, but when it, you know, started to shrink, the panic was, of course, losing the school when

I was there. So the option of having that bus was the great compromise to not closing us down. So on the one hand, I'm glad it's there, I'm glad that the kids have the opportunity to go in and the families don't have to move, but it is a long day, especially in winter, they're getting on the bus in the dark and coming home in the dark. It's all day. I wouldn't want to do that.

Co-researcher 5: Yeah we fought to get the bus. And I really think that we didn't really see the whole picture, but at the beginning we just thought that it'd be they would be on the bus, you know, an hour into town, they go to school and then it's an hour back. But no, they leave at 630 in the morning and don't come back until 430 in the afternoon. So of my four children that went to school here, some of them could sleep on the bus. Some of them could do their homework on the bus so that by the time they got home, they could do other things. But it affected their potential and affected their education, riding on that bus and going all that way. I couldn't afford to move. I couldn't. I was a single parent with four kids, my choices were really limited. My kids were on the bus. And that's all there was to it. But it affected their sports. I mean, it probably affected us as a family. Because I literally spent every extra penny I had driving back and forth to Quesnel, in order to make sure that they were still in sports, they still had dance, they still had all of those things that, I think are really important.

The co-researchers noted that although the students still live in Wells, kids who take the bus feel absent from the community. The bus took away the valued mentorship and volunteering opportunities for the kids, which were important aspects of living in Wells. In addition, students wanting to do extracurricular activities in Quesnel require their parent/guardian/other to drive to Quesnel to pick them up, requiring the driver to have free time and money. The bus was

unreliable and was canceled many times the previous year due to staff shortages, budget cuts in the school district, and dangerous winter road conditions. The co-researchers shared their experiences with the bus below:

> **Co-researcher 3:** The bus was canceled so many times this year. So many, not even just because of road conditions. Just staff shortages and we are the first place to get cut. And we don't know it's cancelled until the morning of.
>
> **Researcher**: So I guess when it does get cancelled on such short notice in the morning, then parents have to drive their kids to school?
>
> **Co-researcher 6:** Generally your kids don't go to school that day.
>
> **Co-researcher 2:** Which leads to a whole other faction of economic impacts. Like, if your kids aren't going to school that day, can [the parent] go to work that day?

When the bus does run, it increases the risk for the children due to road conditions and wildlife encounters. Some child co-researchers were very worried about taking the bus in the future. Past students who took the bus noted that being away from their families/community was challenging. The children who take a bus away from Wells are absent from the community, creating impacts to individual and family well-being.

Children who take the bus feel torn between two communities because of the long commuting hours. The absent children are typically away from their familiar environments, support systems, families, and friends in Wells. Co-researcher 4, a parent of three children who took to the bus to Quesnel, remembered:

> It's quite a culture shock, I noticed for kids going in, because they go from that really supportive mentorship and the independence, and the autonomy of learning to… they kind of end up in an institution, essentially. That's what it is. [Co-researcher 5: "They

> don't have a choice]. No, and, and then, I remember, as a parent, for [their child], you know, I, I felt like she was wilting. But you know… [tearing up] I remember [their other child] saying 'please don't send me back [to Quesnel.]'"

Co-researcher 1, a young adult who went to school in Wells, and took the bus to Quesnel, reflected on taking the bus and leaving the familiarity of Wells:

> You're just always in a space that isn't comfortable and yes, it's exhausting. You can see why these kids come back [from a school day in Quesnel] tired. They just don't have the like, you know, it's the mental load. You just don't have it in you to give back. Just so much. It's yeah, it's interesting too, like the strain, that strain that [taking the bus] puts on families. Personally, I remember, you know, it just impacts family dynamics so much too, I remember coming home, and essentially, I needed like, an hour by myself before either of my siblings could talk to me. Because if they did, like, I was, I just snapped automatically, it didn't matter what it was, but I couldn't handle it, essentially and I just needed to recalibrate. And that's just me but, you know, I think it impacts youth in so many different ways too that actually have very strong impacts on how their family relates and operates together.

Community members, including the remaining children in Wells, miss the absent teenagers and their essential role. Co-researcher 19 said: "Yeah, it's just having this whole demographic missing is weird. And then for the kids that do get leftover, they're like in this weird void of not having any peers." The absent peers' statement was echoed by Co-researcher 2, who reflected: "Yeah, I had a really good buddy who had to move away because her brother was starting high school." There are social and economic impacts felt by kids and families due to the lack of a high school in Wells.

The absence of a high school in Wells was reported to affect the social dynamics of the whole community. Creating and maintaining the tight-knit social community of Wells takes effort and depends on community members' involvement in community functions. Community collaboration and an ethic of volunteering are values within the community but can be taxing to the community members who participate. More community members could help share the load of creating/reinforcing community and community values, but the absence of a high school may deter people from moving to Wells. Co-researcher 2 reflected on the effort put into community building by saying:

> I think another thing that is interesting is about having a community that can hold you here. But also, you need to then build a community of human beings who are willing to do volunteer work that are not also with entire organizations on their back as like a single entity. Because for me, I would love to volunteer more. But I'm tired. Yeah, at the end of the day, I can't pull it out, you know? And, yeah, so it's just another one of those things where... well, more people would share the load. And then the kind of relationships that you're talking about building with the students in Wells or like building with kids like, I think intergenerational knowledge sharing is something that Wells has such an incredible potential for. But if everybody is always working all the time at the things they are doing it is really hard to then at the end of the day to have this conversation with the student who's bright and bushy-tailed, and I want to be there for those human beings 100%. But I also need to sleep.

According to co-researchers, the effects of the absence of a high school have plagued the community for the last three decades since the local high school shut down in the 1980s, inhibiting attempts at community development on an educational, social, and economic level.

Finding 2: Significant student and family impacts.

In Wells and surrounding areas, once a child reaches high school age, families must make a forced decision that impacts the child, their families, and the surrounding community members. The data detailed that families' options (to move, enroll in distributed learning, or take the bus 2.5-3 hours a day to Quesnel) are seen by parents as a decision they are forced to make when children reach high school age in Wells. Parent co-researchers deemed moving away—even if they did not have the means to move themselves—as the best decision for their children's education because of the absence of a high school in town. Even though most child and parent co-researchers may prefer the way the education system is set up in Wells and the way of life in Wells, parents recognized that the best option for their child was going to school near their own home and being close to their family, if they could do so. According to a co-researcher at one of the workshops, Wells loses 1-2 families a year, contributing to the cyclical effect of needing more people to access resources that will benefit community members. None of the options—taking the bus, homeschooling, or moving to another community, are seen as favourable. Co-researchers indicated that all three options disconnect high school children from their homes, families, friends, peers, and support systems, which does not set students up for success in their lives. Co-researcher 3, recently faced with this forced decision, stated:

> I'm in this situation in the present. My son is going to grade eight next year, so we're at a point where he either homeschools, distance learning, or goes to Quesnel to Junior High School, which is a huge change, you know, for a child going from 18 students to 500. Bussing is not an option for us. So as a result, we're being forced to, not forced, we're choosing, but in my mind it's the only option, to relocate, so that [child's name] can attend school and I can be present and supportive during that time. So yeah, that's how it

> affects us. I'm not the only circumstance, we're continually losing families as a result of not having high school.

Parent co-researchers reported seeing themselves stuck in an unfair education system that does not see value in what Wells can offer a child's education.

Kids who will go, are going, and have gone to Quesnel have both positive and negative feelings about the experience. Children reported being nervous about going to school in Quesnel. Co-researchers who were attending the Quesnel school described experienced a culture shock when they first arrived – noise, big class sizes, loss of independence, separation by age, and a resulting loss of role modeling and mentorship. Kids reported feeling a sense of loss or a yearning to be surrounded by nature and be back in Wells. However, some children are/were excited about going to high school away from Wells, where there are more opportunities for extracurriculars, electives, and more people to befriend. The below exchange was between Co-researcher 22, a teenager taking the bus to Quesnel, Co-researcher 23, a parent with children in distributed learning, and Co-researcher 27, a child who moved to Quesnel said:

> **Co-researcher 27**: I don't like going to school in Quesnel because at my school there is over 200 kids and that's more than our whole town, even. And I don't like it because it can get so loud there. I hear cars. Lots and lots of cars. Especially where my house is. You fall asleep to cars and you wake up to cars.
>
> **Co-researcher 22:** [In Quesnel] there's a lot more people so you meet lots of different people and there's counselors 24/7 at the school. And there's a lot more opportunities. [Christy "Opportunities for what?"] Lots of things, so there's a lot of sports you can do at the school. And for spring break I get to go to Italy… you can sign up for like volleyball or cross country running or the swim or the swim team. And then you get electives. Like

> you get to try our own electives… You can practically make anything you want… Yeah, like with the Wells school there's not so many kids, so you couldn't really play [group gym games] like ultimate Frisbee. There are pros and cons to each.
>
> **Co-researcher 23:** I liked the point that you made [Co-researcher 22] that it's a trade-off, which I always say but it's a trade-off. Like yeah, there are things that you give up by not living in the city, but there are things that you gain by living here.

In addition, co-researcher 27, a child who moved to Quesnel, and their friend, Co-researcher 28, who still lives in Wells, had this conversation during the kids workshop:

> **Co-researcher 27:** I didn't really want to [move to Quesnel]. I still don't want to. I don't really know. Its just different. I don't really like it.
>
> **Co-researcher 28:** You're coming back, right?
>
> **Co-researcher 27:** Yes I am. Next year. I am so happy. And I can maybe stay for two more years. Hopefully. If there is a high school. So then I don't have to move back to Quesnel.

Children must adapt to whatever decision their families think is best.

Co-researchers who decided distributed learning was their best option found the course inadequate and frustrating. The four children co-researchers enrolled in distributed learning at the time found the content poorly maintained, with uninspired subject matter, errors with correct answers, and missing/disorganized sections. The co-researchers who had children enrolled in distributed learning contributed much effort to assist their children through the topics. Parent co-researchers noted that not all families could do this if they had jobs with extended hours. In addition, if a child has a disability and enrolls in distributed learning, they felt that the learner would lose a lot of support that would otherwise be provided to them by the school district if

their child went to school in Quesnel. The conversation below is between co-researchers that were enrolled in distributed learning at the time of the kids' workshop:

> **Co-researcher 26:** Some words I found on my lessons are actually misspelled and the stories I have to read are usually kind of problematic and filled with disturbing material, and also racism in one story that I read recently. And another thing is that like, for science, I'm supposed to take the pages and find the tab that matches them on the site and fill in the blanks. But I had page 26 with me yesterday, and you go to tab 26. Nothing like it is on there. That site always does that. And even when it's correct with some pages, for certain parts of the page they just replace it with something completely different. It's like it is rigged or something. And for some reason, someone replaced every multiplication symbol on a page with an apostrophe. And the first stories that I was given to read were really bad. Like some of the questions are kind of disturbing too. Yeah I am not exactly starting to trust the program.
>
> **Co-researcher 24:** Yeah, [distributed learning] is fine. I like some of it. But it feels kind of uninspired. Like the people who made it don't know what eighth graders need to learn. Some of it is way too easy. And some of it is at the right level but I still find hard because I'm not that good at school. Some of it's pretty easy for me and yeah, the first day we had to replace the stories because I, I did a slur count on one of the stories and there were three.

Distributed learning was frustrating and inadequate for some of the co-researchers due to the technology involved and the adaptation of course matter. Parent/guardian co-researchers who had children in distributed learning found it difficult and time-consuming to oversee the

execution of the courses. Co-researchers wished to see more applicable, relevant content available for the students who were enrolled.

Finding 2. A: Forced decisions exacerbate community inequalities contrary to community values.

The data described a community that strongly values equitable access to learning resources. However, inequities within the community are exacerbated when families have to choose to stay, go, or homeschool. Differing finances shape families' available options, and children and families with differing learning or physical abilities are pulled to leave to access needed learning resources. Co-researcher 19, a parent living in the community, shared their story:

> Well, personally, it's very tricky, because my son is going into grade eight next year. And so what we're doing, my son is autistic, and he does really well in school, which I'm really grateful for. Because we have tried doing some homeschooling in the past. And it was… not my favorite thing in the world. It was okay, when COVID happened we sort of figured out a good system. Anyway, I'm not, I just absolutely in no reality can I possibly imagine sending him to Quesnel on a bus, like, it's just totally beyond anything that either of us would ever be comfortable with. So he's gonna do distributed learning next year. Which is like, it's okay. But it's… I mean, it's just the best option that we have at this point. The other option would obviously be to move, but it's funny, I'm kind of, I actually wouldn't mind moving. But I can't afford anything now because it's become so crazy. So we're kind of stuck here.

The impact of exacerbating inequalities was also exemplified through this exchange between community members:

> **Co-researcher 2:** Just a thought about families leaving and stuff like that, for this community, there's, graciously saying, I think there's a tremendous amount of privilege to be able to [move away to pursue educational opportunities for your child] as well. So then if you have like a family who isn't able to provide that, regardless of the supports that their kids are going to need, again, just like then perpetuates a system of not being able to blossom in the ways like kids who find themselves in supportive environments.
>
> **Co-researcher 4:** [Having no high school] becomes a form of intergenerational trauma. Because then it's just pushing back on people who are already maybe… Like, for yourself [community member] as a single mom, I mean, it just added a whole other level of challenge and strain on your children and you that was because of your you know, it's not like you could be moved to another place.
>
> **Co-researcher 3:** And I totally recognize that we are super fortunate and grateful that we have the ability to [move to Quesnel], if we did not, which not everybody does, it would be a different situation for us for sure. And the ability to have a good education for my child would suffer. So I think that it definitely comes to equality and the right to have an education. And, you know, my son will have more of an opportunity to be successful, because I'm setting up, because I have the ability to set up these systems in place for him to be living closer to the school, but not everybody can do that.

This forced choice, and the impacts on the community, can create significant impacts for parents and children.

The mental load of an uncertain future for a child, once they reach grade 8 in Wells, was also noted as a burden for kids and parents. Co-researcher 3, a parent in Wells undergoing the stress of the forced decision, added: "It's scary. It's very scary. And, you know, I'm scared about

what next year looks like. For sure." Although some children are excited about attending high school in a "big city" (perceptions of attending high school may be influenced by popular media), some kids are anxious, nervous, and scared. Co-researcher 30, a child in grade six, who has two years before high school, confided: "[whispers] I don't want to take the bus. Although I do like going on field trips, sometimes when we go on field trips we would take the bus, I felt lonely though. I was alone most of the time." Parents also reported feeling anxious about what their children's high school years would look like for their children and families. This uncertainty about a child's future suggests there is not equal access to education for students in rural areas. In unique ways, the community is responding to the challenges faced and created, and inequalities presented in the status quo. Findings 3-6 show the motivations of community members and detail the resulting vision of a place-responsive high school in Wells, along with similar experiences of experienced educators that will help the community as they move forward with their ideas.

Finding 3: Passionate support for a solution.

Co-researchers were passionate about the idea of an integrative place-based high school and were willing to put in the effort to make it work in Wells by spending time and money on the future school; experienced educators recognized this effort as needed, ongoing, and tends to be taxing for community members. During the research process (which came from the community), 32 community members voiced and showed their excitement, passion, and ideas for the potential high school in Wells. In addition, the mayor and Town Council of Wells endorsed the research in its early stages. Interviews and Community Workshop conversations typically included the co-researchers announcing their deep commitment to implementing a high school in the community. Planning support was voluntarily offered for grant and business plan writing for the high school

proposal. Moreover, the Wells Barkerville Community Forest has bought land in anticipation of enabling future student housing. Other community members offered various skills to potential high school students, including math tutoring, and ideas for art-based and outdoor-based education. As soon as the data-gathering period was finished, dedicated community members formed a High School Committee to continue to work toward planning and implementing the high school project.

Experienced educators noted the amount of work an integrated, place-based school could be for those involved in the process and the importance of spreading the workload among a group, illuminated by Experienced Educator 3, who worked at Coast Mountain Academy, who said:

> You really need the right [people involved] who understand that they're building a school, that they're not walking into an institution that has a system for everything. And we're still in this phase. And I'll often say this in meetings, especially at the start of the year, with new staff, that we're building a school, there often isn't some system that I can just hand you and this is how you're going to do it. When we face issues, it might be the first time we've ever faced them. And we're going to need to navigate that and stick handle that as we go… But trying to find staff who are really keen to develop programs, develop curriculum, and start a school and kind of wear multiple hats, who are willing to do that to make it happen is so important.

The community is passionate and engaged in the potential high school. The process of building an institution in Wells will be ongoing and will require continued dedication and collaboration from community members.

Maintaining community involvement was described as challenging. Experienced educators found that community engagement within their schools could often be taxing on members of their respective communities due to time and emotional requirements. Two experienced educators noted that only a few community members were willing to be involved in aspects of a school, such as housing and after-hours supervision. In a small community such as Wells, some co-researchers noted fatigue and being "stretched thin" in terms of volunteering. Experienced educators explained that finding sources of money to pay engaged community members helped tremendously with finding and maintaining community support. In addition, a high school in Wells would hopefully help increase the town's population and the pool of people able to help. Experienced educator 4, who works at Cortes Island Academy, said:

> We're hiring people to come and do workshops in the schools, like I said, part of our philosophy was to use the resources, the people resources on the island to teach. So we were working with two facilitators that created workshops for outdoor education and leadership. So they're the ones who conducted workshops with the students, who took them kayaking. Anyway, we hired people, facilitators to do workshops. And I worked with the facilitators, and coached them on how to, really how to teach kids. And so that was my role is to look at their ways of teaching, their pedagogy, and their planning. And yeah, we worked as a team, so that the workshops could be done with kids in an effective manner. Because I'm a PE teacher, so I could have taught the PE program, but I'm not a scientist, so I couldn't have taught the science program. I could fake it. I could do it. But it's just not as effective.

Community members in Wells who are involved in the school should aim to reduce the amount of work needed for implementing and running an alternative high school by spreading the

workload to interested and dedicated community members, finding and developing resources to deliver and support content areas, and capitalizing on opportunities in the surrounding area.

Finding 4: Experienced educator and community motivations.

Experienced educator and community motivations for alternative community schools aligned regarding models, pedagogy, and needs for schools in rural communities. Experienced educators interviewed reported being drawn to alternative learning schools because of the long-term connections they experienced being built with students in smaller classes, mentorship opportunities, the freedom and flexibility of integrated learning models, and the potential resources and opportunities their communities could provide. Co-researchers in Wells described similar motivations for a high school. Experienced educators appreciated how alternative models of education that include integrated learning approaches and small class sizes allowed them to support and create long-standing connections with students along their educational journeys. Experienced educators saw the potential for (and often enacted) student mentorship opportunities in the community. The community co-researchers from Wells also appreciated smaller class sizes and wanted to integrate their values of connection and mentorship into the school. Experienced educators described diverse motivations for starting alternative place-based, outdoor-based, and community-based school programs, including: (a) the presence of substantial resources—both human and more-than-human—that could be used educationally, (b) existential threats to rural community schools, (c) eliminating long commutes to school for students, (d) wanting to keep kids in their communities, and (e) the desire to provide educational experiences rooted in the local community. Experts with experience in both independent and public school

models appreciated integrated learning approaches. Experienced Educator 6, who works with Take a Hike Burnaby, said:

> Oh, man, I love the freedom that I have. I can do anything, on any day, anytime… one of the absolute benefits of this [program] is like you get your kids, period. You're not dealing with the social studies schedule, and then switching gears to the science schedule. Yeah, the freedom and flexibility. And then the relational piece, the amount of time you get to spend with the kids. And not just one year, like it's multi-year. And I think that that's one of the things I really like, because you can create amazing relationships. And then the excursions, like being able to go out of the classroom.

All of the motivations described by the experienced educators were also communicated by the community members of Wells. Co-researcher 21, a long-time member of the Wells community, summarized:

> I figure any kids who came to a high school here would be already unique in a way that they wanted to come to this school, that was, people think of us in the middle of nowhere, we're not in the middle of nowhere, but you know, it feels like it I guess sometimes, you know, come out here and learn, like do an outdoor school, and art, just do a different program. So I think those kids would already have a really special, because we always envisioned when the high school starts, that the kids would come and live here, in some form, right? It just feels like it'd be more cohesive if everybody stayed here during the week at least. Right? And I think it would be so cool for people to come and find out, a lot of people don't know what Wells does have to offer as far as, especially the outdoors and art. And then for the local kids to have a sense of incredible pride. Like, you know, this is our town, and yeah, and the values, and these kids, they end up, by the time they're

> in grade seven, it's so amazing, to just to see how… [Chokes up] Oh my god. But just to see how the sense of community we have and how the older ones that help the younger ones and the younger, like it's just this, it's a big family, I think having the high school here, it would continue that sense of you know, it's just so much more balanced here in Wells for relationships and that kind of reality.

According to experienced educators during interviews, the freedom and flexibility to offer educational programming that aligns with community and place values are important aspects that enable education that strongly aligns with community values. This type of education is crucially important to growing and developing the kind of people, citizens, and community co-researchers in Wells desired. This integration of values is central to education and has a crucial connection to community development.

Finding 4. A: Co-researchers tended to resist institutionalized learning, instead embracing alternative forms of learning, such as place-based learning, that reflect community values.

Many community members in Wells resist formal, institutionalized approaches to education that they attribute to the public school system, in which challenging experiences of hardship during high school are normalized as part of personal growth. Community co-researchers countered this notion by embracing mentorship, connection, respect, and independence in their elementary school– attributes they and experienced educator participants associated with alternative learning models. Many co-researchers viewed formal or typical education practices and experiences as enforcing linear ways of learning. This typical style of learning can be difficult for children who find success learning in alternative ways. Community members resisted the idea that negative high school experiences are necessary for a child's future success in 'the real world' Co-researcher 3 said:

> I also feel like a high school like this [potential high school in Wells], it's a really great opportunity for children who don't necessarily fit into that box of the curriculum before the, you know, like at the [Quesnel] high school. It's very standardized, to go from class to class to class, you do your curriculum, you have your electives and stuff. But I think this [vision for a high school in Wells] is just a different way of learning. And I think that not all kids learn the same way. This [high school in Wells] would be a great opportunity to reach some of those children that might not be successful in that type of high school setting. Especially some of the rural communities or some of the Nation communities. Some of those children might do much better in this type of environment than that, the pressure of that typical high school experience and everything else that goes along with it.

Some community members even chose to live in Wells because of the town's educational approach, which does not conform to more institutionalized practices of education, illuminated by Co-researcher 4, who said:

> I actually chose to be here for the education system that Wells provided. Because we didn't like the institutional style of our public education system, and even though there are lots of great programs out there and great teachers, but if, you know, if you provide a space that's actually a beautiful space, like aesthetics actually do factor in, and schools, they're, you have windows that don't open, tiny little windows onto, like, fenced-in yards, where you can't see the, you know, it feels uncomfortable. So I just wanted it to be a place where I knew that there's the possibility that they could just be themselves and be supported in a smaller school environment with a huge building. Yeah, so um, that was really why [their partner] and I made the choice to actually move here.

The public elementary school in Wells already incorporates an integrative, outdoor, art, and place-based learning model that includes mentorship and community engagement, and community members expressed familiarity with the workload and expertise needed for an alternative high school. Examples of place-responsive approaches on the elementary school level included regular class trips to the community forest, and consistent educational program integration with local organizations such as Island Mountain Arts and the Sunset Theatre.

As recommended by experienced educators, co-researchers were committed to continuity and growth from elementary to high school using their model of community mentorship in school. Community co-researchers related the vision for an integrative, outdoor-, community-, and place-based high school with the current pedagogical practices at the town's public elementary school. Elementary students already engage in mentorship between their classmates and other adults in the community. Specific community organizations are already involved in creating educational programming for elementary students, including but not limited to Island Mountain Arts, the Wells Barkerville Community Forest, Barkerville, and the Sunset Theatre, implementing community-based education initiatives. Most community co-researchers noted their motivation for involvement in education at both the high school and elementary levels is because of the value placed on kids and education in the Wells community. The Wells high school project is not just about bringing a high school into the community but also about bringing the community into the high school, was reported. Experienced educators confirmed that the BC high school curriculum allows for outdoor, place-based, and community-integrated learning in both independent and public school models. Experienced Educator 8 described their

experience implementing an integrated community school on Cortes Island in a community that previously had no high school:

> And you should see and feel the dynamics of the town now, where they see a half dozen or eight kids walking down the street, you have, you have kids walking up and down during lunchtime, during our breaks, after school, all that kind of stuff, it's fantastic. It really is now rejuvenating the town. And we always, I mean, in education, we always say that the school is the center of the community. Man, you can really, really feel that, because the school is a little bit more lively now, that the community is now a little bit more lively and more, better, better feel to the community. More positivity.

Experienced Educator 1, from Saturna Island added, "a lot of kids graduated a year early and are doing really well in post-secondary, and whatever other careers they've chosen." These impacts described by Experienced Educator 1 and Experienced Educator 8 are the impacts co-researchers wish to see transform Wells in similar ways.

Experienced educators who participate in alternative forms of learning noted that alternative learning models are an excellent opportunity for students who have not succeeded in more traditional forms of school. Experienced educators also indicated that a school culture that focuses on mentorship, connection, independence, and encouragement could be incredibly supportive for these students. Experienced Educator 4, who works at Coast Mountain Academy, noted:

> Having the opportunity to really connect with your teachers, like the adults care about you in this classroom is totally game-changing for kids… all the research was like, smaller classrooms, connection to your teacher, connection to your classmate, all these

> things were coming out as ways [to keep kids engaged with learning], and that's what we have here.

This idea of alternative learning accompanies the values of inclusion, respect, and independence for students, mentorship, and connection upheld by community members in Wells. The ability to integrate local values into educational content can be dependent on the school structure.

Finding 4. B: There are pros and cons associated with both Independent and Public School models for the proposed high school in Wells.

Community co-researchers were still determining if an independent or public high school model would fit best with their proposed vision. Experienced educators involved in independent school models noted that it gave them the freedom to run the school and teach children how they wanted to, with fewer restrictive rules and financial restraints from respective school districts and the teachers' union. This idea of freedom was demonstrated by Experienced Educator 3 from Coast Mountain Academy, who said:

> I feel like what we're doing here is really like a lot of best practice stuff. And we're able to do that because we are independent… We are truly independent and follow our own vision and mission, which I feel really fortunate that we've been able to grow our school and really stay totally independent. Being independent allows you to move pretty quickly when you want to, when you need to.

However, experts from public schools voiced the important inclusive aspect of public schools, which is a challenge for independent schools because tuition costs create less equitable access for students and their families. Experienced Educator 1, who created and worked at a public alternative school on Saturna Island said:

> [Being independent] is a giant hurdle in terms of inclusion for sure, you should get up to 50% of funding. But you have to prove to the ministry that you are meeting so much of the curriculum, and it's got to be an inspection involved. And then you've got to collect the cost somewhere. And unless you've got somebody who's willing to donate that to your school then great, or if you've got a corporate, some kind of corporate sponsorship, that's a possibility. But otherwise, you're gonna have to start charging tuition. And a lot of families can't afford that. And you'd just be able to bring in the families that can afford it. So that's a big challenge.

Many community co-researchers voiced a belief in public education grounded in a student's right to education and inclusivity, which align with communities' experiences and values. However, because of past experiences with the local school district, some co-researchers think the benefits of an independent school outweigh the negative aspects. Experienced educators found success with integrated learning approaches in both private and public school models. Deciding whether the high school would be independent, a public school in the local school district, or a public school affiliated with a different school district, is a decision that remains for the community members to explore and make. The decision involves how best to have a school that both succeeds in its purpose and desired form, as well as embodies the community's commitment and access to education—a key belief in their own mission to start a high school.

Finding 5: Place-responsive education integrating other forms of alternative education.

For Wells, a place-based approach to education integrates art-, community-, outdoor-, and land-based teaching and learning. Community co-researchers reported viewing the community of Wells as a destination that draws meaning from people, place, environment, history, culture, and more-than-human aspects. The co-researchers made it clear through their

values and current educational practices that their ideal vision for a place-based high school combines community engagement and mentorship, art-based education, land-based education, and outdoor education, even though these educational approaches are often separate and distinct disciplines in academic literature. Co-researcher 9 said, “I think about the resources we have with people who live in this community. We have some seriously educated, talented people from all walks of life. In forestry, in mining, in art, in culture, in history. And we can draw on all that. We can bring that into this building. It is so awesome.” Community members noted that blending these pedagogies will create contextual learning in and around Wells that satisfies high school curriculum requirements. Many experienced educators detailed integrating this holistic view of place-based learning into school models resulted in schools extending beyond the walls of a physical building and into the surrounding area to include community members, the environment, organizations, history, and other more-than-human aspects of a community. Experienced Educator 1, who created and ran the Saturna Ecological Education Centre, talked about their experience with place-based education and said:

> The whole island is considered their school. So we might spend the whole day outside, or we might spend part of the day at the main site in the big cabin, or we might go down to the little school in the valley where the younger students are.

Synthesizing place-based, community-based, and art-based education can educate and create connections to place within the potential high school students. In Wells, many community members see the area of Wells as a learning destination rich with context that the high school and the attending students would become part of.

People in Wells described approaching outdoor education as immersive and interdisciplinary, a more holistic approach than often seen in mainstream Western approaches to

outdoor education. Some programs, such as the Outdoor School Program at Vancouver Technical Secondary School, approached outdoor education as an extension of physical education, focusing on adventure and risk, and usually as a separate experience from their other schoolwork requirements, reflecting a dominant Westernized approach to outdoor education. Other experienced educators viewed outdoor education as an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to learning, where students learn about many different subject areas, such as Experienced Educator 1, who gave the following advice regarding curriculum design:

> The Bowron Lakes Chain can be your shared ordeal at the end of the year to bring your community together, and then start running all your courses around that kind of experience. You could have a tourism course going, you can have your Environmental Sciences course going, your English, your PE, and your foods. So there's your five courses, there's your 15 credits, and they all fit a Bowron experience… I mean, the kids have to feed themselves. So that's the Foods program. And you got that kitchen in the community school there that could be used by the students. I mean, you probably have people in the community who are fantastic cooks and chefs and bakers, who would come in and teach them as long as you got a teacher to kind of vet it and be there in case they're needed. And tourism, [Wells] is a fantastic spot for tourism. And tourism is actually part of the Applied Skills curriculum at the high school level. And then you got your environmental science courses, which are, especially at the grade level 11 Level, they're fantastic, looking at things that you're already doing in the Community Forest, so like sustainability, human impacts, how resource extraction impacts the natural world, humans impacts on climate change, those are all there in the curriculum. So it's all about looking for needs, figuring out what the community wants, figuring out what the

> resources are, and then designing a project. Kids could have a lot of mentorship there. So that could provide you with a really strong program that would draw people here and give them and give them those 15 credits towards graduation, which is really valuable.

Co-researchers agreed with the above view of outdoor education, often noting that learning outdoors can be integrated with forms of art-, community-, and place-based education to satisfy curriculum requirements. Co-researcher 3 described their vision for using the green space around the school building (displayed in Figure 2) and how outdoor spaces can integrate community and place:

> In addition to this school building that sitting here that is huge in value, we also have this incredible green space that is really underutilized, but it's kind of a center of the community, it's a hub of the community and, with a vision and with some love it could really become a really special place that's connected right to the forest, attract more people, almost like a village green concept. You know, you could have some benches you could have some nice trees, you get somebody in with a vision [Co-researcher 6 chimes in with: "maybe some high school students"] and make it look beautiful and this is the hub of our community and then everything from there kind of grows… So that's where the cultural recreational concept comes into this building as we try and transition it from just being primarily a school, is to incorporate that green space as well, so that we can really capture just the central location of the community.

When community co-researchers were asked how much time they pictured the potential high school students would spend outside, they ranged from 60%-90%. Co-researchers attending the Wells elementary school said they hoped they could "do math outdoors" at the potential high school just like they do in the Elementary.

Finding 6: Desired school experiences informed by values in the community.

Co-researchers envisioned school experiences that illustrated community values. Participants' experience and making of place embraced the unique socio-geographic setting, artists, creativity, supportive relationships among adults and kids, as well as their perceptions of rural and urban living. Co-researchers appreciated the rurality of Wells and how that rurality contributed to their interpretation of community. The beauty of the natural environment surrounding Wells was continuously brought up in many conversations, as represented by the conversation between co-researcher 4, 6, 16, and 18, who are either parents, kids, or involved community members:

> **Co-researcher 6:** Well, I can say, my children have grown up in the environment and nature, for how many years? It just amazes me, I could go for a walk in the bush with them and they could have a complete meal. Oh, you can eat this, you can eat that. I would have never known this… [laughter] it would have never crossed my mind to eat that thing [laughter].
>
> **Co-researcher 4:** And really just even the recreation of walking out the front door and either going for a ski or walk in a beautiful forest with trails that are open year round with very little financial output. Like, what, its $20 for the year? Like, it's crazy, like its affordability and accessibility for recreational activities… it's not an economic barrier for people to actually recreate.
>
> **Co-researcher 18:** We have a lot of good hikes in the area too, you are actually getting up into the Alpine which a lot of places just can't offer.
>
> **Co-researcher 16:** So all of those things mean that it's a part of the kids growing up and experiencing, it is expectation really.

Physical and political geography, environmental, and economic contexts influenced life in Wells, which community members contrasted with their perception of city life. City life was described as busy, noisy, and negative. Co-researcher 18 said, "I could never live in a larger city. I don't enjoy being in them that much. It'd be a pretty tough move. Think I'll definitely always be rural." Another community member, co-researcher 13, said, "I just don't like the city. It's all concrete, concrete, concrete. Where are the trees?"

Many community members valued their small, quiet, politically active, and supportive/caring community, relative isolation, and connection with beautiful natural settings. Co-researcher 23, a child who attended the children's workshop, described Wells:

> I like that it's, basically, you found a bush, and you put some houses in it. And that's basically Wells. A bush with some houses in it… like my house, we live like just over there. And we, maybe 25 feet from the back of our house is a forest. And it's just so nice, because you can just be like, you know, I just need some time alone. And I'm just going to go into my backyard and talk to the birds. If you lived in like a city or something, you wouldn't have that option. You'd say, I need some time alone. I'm gonna go shut myself in my soundproof bedroom because that's the only place where there's no noise.

While the community sees opportunities and resources for education outside of the town, particularly in what they consider urban areas, they want to see the community's kids raised in Wells, using the opportunities present in and around their community and benefiting from their unique way of life. Two Co-researchers who are parents explained:

> **Co-researcher 23:** And the kids in this community have a voice in the community. Whereas when you go to a big city, there's no, there's a big difference between kids... Yeah, it's like two different populations. And when we were talking, we had a meeting

> the other day with the school district. And the person we were meeting with was saying there's just this richness of opportunities if you go to school in Quesnel, and well, I thought, but there's just a different richness of opportunities if you go to school in Wells, you know, there's so much stuff that my kids get to do… cross country skiing, downhill skiing, artists coming into the classroom, that I certainly didn't have when I was growing up.
>
> **Co-researcher 9:** And I think, I watched these kids, I watched [community member] and [community member], you know, explore this area, [community member], I watch her and my daughter ride their bikes. I know they're getting their independence. Like, my daughter is only nine. But she's off doing her own thing. And I feel totally secure about it. I don't feel secure if I took her to Quesnel. Maybe within a couple of blocks, but it's so much bigger. It was like that when I was a kid growing up here, the freedom you had to go do whatever you wanted, but there was always somebody watching you.

Some community members also valued Wells as being inhabited by an integrated, resilient, and diverse population. Co-researchers described the variation in peoples' likes, skills, hobbies, and knowledge in the town creating a strong network of inclusive and resilient community members and a community support system based on connection and relied on by many, exemplified by the exchange below:

> **Co-researcher 16:** I think it's a very unique community with all kinds of different people in it. And it's kind of, it's mind-boggling. There were four people in town at one point that all knew how to cook in a woodfire oven. Like what?

> **Co-researcher 14:** We had a workshop one time, and the facilitator, she says I've never seen a community with people with such different backgrounds and ideas, but all want to support the community.
>
> **Co-researcher 3:** I love bringing people into the community and helping them see the diversity of opportunities we have [in Wells] because it just reminds you, it puts everything back into perspective for why you live here because they're, you know, most people are completely blown away and just in awe on everything that we have to offer. And seeing people experience that from the city that don't have access to stuff like that, whether it's friends or family or through business, just being able to share what we have here. It's always super rewarding because it reminds you what you have and why we're so lucky.

Co-researchers made it clear that these values are deeply connected and unique to Wells, and their lifestyles could not be obtained elsewhere.

Some co-researchers had concerns about how the potential high school will include students with cognitive or physical disabilities. There were concerns about if a student in a wheelchair wanted to be included or else past experiences where students with disabilities had to move away from Wells to pursue different educational opportunities. When asked, experienced educators had various levels of inclusive practices in their alternative schools. Therefore, levels of inclusion seemed to depend on the pedagogical and ideological worldview of the teacher/planners of the school when determining how inclusive it would be for students with disabilities. Because of the value of inclusion for all abilities in Wells, experienced educators recommend approaching inclusion on a case-by-case basis.

Parent and non-parent co-researchers valued the town's children and the reciprocal relationship between kids and adults, exemplified between two parents and a teacher who live and work in the community:

> **Co-researcher 4:** So, and I have to say, I think what makes Wells really unique, I just don't know if there is another community… I've lived in different places, and maybe it's just my perspective as a teacher, but man, does this community ever value the children. Like it… It blows me away being, as a teacher at that school, how much… like I can offer all this incredible programming, art or, you know, outdoors, or whatever it might be, but basically, people come to me and say, 'hey, I have an idea, And what do you think?' It's just so cool. And [the children] are always at the forefront of everybody's mind. It's like [the community] is always talking about the kids. It's really neat.
>
> **Co-researcher 6:** I know just from raising kids in this community that you feel so safe with your children wandering around anywhere in the community because everyone knows whose kids they are. So you know if they're up to anything or not, or if someone's being suspicious, everyone's looking after the kids. It's like they are children of the community.
>
> **Co-researcher 3:** I do think that the community embraces our children as their own. Yeah, it's really special.

Participants also emphasized the lack of age segregation in Wells and how children of all ages go to school in the same classroom, play and grow together, and are treated with respect by the town's adults. Some community members noted that at community events, such as potlucks, adults and children mix seamlessly where there would typically be age separation. Co-researchers noted the benefits of growing up with the values of Wells and wished to see

teenagers continue to live in the community during their high school years, illustrated by the discussion below:

> **Co-researcher 9:** I don't think being in a small community is a bad thing. I think it was a very good thing for these kids. And we have such smart, talented kids in this school that are going to be successful whatever they do. I want to keep that here.
>
> **Co-researcher 23:** And the kids in this community, I've always found, have a voice in the community. Whereas when you go to a big city, there's no, there's a big difference between kids and adults.

Community participants noted that teenagers play a unique and vital role in enhancing the community. Teenagers and kids were thought of as equal and essential participants in community building and way of life in Wells. Co-researchers frequently mentioned the vibrancy that kids and teenagers added to the community. The lack of a high school reinforces the missing demographic of teenagers in town, affecting relationships and connections throughout the community.

The community found value in art, artists, and living in a creative community. Co-researcher 22, a community member since the 1970s, described, "and that's what this community is like, it's so creative" when asked about living in Wells. The co-researchers professed the importance of art in the community, including the organizations and spaces such as Island Mountain Arts and the Sunset Theatre, which allow people to participate in or observe the creative endeavors organized by local community members. Community co-researchers valued the widespread knowledge that Wells is known as a cultural hub in rural BC, with art as a central focus. At the children's workshop, Co-researcher 24 noted, "I like the amount of artists that

travel here. And it really shows that this is a very inspiring place," which other children quickly agreed with. At another workshop, Co-researcher 19 commented:

> When I moved here, I moved here almost 16 years ago, and at the time there were eight art galleries, we had the most art galleries per capita in Canada. So it was and still is very artistic… There's still lots of artists, and all different kinds of actors, and painters, and writers, and musicians, and that's really wonderful. And that's, for me, that's what keeps [living in Wells] really lovely.

Access to art was important for community participants, especially access to art for children in the community. Co-researcher 2, employed at Island Mountain Arts, stated:

> When you're young is one of the most important times to instill that art is an important part of life, and it is important for [young people] to be appreciated and to feel and to know and, and I think that artistic activities are a really important way for that to occur. And just having [art] be a regular part of what kids are doing and making it accessible to the people that are living here. It's important, that there's access to artists and stuff like that.

Co-researchers agreed that Wells is a place that embraces and supports artists and artistic expression of all forms, emphasizing creativity.

Co-researchers also valued the physical environment in and around the community, represented by Co-researcher 3, who stated, "I think environment is a core value that goes from the children all the way to adults. I think everybody in the community values the environment and respects it." Many participants valued the surrounding forests, mountains, and lakes. Co-researcher 19 described, "the access to nature [in Wells] is so huge. And now we've got this amazing boardwalk… where we live, it's just a forest, like I can just see forest right now behind

me. And it's so amazing." Co-researcher 30 reported their favourite outdoor activities at the kids' workshop, "I like Wells because there's a lot of things to do like hunting fishing, and when it's wintertime you can go snowmobiling a lot. And sledding. And there's, you can never get bored in Wells, really." Organizations like the Wells Barkerville Community Forest and the Wells and Area Trails Society tended to be referenced in tandem with the physical environment, exemplifying community approaches to managing access and recreational opportunities as well as preservation of the physical environment around the community.

The different seasons and annual changing weather patterns were noted, and surviving the winter was considered a point of pride among community members involved, who used winter survival as a rite of passage to truly becoming "a member of Wells." This rite of passage is evidenced by the exchange between three members of the Wells community:

> **Co-researcher 14:** The community is people.
>
> **Co-researcher 7:** People who have survived the winter here.
>
> **Co-researcher 16:** I moved here partially for that experience of having to earn my survival essentially, and not to be dramatic or anything but my dad called it direct labor. And I really love that term. It's very direct.

The unity that comes from living in nature and "surviving the elements" was further described by the conversation between two community members below:

> **Co-researcher 2:** … it's not like a single word. But the community is kind of, you kind of have to bend to nature, you don't, on a day when there's eight feet of snow, it's just like, that's just the day we're having today. On a day when the power's out for 12 hours. It's just that's just the day that we're having today. And there's something about that, that

> I think is really unique to small areas, because you all are sort of going through, kind of this like you all against this thing, which I think is interesting, not necessarily against it…
>
> **Co-researcher 16:** It's kind of unifying.

Although the idea of working against nature to survive was brought forth, community members were quick to note the importance of the physical environment, linking the environment as an important aspect to their mental health. Co-researcher 8, an invested member in the WILD project, noted: "nature and mental health go together," repeated by co-researcher 9, who said: "I think that mental health is so important and it's getting lost in the big schools, we're not looking after mental health, and I really think it is important to get back to nature." Co-researchers detailed a connection to and a closeness with nature, and referenced how living in such proximity to the natural world is an integral part of living a healthy life. The surrounding spaces around the town, and the ability to share these spaces with other community members, enhanced the deep connections community co-researchers felt with one another.

Conclusion

According to co-researchers, life in Wells is impacted from the absence of a high school. Examples of impacts include a declining population, a difficult decision for families with high school-aged students, and economic impacts that reverberate throughout the community, as well as social and mental/emotional well-being of students, families, and community members. Co-researchers reported that the lack of a high school, and the resulting effects, obstruct attempts at community development and hinder community life. Detailing these impacts help to serve community members by focusing on opportunities that counter the effects stemming from the absence of a high school. Even with these adversities, co-researchers demonstrated a commitment to implement a place-responsive high school, guided by local values and based on

the current approach to education in their elementary school. Experienced educators advised that this type of dedication from the community will be crucial as members implement their vision for a school that draws kids and families into the community and enhances life in the town.

Co-researchers described Wells as a place with many interlacing and overlapping elements, including human, more-than-human, social, economic, and environmental processes, and emphasized the importance of their connections to place and the different elements throughout the research process. Education in Wells that was place-based was understood by co-researchers as an appropriate school model to use to integrate community co-researcher's values and meanings of place into the education system within the community, and which was already being utilized in the towns elementary school. According to co-researchers, the vision for place-based education in Wells integrated community-, art-, outdoor, and land-based education. The experiences of experienced educators who work(ed) in similar alternative school models in rural areas helped to give credibility to the vision of a place-based school held by community members, as well as advice for future decisions and processes the community may come across as they continue implementing this project in Wells.

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings in response to the research questions, and relative to existing theory and literature, as well as practical applications. The project asked three questions: (1) what lessons from community development and place-responsive outdoor-based education might apply to and serve the context and community of Wells, BC, given the loss of its high school? (2) what form might a place-responsive and community-based high school take in Wells, following community engagement and collaboration? And, following this collaborative process, (3) how the experience of a group of concerned and dedicated citizens informs understandings and practices of place-responsive education and rural community development? Based on my analysis, the research findings may offer three significant lessons. The first lesson illustrates that the lack of a high school in Wells directly and indirectly impacted community life, from students and families to business owners and more. Impacts included significant mental, social, and economic ramifications. The second lesson is that the resulting vision of a high school was place-based in a unique way that combined pedagogical approaches of outdoor education, arts-based education, and community-based education to reflect community life and values in Wells. The third lesson is that understandings and development of place-responsive education and community development are informed by individual community values, affected by economic forces, and both influence and are influenced by place. Community co-researchers' values highlighted connecting to place as ways of belonging in Wells. These values motivated involvement, were present throughout the research process, and are reflected in the resulting vision for a high school in Wells.

Lesson One: Direct and indirect impacts.

The lack of a high school in Wells directly and indirectly impacted community life in Wells. The repercussions from the absence of a high school were discussed extensively during the workshops, highlighting various economic and social impacts that inhibited community development. Co-researchers stressed the current lack of educational opportunity for high school-aged students in Wells, despite the BC curriculum stating that

> British Columbia's schools include young people of varied backgrounds, interests, and abilities… The school system strives to create and maintain conditions that foster success for all students. These conditions include equitable access to and equitable participation in quality education for all students (Government of British Columbia, 2022b).

Although the BC curriculum emphasizes equitable access to and equitable participation in quality public education, the lack of a high school in Wells has negatively impacted students, siblings, parents, community members, and community organizations in various ways, including effects on economic, social, and mental well-being. The consequences on student well-being are echoed by Cristall et al. (2020), who noted that local rural high schools are directly linked to student mental health. When students leave their home community to go to high school, they experience a loss of familiarity (a loss of friends, classmates, teachers, and routines) that can have profoundly negative repercussions (Haynes, 2022). In Wells, students reported being torn between two places, with accompanying negative effects to their mental well-being and home life. Such consequences suggest unequal access to and inequitable participation in education. This point is supported by Haynes (2022), who declared that educational policies in Canada are applied with an urban-centric approach that leads to a bias toward closing rural schools. This research supported literature on rural school closures in Canada, and points to difficulties in the

ability for School Districts to sustainably balance collective and individual needs of rural areas and communities.

Research findings showed the effects of the closure of the Wells high school going beyond families simply having to take a bus to Quesnel, move, or homeschool, and showed, further, what those choices look like and the aftereffects on students, families, and community members. For example, parent co-researchers reported that distributed learning disrupted home for their families. Community co-researchers also discussed how 1-2 families move away each year to pursue educational opportunities for their children, compatible with Statistics Canada's census on the Wells area, which reports a steady population decline, with numbers going from 249 inhabitants in 1996 to 218 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2019, 2022). These circumstances are consistent with Oncescu's (2014) work that showed the absence of a high school affects rural community prosperity and well-being. The effects are physical, social, and economic and tend to affect the mental well-being of students, parents, families, and other community members (Haynes, 2022; Lyson, 2002; Oncescu, 2014). This study further supports conclusions from research on rural education in Canada, showing the availability of education to be an issue of social justice for individuals and communities. Beyond access to a classroom, the loss of a school adds burden and stress for individuals, families, and communities as a whole.

Bussing for school is common in rural communities (Haynes, 2022; Ramage & Howley, 2005). In Wells, if students and their families wish to remain in the community and get a public education in a physical school building, the student must ride the bus to Quesnel. Bennett (2013) and Haynes (2022) showed that rural students in Canada who take extended bus rides tend to suffer academically, socially, and physically, a reality echoed by the co-researchers. Although there is little research on the average amount of time students in rural Canada spend on a bus,

Fox's (1996) study found that in Quebec, rural students tend to be on a bus for 2-6 hours a day. Co-researchers announced that high school students in Wells spend up to 3 hours a day travelling to and from Quesnel by bus. According to Haynes (2022), the effects of long bus rides on school performance and home lives is "a contentious issue recognized by rural parents but often dismissed by school district officials" (p. 68). Ramage and Howley (2005) further stated that "too often, in the absence of systematic research, school leaders consider only the practicalities of bus rides rather than considering the effects of bus rides on the students' school performance and home lives" (p. 1). Community members in Wells certainly appear to perceive School District decisions being made this way, with limited understanding of the real impacts, leading to senses of injury, mistrust, and frustration. According to the Government of British Columbia (2017), transportation/travel times for rural students who must bus into different communities for schooling have continuously been a key challenge in terms of student well-being. There are no set guidelines in BC for maximum travel times relating to the commute for rural students. The Association of School Transportation Services of BC elaborated on the transportation theme and "discussed the need for some provincial guidelines (e.g., maximum bus travel times)" (Government of British Columbia, 2017, p. 43). The research in Wells shows that a bus ride effects students on an individual level, but also that effects cascade through individuals, families, and communities. Alternatives to bussing—should parents/guardians in Wells decide the bus ride is not an option for their family and have the means to choose differently—are limited to homeschooling, enrolling in distributed learning, or moving away from the community. The options presented to families in Wells by current educational policy or practices at the school district may have been implemented in response to the absence of a high school in their community, but have had compounding effects. Co-researchers detailed that each possible choice

has negative consequences on student, family, and community well-being. Although people living in rural communities may experience similar ramifications from a high school closure, this research process gave life and meaning to the particular experiences of people living in Wells.

Community members returned to a range of impacts throughout the series of workshops dealing with distinct topics. Using a place-based approach to the research helped show the complex and diverse experiences in Wells with rural high school education, which adds significantly to the descriptions of rural education or of high school loss that tends to be general in nature (Corbett, 2014, 2021). Such oversimplification of rural education experiences harms understanding within policy and among school districts and rural communities (Harris, 2014; Pini et al., 2015). Corbett (2014) noted the importance of understanding, embracing, and supporting the unique character of each community.

Literature shows that place-based education requires a flexible curriculum in order for practitioners to adapt their pedagogies to reflect the local place, environment, and culture (Lloyd et al., 2018; Lowenstein et al., 2018). Importantly, the Government of British Columbia (2022b) redesigned the BC curriculum to advocate for flexibility that will

> support teachers to combine the learning standards in various ways. Teachers are encouraged to create modules, thematic units, or learning experiences that go beyond learning area borders to focus on students' needs and interests or local contexts. The curriculum design provides the flexibility to serve the unique needs of classrooms, students, and teachers. (para 21)

The literature and the new BC curriculum support localized learning models that embrace diverse and unique contexts or areas, which aligns with a place-based learning model that aims to encompass the uniqueness and diversity of place in Wells. The experienced educators in this

research described successful implementations of alternative rural schooling around place and place-based learning. Co-researchers voiced the desire to implement a place-responsive high school rooted in the local community and deliver educational programs that combat the negative impacts of not having a high school in town. The school would reflect the community's values and allow local voices and knowledge to be integrated into schooling experiences. Despite this, the educational policies and systems implemented in Wells thus far have resulted in something of a trap— the absence of a high school makes it difficult to attract and retain families, severely limiting the population growth of the town; at the same time, access to additional educational resources like extra teaching staff require a higher student population. Community members are finding it extremely difficult to innovate and incorporate flexible place-based educational high school programs in their town. The BC Ministry of Education and Child Care described the objective of school policy as "provide regulated learning standards that promote student success and achievement in B.C" (Government of British Columbia, 2022c, Policies section). Making and managing educational policy is the responsibility of the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, school districts (or school boards), and schools (Government of British Columbia, 2022e). The Ministry implements policy regarding educational standards, student performance monitoring, and reporting, funding, and overall governance (Government of British Columbia, 2022e). School boards have the ability to enact educational policies that reflect unique opportunities and aspirations of particular communities and even have the ability to establish specialty schools that implement specific educational programming for students as long as these policies fall within provincial guidelines (Government of British Columbia, 2022e). Lastly, school principals and administrators develop policies relevant to the operation of their school, such as student conduct (Government of British Columbia, 2022e). School closure is typically

controlled by the school boards. The Government of British Columbia (2022a) stated that when public school boards close a school permanently:

> The boards of education must consider potential needs for alternative community use of the school building… and the board must develop and implement a policy that includes a public consultation process with respect to permanent school closures, and this policy must be available to the public…. The public consultation process must include a) a fair consideration of the community's input and adequate opportunity for the community to respond to a board's proposal to close the school permanently; b) consideration of future enrolment growth in the district of persons of school age, persons of less than school age and adults; and c) consideration of future enrolment growth in the district of persons of school age. (2022a, p. 1)

In Wells, the school board for School District 28 decided to close the elementary school in 2002, despite community desire, resulting in a protest that made national news (Trumpener, 2019). The elementary school was reopened after negotiations between Wells and the local school board. According to community co-researchers, repeated attempts to procure extra resources, such as teaching staff for the elementary school, were unsuccessful. To explain the lack of resource allocation to rural towns, Ferne et al. (2020) reported that school district decision-making across Canada tends to favour economic gains over student well-being and community desires.

Although there is flexibility in the BC curriculum and in provincial school policy for teachers and schools to implement school models tailored to communities school models, findings show the educational systems in place for Wells inhibit community development by making it challenging to implement a localized high school. In essence, while curriculum and pedagogy may have room to support alternative learning pathways, in Wells, the public school

system does not enable—and in many cases actively dissuades—the community from executing their vision of place-responsive education.

Experienced educators weighed the pros and cons of independent vs. public school models. Public school models in BC emphasize inclusion for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status, which is consistent with the values of community co-researchers. Co-researchers described a high school in Wells as an inclusive and diverse place, open to all students who wish to attend. Fan et al. (2023) wrote, "the public school system provides all children with an equal learning opportunity, which helps to mitigate the effects of adverse family backgrounds and to highlight the role of innate ability in the determination of educational attainment" (p. 133). However, experienced educators also observed that due to public school constraints, such as funding or union requirements, an independent school model gives autonomy to co-researchers and the community of Wells by allowing the community the freedom and flexibility to offer the type of programming they want. Fortin Lalonde (2022) declared that although public education is provincially mandated, efforts to standardize policy, curricula, and practice have resulted in educational policy across Canada to focus on "neoliberal framings of education which focus narrowly on testing, standardization, closing performance gaps, and the economic return on educating students" (p. ii). Experienced educators noted that union requirements could also influence staffing and administrative functions of public schools. Lopes and Oliveria (2020) agreed that independent school models provide more autonomy to teachers and administrators in terms of staffing, programming, and student selection. In independent school models, however, the onus of funding is on the student (i.e., tuition), possibly constraining the inclusivity and diversity of the school (Fan et al., 2023). The decision to be a public or independent school is a significant consideration for the community and co-researchers.

Instead of being free to decide how their school will incorporate the values of their community, the co-researchers may have to prioritize values when deciding between public or independent school models. Furthermore, the educational policy, as well as past conflict between the school board and the community of Wells, have led to further distrust and resentment of public school models and policies. This history and friction creates a perceived barrier to developing a public alternative school in Wells and makes an independent or private school more attractive than it would be otherwise. Community co-researchers gravitated towards independent school models even though the BC curriculum provides the flexibility for such public high school programs, and the community desires and strongly believes in the importance of access to public education – the core reason they started this project. In Wells, community members must balance economic and policy constraints and opportunities in order to combat the issues stemming from the loss of a high school in their community.

Lesson Two: Combining pedagogies in place.

The resulting vision of a place-responsive high school combined pedagogical approaches of outdoor education, arts-based education, and community-based education to reflect the unique way of life and values of Wells. Corbett (2014) called for approaches to rural education that incorporates and integrates localized opportunities for unique and context-specific educational practices. The series of workshops in this research helped identify and develop a place-responsive approach to rural education and school development, which the BC curriculum implies is needed (Government of British Columbia, 2022b). Community co-researchers have experienced the complex realities and thought about how best their community can respond to the lack of a high school; in these ways, they are vested stakeholders regarding this place and problem. Recognizing co-researchers as knowledge holders, the place- and community-based

approach to community development used in this project enabled the findings and the future school to reflect and respond to citizens' values (Bridger & Alter, 2006; Nordberg et al., 2020; Theodori, 2008), attributes of place (Dale et al., 2008; Soini et al., 2012), and particular challenges and opportunities present (Green, 2018; Ling & Dale, 2014; Parkhill et al., 2015). Experienced educators agreed that utilizing aspects of place in communities, such as skilled community members, can make learning experiences more effective for students.

Academic literature about place-based education and other alternative forms of education often details the perception that elementary school models are a better fit for alternative education and that traditional institutionalized schooling models are best for meeting the needs of high school graduation requirements (Davis, 2018; Inwood, 2008; Sesigür & Edeer, 2021). However, experienced educators that were involved in this research prove the existence and effectiveness of alternative high schools, both public and independent, and point towards the potential for a unique place-based education center in Wells. Brenner et al. (2021) explained that teachers are motivated to teach in place-based learning programs because of the positive connections to community and enhanced student/community relationships that are cultivated, and the ability to adapt the curriculum to better reflect local contexts and personal pedagogies. Experienced educators in this project noted that alternative learning pathways can be effective for students who have not found success in more traditional forms of schooling. Already, there are various examples of what a localized and context-specific place-responsive and community-based education high school may look like throughout BC, including the Saturna Ecological Education Centre, Coast Mountain Academy, and Cortes Island Academy. Experienced educators from these schools described the flexible, connected, and encouraging school culture that can be created, as well as the freedom to design programs that reflect their own values and

community aspects. The adaptability of high school programming is, in part, enabled by a revised BC curriculum that values flexibility and a switch to a 'concept-based' learning model that aims to result in deeper learning (Government of British Columbia, 2022b). According to the Government of BC (2022a), deeper learning is "better achieved through 'doing' than through passive listening or reading. Similarly, [concept-based learning] engages students in authentic tasks that connect learning to the real world" (para. 15). The existence of experienced educators in alternative high school education and the flexibility and concept-based approach of the redesigned BC curriculum validate the potential for a place-based high school in Wells.

Research question two asked what form a place-responsive and community-based high school might take. Authors such as Sanders and Harvey (2002) and Wheeler et al. (2018) argued that education should not be limited to classrooms. By detailing a rich vision of what an alternative, place-based high school could look like in Wells, community co-researchers proclaimed that the entire town (including the people, organizations, businesses, and surrounding natural areas) would be the school and not just the physical school building. The high school would pull on and contribute to place. The elementary school in Wells already adopts this type of place-responsive approach to education by using the local environment and opportunities for community mentorship with interested organizations, such as Island Mountain Arts, the Wells Barkerville Community Forest, and the Barkerville National Historic Site. Many of the elements mentioned above that form the vision for the high school characteristics of this project— co-researchers' passion and dedication throughout the process and the community's idea for the high school to use a model already in place in the elementary school —are consistent with successful Community-Based Participatory Research projects that result in real-life changes (Johnson, 2017a). The research process emphasized community influence over the research

direction by engaging co-researchers as equal participants and describing the unique and localized attributes and values of Wells (Dale et al., 2008; Ling & Dale, 2014). The vision of a high school in Wells is a direct expression of community co-researchers' goals, aims, and desires. The ability to implement a school, however, will depend on the work of dedicated community members, and the navigation of economic and educational policy tensions within the community.

Oncescu (2014) noted that high schools can be the heart of rural communities because of the important role they play in economic and social prosperity and by stabilizing a town's population. Research results suggest that a high school in Wells will contribute to the community by integrating educational practices through mentorship opportunities with local community members and organizations, encouraging local families to stay in Wells during their child's high school years, and motivating families and students to relocate to the area. The community envisions their school to be multi-grade, supportive, and small, focusing on connections between students and teachers. Community co-researchers envisioned a high school that is immersive, inclusive, diverse, tight-knit, caring, kind, and fun experience for learners. Locations of educational experiences for students include and extend beyond the physical school building into the surrounding area, such as the Community Forest, Bowron Lake Provincial Park, Barkerville, and more. Examples of educational activities the learners may participate in, which were brought forth by co-researchers, include trips to and participation in the maintenance and research within the Community Forest, cooking, theatre, theatre production, painting, music, event organization, foraging, walking/hiking, winter survival, and paddling/canoe skills (programs which already exist at the elementary school), which would satisfy curricular requirements through courses

such as English, Leadership, Tourism, Food Studies, Social Studies, Arts Education, Math, and Outdoor Education.

Based on the community's experience with elementary school students, they envision mentorship opportunities inside and outside the classroom among students and community members and organizations such as the Wells Barkerville Community Forest, the Sunset Theatre, Troll Mountain Resort, and Island Mountain Arts. Local Elders would provide even more opportunities for learning and mentorship. The school would involve community members by collaborating on educational programs for students that integrate community members' skills and strengths. These skills and strengths could be related to personal interests or member's work with local businesses and organizations mentioned above. Community co-researchers would like to see themselves as having the ability to participate in the creation of a unique school identity that would co-exist and coincide with the values of Wells. Schools that reflect community values were described by Lyson (2002) and Haynes (2022) as resulting from communities having the power to enact their own place-based education programs.

Experienced educators and co-researchers' experiences in being involved in alternative schools included fostering long-term connections between students and teachers, small class sizes, mentorship opportunities, freedom and flexibility for teaching and learning, and having the opportunity to seek out valuable learning resources within their home communities. Co-researchers are looking to achieve similar types of experiences in Wells through their high school. Some of the experienced educators in this study noted similar negative impacts of high school loss in their communities (detailed in lesson one), but in response, each of the resulting alternative high schools used the unique circumstance and places as attributes and strengths. These examples above show that although motivations to pursue alternative education (as

students, teachers, or community) may be similar, the resulting alternative schools are distinct and offer learning opportunities responsive to the place and context. Examples found in this study are, in this way, consistent with research showing rural community education programs succeeding by being localized and context-specific – that is, responding to place (Deringer, 2017; Flanagan et al., 2019; Martin, 2022). A place-based school in Wells will be unique and contextual, building from community co-researchers' values and interpretations of place into learning and educational philosophies that incorporate attributes of place into pedagogy and students' learning. In Wells, such attributes include the surrounding geography and ecology, history of the community, cultural activities, and the current community organizations and industries that have also shaped community values, as shown in Finding 6. Telford and Beames (2015) advocated for the inclusion of these aspects into outdoor educational programming.

Academic literature concerning educational theory/pedagogy frequently defines and treats place-responsive education, community-based education, outdoor education, and art-based education as distinct approaches to pedagogy and program design (e.g., Rolling, 2010; and Smith, 2002). However, these approaches can be used in conjunction, and they each describe education programs that facilitate learning by engaging with the surrounding community and environment (Breunig et al., 2015; Cole, 2010; Prins & Wattchow, 2020b; Waite, 2013). According to feedback from co-researchers, their vision of a high school incorporates place-responsive education, community-based education, and land-based education. The high school would have elements of a dominant Western approach to outdoor education, but also incorporate outdoor learning that links to other curriculum requirements.

In Wells, opportunities for alternative education include community engagement and intergenerational mentorship (community-based education), opportunities for art integration (art-

based education), and opportunities for outdoor-based education in the surrounding area. Many community organizations already adopt place-based and community-based approaches to education programs when partnering with the elementary school. For example, the Wells Barkerville Community Forest provides integrative programs for elementary students that often simultaneously involve environmental education, research, forestry, and recreation (Wells Barkerville Community Forest, 2019). In Wells, the specific aspects of place (community connection, support, involvement, mentorship, art, artists, art culture, history of art, and value of the surrounding outdoor spaces) are important for a reflection of place-based education.

Outdoor education, in particular, is debated in literature. Some academics view outdoor education as being a simple conduit for content (Lundvall & Maivorsdotter, 2021; Monti et al., 2019; Tuuling et al., 2019), while others argue that outdoor education is a broader pedagogy that can be used for multiple subject areas (Mannion et al., 2013a; O'Connor, 2019; Vladimirova, 2022; Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Yemini et al., 2023). The experienced educators interviewed in this project also had differing views on what exactly constituted outdoor education, similar to the discrepancies noted in the literature. Community co-researchers on this project approached outdoor education as experiential, immersive, interdisciplinary, and holistic education in the place they live, with all its variety, rather than a course with curriculum requirements or specific pedagogy and learning outcomes. Even so, there were still some aspects of dominant Western approaches to nature and landscapes, present in the language co-researchers used to describe the surrounding area and the potential high school programs. Nxumalo (2015) advocated for re-storying landscapes and places through material-discursive relations and Indigenous relationalities, which may be productive in countering colonial narratives such as 'survival in the wild,' 'access to nature' and 'utilizing land'. Nonetheless, in Wells, and, therefore, at the

potential high school, a more holistic and experiential approach to outdoor education fits the values and visions of the co-researchers, and allows educators to incorporate different aspects of place into an immersive, interdisciplinary program.

The BC curriculum details outdoor education as an opportunity for grade 11 and grade 12 high school credits, with the overarching idea that:

> Participation in outdoor activities allows for the development of skills in a complex and dynamic environment; spending time outdoors allows us to develop an understanding of the natural environment and ourselves; and participating safely in outdoor activities requires communication, teamwork, and collaboration. Participating in outdoor activities allows for the development of leadership skills that can be applied in a variety of contexts and environments (Government of British Columbia, 2022d).

This curriculum requirement for outdoor education suggests the ability and flexibility required to offer immersive and holistic outdoor education, which aligns with the vision of community co-researchers. Based on the description of outdoor education in the BC curriculum, opportunities to integrate education exist in the local geography (such as the community forest and Bowron Lake Provincial Park), the town's established visual theater and performing arts culture, as well as the local tourism and surrounding mining and forestry industries. This type of outdoor learning better reflects attempts at moving beyond using outdoor education to exclusively focus on personal growth through risk and adventure, or environmental education (Beames et al., 2012).

To summarize, community co-researchers have expressed their vision for an interdisciplinary, place-responsive high school that merges community-, outdoor-, and art-based education models and pedagogies. The integration of these school models and pedagogies will better allow community members to create educational programming for students that reflects

the community's unique and contextual circumstances. The school will extend into the community and surrounding area, utilizing skills of interested community members, local organizations, and geographical landscapes for programming, drawing on learning opportunities from local sources. In this way, the school will be designed, implemented, and run using community values, which will be used to determine the goals, identity, traditions, and future directions of the establishment.

Lesson Three: Education and development informed by community values and place.

Co-researchers understandings and development of place-responsive education and community development were informed by community values and were influenced by a sense of place. Research question three asked how the experience of a group of concerned and dedicated citizens informed understandings and practices of place-responsive education and rural community development. Teff-Seker (2022) described localized values as "local cultural norms, concepts, and knowledge systems, in addition to unique ecosystem features, [and] play an important role in how specific landscapes, local species, and human-nature interactions are perceived and experienced by those closest to them" (p. 8). The research study showed that perceptions of community values, place-making, and sense of place are relative constructs and depend on local and contextual connections. Co-researchers frequently compared living in Wells with 'city life', inferring that attributes of their community are specific and unique to Wells, and contrast with life in more-urban areas. Webb et al. (2021) concluded that people living in rural areas experience emotional and subjective attachment to the unique and local topography, culture, and history of their area, including their sense of belonging to the community and the physical and material space. Such relative perceptions of rurality were exemplified by co-researchers' references to Quesnel as a 'city' when Quesnel could also be defined as a rural town

by people living in larger urban centers. In essence, people may use their own relative experience to define their respective worlds, such as what constitutes a town or city. Community co-researchers described the values and attributes of their community that provide insight into their personal and unique connections to place, and which belie the assumption of rurality as a universal or general experience (Corbett, 2014, 2021; Cristall et al., 2020).

According to Levkoe and Kepkiewicz (2020), successful community development initiatives should be contextual and relational to the community, as well as collaborative, building on existing social networks. Through these unique and localized place-making processes, values, and perceptions, Wells is more than a location where people chose to live, it is a world they inhabit and contribute to through their ways of life (as parents, kids, artists, teachers, foresters, etc.). Their preferred ways of life are significantly interrupted in various ways by the lack of a high school, which continues to shape the place. In response, citizens are taking action to support the community/place they love and inhabit. Inclusion and collaboration are important to community members in Wells and will help to enable a unique community-connected and place-responsive school (Levkoe & Kepkiewicz, 2020). The emphasis on inclusion and collaboration also responds to wider local development realities, issues, and opportunities which is crucial to successful rural community development (Musavengane, 2019; Stone, 2015).

Co-researchers were motivated to participate in this research because of their desire to preserve and contribute to their place and to solve a problem they see as significantly limiting the town. At the same time, co-researchers understood that communities or geographical regions are also places within a larger global environment. As DeFilippis (2001) described, communities are not:

> A sole function of the internal attributes of the people living and working there…[communities] are not simply outcomes of the characteristics of those within them, they are also outcomes of a complex set of power-laden relationships—both internally, within the communities, and externally, between the actors in the communities and the rest of the world. (DeFilippis, 2001, p. 789)

The community of Wells is situated in a larger context and relative to other locations and places. Conceptualizing Wells in such a way rationalizes the effectiveness of a place-based approach for the potential high school as a way for students to attempt to understand their community as it fits inside a larger global context. This notion of place also helps understand the constraints and sense of limitations felt by the residents that are enabled by larger institutions across the province. Co-researchers described how they were not able to create a school they dreamed of in their own community, detailed in finding 4.

In this study, place-making was ongoing and dynamic, which is echoed by other scholars who study sense of place and place-making in communities (Bissell, 2021; Caine & Mill, 2016; Redvers et al., 2023). Community co-researchers frequently brought up how the changing seasons affected their perception of community life and changing weather patterns through time, indicating a familiarity gained by living in and experiencing an area over many years. Bissell (2021) noted that the amount of time spent in an area increases an individual's sense of belonging, which influences sense of place. Community co-researchers frequently mentioned cultural aspects of the community, such as art, and those that had lived in Wells for a decades often supplemented their answers with stories about the past and how life has changed. These answers reveal a comprehension of cultural, historical, economic, and environmental processes that contributed to their perceptions of Wells as it is today. This long-term accrual of cultural,

historical, economic, and environmental knowledge is consistent with Ryfield and others' (2019) conceptualization of sense of place and place-making as a "way in which cultural texts, activities, or artifacts are both shaped by their material contexts, and in turn shape the way communities see and express themselves. Sense of place, in particular, can reveal relational, historical, and affective meanings and values" (p. 2). Ingold (2000) and (Mullins, 2014b) agreed that people can affect and be effected by places and environmental, social, economic, and physical processes.

The place-making processes mentioned above are not clear-cut concepts that can be separated into distinct categories. Co-researchers are part of a community of diverse and complex people with different perceptions, understandings, knowledge, attitudes, and ideas who have different relationships with each other and the processes around them. Moreover, these relationships are not static; they change over time. Co-researchers perceive place-making processes and community values in different ways, and some may resonate with certain attributes more or less than others. Therefore, place, or the community of Wells, as described by the findings in this research, reflects the perceptions of those included in the research. Wells is a place with historical, economic, environmental, and social processes that impact and are impacted by the people who live in and/or visit the area. Community co-researchers valued diversity and inclusion, demonstrating their openness to embracing and accepting different perceptions of place. The community workshops, an integral part of this research, contributed to place-making by drawing on diverse lives lived, current realities, and futures desired. Community members were coming together to share (tell stories, share ideas and ideals, and support one another) and work to create a better place. Co-researchers wished to construct a better future for the place they live and love.

Rather than more-typical and institutionalized linear learning models, co-researchers preferred educational experiences that reflected their values, such as mentorship, connection, respect, and independence. Co-researchers' preferences were similar to experienced educators' motivations and experiences with alternative school models that incorporated place-based and community-based education. Brenner et al. (2021) showed that teachers can be motivated to teach in place-based learning programs because of the positive connections to community and enhanced student/community relationships that are cultivated, and the ability to adapt curriculum to better reflect local contexts and personal pedagogies. A case study by Best et al. (2017) from Australia revealed that designing place-responsive educational programs lead to meaningful connections between people and communities, and could support communities as they create preferred futures through education and school design. Best et al. (2017)'s project showed alternative education may be a good fit for communities like Wells that want schools to reflect and support their educational values and attributes of place as forms and institutions of community development. Place-responsive alternative learning programs can create schools that embody, reflect, and sustain ideal values and attributes of community and place. The freedom and flexibility to offer localized educational programming is imperative to attracting and developing the kind of citizens and community desired, which has crucial connections to community development. Harmon and Schafft (2018) declared that educating rural students requires connections between student academic success and the social, physical, and economic vitality of the town. In this way, education and community development are inextricably linked (Schafft, 2016; Zuckerman, 2019).

Co-researchers showed passion and dedication to the project throughout the research process. Tryon and Madden (2019) noted that projects that involve community engagement

require dedication from community members, a thought that was echoed by experienced educators in the findings of this research. Community co-researchers were willing to work together to make their vision for a high school come to fruition. The work and commitment shown by the co-researchers will help maintain the momentum as the potential high school project moves forward. Designing, implementing, and running a place-based school is ongoing. Experienced educators stressed that the amount of work required of community members when implementing alternative community schools could be strenuous, and the workload must be shared among groups. The community members from Wells demonstrated their commitment to the future high school and exemplified the collaboration necessary for implementing an alternative high school in Wells throughout the research process.

To summarize, the experiences of the community co-researchers and their values were deeply connected to their sense of place, which was situated within larger, global processes. Co-researchers' revealed dynamic historical, cultural, economic, social, and environmental knowledge that was reflected in their expressions of the community. In this project, co-researchers attempts at school development was a form of community building, where local values were used to respond to local issues. More broadly, research results suggest that the values of community members, when defined and integrated into community initiatives, allow for place-based approaches to education and rural development. These place-based approaches are then designed to respond to the unique and contextualized needs of individual communities.

Conclusion

Three lessons were learned. The first lesson detailed the impacts of the absence of a high school in Wells, and how that absence has created and compounded different social, mental, physical, and economic consequences among community members, including students, siblings,

parents, and professionals. Flores and Samuel (2019) stressed the importance of communities having the ability to create grassroots organizations that aim to tackle local area needs. The findings in this research are significant because they help explain how attempts at grassroots and place-responsive community development can be impeded by government and institutional policy and practices regarding education and rural areas. School boards may not have the capacity, funding, or expertise to create unique models for all rural communities. Additionally, generalizing and perhaps stereotyping conceptions of rurality and rural life in policy and within school district's decision-making ignore unique educational opportunities available in different and distinct rural communities (Arnold et al., 2005; Corbett, 2014, 2021; Haynes, 2022; Pini et al., 2015). The specific and localized details of rural communities are especially important, as Pini et al. (2015) and Corbett (2014, 2021) argue, to identifying opportunities and effective responses to local challenges for rural education and community development. The detailed experiences of this project's co-researchers revealed a nuanced vision of a high school in Wells as a constructive response, that will positively impact and support the community. Understanding the impacts in Wells also set the context for understanding community efforts at place making through school development.

The second lesson described a vision for a high school in Wells. Adding to the literature from Breunig et al. (2015), Cole (2010), Prins and Wattchow (2020b), and Waite (2013) on place-based and community-based education, this research study suggests that in the context of Wells, different pedagogical and philosophical approaches to education (such as community-based, outdoor-based, and art-based education) can be brought together in a place-responsive approach. This place-responsive approach reflects community values and senses of place, and it contributes to community development. According to co-researchers, this place-responsive

approach is used at the Wells elementary level, and the community will likely expand and innovate its use as they move forward with their high school.

The third lesson was that understandings and development of place-responsive education and community development were informed by co-researchers' values, which were influenced by and influenced senses of place. These values could not be fully expressed, and were undermined by the choices and realities of the town because of the absence of a high school. Levkoe and Kepkiewicz (2020) declared the success of community development initiatives must be contextual and relate to specific areas, and are often tied to existing social networks. In Wells, dedicated community members are acting in response to the absence of a high school and are motivated to participate in this research as a way to support the place they love and live in. This lesson shows that dedication and collaboration are essential to enacting place-responsive community development initiatives, consistent with findings from Tyron and Madden (2019), who examined community engagement in community-based learning programs. These relationships exist within other processes (i.e., cultural, physical, economic, and historical processes), placing theories of education and place-based learning into larger contexts and as tools for community development.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a review and synthesis of the research process, including the research context, the methodology, the findings, and the contributions of this thesis research to understandings of rural place-responsive community development and education. My concluding thoughts pertaining to the main findings as they relate to the research questions and aims will be discussed. I will also elaborate on how the research results contribute to the literature on rural community development and place-responsive education. Finally, I position the relevance of this research in the broader context of rural education policy and rural community development. A summary of the limitations of this study is provided, and I highlight my reflexivity throughout the research process and learning journey, focusing on my personal growth. Lastly, I propose some directions for future research based on the discussion and limitations of this study.

Research Review

The purpose of this research was to examine rural education and community development processes using place-responsive approaches in the community of Wells, BC using CBPR. Community members who contributed to the project were positioned and recognized as co-researchers, and the CBPR design and process emphasized and valued co-researchers' significance, participation, and knowledge. Through a series of six workshops, community co-researchers shared their experiences and perspectives about living and going to school in Wells; each workshop centered on a distinct topic concerning education in Wells and the high school, including one that invited experienced educators to share their knowledge. Experiences were also collected using interviews. Community co-researchers included general citizens, teachers, members of local organizations and businesses, families, and children living in Wells. Experienced educators were teachers, administrators, or principals in rural and alternative

education from across Canada who shared their perspectives, experiences, and advice. Co-researchers also engaged with experienced educators to help inform and add to the multi-directional sharing of knowledge that is important in community-based research (Bastain et al., 2017; Springer & Skolarus, 2019).

Synthesis of Findings and Discussion

This research confirmed that rural students can experience negative impacts on their mental, social, and physical well-being, and that these repercussions occur in Wells, BC, even though there is an emphasis on equitable access to and equitable participation in quality education in the BC curriculum (Government of British Columbia, 2022b). Furthermore, this research study has shown that rural high school closures go beyond influencing individuals and are an issue of social justice. The absence of a high school in Wells effected the social and economic prosperity and well-being of the whole community.

The research results showed that although public school policy attempts to combat the absence of a high school in rural communities, the forced decisions families must make when their children reach high school age result in impacts that compound through students, families, and communities, decreasing community well-being and prosperity. Neoliberal school policy that favours rural school closures and rural school consolidation has created a system where community members in Wells will have to forfeit important values—such as inclusion and access to education—in order to actualize their vision of a place-responsive school. Given the strong impacts that high schools (or the lack of a high school) can have on communities, people who live in rural areas should be able to be recognized as experts in decisions concerning their community, and rural high schools should reflect and integrate community values.

Attaining the high school envisioned in Wells will require dedication and commitment from community members. Community co-researchers expressed their goals, aims, and desires for the high school, which included aspects like offering multi-grade, supportive, small, connected classrooms that build strong relationships between students and teachers, and between the school and the community. Opportunities for learning will happen both inside and outside the physical school building, utilizing the diverse natural surroundings of the area to engage in different types of educational activities that satisfy high school curriculum components. Opportunities for partnerships between the school and community members and organizations will result in mentorship for the students. In this way, the 'school grounds' encompass the whole area around Wells, including the people, plants, animals, and the cultural, economic, and historical processes that offer diverse possibilities for education. A place-responsive school in Wells will be unique and contextual, with learning and educational philosophies that incorporate community co-researchers' values and interpretations of place. The people of Wells envisioned the school as an integrated, holistic, and interdisciplinary place that approaches learning by engaging the area around the school. The practical applications of alternative schooling in Wells will likely be interdisciplinary, integrating the local community, including local businesses and organizations, and drawing learning opportunities from the area.

Community values can be used to design educational models and programs that respond to context-specific community desires and needs. The research process informed understandings and practices of place-responsive education and rural community development by defining the localized and specific community values and processes that contributed to the vision of the future high school. According to this research, the school will, over time, continue to engage with these diverse processes and serve an important function for ongoing community development and

place-responsive education. Wells is also situated in a larger context, and a place-responsive high school provides an opportunity for students to understand local issues and how they contribute to or are influenced by global processes. Having education respond to community needs serves a role in community development by rectifying the limitations and constraints felt by residents that are imposed by institutions from 'outside' operating regionally and across the province, but which radically shape their homes, lives, community, and futures.

This research was valuable in its partnership with community members as they attempted to envision a place-responsive high school for their community through a process that gave light to unique values and attributes of place, which could be incorporated into the form and function of a high school – both for education and community development. The research enabled multi-directional learning among academic researchers, co-researchers, and experienced educators. The findings support academic literature on the significance of rural high schools in their communities and the powerful negative effects of losing a high school for rural students, families, and community members. They also detail the specific impacts on and experiences in Wells. The specific findings help avoid generalizations about rural areas that can lead to harmful stereotypes and conceptualizations of rural schooling while validating the consequences in Wells that co-researchers described as substantial for their community. Policies created around rural education and community development should be open and flexible to working with the unique values, sense of place, and specific opportunities of rural places.

Personal Reflections

Before coming to UNBC, I graduated with a degree in Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership from Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, and then began working in outdoor recreation. When I learned about this master's opportunity and saw the WILD proposal

put forth by the Wells community, I initially focused on the outdoor education aspect of the school, using my own experiences with outdoor education to guide the research direction. Once I started regularly meeting with the community champion and started better understanding the community's vision for a high school, I began to learn more about British Columbia's education policy and curriculum, which was important for the research.

Graduate coursework and my own reading and guidance from friends and colleagues helped me begin to understand the power dynamics that can occur between researchers and communities. It was important to me to minimize power inequities between research participants, the co-researchers, and myself throughout the research process. Even though my research adopted a community-based participatory approach, I still felt like academic constraints and institutions did not fully allow co-researchers to be equal partners in the study. That being said, my research journey resulted in a personal connection to Wells and the community members. The community champion, with their dedication to the project and to the community of Wells, helped guide me and led me to start understanding the complexities of the community. As my involvement in the research grew, and I became more integrated with the co-researchers, I began to develop an understanding of the importance of place.

My understanding of Wells morphed drastically during the research process. My first visit to Wells was during a quiet and sunny February day. Most community members I met during that day were conscientious about COVID considerations, and everyone wore masks. Contact with community members was quite limited. I was lucky, and I got to visit Wells many times throughout the research process to host workshops and conduct interviews. The last time I went to Wells, I went to the local theatre, participated in a pickleball workshop, went cross-country skiing on the local trails after a massive 2-foot snow dump overnight, and I began to

recognize community members and have quick catch-up chats when we encountered one another on the street. My perception of Wells changed and is still changing. Place-making is dynamic (Murphy et al., 2019). The purpose of trying to define Wells as a place with meaning goes beyond a couple of descriptor words that can be applied to the area to entice potential students or potential stakeholders into endorsing the idea of a high school in the community, but acknowledges Wells as a place with historical, economic, environmental, and social processes that impact and are impacted by the people who live in or visit the area (Mullins, 2014b).

The relationships and experiences I shared with the co-researchers resulted in some of my favourite memories during graduate school. The community champion and their partner instantly welcomed me into their home whenever I needed a place to stay and made sure that I was included in the different activities that always seemed to be happening around town. Through my friendship with the community champion and from the hours other community members put into the project, I began cultivating relationships with other community members. I even became the resident cat sitter in Wells for a while, and it was so nice to work at school alongside some of Wells' furry friends. Many community members made me feel very included in the town, and my appreciation of that is something I do not think I will ever be able to express.

Project Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

One of the biggest limitations in this research is the absence of Indigenous voices and perspectives, particularly from the Dakelh and Secwepemc Nations in whose traditional and unceded territories the research occurred. Throughout the research, I tried to connect with knowledgeable people from Indigenous communities to include their voices and perspectives, but my attempts went unanswered. Perhaps these unsuccessful attempts could be attributed to the time constraints of my own master's degree and the time it takes to create and cultivate

meaningful relationships. It may have been due to the perception—real or not—of the politics of research control and autonomy over decision-making that have been harmful to research participants and stem from traditional research done *on* communities (instead of with communities) (Davidson-Hunt & O'Flaherty, 2007). The absence of Indigenous voices in this research may have also been because of the amount of work involved in the project. Although the research revolved around a project for the Wells community, the amount of time and dedication required of co-researchers was substantial and could understandably dissuade some community members' involvement. Future research should include more attention and involvement of land-based learning principals and Indigenous voices, Elders, community members, and scholars. Blenkinsop & Fettes (2020) declared that reconciliation and the climate crisis are deeply connected; moving forward, meanings of land, land as a teacher, intentional language, and listening/learning from Indigenous voices should be incorporated into all educational programs, and doing so can address environmental education concerns. Community members from Wells explicitly noted that their vision of a high school includes partnerships and mentorship opportunities between the school and Indigenous communities and elders. The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives is particularly important; the Government of British Columbia (2023) makes a point in the curriculum of including Indigenous learning, declaring that:

> The voice of Indigenous people be heard in all aspects of the education system; the presence of Indigenous languages, cultures, and histories be increased in provincial curricula; and leadership and informed practice be provided. At the same time, Indigenous perspectives and knowledge are a part of the historical and contemporary foundation of British Columbia and Canada. British Columbia's education

> transformation, therefore, incorporates the Indigenous voice and perspective by having Indigenous expertise at all levels, ensuring that Indigenous content is a part of the learning journey for all students, and ensuring that the best information guides the work. An important goal in integrating Indigenous perspectives into curricula is to ensure that all learners have opportunities to understand and respect their own cultural heritage as well as that of others. (Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledge, Para 1-2)

Including or building programs based on Indigenous land-based learning principles and using knowledge with and from Indigenous peoples and Elders is particularly important to place-based learning models so they more accurately reflect local contexts (Henri et al., 2022). Future research should also incorporate reconciliation into place-responsive education and rural community development initiatives, and how place-responsive education initiatives may intersect with and/or conflict with land-based learning and other forms of Indigenous education.

In the methodology section, I mentioned some of the challenges of Community-Based Participatory Research, which included time constraints that can happen when mixing academic pressures and timelines with community work that requires time to cultivate authentic and strong relationships (Johnson, 2017b; Springer & Skolarus, 2019). I also felt constrained due to financial reasons, which motivated me to hurry through my degree. I believe that the relationships I made with community members were deep and rich, but I have to wonder how different they may have been if I had more time to cultivate them. In addition, spending more time in Wells, maybe even moving there for a semester or two, would have allowed a deeper immersion in the community. Another limitation came from how some community members viewed universities and academic research. D'Alonzo (2010) did a study using Community-Based Participatory Research, and found that participants can be dissuaded from taking part in

research because of perceptions of power dynamics between communities and academic partners. Similarly, some community members in Wells felt intimidated by the project's affiliation with a higher education institution; their perceptions led them to believe they were not educated enough to contribute meaningfully to the project.

A future inquiry could be to conduct similar research in different rural towns in British Columbia to begin to understand how complexities of place are or can be incorporated into place-responsive education and rural community development in rural areas. The powerful stories and unique approach to schooling evoked by Wells through this research warrant further study of the power and possibility for place-responsive education in rural and remote communities. A deeper understanding of rural communities and their specific experiences, opportunities, challenges, and impacts concerning community development and alternative place-responsive learning could allow increased recognition of diverse rural places, and validate opportunities for unique place-based learning. Such understandings would also contribute to research about rural community development and alternative place-based high school more broadly. Future research using an ecological paradigm and a place-based conceptual approach should also emphasize the significance of more-than-human aspects through the careful consideration of methods and data analysis. I had hoped to allow the more-than-human to have more of a role in this research, however, researching ‘ecologically’ is difficult, and I struggled to incorporate the more-than-human beyond attempting to understand the nuance and complexity of place through co-researchers experiences. Increased time and resources (i.e., travelling to an outdoor site and spending time there) would be necessary if more-than-human is to be a prominent aspect in future studies (Lynch, 2019).

Future research studies could also focus on systematic issues and economic forces and how these forces operate for or against alternative schooling in rural areas, particularly at a high school level. Incorporating how alternative high school models differ depending on the province they are situated in, and compare alternative schools provincially, or nationally, while taking into consideration the different provincial educational policies may also be beneficial. Studies could include explorations of school districts and decision-making systems, and the radiating impacts of these choices/decisions for years to come, as well as examinations or case studies on other place-responsive schools/pedagogies that embrace and encompass different types of learning, such as outdoor-based, art-based, and community-based education.

Closing

Current BC high school curriculum and policy allow for alternative, localized approaches to schools. Unique and contextualized place-responsive approaches to education can utilize community-, outdoor-, and art-based philosophies and models, integrating opportunities present within communities and responding to relevant issues or needs. However, community co-researchers found it challenging to implement such educational methods in their town, even though the importance of high schools to rural communities was exemplified throughout this research. Nevertheless, the process portrayed how nested communities can collaborate to create a vision for a community school, identifying cultural, physical, economic, and historical processes integrated within local attempts at community development. The experiences of Wells community members fit inside larger provincial, national, and global contexts. Research results can be used to aid educational policy decisions and future directions, locally and beyond.

This project resulted in an incredible journey that I am so grateful for. I learned about many different research processes, including relationship building, data gathering, and data

analysis, and through these experiences, I got to connect with a diverse group of people who live in Wells, BC. It is my intention that the research process and the research results assist dedicated community members as they implement an alternative high school in their community. Although this thesis focused only on Wells, BC, I also hope that the insights gained in this research may contribute to knowledge and policy about place-responsive education and community development, particularly in rural areas in British Columbia and Canada.

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Appendix A: List of Co-researchers and Experienced Educators

Participant Key	Role
Co-researcher 1	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 2	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 3	Community member (Parent)
Co-researcher 4	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 5	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 6	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 7	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 8	Community member (Parent/Guardian)
Co-researcher 9	Community member (Parent/Guardian)
Co-researcher 10	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 11	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 12	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 13	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 14	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 15	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 16	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 17	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 18	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 19	Community member (Parent/Guardian)
Co-researcher 20	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 21	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 22	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 23	Community member (Parent/Guardian)
Co-researcher 24	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 25	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 26	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 27	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 28	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 29	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 30	Community member (Youth)
Co-researcher 31	Community member (Adult)
Co-researcher 32	Community member (Adult)
Experienced Educator 1	(Past principal at SEEC)
Experienced Educator 2	Deputy Director at the Boundless School
Experienced Educator 3	Head of Coast Mountain Academy
Experienced Educator 4	Admissions at Coast Mountain Academy
Experienced Educator 5	Practicum Coordinator at UNBC
Experienced Educator 6	Take A Hike Teacher in Burnaby
Experienced Educator 7	Admin for Green Certificate Program (Alberta)
Experienced Educator 8	Teacher at Cortes Island Academy

*Note: Parent refers to parents who currently have K-12 aged children in the school system

Appendix B: Description of Workshops

Workshop One: Understanding the problem

- Location: Community Hall
- This workshop aimed to understand the impacts that the absence of a high school in Wells has had on community members. The workshop was targeted equally at students, families, community members, youth groups, and business owners within the Wells community. At the beginning of the workshop, I spent approximately 10 minutes providing an introduction, which included a quick overview of the research, the workshop structure, and a timeline for the workshops that were to follow. A key stakeholder from the Wells and Area Community Association introduced the work done on the WILD school's vision leading up to this point.
- Prompts to be explored:
    - How has the absence of a high school impacted you?
    - Have you had any friends or family members leave because there is no high school?
    - How has the absence of a high school impacted your sense of community? Do you feel a sense of loss or absence?
    - Has your business been affected?
    - Are there possible benefits/positive outcomes? For example, the opportunity for students to broaden their horizons by going away?
    - Any other impacts (positive or negative) that have not been covered?
    - Does anyone have any concluding thoughts?

- At the end of the workshop, attendees were thanked for their time. I provided my email address in case any participants had additional questions, comments, or concerns they wanted to discuss privately with me.
- The co-researchers brought valuable insights from different aspects of the community (families, friends, organizations, business owners, youth groups, etc.). I contributed examples of research on rural high schools found in academic literature, providing an opportunity to combine direct experiences within Wells and peer-reviewed research from academic journals. Together, this advanced the research and school project by providing a solid foundation for understanding the problem in terms of North American and worldly trends in rural high schools and grounded the research in Wells specifically.

Workshop Two: Values of the Community

- Location: Community Hall
- This workshop focused on values in the community of Wells. The workshop was targeted equally at students, families, community members, youth groups, and business owners within the Wells community. At the beginning of the workshop, I spent 10 minutes briefly introducing the research as well as the topic that was covered. I described different examples of values, such as physical spaces within the community or cultural processes. At the beginning of the workshop, participants were invited to go for a walk in the community. The community members themselves determined the locations of the walk.
- Prompts:
    - What do you think are the central values in this community?

    - Consider the following types of values: have we covered these? What fits your perception of Wells' community values within each category?
    - Which values do you think will be most important in the future for students generally and for the town of Wells specifically?
    - Anything to add, change, remove, or re-order?
    - Are there any concluding thoughts? Questions? Concerns?
- At the end of the workshop, attendees were thanked for their time. I provided my email address in case any participants had additional questions, comments, or concerns they wanted to discuss privately with me.
- This workshop aimed to understand the values of Wells. Part of the justification for a destination high school in rural areas was the unique opportunities for alternative forms of education. This workshop advanced the research and school project by providing insight into Wells' unique location and community and how this can promote a destination high school in this area.

Workshop Three: Kids Workshop

- Location: Wells Elementary School.
- This workshop targeted children living in Wells and their parents/guardians.
- At the beginning of the workshop, I introduced the research, including a background to the WILD project. Then, I went over the topic of the workshop with the kids.
- Prompts:
    - What is it like to live in Wells?
    - What are your favourite things to do in Wells?
    - What is it like going to school in Wells?

  - What is it like taking the bus?
  - What is it like to be doing distributed learning?
  - What is it like to go to school in Quesnel?
  - (For children not in high school) how do you feel about going to school in Quesnel? About taking the bus? About distributed learning?
  - What would you like a future high school to look like?
  - Any questions, concerns, or comments?
- At the end of the workshop, attendees were thanked for their time. I provided my email address in case any participants had additional questions, comments, or concerns they wanted to discuss with me privately.
- This workshop focused on the kids in the community and their experiences living and going to school in Wells. The participants in this workshop provided valuable insight into what they envision when thinking of a future high school in Wells, helped integrate kids into the process, and raised awareness about the project with the kids. This information helped to understand place from another sub-community that was missing before.

Workshop Four: Opportunities for Education

- Location: The Council Chambers, Zoom hybrid.
- This workshop was targeted at WILD stakeholders and community organizations but was also open to experienced educators. The object of this workshop was to identify the unique education opportunities present in the town of Wells by drawing on relevant knowledge from educators with experience in alternative education. At the beginning of the workshop, I briefly introduced the research project, including past workshops that have been done and how they related to this workshop. I summarized the key insights and

themes from my interviews with experienced educators using a PowerPoint presentation. Then, participants could ask questions, make comments, and get an idea of the process they may undergo and the options they have when implementing their alternative high school.

- Prompts:
    - Given the community values uncovered in workshop two, how will the values look in a functioning school?
    - Given the results of the interviews with experienced educators, which fits with the values and strengths of the community? What might be some limitations?
    - Given the problem and its impacts, in what ways might these models alleviate the impacts of not having a school, and what aspects are well suited? What aspects are not?
    - What might work and what might not work?
    - What are some issues or approaches you hadn't considered before?
    - What are the key takeaways from this information?
    - Any concluding remarks, questions, or concerns?
- At the end of the workshop, attendees were thanked for their time. I provided my email address in case participants had additional questions, comments, or concerns they wanted to discuss privately with me.
- This workshop allowed co-researchers and me to discuss the results from the interviews with experienced educators and how the information may or may not pertain to the research project and the WILD school. I brought this information to the community members, who could dissect it for relevancy. Together, this workshop advanced the

research and school project by providing information about successful alternative school models and how these models can be used to further the WILD proposal.

Workshop Five: Refining/Developing the Opportunities

- Location: Community Hall
- This workshop targeted WILD stakeholders and community organizations interested in being partners in the potential school. This workshop aimed to refine and develop different educational opportunities in the town of Wells. This workshop was co-facilitated by an experienced educator with ties to the Wells community and the potential WILD school. At the beginning of the workshop, I briefly introduced the research project, including past workshops and how they related to this workshop. I also summarized the key insights and themes from workshop four. Then, my co-facilitator introduced the topic and activity in this workshop, which included writing a letter as a future student at the Wells high school. Details of this facilitation process can be found in Appendix B.
- After the letter writing process, we created a summary of the key points uncovered during the workshop in the form of an admin letter going to potential high school students. The results of this workshop summary can be found in Appendix B.
- At the end of the workshop, attendees were thanked for their time. I provided my email address in case any participants had additional questions, comments, or concerns they wanted to discuss privately with me.
- This workshop provided a space for theoretical applications of PBE and CBE to be conceptualized in a relevant way for the Wells context. Workshop attendees were community members interested in being a part of the WILD high school. These

community members brought their own experiences and backgrounds and were able to share these aspects with other interested partners.

Workshop Six: Bringing the Findings to the Community

- Location: Zoom.
- This workshop was targeted at key WILD stakeholders and interested community members. At the beginning of this workshop, I reviewed the research process undergone by the community. I presented the preliminary/draft findings from the workshops as a way for community members to check the data and my interpretations.
- Prompts:
    - Any reflections on the process we engaged with?
    - What are the reactions to the results we've come up with?
    - A brief discussion of each finding/part.
    - Does this all ring true? Did I miss anything important?
    - Which pieces of information are most relevant?
    - Have we left any noticeable gaps that you can see?
    - Given where we have come to, what can you see is the next step(s) and/or future work?
    - Any final thoughts?
- At the end of the workshop, attendees were thanked for their time. I provided my email address in case any participants had additional questions, comments, or concerns they wanted to discuss privately with me.

- This workshop was important because it allowed co-researchers and me to reflect on the research process. I brought my findings and interpretations to the community, and they could discuss them, reflect on them, and check them for validity.

Appendix C: Workshop Five Overview and Facilitation Materials

Guidelines for "Dear Mom"

- You are writing the letter from the point of view of a well-spoken, high academic senior high school student who has been at the Wells High School for two weeks during its first year of operation, which may be September 2024. He/she/they is from out-of-town and is writing an update to their mom.
- The choices you make should reflect your hopes and expectations for the school, as well as the reasons for creating a school. You should be ready to share your thinking with the larger group for each choice.
- Don't worry about trying to make your letter sound like it has been written by a teenager. The words you choose to use should be the ones you'd ideally like the student to say about your school.
- Try to balance your ideal hopes and dreams with what you think is truly possible for your community to achieve.
- Feel free to record ideas that are larger than the spaces provided. Just print small or add notes on the side of the paper.
- You may edit the script if you feel that the given narrative is too limiting or on the wrong track. For example, the letter suggests that the students watched and discussed a movie together. If you don't think this is at all an activity that the Wells High School students should engage in, you may cross it out or change it to something else they might do and discuss.
- There are notes on the back of each page of the letter outlining Ministry requirements and clarifying the questions.

- If you can't agree on a choice within your group, you may record more answers than the number called for. For example, if one of you wants to say that the students should have Corn Flakes for breakfast each day, while the other insists it must be Rice Krispies, you may write down both. (We don't want any cereal killings today☺)
- Steve can tell individual groups what he did at the Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) during his years there, in relation to any part of the letter, but only if you are totally stuck for ideas or after you have made your group decisions about your own school. It is important that the ideas come from you and your community and what worked in the Gulf Islands may not work for Wells.
- Be creative. Don't worry about conforming to ideas you may have heard about the potential school. Don't assume some things are already set in stone.
- Have fun!

Dear Mom Letter

Dear Mom,

It has been a very (1a:ADJ) and (1b:ADJ) start to my time at the Wells High School and I can't believe I've only been here for two weeks! The other (2:#) students are all (3a:WHAT?) and (3b:WHAT?) and we are all getting along (so far!) even though we range from grade (4a:#) to grade (4b:#) and they're from all over the place, including (5a: place), (5b: place) and even (5c: place), besides the (6:#) kids who actually live here all the time!

I miss home a bit, but here I get to stay (7: WHERE?) with (8: WHO?), where we're lucky to have (9a:WHAT?) and (9b:WHAT?) and be able to (10a: WHAT?) and (10b:WHAT?) We're expected to (11a:WHAT?) and (11b:WHAT?) in return for such a (12: ADJ) place to live. (13:WHO?) makes sure we stay out of trouble, and treats us like (14:WHAT?).

Our (15a:ADJ) and (15b: ADJ) meals are planned and prepared by (16a:WHO?). The food comes from (17: WHERE?) and of course it's paid for by (18: WHO?). We usually eat (19a:WHERE?) or (19b:WHERE?).

We can walk to most places in town; though they do have a (20: ADJ)(21: WHAT?) to get us to places that are farther away. I am also getting a lot of exercise with all the (22a:WHAT?) and (22b:WHAT?) we do!

As you know, this (23a:TERM), I am taking (23b:#) courses but they are "taught" in a very different way! We spend a lot of time (24a: WHAT?), (24b: WHAT?), and (24c: WHAT?), and unlike my last school, there are no (25a: WHATS?), (25b: WHATS?), or (25c: WHATS?). The teachers here are very (26a:ADJ) and (26b:ADJ)! Some of them are not even what some

people might call “real teachers”: we get to learn from (27a: WHO?), (27b: WHO?), and (27c: WHO?).

So far, my favourite course is (28a:COURSE) because it is (29a: ADJ) and (29b: ADJ). I’m also enjoying (28b:COURSE) because we get to (30a:WHAT?) and (30b: WHAT?). We’ll also earn credits for (28c-?: LIST OTHER COURSES) so I’ll be well on my way to my Dogwood.

We spend about (31: %) of our “learning time” inside a (32: ADJ) classroom at the (33: ADJ) local school, but most of the time we’re out and about at various other places including (34a: PLACE) ,(34b: PLACE) and (34c: PLACE). The school serves as a place for (35a:WHAT?), (35b:WHAT?), and (35a:WHAT?), and we get to (36a: WHAT?) and (36b: WHAT?) with the younger kids who go there!

We’re reading and discussing (37:WHAT?) and last night we all watched the movie “(38:WHAT?)” then talked about what it made us think and feel.

The scenery here is (39:ADJ) and we get to (40a:WHAT?) , (40b:WHAT?) and (40c:WHAT?) in the area that surround the (41:ADJ) little town. On Tuesday, we did a day trip to (42: WHERE?) so that we could (43a:WHAT?) and (43bWHAT?) and we’re now busy planning a major (44:#) overnight trip to (45:WHERE?) that will involve (46a:WHAT?), (46b:WHAT?), and (46c:WHAT?),! In terms of the natural world, I’ve been learning all about (47a:WHAT?) (47b:WHAT?) and (47c:WHAT?) by being right out there instead of just watching videos or looking at pictures in books.

I’m really looking forward to (48:WHAT?) today where we will learn how to use (49a:WHAT?) and (49b:WHAT?) so that we can (50:WHAT?). Every day around here seems to

involve (51a:ADJ?) and (51b:ADJ?) activities that I've never tried before. By the time the term is over in (52:MONTH), you may not even recognize me because I'll be able to (53a:WHAT?), (53b:WHAT?) and (53c:WHAT?). Weird, eh?

Did you know that there are people in Wells who know how to (54a:WHAT?) and also experts at (54b:WHAT?)? I do, because they've worked with our (55: ADJ) class to show us their talents. Cool, huh?

This evening we're all going to (56:WHERE?) to (57:WHAT?) as part of our (57b. WHAT?). Don't worry! We'll be back before our (58:TIME) bedtime and they really make sure we are safe with no (59a: WHAT?) or (59b:WHAT?) allowed and an expectation that we always (60a:WHAT?) , (60b:WHAT?) and (60c:WHAT?). If anybody does break the rules, they can expect (61:WHAT?) and the teachers usually (62:WHAT?). One kid was caught (63:WHAT?) behind the (64: WHAT?) and he was asked to (65a:WHAT?) and (65b:WHAT?) while the rest of us (66: WHAT?)

So, anyways, I've got to run. Yes, going to school here sometimes means (67:#) hour days, but they are usually (68a:ADJ) and (68b:ADJ) . Don't let it go to your head, but you were right. This place makes me (69:WHAT?) and the people are (70: ADJ?). I never could have (71:WHAT?) at home and when you come to visit I can't wait to show you (72a:WHAT?) and (72b:WHAT?) and introduce you to (73:WHO?)?

Your very (74:ADJ) offspring,

Casey

PS: Please send (75: WHAT?) ! I didn't realize (76: WHAT?) !

Dear Mom Letter Instructions

*Numbers correspond to the numbered blanks on the letter above

1) ADJ stands for ADJECTIVE. Choose a relevant and meaningful describing word for each "ADJ". * These word choices help to describe and give texture to the high school experience you want to create.

* CHALLENGE: Try not to repeat adjectives during the entire letter!

2) The number of students in an Independent School must be 10 or greater.

3) What qualities do you want your high school students to have?

*This may inform your "Admissions Policy".

4) This is a major decision. Please refer to the Credits and Courses fact sheet.)

* The older the students, the more funding you get from the government.

* Students in grades 8 & 9 have far more course requirements per term than those in grade 10-12, and their learning outcomes are less flexible and diverse than grade 10-12 courses.

* If you don't include grades 8 and 9, what do your local students do in the two years between the school you have and the high school you are creating?

5) Where would be some logical places your students would come from?

* This can inform your "Promotion and Recruitment" plan.

6) How many Wells kids will be in your chosen grades in September 2024?

The following questions are key to your boarding arrangements, policies and procedures, but can also have an impact on recruitment, safety, staff working conditions, and your overall financial feasibility.

7) Where would out-of-town students stay?

8) Who would share a room?

9) What key features would the "boarding place" have?

10) What could the students do there in their free time?

11) What tasks or chores would they be expected to do?

13) Who would supervise them outside of school hours?

16) Who plans and prepares the food?

17) Where does the food come from?

18) Who pays for the food?

19) Where do the students eat?

21. What type of transportation will the school provide for longer trips?

* Part of your "Transportation Policy" and resource planning.

22. How will the students get their daily exercise?

* DPA (Daily Physical Activity) is a key Ministry objective and can also be credited towards physical education courses, even if it is not your typical "gym" activity.

23. Your key decision here is determining how long each "cohort" of students would attend the Wells high school for one set of courses. Usual choices "YEAR" or "SEMESTER"

** Please refer to the CREDITS & COURSES FACT SHEET

Thinking about the potential high school's educational identity…

24. What "types" of learning activities will high school students experience?

25. What "traditional" high school features will NOT be a part of the Wells high school?

26. What qualities do you want your teachers to have?

* This can inform your "Human Resources" policy and procedures.

27) If it takes a village to raise a child. Who in the village will be "teaching" the kids?

* Those without teaching certificates (or special permission from the Ministry) may only "teach" the students if supervised by a certified teacher. This is true for both public and independent schools.

* Non-certified "teachers" may work with the students without a certified teacher present, but their time together would not be considered "instructional time" for the purpose of credit hours.

* All adults who work with students need to submit a criminal record check.

28) What courses do you want your school to offer?

* This may change each semester or year.

* All students may explore the same courses together or choose their own.

* Almost anything you can imagine being taught can be part of a credited course, so don't worry about the actual course names.

29 & 30: More thinking about the educational identity of the Wells High School.

* A "Dogwood" is a nickname for the "High School Graduation "Diploma".

31) There are no set rules around the % of time one needs to be inside a classroom.

34) Where are some other key places where the students could learn effectively?

35) How can your existing school best support your high school program?

36) How will your high school, students and elementary students connect? How can each group benefit the other?

* High school students can earn credits for many different courses through working with younger students.

37-38: What are some types of learning resources would you like to see being used at the Wells High School?

* An independent school, needs a "Learning Resource" policy.

* As you work your way through the next questions, think about the type of unique and powerful learning program you would like to help create. How would it be supported by your own unique community?

* The Wells High school student activities can serve many purposes. They can:

    * be part of specific course strategies and goals. (= Instructional Time)

    * help the students acclimatize and connect with your place.

* be fun and add to the student excitement and enthusiasm in the school.

* build bonds between the students and with staff & community members.

* all of the above!

40. What are some key outdoor activities Wells high school students would experience?

42. Think of a specific location in your area that could provide a rich experience. based on one or more of the points listed above.

43. What relevant learning activities can you imagine there?

44-46. If including a major trip in the term, up to how many nights might it include, where would you go, and what would be the main learning activities?

47. What important natural world learning could the students experience that is related to the courses you have chosen?

48-50. What course-related learning activity might the students experience where they learn to use special tools to accomplish something important.

51. More thinking about Wells high school's educational identity!

52. This relates back to how long your terms will be.

53. More thinking about the personal impact you want your school to have on your learners.

* This can be communicated in your promotional material and recruitment efforts.

54. What special skills do the people of your area have to share with the students?

* They don't have to be directly connected to course goals of content, but it helps build the credit hours if so. These could also well involve or constitute "free time" activities that are mainly for fun and to add zest to a young person's life at the Wells high school.

56-57. Where might the students go and what might they do there as a nighttime learning OR free time activity? (Choose one of these two options for 57a.)

* If it is a designated, teacher-led activity, it could count as "Instructional Time". (Refer to "Instructional Time" fact sheet)

* If it is a free time activity, it may be informed by the high school's boarding policy as below.

* The following questions relate to Wells high school's "Discipline Policy & Procedures", "Field Trip Policy", and "Boarding Policy", which need to be created as part of the school's policy and procedure manual. (Note: The Ministry is working on a set of "Boarding Guidelines" that are due out in 2023.)

58. When should all the students be in bed?

* This will impact the hours and duties of staff.

59. What might be prohibited be at the high school?

60. What are some important expectations in terms of student conduct?

61-66: How should "incidents" be handled at the high school? What might occur?

67. How long might the typical "school" days be?

*This has an impact on the high school's total "Instructional Time", which impacts the flexibility of your scheduling, calendar, and time off.

68. Which adjectives would "justify" the hours the students have to put in, especially if they are longer than they are used to at past schools?

* The following questions explore ideas that a may be keys to your promotion and recruitment efforts, beyond communicating what you hope your school will inspire.

69. Think of an important impact your school could have on a young person.

70. How do you hope students feel about your community people?

71. What unique opportunities will the Wells high school provide?

72. What will the students be eager to show their parents?

73. You could print the name of a specific person or the role of a person they might be impressed by. It could also be a group of people.

74. How would you want a student to feel at the end of a long, busy day or two weeks?

75-76. Mostly for fun, but also worth considering when composing a list of things a student should bring to the Wells high school ☺

Additional High School System Information for Workshop Participants

High School Credits and Courses

* High Schools may include grades 8 to 12.

(* Some smaller schools are even K-12; which is something to think about if you go the Independent School route.)

* Grade 8 & 9 : (Not part of the Graduation Program)

Schools must provide all students in grades 8 & 9 with a full slate of courses each year including:

(a) English Language Arts (b) Mathematics

(c) Science (d) Social Studies

(e) Physical and Health Education (f) Arts Education

(g) Career Education, (h) Language not English

(i) Applied Design, Skills, and Technologies.

*These courses could be divided into two semesters or could be explored all year long.

* Grade 10-12: Graduation Program

* In order to meet graduation requirements and be awarded a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood Diploma), students must earn a minimum of 80 credits and write the Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment and Grades 10 and 12 Literacy Assessments. The 80 credits must include 52 credits for required courses (including 8 credits of Career Education courses) and a minimum of 28 elective credits.

Credits must be earned in the following subject areas or courses:

A Language Arts 10 (4 credits)

A Language Arts 11 (4 credits)

A Language Arts 12 (4 credits)

A Social Studies 10 (4 credits)

A Social Studies 11 or 12 (4 credits)

A Mathematics 10 (4 credits)

A Mathematics 11 or 12 (4 credits)

A Science 10 (4 credits)

A Science 11 or 12 (4 credits)

Physical and Health Education 10 (4 credits)

An Arts Education and/or an Applied Design, Skills, and Technologies 10, 11, or 12 (4 credits)

Career Life Education (4 credits)

Career Life Connections (4 credits)

NOTE: Unless your students are spending all three of their graduation program years at the Wells high school, you DO NOT have to offer all of the courses listed above. You may provide a blend of required and elective courses in each semester or year.

Years & Terms

Most common;

1) Semesters= 2 per year = 5 months each = 4 to 5 courses each

2) Linear: All year = 10 months = 8 -10 courses.

* There are other options (such as the quarterly system used by many schools during COVID to minimize mixing) but these top two allow students to move from school to school more seamlessly.

NOTES:

* Students may take more courses than the minimum. If so, they could graduate in less than the usual three years or take fewer courses in a future semester when they are taking courses that are more intense and have a higher workload.

* If they take less than 8 courses per year, they may have to attend grades

10-12 for more than three years.

* Students can take any "grade" of course at any time in Grades 10 to 12. There are no prerequisites. For example, a grade 10 student could take Food Studies 12, even without having taken Food Studies 10 or 11. In some courses, it makes sense to take the early grades first, as they help a student build up to the higher levels, whereas in other courses, such as Life Sciences 11 & 12, the content is not sequential: Life Sciences 11 is focused on taxonomy, while Life Sciences 12 explores Human Anatomy.

Instructional Time & Calendar

The following are the prescribed minimum hours of instruction that a board must offer to students enrolled in the schools in its school district in the 2021/2022 school year:

a) 823 hours of instruction for students in kindergarten.

(b) 848 hours of instruction for students in grades 1 to 7.

(c) 922 hours of instruction for students in grades 8 to 12.

* There are no prescribed minimum hours of instruction that a board must offer to students enrolled in a distributed learning school.

The Math...

Instructional Time for High School Students

Linear = 922 hours overall

Two semesters = 461 hours each

* 16 week semester = ~30 hours per week

5 Day week = 6 hours per day (Standard in BC districts)

4 Day week = 7.5 hours per day (Gulf Islands Schools)

3 Day week = 10 hours per day (SEEC week)

What if you did 7 sessions of nine days each?

7 sessions of 9 days each = 63 days x 7.5 hours per day = 472 hours per semester.

16 weeks x 7 days a week = 112 days in 16 weeks.

112 days - 63 days of school = 49 days off : (9 on 7 off)

9 x 7 = 63 days of school x 7.5 hours per day = 472 hours per semester.

* "Hours of instruction" means an hour in which students of the independent school are in attendance and under supervision for the purpose of receiving instruction in an educational

program, including work study and work experience programs, examinations or other learning activities provided by the authority, but does not include recesses, lunch periods and other scheduled breaks between classes.

Reflection on the information gathered at workshop Five:

Dear Parent/Guardian

Thank you for your interest in our growing school. We are so excited about the opportunities for learning and personal growth this school can provide to students. We strive to create an exciting, diverse, challenging, caring, inclusive, and accepting community of well-rounded learners.

Our overall approach strives to be outdoor, collaborative, and project based. To do that, we engage with local organizations such as the Sunset Theatre, the Barkerville Historic Society, the Community Forest, and Island Mountain Arts. We also interact with local spaces, such as the school grounds, Bowron Lake, Barkerville, the surrounding mountains and trails, the Community Forest, and the Community Garden. We work to incorporate and understand important issues into our learning, such as climate change, environmental issues, race, residential schools, and their impacts by using a variety of resources from different voices, such as books and films. We strive to encourage caring, inspiring, accommodating, flexible, and healthy qualities in our graduates, creating a school where students and teachers alike enjoy living, learning, and working. To do this, the teaching and classes often involve outdoor learning, nature immersion, projects, making art, experiential programs, and mentorships. We approach learning by teaching outside, sharing stories, collaborating, finding creative solutions, and more.

We usually have anywhere between 12 - 32 students, who are between 50% - 60% local children. We offer grades 8-12.

In grades 8 and 9, we approach English, Science, Physical Education, Social Studies, and Art Education courses through integrative and immersive programming (not compartmentalizing individual courses), and a mix of virtual learning and hands-on approaches.

Working towards graduation, grades 10-12 focus on cooking, art, tourism, technology, and the surrounding local environment. In these years, students can select among Foods, Art, English, Science, and Social Studies. In grades 10-12, we do not offer math, so students wanting to take this course should plan to enroll in distributed learning or take math at their home school. After attending our high school, you can be confident your child will have outdoor skills such as winter survival, planting and harvesting skills, and skills related to planning and preparing meals. The year runs from September to June, and we run classes split into two semesters.

The school and students play an important role in the school and the community by planning and preparing meals, cleaning, shoveling walkways (for seniors), caring for plants, doing all the chores, following the respect guidelines, and cooperating with each other and other community members. We are so grateful to have such a supportive learning environment, and the integration of this school and this community creates a strong atmosphere where high school students can live, learn, and grow.

You can learn more about logistics, accommodation, and general supervision from our web page www.wellshighschool.com.

We look forward to meeting you and your students!

Sincerely,

Wells High School Administration Team

Appendix D: Interview Prompts

Interviewees were introduced the research project and given the rationale for the interview.

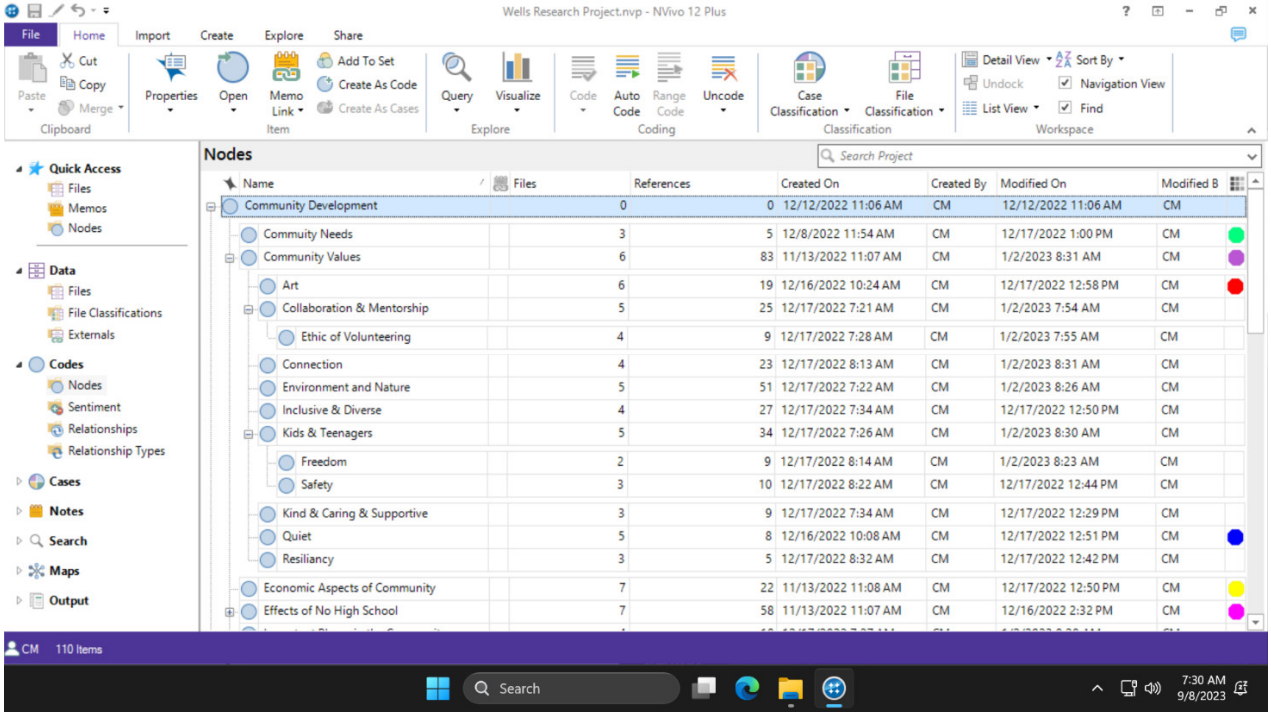
Prompts for the interview included:

- Can you give me a brief overview of your school and your role within that school?
- Why did you want to or choose to work at a alternative learning high school?
- What are the successes and challenges you encountered while implementing your own programs?
- What would you have done differently?
- How did you negotiate the challenges you encountered?
- Here is what we have identified for Wells, how does this speak to you?
- Any questions, concerns, or comments?

Interviewees were thanked for their time and asked if they would like to continue to support the high school project by being a reference.

Appendix E: Example of How Themes Were Uncovered

Below is a screenshot of NVIVO, and the subcodes under community development. Community Needs, Community Values, Economic Aspects of Community, and Effects of no high school is a subcode. Community Values were organized into smaller sub-codes, including Art, Collaboration and mentorship, Connection, Environment and Nature, and more.



The below excerpt from P2 was found in the "art" sub-code in NVIVO.

> Reference 2 - 1.62% Coverage
>
> **P2** 05:20
> So something that I have a deep interest in, and is something that I'm hoping to build a bit more is the capacity for artists to be able to live in this rural place for longer periods of time, to be able to work on their own craft, but also to be able to share information about their craft with other people. I think the, the intergenerational kind of knowledge sharing that occurs in that kind of situation is really interesting.

Now, let's look at an excerpt from my field notes that coincides with P2s statement: "[Name redacted] works at Island Mountain Arts (IMA), moved here a couple of years ago. Big art background. Continuously brought up ways to integrate and interact with the school, as well as with the community. Advocate!"

Finding a Theme: from my field notes, I can remember that P2 is an employee at Island Mountain Arts, which helps give context to the statement. However, not only does this statement refer to the community value of art, but also to the passion and advocacy of this community member, which was echoed in other ways by other community members. This information led to the development of the theme "co-researchers were passionate about a solution."