FOREST SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Forest School's Fit: How do Forest School principles work in the wider field of outdoor learning?

Sue Waite

Associate Professor

Plymouth Institute of Education

EDUCATION RESEARCH WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

What am I going to talk about?

- Learning outside the classroom in natural environments (LINE)

- Multiple approaches

- A principled approach to Forest School

- How do these map onto current educational trends?

- How can fidelity be maintained with flexibility?

- Theory of cultural density

- Aligning purpose, place, people and pedagogy and the PAT

- Evidencing and aggregating diverse benefits to assess fit

Benefits of LINE

- Learning outside the classroom in natural environments (LINE)

- Physical activity and health

- Mental wellbeing

- Nature attachment

- Choice and autonomy

- Enjoyment and engagement with learning

Multiple approaches

- Free flow play in early years
- Forest School
- Eco-schools
- Enviroschools
- Education for Sustainable Development
- Natural Connections Demonstration project
- Field Studies
- *Udeskole*
- Real World learning
- Experiential learning

Forest School's Six Principles

1. a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

2. takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

3. aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners

4. offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

5. is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

6. uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning

http://www.forestschoolassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/

Current challenges in mainstream education

- **Trends in five areas:**
- changing attainment gaps between particular groups of pupils,
- increasing pupil numbers,
- decreasing numbers of trainee teachers,
- growing use of technology and
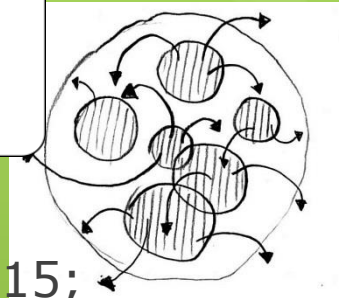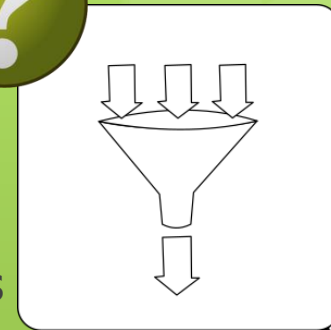- changing levels of autonomy and diversity in UK education systems.
- **Three factors affecting UK education:**
- population growth,
- levels of inequality and
- the changing labour market.

(POSTNOTE 504 Trends in Compulsory Education)

Lessons from Near and Far:
21st century learners

- Preparation for an unknown world

- Responding to diversity and inequalities

- Do challenges call for narrowing or broadening?

- Character education (Birdwell, Scott & Koninckx, 2015; Gutman and Schoon, 2013)

- Health and wellbeing (Marmot, 2010)

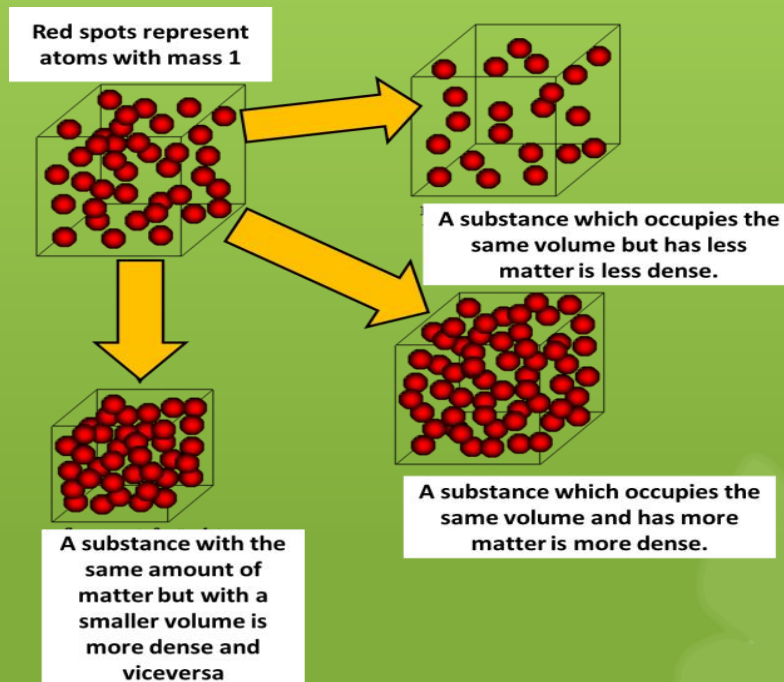| Themes /desired student outcomes	Outdoor Learning pedagogies
Theme 1: Healthy bodies and lifestyles a healthy body and mind	Experiential learning in natural settings Outdoor education/learning LOTC Vegetable gardens/Animal husbandry
Theme 2: Social, confident and connected people a sociable confident person **FS principles 3 & 4**	Achievement (small steps) Differentiation and progression Problem-based learning Project-based pedagogies Social learning
Theme 3: Self directed learning a self-directed learner **FS principles 3 & 6**	Inquiry learning Self-directed learning Play pedagogies
Theme 4: Effective contributor and collaborator an effective contributor **FS principle 1**	Participation Residential experience Adventure education Place-based learning Problem-based learning Team building
Theme 5: Concerned active citizens an active global citizen **FS principle 2**	Field trips ESD/EE FS2 Geography International studies

Fidelity, Flexibility or Fuzziness?

- Williams-Siegfredson (2012) and Knight (2009, 2012, 2013) claim that the fundamental difference between Forest School and other outdoor activities [is] the child and adult are **partners in the experience, the child's interests direct the session, with the adult interacting and supporting**. The emphasis appears to be on **process** rather than end **product**. (Mackinder, 2015: 2) FS principle 6

- Forest School full fat or lite? (McCree)

- Where and how can/should Forest School fit in schooling's agenda?

Theorising learning environments

'**Cultural density** refers to the strength and composition of dispositions to practice and norms of behaviour embedded within places that mediate the possibilities for action of individuals in them'

(Waite, 2013: 414)

Red spots represent atoms with mass 1

A substance which occupies the same volume but has less matter is less dense.

A substance which occupies the same volume and has more matter is more dense.

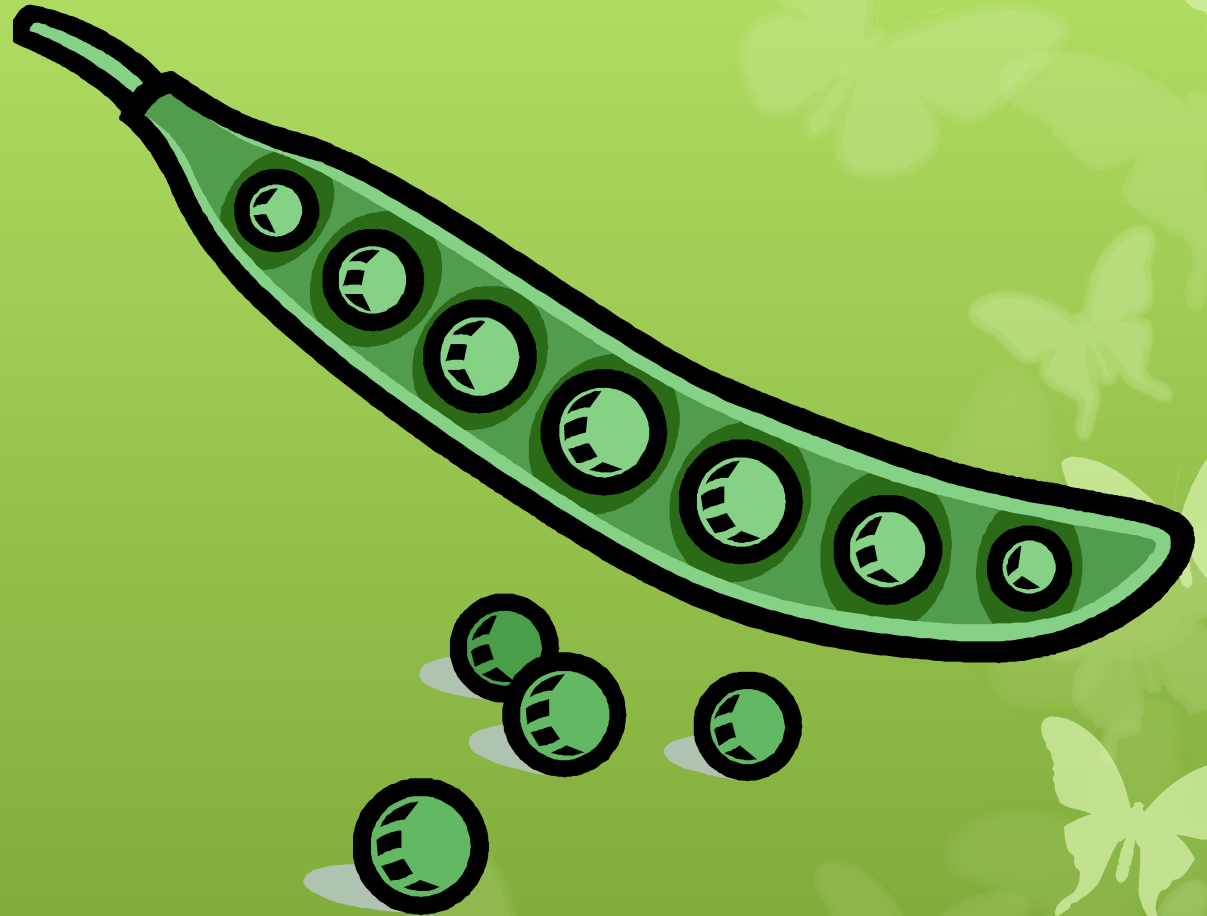A substance with the same amount of matter but with a smaller volume is more dense and viceversa

Cultural density

- A way of thinking about place and practices
- The way we do things here – Bourdieu's habitus
- Schools' institutional habitus
- Forest School's pedagogical principles provide an alternative culturally dense context
- Structures and freedoms - dense and open spaces
- Consider concord or clash? Productively working with culture (Waite, in press)
- Making the invisible (ethos) more apparent
- Aligning with priorities and purpose

A plea for peas

- Policies
- Priorities
- **Purpose**
- **Place**
- **Pedagogy**
- **People**
- Perspectives
- Personalised
- PLUS
- Possibilities…

Fine tuning pedagogical principles... Aggregating evidence

- **What if...**

- We could align purposes and Forest School principles more effectively?

- We could capture and reflect upon the diverse outcomes and processes that lead to change?

- We could quantify the extent to which aims had been met?

- We could aggregate evidence across Forest School practice?

- We could report on the success of Forest School using a common tool?

The Priorities Assessment Tool

- **PURPOSE & PRIORITISE**

- What do you want to achieve?

- How important is this?

- How likely is it that this can be achieved?

- **PLAN**

- **ACTION**

- **REVIEW**

- Has it been achieved?

- To what extent?

- How much is due to the actions taken?

- **REFLECT & SUBMIT**

(Waite, Passy & Gilchrist, 2013)

Towards Forest School evidence-informed practice and practice-informed Forest School research

- More and more research going on BUT still mostly small scale and methodologically diverse, making aggregation of evidence challenging. Comparing apples and pears (Waite, Bølling & Bentsen, 2015)

- Some FSA Research group aspirations:

- Common evaluative framework & tools for practitioner research (Slade, Lowery & Bland, 2013; Waite et al., 2015)

- Collating a database of evidence

- Reflective tool to examine the robustness and relevance of Forest School principles

- Making the case syntheses for funders and stakeholders

Thank You!
sjwaite@plymouth.ac.uk

References

Birdwell, J.,Scott, R. & Koninckx, D. (2015) *Non-formal learning could help to build character and close the attainment gap: Learning by Doing*. DEMOS

Gutman, L.M. & Schoon, I. (2013) *The Impact of Non-Cognitive Skills on Outcomes for Young People: Literature review*. Education Endowment Foundation and Cabinet Office, 2013.
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Non-cognitive_skills_literature_review_2.pdf

Mackinder, M. (2015) Footprints in the woods:' tracking' a nursery child through a Forest School session, *Education 3-13,* (iFirst) www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03004279.2015.1069368?src=recsys

Malone, K. & Waite, S. (forthcoming) Learning in Natural Environments: Pathway to Impact report

Marmot, M. (2010) *Fair society, healthy lives: strategic review of health inequalities in England post 2010.* London: The Marmot Review.

Slade, M., Lowery, C. & Bland, K. (2013) Evaluating the impact of Forest Schools: a collaboration between a university and a primary school, *Support for Learning*, 28 (2), 67-72.

Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (2015) POSTNOTE 504 September 2015:Trends in Compulsory Education.

Waite, S**.** (2013) 'Knowing your place in the world': how place and culture support and obstruct educational aims. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 43 (4), 413-434.

Waite, S. (in press) Culture clash and concord: supporting early learning outdoors in the UK. In: H. Prince, K. Henderson & B. Humberstone. (eds.) *International Handbook of Outdoor Studies.* London: Routledge.

Waite, S., Bølling, M. & Bentsen, P. (2015) Comparing apples and pears?: a conceptual framework for understanding forms of outdoor learning through comparison of English Forest Schools and Danish *udeskole*, *Environmental Education Research*, (iFirst)
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504622.2015.1075193

Waite, S., Passy, R. & Gilchrist, M. (2014) Getting it off PAT: researching the use of urban nature in schools. In: E. Backman, B. Humberstone and C. Loynes (2014) *Urban nature: inclusive learning through youth work and school work.* Stockholm: European Outdoor Education Network.