

**TAKE ME OUTSIDE! BALANCING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
LIVES USING A FOREST SCHOOL APPROACH**

by

Kristi Downing, B.S.

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Education

in

Elementary Education

University of Alaska Fairbanks

May 2022

Approved:

Joan Hornig, Committee Chair
Barb Sivin, Committee Member
Brooke Freeburg, Committee Member
Robin Child, Committee Member
Joan Hornig, Department Chair
Elementary Education

Abstract

As our fast-paced society brings children indoors at an increasing rate we are losing the essence of childhood experiences in nature. The ability to connect with the land, engage in our environment, and connect to the place we call home is essential for developing healthy social connections and skills. The Forest School ethos and principles uphold the sacredness of child-led, nature-based learning, and of giving children autonomy and agency in their lived experiences while exploring and learning outside. Forest School is based on a Swedish philosophy and way of life, *friluftsliv*, literally “free air life” which has more recently been adopted across other countries and other cultures. The importance of spending time exploring and learning in nature has been shown to improve social and emotional health, restore attention to task, and support cooperation, community building, problem-solving skills, and empathy. The literature and research support the profound experiences of those embracing a long-term Forest School approach and the successes with improved social-emotional skills.

For my project, I created a usable, informative website that helps make outdoor learning with a Forest School approach a feasible option for all parents and educators. The website outlines a collection of activities for educators and parents to use in the outdoors that support children and young people’s social-emotional skills in a holistic way.

Take Me Outside!

When young people feel a connection with nature and each other, they will care for both
(Knight, 2016).

Defining Terms

For the purpose of this paper, I will use CYP to denote 'children and young people' which encompasses children between 6-12 years of age. In addition, I will use SEL for social-emotional learning and FS when referring to Forest School, which I define within the Introduction. Each of these are used extensively throughout the paper, and using shorthand does not take away from the understanding of the writing.

Introduction

'Go outside and play' - parents everywhere

In an age where our children struggle with rising counts of mental disabilities, nature-deficit, increased diagnosis of ADHD, and behavioral struggles, we are missing the target with decreased outdoor experiences, increased standardized testing, and the pressure to perform academically at younger and younger ages (Hanscom, 2016; Largo-Wight, 2018; McCree et al., 2018; Worroll & Houghton, 2018). It is no wonder that more and more CYP are struggling with their behaviors and SEL skills in these high-stakes environments.

Extensive research evidence suggests that using the outdoors as a learning space enhances children and young people's self-concept and self-esteem, broadens attention spans, increases well-being and mood, improves confidence and social skills as well as aiding in self-regulation (Hanscom, 2016; Harper et al., 2019; Harvey et al., 2020; Knight, 2011, 2016; Largo-Wight et al., 2018; Louv, 2008; McCree et al., 2018; O'Brien & Murray, 2007; Price, 2019;

Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Tiplady & Menter, 2020; Weeland et al., 2019). Getting kids outside has proven to be an antidote to stress, attention problems, behavioral problems and supports mental health (Hanscom, 2016; Harper et al., 2019; Harvey et al., 2020; Knight, 2011, 2016; Largo-Wight et al., 2018; Louv, 2008; McCree et al., 2018; O'Brien & Murray, 2007; Price, 2019; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Tiplady & Menter, 2020; Weeland et al., 2019). I want to emphasize these benefits for children and young people (CYP) who struggle with their social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, but not to the exclusion of how this approach benefits *all* CYP. I want to promote the benefits of giving children a consistent opportunity to spend time outside in a fashion that supports their agency, is child-led, and is without a preconceived academic learning objective or agenda. The literature and research support promoting imaginative play, cooperation, risk-taking, problem-solving, and thus growing one's self-esteem as a worthy endeavor in and of itself (Hanscom, 2016; Knight, 2011, 2016; Price, 2019; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Tiplady & Menter, 2020; White, 2012).

There are a myriad of ways of using an outdoor education approach with CYP, however the underlying ethos I am drawn to time and again is in the Forest School (FS) approach. Forest School refers specifically to a pedagogy developed in Scandinavia. The origins of Forest School began mostly in Sweden and Norway and is based on a Swedish philosophy called *friluftsliv* which translates literally to “free air life,” meaning a lifestyle philosophy based on experiences of freedom in nature and spiritual connectedness with the landscape (Leather, 2016). The Forest School ethos embodies a child-centered, child-initiated pedagogy with an element of freedom and agency for the learner.

Although the UK began adopting the Scandinavian FS model in the 1990s, how it is implemented within another culture needs to be considered in context (Leather, 2016). The Scandinavian philosophy is based on deep spiritual connections to the land upon which the CYP are engaged. It should be noted that with the explosion of popularity in FS, some things can be ‘lost in translation’ (Leather, 2016). Forest School, at its core, is not based on just being outside;

it is a philosophy of connection to the land, learning from the land, and repeated exposure to the land within a place. Blenkinsop and Fettes (2020) talk about the importance of *Land*,

...where our main task is to learn by observing and participating in the webs of relationships that carry both doing and thinking. This is what 'land as first teacher means'. Land teaches not simply by offering a place to live, or the food and material resources necessary for survival, but more fundamentally by showing us and letting us experience, continually and in myriad ways, what living relationships look like and feel like and how they weave together to make greater, more complex, self-sustaining and adaptive wholes (p.1037).

The Forest School ethos is at the heart of my connection to the idea of “outdoor education” within my project; including the land as part of the people and the people as part of the land in a cultural context.

There are six principles that guide the Forest School ethos (Tiplady & Menter, 2020):

1. Regular sessions over a long time period
2. Occurs in a woodland or natural setting
3. Uses a range of child-led learning approaches
4. Based on holistic learner development
5. Allows for supported risks and challenges within the environment
6. Run by qualified FS professionals

Outdoor, nature-based learning is beneficial for all children. I am interested in creating and maintaining a framework promoting the use of regular, long-term sessions of outdoor, nature-based learning for elementary children (ages six to twelve years old) to support their social-emotional lives using a place-based, Forest School approach. Although it is well researched that a FS approach has positive effects for *all* children, it has been shown to really benefit CYP who otherwise struggle with their SEL skills in an even greater way than their typical peers (Knight, 2016; McCree et al., 2018; Price, 2019; Roe & Aspinall, 2011). This

approach is a way of effecting change, growth, and support for those who need it most. The children of today will be making the decisions on all of our tomorrows. I believe that gifting our CYP consistent time in nature supporting the discovery of themselves will make for more complete, well-rounded individuals. We need to allow kids to take risks and challenge themselves, to collaborate with peers, to explore their world, and make connections with nature as well as each other, on their terms. This requires a consistent commitment to giving our children and young people the time in nature they need for connection and growth in a supportive environment that allows them to explore their ideas and build their own learning experiences.

This project is a step away from the traditional adult vs. child viewpoint where one can often be pitted against the other. Rather, this project is a step toward undoing much of what has been done to these relationships and working on reconfiguring what we understand as a valuable learning experience. To step back and ask: Who is the teacher? Who is the learner? We all are. It is not so much reversing these roles, but of changing our perception, even if just for one day a week, of what is important for kids to learn; to see the development of relationship building, connections to place and to our natural world, natural risk-taking and personal growth as worthy endeavors; to believe at the end of the day these can stand alone as valuable ways to spend time; to give these elements in our lives value again and not see them as fluff or “extra”; to see this time spent in nature as crucial and of equal importance to the work that may go on in classrooms or in homeschool settings for much of the rest of a child's life, as essential.

Rationale

... *as we restore our connection with nature, we restore ourselves (Cornell, 2015)*

As a parent of a child who struggled with his social-emotional life in a regular educational setting, I have seen the benefits firsthand of using a nature-based approach to supplement learning. Regular, long-term time in nature has given him the chance to connect

with the natural world and respect his place in it; it has given him a place to practice both taking risks and working with others, reflecting on his skills and challenges, and balancing his well-being.

Furthermore, at a local level, Fairbanks needs its children to care about the natural world, have a balanced emotional life, and ensure its children's well-being is at the forefront of what is important about being a human being and an engaged community member. Using a place-based FS approach has shown to be a successful and holistic approach in supporting the SEL development of CYP (Knight, 2016).

Nature offers space to absorb excess emotional and behavioral energy; as well as give it back - and to return attention back to other tasks (Harper et al., 2019). I truly believe this has helped strengthen my child's personal identity and self-worth. We owe all children the chance to show themselves that they are capable of success and allow them to embrace their own interests and agency. Even for those who may not present with SEL difficulties, they too deserve to benefit from learning in nature. The FS approach is not exclusionary to any child, it embraces and enhances the lives of everyone it touches. The very well-being of our communities is at stake.

Literature Review

An environment-based education movement . . . will help students realize that school isn't supposed to be a polite form of incarceration, but a portal to the wider world. (Louv, 2008)

I reviewed stacks of research and literature as my interest and ideas grew and transformed around my intent of using a nature-based Forest School approach to enhance the SEL lives of children. It began as a way to advocate for using outdoor learning to help enhance the social-emotional lives of children who are challenged to learn appropriate SEL skills, and who struggle in the traditional classroom setting. Learning in nature is a holistic approach to

teaching CYP; it encompasses all of the senses, can act as a buffer (Roe & Aspinall, 2011), and offers freedom, space, calm, quiet, and connection to nature. However, over time and continued research, I have realized the importance of this approach for ALL children and young people. I am adding the lens of how this approach can help develop these same skills for all children. I believe that this knowledge was always in me, but it took me finding new and exciting resources and reflecting on my own experiences both as a student, a parent, and a teacher.

I combed through the literature and current research on how using the outdoors benefits the social-emotional lives of CYP. There are many approaches to using the outdoors in education. Forest School is one branch on the tree of outdoor education, and as I mentioned in my introduction, this approach resonates with me. As I read through research articles on using the outdoors to augment SEL for CYP, four articles I reviewed specified a Forest School approach (McCree et al., 2018; O'Brien & Murray, 2007; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Tiplady & Menter, 2020) and two others reflected the Forest School pedagogy in their study design (Price, 2019; White, 2012). Though there are similarities within the pedagogical approach between many of the studies in the articles I reviewed, there are just as many approaches to the idea of using the outdoors as an extension of the classroom as there are research studies. I found those with an intervention more closely modeling the *friluftsliv* philosophy to have more profound and meaningful results as reflected in CYP's ability to transfer the SEL skills to other contexts, which also appeared to align with studies embracing CYP's agency (McCree et al., 2018; O'Brien & Murray, 2007; White, 2012). Although, it would be foolish to dismiss other approaches as not significant. Across the board, it was found that with consistent, meaningful exposure to learning in nature, children showed marked improvements in their SEL skills - more so for those who had already been identified with SEL difficulties (Knight, 2016; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Weeland et al., 2019).

In my research, many of the books and research articles pertaining to a true FS approach are from the UK perspective. Although the principles and ethos can be applied universally, FS is

not a normalized approach to learning here in the US, although it appears to be catching on. There are numerous teachers in the United States approaching the FS ethos in their public school teaching practice across the grades. Jennifer Kramer, a sixth-grade teacher in Guilford, Vermont, took inspiration from other teachers using a once-a-week FS approach and “implemented it this past year with her 22 challenging students, a third of them with Individual Education Plans” (Sobel, 2020). Not only did the students enjoy their time in nature, but their academic test scores increased, their class cohesiveness was strengthened and their behavioral challenges within the classroom decreased (Sobel, 2020).

Theoretical perspectives

In addition to the plethora of evidence and support for using a nature-based outdoor FS approach to learning, there are similarities and overlaps in the theoretical frameworks the research and literature in this area are based on. My project, which puts forth a FS approach to support SEL for children, is built on several theoretical frameworks, including social constructivism, attention restoration theory (ART), biophilia, and place-based theory, as supported in the research and literature.

Beginning with a social constructivist theory of CYP developing their learning experientially, the paradigm supports the FS approach of building knowledge and understanding through direct experience. With CYP having hands-on, authentic learning alongside a supportive adult they are building their understanding of the world around them. This framework is supported in the literature relating to Forest School as a social-emotional learning platform (Leather, 2012; McCree et al., 2018; O’Brien & Murray, 2007; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Tiplady & Menter, 2020; Knight, 2011, 2016; Price, 2019; White, 2012).

With social constructivism, the role of the outdoor educator or teacher is that of a facilitator who provides information and organizes activities for learners to discover their own learning, something which is evident in a well-facilitated Forest School experience (Leather,

2012). In addition, it is recognized that both Piaget and Vygotsky are influential in the foundations of FS beginning in the early years in the social constructivist theory. Piaget's belief in direct experiences in supporting children's growth and knowledge building, and Vygotsky's belief in scaffolding from a trusted adult or peers to enable the process of constructing meaning to add to existing knowledge, are part of the FS ethos (Knight, 2016). Burr argues that social constructivism "insists that we take a critical stance toward our taken for granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves and the ways in which we understand the world which are historically and culturally specific" (Burr, 2003, as cited in Leather, 2012), reminding us to be cognizant of the cultural context of the land we are engaged upon and to not let Forest School become a commodity (Leather, 2016).

In addition, my project is influenced by Attention Restoration Theory (ART); which upholds the healing power of nature and is grounded in the idea that when there is a depletion in our ability to focus and learn, then that resource needs to be restored. ART was first put forward by theorists in the 1980s to describe the need for restoring our ability to use our direct attention to a task, as it becomes depleted over time (S. Kaplan, 1995). Nature has proven to be a way in which our ability to pay attention is returned, our stress levels reduced and our whole personhood is reset by "reducing our mental fatigue and improving our concentration" (Roe & Aspinall, 2011). It is suggested that nature has a quality that also enhances children's "cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of self-regulation" (Roe & Aspinall, 2011). Attention restoration theory is supported by many researchers and professionals in the literature related to nature-based learning, especially in support of CYP who have attention deficits or struggle with self-regulation. It is a well-researched theory that being outdoors, in nature, is restorative (Harvey et al., 2020; Largo-Wight et al., 2018; Mcree et al., 2018; O'Brien & Murray, 2007; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Weeland et al., 2019). Numerous authors I reviewed used this framework to support their work (Harper et al., 2019; Knight, 2016; Largo-Wight et al., 2018; Louv, 2005; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Weeland, et al., 2019).

Moreover, through a social constructivist paradigm resides the biophilia hypothesis, which embraces the belief that we, as humans, are striving toward a connection with the natural world. Again, numerous authors cited this as their theoretical framework (Harvey et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2019; Louv, 2008; Knight, 2016). Harvey et al. described biophilia well, believing, “that we have an innate tendency to connect with nature” (2020). This is different from ART in that it doesn't focus on the psychological attention aspect, instead, it relies on a more instinctual, biological attraction humans have toward nature.

As represented in Figure 1, Sara Knight so cleverly depicts in her image of a tree the key elements of the benefits and theoretical underpinnings of FS:

Figure 1

Sara Knight's Forest School Pedagogy Tree



Note. Image photographed from, Knight, S., (2016). Forest School in Practice. Sage Publications Ltd.

I appreciate how she acknowledges that this is her contribution to the debate on the theoretical and philosophical base of FS; that it very well likely does not represent the total of all FS experiences and that one diagram cannot capture all FS experiences (Knight, 2016). It does cleverly represent how different theoretical frameworks, philosophies, and theorists fit within the FS experience. The beautiful tree is, of course, symbolic of the FS experience as well.

I would also like to address how place-based educational theory is connected to my project. Place-based theory is grounded in the ability of a place to provide for, develop, and enhance CYP connections to their community (Sobel, 2015). Using what local resources a place provides helps connect CYP to their education in meaningful ways. Practical application, real-life, hands-on immediate feedback are all benefits. Knight draws on Cartwright reminding us how “...education rooted in ‘place’ draws out knowledge rather than pouring it in, thus creating confidence and self-worth” (Cartwright, 2012, as cited in Knight, 2016). Sobel believes a place-based approach helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances appreciation for the natural world, and creates a sustaining commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens, which is believed to contribute to eco-conscious youth becoming eco-conscious adults supporting sustainable, earth-friendly practices within communities (2005). The FS approach advocates for establishing a connection to ‘place’ over time (Knight, 2016) and connects with a place-based approach as a way for CYP to connect to the land upon which they live.

Although there is a universal appeal in the FS approach to my project, it is important to maintain cultural relevance based on where the FS experience is. The FS approach should not become a cookie-cutter experience. Cultural relevance and the importance of the land the FS experience is happening on needs to be at the forefront of our intentions for CYP’s experience (Blenkinsop & Fettes, 2020; Leather, 2016). As Sobel states, we need to imagine ourselves “within the continuum of nature and culture in that place” (2005). With that in mind, there is no denying the many ways it can be connected to Fairbanks.

Statement of Bias

Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives (Thomas Berry)

My position in the world and my life experiences influence my ontological position and thus the way I am approaching this project. A few to consider include me being a white, educated, married, democratic, middle-aged teacher, mother, and rural living Alaska-born woman. I am also a public-schooled, homeschooling parent. Although raised in a western mindset, I try to remain open to other ways of knowing and seeing the world. I am reflective on my ways of thinking and what is considered knowledge in a cultural context. Who is the giver and receiver of knowledge, and who decides what is important or relevant for each of us to “know” is very different not only between cultures but even between individuals. Hence, my epistemological position is ever-evolving and morphing as I check myself for bias in my own thinking and position.

I also come to this place truly believing that our connection to the natural world should start young and that it *does* help us develop as more complete human beings. I believe in the power of nature to help heal us and balance us. I believe our connection to the natural world is important - it enhances empathy and reflection, quiets the mind, and enables us to feel grounded as human beings.

Methods

Open yourself up to nature and she will show you a whole magical world of adventure (Walmsley & Westall, 2018)

My aim was to create a usable, informative website that helps make outdoor learning with a Forest School approach a feasible option for all parents and educators; giving CYP an

opportunity to enhance their SEL skills, improve their self-concept, and embrace their learning as a whole person. My project is not meant to be a stand-alone curriculum, but rather an additional approach to enhance what may already be happening in a child's classroom, homeschool, or unschooling environment. The website outlines a collection of activities for educators and parents to use in the outdoors that support children and young people's SEL skills in a holistic way. I want to draw attention to using a nature-based, Forest School approach as a particularly beneficial way to support the social-emotional learning for CYP, especially those who already struggle with these skills.

As discussed in the literature review, a nature-based FS approach is well researched and allows children to build their SEL skills in a more integrated, real-world way, rather than as separate lessons within a classroom, which may or may not have immediate relevance for the children at that time (Price, 2019; White, 2012). It embraces experiential learning and its benefits in the moment, including learning through a social constructivist method of building understanding and knowledge through direct experience (Knight, 2012, 2016; Leather, 2012; O'Brien & Murray, 2007; White, 2012).

In that vein, my website outlines the principles of the FS ethos and includes the SEL benefits for children. Furthermore, the project gives ideas on activities across the seasons of the Fairbanks year to put forward as an option for the FS day; however, it is important to keep in mind the structure is child-led and open-ended. The activities are there as a "safety net for those children who need inspiration" (Knight, 2016). It is integral that the teacher or adult is prepared to scaffold children's curiosity, support and shape their exploration, and be an attentive observer of how each child experiences the setting in order to help facilitate a positive connection and experience.

The website also provides information on how to assess a setting, how to balance risks vs. hazards in the environment, how to set both physical and behavioral boundaries, and what to include in your basic Forest School materials kits. It also includes an example outline of the flow

of a Forest School session, with an emphasis on the importance of supporting child-led learning and free exploration. In addition, there are links provided to local resources to support place-based, outdoor learning interests, as well as links to recommended reading material, including my complete reference list for further information on concepts or ideas.

During the development of my website I found two new resources supporting the Forest School pedagogy, *The Outdoor Classroom in Practice, Ages 3-7* (Karen Constable, 2015) and *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens* (David Sobel, 2016). Both books contributed additional reinforcement to my research, gave me additional information on how Forest Schools can look for young children, and how as adult facilitators we are there to support the children's experiences.

Limitations

The project is limited in scope in that it may only present relevant or usable information to a small percentage of educators, as classroom teachers may not be able to devote the time necessary for the FS approach into their school year.

In addition, Fairbanks, as a sub-arctic region poses its own limitations for many with its weather. As a parent and teacher, I remain an advocate of getting kids outside every day whatever the weather. However, proper gear and CYP's comfort and safety are essential so access to warm clothing needs to be figured out or activities modified if the adequate gear is unavailable. Lastly, the more I read and dig deeper into the research and existing literature the bigger the picture gets; however, I am focusing on a local, place-based approach for CYP. The literature does emphasize the importance of starting FS at a young age - kindergarten is the age it originated in. However, the importance is not lost for older children, it just looks different. A focus on teenage outdoor education ideas and benefits would make for a great project but is not included in the scope of this project.

In addition, the essence of small groups with a high adult:child ratio is hard to

accomplish in a public school. Although this project is not specifically aimed at public school teachers, they are the gate-keepers of so many of our community's children on a daily basis for a majority of the year. Ideally, I would love to see whole schools adopt the FS ethos and support teachers getting kids outside on a regular basis. For homeschoolers and unschoolers the high adult:child ratio is easier to achieve.

We do not have an established Forest School, nor certified FS practitioners here in Fairbanks so this is unchartered territory. I myself am not a certified Forest School practitioner - I rely on my experience, interest, continuing education, and my elementary ed. licensure; although truly I do not see this as a limitation, I see this as an opportunity.

Description of Final Application Project

Forest School is not about quick fixes but about deep change and education for sustainability, both human and natural (Knight, 2016)

This past fall I was able to offer a series of Forest School sessions through the Folk School. For eight weeks, September through October, I had 5 children between 7-9 years old attend Forest School every Friday from 9:30 - 12:00 on our property. I chose to cap the class at 5 because I wanted to maintain the high adult:child ratio (1:5). I didn't know if I would have any "wild cards" in the group, and being the single adult I wanted to ensure a good experience for all.

In addition, in keeping with the FS intention of a higher adult:children ratio, I also hired my 13-year-old son to help at Forest School as an assistant. He helped set up and break-down camp each week, helped with activities, and was always on hand to assist children during their forest exploration time. Having an assistant was of immense value and well worth the monetary investment.

We live in a mixed birch and spruce boreal forest situated on 21 acres. Before setting up Forest School, I did a site assessment to determine any hazards within the boundaries and what

potential risks may exist. After considering several areas within our woodland for a Forest School camp space, I settled on an area that was relatively flat (the land is on a hillside), was easily accessible by an established trail, and had a natural openness to it allowing for movement and a sense of space. Lastly, in preparation for Forest School, I prepared my kits. Kits are the materials you need to be prepared; first aid kit, activity kit, supplies kit, etc.

The class filled up quickly, with a number of people waitlisted. One family asked to come over the week before Forest School began to meet me and see the property. They were new to the area and wanted to feel secure in where their children would be and with whom, before dropping them off for the first day. In addition, it allowed the children to feel secure on their first day as they were returning to somewhere and someone familiar already.

I established an initial plan for the flow of each Forest School session, which was written on the chalkboard at camp each week - beginning with defining our rules and our boundaries which would carry across all the sessions. The children helped come up with the rules and agreed on the boundaries. There was consistency in the flow of the day from week to week.

I kept a document for each week of Forest School including the schedule for the day, materials list, plus a reflection on how the day went, what changes I might implement for the next session, what I may have noticed about the children, and their experience and how I might better support them. I have included excerpts of these reflections in the Appendix. This information is incredibly valuable for future sessions. The insights gained here will help steer future approaches to Forest School sessions.

Some of the positive aspects of the Forest School experience include the supportive feedback from the children and the parents, having the opportunity to offer the experience to children, seeing the creative endeavors the children were able to engage in during the exploration time and supporting them in their interests during the time we had together. I've included some quotes from the parent feedback form the Folk School uses as a class evaluation tool:

“Kristi was dedicated, knowledgeable, communicative, and organized. She provided many stimulating and fun nature-based learning opportunities. My kids enjoyed the classes, and I felt comfortable leaving them in her care.” - parent

“K- LOVED this class!!!” - parent

The main hurdle included the imposition Covid has on all our lives and interactions these days. I support mitigation efforts but wearing a mask outside, even for “just” a morning, was hard. The kids came up with a few partial solutions to alleviate some of the difficulties of wearing a mask for hours - one was to step away from the group in order to pull their mask down and “take a breath of air”, the other was to bring additional masks so when one became too moist from their exhaling breath they could switch to a dry mask.

Anticipated outcomes of the project

The future of education is in the outdoors - Candy Vanderhoff (Lowv, 2008)

I hope to continue spreading knowledge and promoting a nature-based Forest School approach by providing evidence-based information and a generalizable framework for use by educators and parents. A potential outcome could be the promotion and formation of a Forest School practice either separate from, or in conjunction with, area schools. In addition, the information within the website can be transformed into a professional development presentation for interested audiences, such as teachers and educators, parents, counselors, special education teachers and support staff, principals, homeschools, preschools, summer school sessions, or summer camps.

The website, [Take Me Outside!](#), will remain a public domain, providing free access to

information and activities for those interested in such endeavors. In addition, the website will be a living document that can be updated as needed over time to provide current, relevant information and reflect best practices for Forest School in Fairbanks.

References

- Blenkinsop, S., Fettes, M., (2020). Land, language and listening: The transformations that can flow from acknowledging Indigenous land. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 54(4), 1033-1046.
- Constable, K. (2015). *The Outdoor Classroom in Practice, Ages 3-7: A month-month guide to forest school provision*. Routledge.
- Cornell, J. (2015). *Sharing Nature*. Crystal Clarity Publishers.
- Hanscom, A.J. (2016). *Balanced and Barefoot*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
- Harper, N., Rose, K., Segal, D., (2019). *Nature-Based Therapy: A practitioner's guide to working outdoors with children, youth, and families*. New Society Publishers.
- Harvey, D. J., Montgomery, L. N, Harvey, H., Hall, F., Gange, A. C., Watling, D. (2020). Psychological benefits of a biodiversity-focussed outdoor learning program for primary school children. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 67, Article 101381.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.101381>
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15, 169-182.
- Knight, S. (Ed.). (2011). *Forest School for All*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Knight, S., (2016). *Forest School in Practice*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Largo-Wight, E., Guardino, C., Wludyka, P.S., Hall, K., Wight, J.T., Merten, J. (2018). Nature contact at school: The impact of an outdoor classroom on children's well-being. *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 28, 653-666.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09603123.2018.1502415>
- Leather, M. (2012). Seeing the wood from the trees: constructionism and constructivism for outdoor and experiential education. *Conference paper*.
- Leather, M. (2016). A critique of Forest School: Something lost in translation. *Journal of*

Outdoor and Environmental Education, 21, 5-18.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-017-0006-1>

Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder (2nd ed.)*. Atlantic Books.

McCree, M., Cutting, R., & Sherwin, D. (2018). The hare and the tortoise go to forest school:

Taking the scenic route to academic attainment via emotional wellbeing outdoors. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188, 980-996.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1446430>

O'Brien, L., Murray, R. (2007). Forest School and its impacts on young children: Case studies in Britain. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 6, 249-265.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2007.03.006>

Price, A. (2019). Using outdoor learning to augment social and emotional learning (SEL) skills in young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 19(4), 315-328.

<https://uaf.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/PDF/417973.pdf>

Roe, J., Aspinall, R. (2011). The restorative outcomes of forest school and conventional school in young people with good and poor behaviour. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 10, 205-212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug2011.03.003>

Sobel, D. (2005). *Place-based education*. The Orion Society.

Sobel, D., Bailie, P.E., Finch, K., Kenny, E.K., & Stires, A. (2016). *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The handbook for outdoor learning*. Redleaf Press.

Sobel, D. (2020). School outdoors: The pursuit of happiness as an educational goal. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 54(4), 1064-1070.

Tiplady, L.S.E. & Menter, Harriet (2020). Forest School for wellbeing: an environment in which young people can 'take what they need'. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2020.1730206>

- Weeland, J., Moens, M.S., Beute, F., Assink, M., Staaks, P.C., Overbeek, G. (2019). A dose of nature: Two three-level meta-analyses of the beneficial effects of exposure to nature on children's self-regulation. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 65.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.101326>
- White, R. (2012). A sociocultural investigation of the efficacy of outdoor education to improve learner engagement. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 17(1), 13-23.
<https://uaf.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/PDF/418027.pdf>
- Worroll, J. & Houghton, P. (2018). *A year of forest school: Outdoor play and skill-building fun for every season*. Watkins Media Limited.
- Walmsley, N., & Westall, D. (2018). *Forest School Adventure: Outdoor skills and play for children*. Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd.
- Wiedel-Lubinski, M. & Madigan, K., (2020). *Nature Play Workshop for Families: A guide to 40+ outdoor learning experiences in all seasons*. Quarto Publishing Group USA Inc.

Appendix

Week 1

September 10, 2021

First Day of Forest School!

- Making name tags - I had my own as a sample of making a name tag on birch bark which was really cool and pretty easy. Reilly had a name tag from a birch cookie. I had pre-made several birch cookies, but the kids all wanted to “make their own” which I had the supplies for, but it was hard to saw through the wood! Each kid gave it a try (going over safety first) but was not able to do more than 1-2 strokes with the saw, so I had to finish each, which was tiring! Although I sweated it out, I would not have this as an option again unless I had softer wood and a proper workbench and I’ll have to look into different saws (maybe better ones for kids??).
- Fire - Meanwhile, Reilly started a fire for us, using proper technique of course. The kids all had “sit spots” and we went over fire rules - go around sit spots to move around, do not add anything to the fire, and do not move sitspot closer to the fire without permission.
- Snack - Kids helped mix a batch of stick bread for cooking over the fire. While the dough was rising, we went exploring for roasting sticks, as well as any other treasures.
- Back to the fire to prepare sticks! Kids are hungry but it will be a while before stickbread is ready, some brought their own snacks so they were welcome to eat them at any time. Thankfully they all had snacks, as the stickbread did not cook over the fire very well! Too much dough, and too little fire. Need to really build the fire up big and let it turn to good coals for roasting.

Week 2

September 17th, 2021

Forest School

- Today went well. Each activity flowed better, and inserting a bathroom break helped keep us on time.

Week 3

September 24, 2021

Forest School

- One kiddo was a little hesitant so I had to make sure I was sensitive to her involvement at her comfort level. The other was overly concerned with getting snow on her coat (!) so I moderated that comfort level.

Week 4

October 1, 2021

Forest School

- Kids did not like the tea - haha! Back to hot cocoa :)
- During the walk K- was complaining of being tired, “when will we be back at camp?” Maybe next time take the time for a break somewhere along the walk to look at the surroundings, have a snack, explore, etc. I have to remember to let go of my agenda and allow the children’s reactions and interests to guide the session.
- B-, M- and S- were definitely interested in the forts. We can explore that further.

Week 5

October 8th, 2021

Forest School

- The kids really enjoyed the treasure hunt. It would have been better for the s'mores had the chocolate been warmed up, but with our fire pit, this was not able to be done - needs improvement. A fire ring with a built-in grill would be best for FS.
- B-, M- and S- really enjoyed exploring with fairy houses and forts. This should be explored further next week. Only 1 kiddo was interested in doing the cone gnomes, which was okay, but I wouldn't necessarily do this one again unless we were inside, or it was a group that really enjoyed crafts on the whole. On the other hand, the cone bird feeders were very popular. More so than expected. It got a bit messy with the almond butter, I need to figure out a way to get the nut butter on the cone with less mess. Maybe store-bought pb with fillers so it is not so drippy as natural nut butters tend to be. Jiffy.
- The kids tend to want to just eat snacks for a long time. Maybe have more structure built around when snack time is.