

Evaluate 2 pieces of research on Forest School practice.

Research 1 title

'Such Enthusiasm - a joy to see' (Murray and O'Brien 2005) ; an evaluation of Forest School in England. (see paper attached below) Along with a study of Wales, this research was funded by The Forestry Commission.

I chose this piece of research as I like the fact they are advocating that their research was not just to gather information and learning but was to inspire people with energy and confidence.

The research was undertaken using three case studies from Worcestershire, Shropshire and Oxfordshire. A total of twenty four children were tracked over a period of 8 months.

The research outlines 5 main features of Forest school;

1. The Woodland space/setting

An area which is well maintained and has low risk factors. There is room for freedom and flexibility of child-initiated learning after dedicating time to routines and establishing boundaries.

2. High adult to child ratio

Allowing more challenge within tasks and play activities. More able to risk take but without risk of harm.

3. Linking learning to the curriculum

Both National Curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum objectives can be met in a different context to the indoor type provision.

4. Sensory exploration

Multi sensory approaches can be explored in creative, diverse and imaginative play situations.

5. Regular sessions with the children.

The routine of regular contact with the children is significant in building effective Forest School principles.

From the case studies, Murray and O'Brien were able to create eight evaluation themes to show the impact of Forest School on the children studied and the wider impact on Parents and Teachers. The key themes were as follows:

1. Confidence:

Being given freedom, space and time, children had opportunities to grow, learn and be independent. They became self-confident and had more self-belief.

2. Social Skills:

The children learned co-operation skills. They were challenged to manage conflict between themselves and others. They developed an increase in awareness of consequence through their own and actions of others.

3. Language and communication:

Visual and sensory experiences at Forest School led to children have a more developed and sophisticated approach to written and spoken language.

4. Motivation and Concentration:

Increased levels of participation to explore and play were observed and children also demonstrated a keenness to focus on longer tasks.

5. Physical skills:

Gross motor skills and stamina increased in the children's ability to move freely around the Forest School site. The tasks of constructing and making objects encouraged the develop of fine motor skills.

6. Knowledge and understanding:

Children became more knowledgeable about the nature around them. They showed care for the environment and encouraged safe movement with those around them. They began to take notice of Flora and Fauna and understand the purposes of the ecosystems.

7. New Perspectives:

Adults could observe and gained a better understanding of the different learning styles of individual children.

8. Effects beyond forest school:

Parents' saw the impact Forest School had on their children. Especially as Forest School learning was taken home by the children with children willing parents to take them in the outdoors more often.

In conclusion, this research suggests that Forest School is not just a 'one-off' session. To see impact to behavioural changes, Forest School ethos needs to be established over time . Raising achievement was proven in this research and acknowledged in many Ofsted reports. The fundamental reason for observing the

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children is that Forest School is key to four out of five areas of Every Child Matters Framework (DfES, 2004), identified by children as key to well-being. These are:

- 1) Be healthy
- 2) Stay safe
- 3) Enjoy and achieve
- 4) Make a positive contribution.

Research 2 title

The Forest School and Inclusion: a project evaluation BARBARA PAVEY (PhD)
2006

This second piece of research is specific to children with very different learning needs. Many of which are comparable to some of the children in my own setting. The case study research was carried out over 16 weeks, every Thursday morning. 9 boys within the age range 5-7 years were observed. I chose this research piece as it is a very honest portrayal of a piece of Forest School practise. The outcome of Forest School is very much the same as the first piece of research, in that, children and adults of all capabilities can achieve in a Forest School approach to learning.

This case study has more 'real life' examples outlined and is almost portrayed as a working document of the FS practitioner's reflective learning log. Much discussion was held between practitioners from different establishments. Some contrasting views gave sight and reason for recommendations (stated below).

A multi-sensory approach (like the specific needs of the pupils) was used to gather evidence to answer three main questions:

1. What is the nature of the Forest School experience for young children with significant special educational needs?
2. Can the Forest School meet the needs of young children with significant special educational needs?
3. Does the Forest School develop the personal and social qualities of young children with significant special educational needs?

Observation was used as an important tool to critique this case study and evaluate the contributions of all stake holders in the Forest School Provision.

The contrast to this piece of research was the exploration of how progress could be measured. Although there was acknowledgement that Norwich and Kent (2002: 60) citing Inman et.al. 1998 point out, an attempt to 'measure the unmeasurable',

there was still pressures to provide assessment for personal and social development. As Norwich and Kent assert, (2002; 62)"Though assessing PSD is fraught with difficulties, there seems to be no way of avoiding the need to do so". A questionnaire filled out in collaboration with a few practitioners was undertaken at the beginning and then at the end of the FS project. It was not evidently clear that the outcomes of the questionnaire would have achieved the same results with or without FS provision.

This reflective piece of research showed how children with SEN or difficulties could access FS with out barriers. There were positive achievements identified and the experience for children with special educational needs was enriching. It also suggested the main recommendations were focused around the roles of adults. Mainly being prepared to share ideas about different approaches that need to be recognised and dealt with before the children embark on the Forest School activities.