

“Our Forest School isn’t just the Trees.”

Forest Schools: Micro-Communities for Social and Emotional Development

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Abstract

Forest School provision is a growing phenomenon in the UK due to its perceived impact on participant learning and wellbeing. This study sought to understand the impact of Forest School provision on the social and emotional development of participants using practitioner's reflections. Semi-Structured interviews with six qualified Forest School Leaders explored practitioner experiences working with children and young people. A thematic analysis with a social-constructionist epistemology revealed three interrelated themes, which are inherent in the Forest School ethos. These themes show Forest Schools to be micro-communities constructed by participants.

The study concluded that Forest School micro-communities are established by each Forest School that is formed. These micro-communities contribute to the social and emotional development of children and young people through the construction of a shared space, fostering a sense of community and a shared power paradigm between leaders and participants.

Key Words – Forest School; Space; Community; Power; Social and Emotional Development; Learning; Social Constructionism

1 **Introduction**

2 The growing number of Forest Schools in the UK provide participant-led outdoor learning
3 opportunities for people of all ages (O'Brien & Murry, 2007). The process of Forest School
4 emphasises play, preferably based in, though not limited to, a woodland environment (Forest
5 School Association, 2018). Through the natural world, Forest School inspires learning and
6 supports children and young people's development, including cognitive, physical, language
7 and social-emotional growth (Sackville-Ford & Davenport (2019).

8 Guided by Fine and Van der Scott's (2011) definition of micro-communities, this research
9 explores the coming together of small groups, with common interests or goals, in a shared
10 learning environment to develop new skills and improve wellbeing through connections with
11 others. The aims of this inquiry are to encourage further discussion among practitioners and
12 academics regarding the community aspect of the Forest School process and its benefits to the
13 development of children and young people.

14

1 **Forest School – Constructing a Community of Learning**

2 *Defining Forest School*

3 Scandinavians use the term ‘Friluftsliv’ (Free Air Living), rooted in the self-image of
4 Scandinavians as nature-loving people, closely connected with free movement and access to
5 nature (Gelter, 2000). Friluftsliv complements the Scandinavian approach to outdoor learning,
6 which inspired the UK’s Forest School movement. However, the UK has no deep-rooted
7 philosophy to draw from which has meant the country has had to define Forest School for itself.
8 Murray and O’Brien (2005) highlight this helpful but limited definition:

9 ***“Forest School is an inspirational process that offers all age’s regular opportunities to***
10 ***achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland***
11 ***environment.”***

12 Knight (2011) later identified the defining characteristics of Forest School as: being based in
13 an outdoor setting (not limited to a woodland), in a safe-enough environment, happening over
14 a period of time in all weathers, with trust essential to the process.

15 After consultation with Forest School Networks and practitioners across the UK, The Forest
16 School Association (2018) published the six key principles of Forest School:

17

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

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

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

1 **4. Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate**
2 **to the environment and themselves**

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

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

7

8 Whilst similar to Knight's (2011) characteristics, these principles emphasise the holistic
9 development of Forest School participants, with the development of a community important to
10 the learning process. It is within these characteristics and principles that Forest School offers a
11 unique opportunity for children and young people to develop socially and emotionally.

12

1 *Constructing Forest School*

2 Leather (2018) proposed that Forest School is socially constructed, shaped by those involved,
3 as individuals and collectively, by attaching unique meanings known to those within. This
4 constructionist lens emphasises the importance of context (Crotty 1998). As Forest School is
5 based within its specific context, the setting will shape the character and delivery of Forest
6 School, as those participating will bring their own cultural and environmental nuances,
7 influencing the participant-led process.

8 Cummings and Nash (2015) and Elliot (2015) bring alternative constructionist perspectives to
9 this exploration of Forest School. Cumming & Nash (2015), found that a sense of place was
10 integral to the development of children attending a Forest School in Australia; the term Forest
11 School was replaced with Bush School indicating the significance of cultural understanding
12 when constructing the Forest School concept within its environment.

13 Elliot's (2015) exploration of the planning and development and of a new Forest School within
14 a UK urban environment highlights the positive reception the Forest School ethos received
15 from parents and school staff. However, Elliot's study acknowledged the fears associated with
16 a risk-averse society such as that of the UK (Gill, 2008; Harper, 2017; Harper & Obee, 2020)
17 and noted concerns parents had regarding the risks of outdoor learning to children's health.
18 Elliot's paper recommended that the construction of Forest Schools include parents in order to
19 reduce fear and support a better understanding of outdoor learning and its benefits through
20 involvement in the Forest School process. Like Cummings and Nash, Elliot considered Forest
21 School as something to be developed and shared communally. This is in line with the sixth
22 principle of the Forest School Association, emphasising community learning.

23

24

1 *Democratic and Active Learning*

2 The approaches to learning within Forest School are rooted in a democratic learning style. This
3 method of schooling is founded on a socio-constructivist perspective of education (Aasen et al,
4 2009) and encourages active participation in the learning process, which is linked to the
5 development of a learning community. This community creates its own meaning through
6 participation with pedagogues, fellow learners and the environment. Learning in Forest School
7 is inspired through a variety of activities, using an array of theoretical concepts not rooted in
8 the typical UK curriculum. The Forest School Leader's role is that of a facilitator rather than a
9 teacher and approaches to learning take influence from theorists such as Dewey (1897), Freire
10 (1972) and Vygotsky (1978). Dewey (1916) believed that education should be democratic and
11 child-centred, with children free to pursue their interests. He believed the outdoors could be
12 used to facilitate education. Freire (1972) saw students as part of the learning process and
13 suggested the teacher should offer an introduction to the topic, allowing learners to experiment
14 and discover ideas for themselves. The outcome for Freire is the process of learning and critical
15 thinking rather than just the acquisition of knowledge. Both theorists inform the Forest School
16 approach to learning with its child-centred philosophy and hands on experiences to education
17 that are facilitated rather than directed. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development is
18 applied in Forest School to support participants' active engagement in learning. The Forest
19 School Leaders role is to facilitate participants learning and support them in acquiring the skills
20 initially, stretching their learning before leaving the child/young person to continue on their
21 own. Although the Forest School approach to pedagogy lacks clarity (Coates & Pimlott-
22 Wilson, 2019) it is agreed that its ethos allows for a flexibility in the educational process that
23 promotes engagement in education and encourages self-initiated learning. This approach to
24 learning with less adult control has wider benefits beyond the school curriculum for children,

- 1 such as the development of independence, responsibility for others and applying knowledge to
- 2 other contexts (Waite, 2011).

3

1 **Methodology**

2

3 This research used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The information obtained was
4 transcribed verbatim and analysed using a Thematic approach as presented by Braun and
5 Clarke (2006). A constructionist epistemology underpinned the researcher’s examination,
6 supporting an in-depth exploration of the experiences of Forest School Leaders. The research
7 was approached in this manner as Forest School is argued to be a socially constructed process
8 (Leather, 2018) and Forest School Leaders will approach Forest School based on their own
9 experiences and the needs of each group they lead.

10

11 **Data Collection and Sample**

12 Data sampling was purposeful and the sampling strategy was criterion-based. A criterion-based
13 sampling method suited the research question; participants needed certain qualifications and
14 experiences to answer the interview questions. The inclusion criteria were level-3 qualified
15 Forest School Leaders, with two or more years of experience delivering Forest Schools with
16 children and young people. The table below provides further details about the participants and
17 their backgrounds. Participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality.

Participant No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Length of Time in Practice	Forest School Delivery Settings
1	Winston	Male	14 Years	Schools – Primary and Secondary, Pupil Referral Units and is a training provider.
2	Daniella	Female	19 Years	Schools - Primary and Secondary Schools. Training Provider.
3	Hannah	Female	11 Years	Schools - Primary and Secondary. Specialist Schools and is a training provider.
4	Holly	Female	10 Years	Schools - Early Years, Primary and Secondary and is a training provider.
5	Lucy	Female	11 Years	Schools, Outdoor Education Centres and is a training provider.
6	Harry	Male	6 Years	Schools – Primary and Secondary and Outdoor Education Centres.

1

2 Interviewees were identified through the public register on the Forest School Associations
3 website. The target sample size was six to eight Forest School practitioners; following consent,
4 six were recruited.

5

6

1 **4.4 Data Collection**

2 Semi-Structured interviews covered the topic needed for research purposes, enabling
3 interviewees to elaborate or provide further information. The interviews were receptive in style.
4 Receptive interviews have a humanistic approach and can be considered Rogerian (Leavy,
5 2014), using open questions, allowing the participant to answer as broadly as they wish,
6 facilitating participant control. This complemented the constructionist epistemology, and
7 aimed to hear participant experiences, with the capacity to respond freely.

8 An interview schedule was developed based on the study's aims and objectives, informed by
9 the literature review. Following Fylan's advice (2005) to keep interview schedules brief, eight
10 questions were developed. The first three were 'warm-up' questions to establish rapport
11 between interviewer and participant, seeking to gain an understanding of the participants own
12 constructs of Forest School.. The subsequent five questions focused on the impact of Forest
13 Schools on the social and emotional development of children and young people. The interviews
14 lasted an hour on average, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after
15 the interview.

16

1 **Data Analysis**

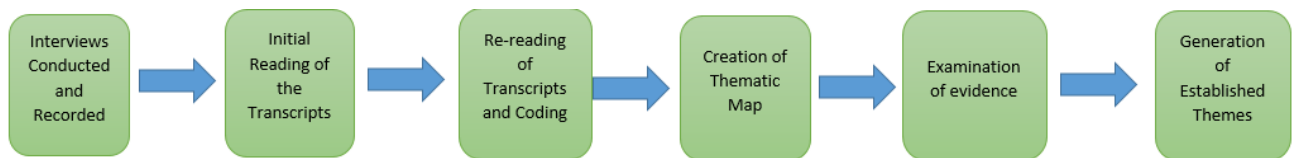
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3 Thematic Analysis analyses data and identifies patterns or themes which occur during research.
4 This flexible approach adapts to a range of epistemologies, including constructionism (Braun
5 and Clarke, 2006). Thematic Analysis is a trustworthy, confirmable method that grounds
6 theoretical findings which can be replicated (Nowell et al, 2017). Its flexible approach to
7 epistemologies means it was considered viable for this study because the analysis sought to
8 identify patterns and themes in the data.

9 As the study was conducted by a lone researcher, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) reliability criteria
10 was used to limit bias, including; an audit trail; transcribing interviews verbatim to provide rich
11 detail for analysis; and acknowledging own bias. Whilst there is no universal agreement on
12 evaluating qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015), these strategies enabled a rigorous
13 study.

14 Analysis was conducted by immersive reading of the transcripts and generating initial codes.
15 From these codes, a thematic map was produced (Appendix, 2). The researcher identified
16 themes which were reviewed and were determined based on the evidence in the data to support
17 each theme. The researcher ensured the themes correlated with the coded extracts and fit well
18 with the whole dataset. In-depth analysis of each theme was undertaken and names provided
19 for the themes identified. To test the clarity of each theme the researcher followed Braun and
20 Clarkes (2006) advisement that a theme should be clearly described in a couple of sentences.
21 Once the themes were established the researcher chose vivid extracts to support these themes
22 in the findings. Figure.1 shows the process of analysis.

23



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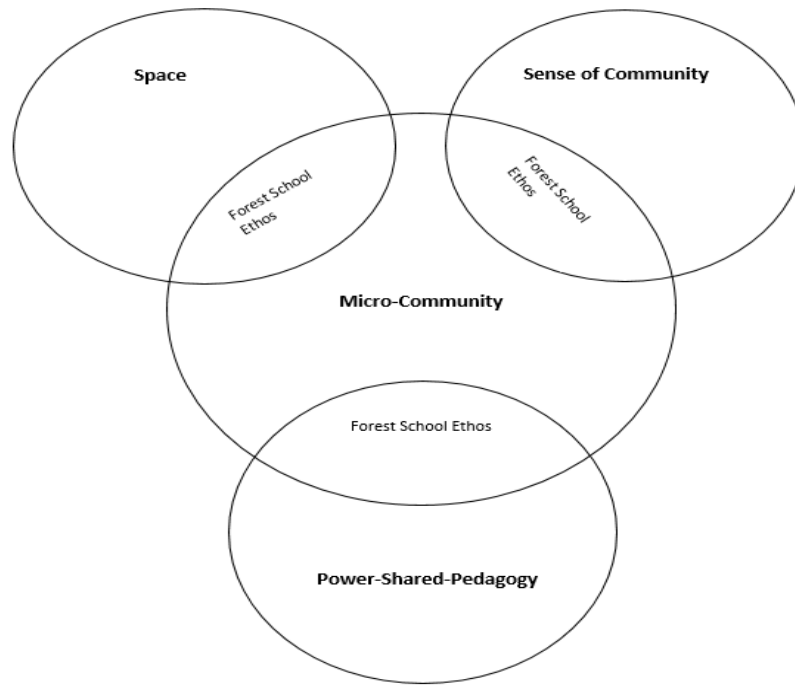
2 *Figure.1 Process of Analysis*

3 The themes in this study correlated with other research completed in the area (Harris, 2017;
4 Kemp & Pegden, 2018; McRee, 2018) offering further insight into how these themes promote
5 the social and emotional development of participants engaging in the Forest School process.
6 The findings herein reveal the impact a Forest School Micro-Community can have on
7 participants.

8 **Findings and Discussion**

9

10 Analysis identified three interconnecting themes: Space, Sense of Community and Power
11 Shared Pedagogy. Each theme had a defining set of characteristics and are considered
12 important as they appeared in the data most frequently across the six interviews. Analysis
13 showed that these themes connected, demonstrating a wider influence in Forest Schools, and
14 facilitated the creation of micro-communities which impacted on the social and emotional
15 development of Forest School participants. The themes were connected by the Forest School
16 Ethos (Figure.2) which O'Brien & Murray (2007) note is grounded in constructivist approaches
17 to learning, advocating a child-led process whereby the leader shapes the Forest School
18 sessions to the needs of the participant with socialisation and conversation integral to the
19 learning process.



1

2 **Figure 2: Forest School Micro-Community - Thematic Connections**

3

4 ***Space – Learning beyond the formal walls of a classroom***

5 Space was a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews. Although no interview questions
 6 mentioned space, the theme arose in participant narratives, often central to their point. Kraft
 7 (2013) argues spaces are not limited to static objects such as buildings but are dynamic, inter-
 8 changeable entities that derive meaning from human interaction and construction. The
 9 constructions within an educational space create a “learning atmosphere”. With emphasis on
 10 autonomy and giving children freedom and space, Forest Schools allow participants to explore
 11 their interests outside of mainstream-style learning. The quote below from Winston highlights
 12 the impact autonomous use of space can have on emotional development, where freedom to
 13 roam and choose activities allows for socialisation and connection.

14 *“The use of green space and the fact that you’re not so obviously contained in a*
 15 *space. So there’s a couple of kids over there, there’s a kid digging on his own there*

1 *and the rest are clustered together socialising. I think that is one of the keys to*
2 *emotional development, because you've got space to do your own thing. " (Winston)*

3 Holly highlights the value of Forest Schoolers having time outside of institutional learning
4 and space to form connections with others and their environment.

5 *"It comes back to what I was saying that nature connection and caringthere is a*
6 *combination of caring for themselves, caring for each other and nature... and having*
7 *the space and time to do that, they kind of become deinstitutionalised." (Holly)*

8 For Holly, the space created is separate from mainstream schooling, indicating an
9 unschooling nature to the Forest School process, where children have the freedom to connect
10 with others and their environment. Unschooling is considered an informal type of education
11 offering hands on experience without much adult intervention, and benefits can include
12 development of social skills (Gray & Riley, 2013). Unschooling and Forest Schools share
13 similar thoughts on the need for space and autonomy in learning, with emphasis on learner
14 freedom and self-motivation. Petrovic and Rolstad (2017) consider unschooling to be
15 defined by the pursuit of autonomy, self-motivation and child-led learning experiences.

16 Both reflections above highlight differences between the space in Forest School - more
17 open with freedom to move - than in spaces such as the classroom, which are closed with
18 limited movement. Harris (2017) explored the concept of space in Forest Schools noting
19 that the flexible learning environment supports child-led learning and increased engagement
20 from those involved. This paper concurs with Harris (2017) as the data presented
21 demonstrates that the Space of a Forest School environment is central to the social and
22 emotional development of participants. . It was evident that the environment afforded
23 opportunities for social and emotional growth due to the features of the surroundings and

1 the freedom to explore and interact. Lucy reflects on how the space provides opportunities
2 to engage in practical and social learning.

3 *“I worked in a couple of special schools, one that I was working in, the young people*
4 *collaborate and cooperate. Where they were struggling in school and finding it*
5 *difficult to find space for them to move to, an activity they could do... there was an*
6 *amazing freedom that meant they could sit alongside people, they could be working*
7 *on something practical, that they are giving their single attention to, and when*
8 *they’re doing something, particularly boys, when they’re doing something they will*
9 *talk. “(Lucy)*

10 Supporting this reflection, Leather (in Jeffs & Ord, 2018) offers a model which interlinks
11 engaged experience with socio-cultural, personal and physical context that are all connected
12 by talk. Forest School spaces offer such opportunities for growth and learning, Lucy’s above
13 quote provides evidence for this.

14 McRee et al (2018) found that the space afforded to children in Forest Schools fostered an
15 environment where participants had time to manage emotions and learn to self-regulate. The
16 article discussed the role of the ‘physical’ space and how this allowed children the freedom to
17 explore their own interests and then discuss how conflicts during activities, such as den
18 building, affected them. Part of this was the owning of the space and choosing the affordances
19 to engage with. Affordances are defined in relation to the features of an environment (Clarke
20 & Uzzell, 2005). In the “Space” theme, interviewees discussed how the Forest School
21 environment provides affordances for social development such as physical activity, space to
22 move from conflict or even a space where “permission” is given to reflect and regulate.

1 *“There is something in the environment that really makes that work not just the*
2 *reflection of the physical environment but the... permission in the environment.”*

3 *(Hannah)*

4 *“One lad, found being in the woods was a coping strategy. He got all of his anger out,*
5 *there is nothing better than a pile of wood to work into an anger problem. (Lucy)*

6 The above quotes demonstrate that the Forest School space can be used for emotional growth,
7 regulation and physical activity, through the space offered and affordances available. The
8 evidence in this and other studies (Harris, 2017; Waite & Goodenough, 2018; McRee et al
9 2018) indicates that this is due to how the space is used by participants. This paper demonstrates
10 the value of the Forest School space, not just as a physical entity but through the meaning that
11 is constructed jointly by participants within the environment. Cresswell (2015) states that *space*
12 becomes *place* when meaning is attached to the *space*. This paper concurs with Cresswell as
13 the evidence shows that while a variety of Forest Schools can be held in the same environment,
14 the meaning of each Forest School is constructed by the different groups and individuals
15 inhabiting the space. Therefore, as each group develops and connections are made, the *meaning*
16 of their Forest School starts to develop through shared constructions. Within this co-
17 constructed space a Sense of Community is fostered by Forest School participants.

21 ***Sense of Community – Conflict, Communication and Connection***

22 Interviewees discussed the significance of community and the development of relationships
23 within Forest School. The development of a learning community in Forest Schools is part of

1 the educational experience and a component of Forest School principles (Forest School
2 Association, 2018). Communication was integral to the Sense of Community theme,
3 correlating with the importance of social-connectedness. Social-Connectedness is commonly
4 agreed as a person's sense of belonging to others and institutions, which improves wellbeing
5 over time (Jose et al, 2012, Lamblin et al, 2017). This study agrees that social-connectedness
6 builds wellbeing through connections with others and that Forest Schools provide opportunities
7 for social-connectedness. Harry's reflection demonstrates how social-connection is fostered
8 within Forest Schools.

9 *"She said my favourite time of the week is when we have a hot chocolate because that's*
10 *when we sit and we are calm. And in the rest of my week this is the only time I get to be*
11 *calm and when I'm ever stressed I think about me having a hot chocolate with my*
12 *friends."* (Harry)

13 Harry's recall shows the value of regularly sitting with others in a group, sharing an interest or
14 activity and a moment of calm. The young person's comments demonstrate the lasting power
15 these moments can have. Pryor et al (2005) postulated on the socio-ecological benefits of
16 outdoor experiences, concluding that time outdoors in small groups supports wellbeing and
17 that connection to others is a key component of the therapeutic process of outdoor experiences.
18 This study's findings mirror such emphasis on the benefits of building a community and
19 fostering connection with others. The following comments highlight the significance of
20 community building in Forest School.

21 *"It has to take place in a wooded area really, rather than just a corner of the school*
22 *field. You have to build community and you have to build a love of nature and the*
23 *natural world."* (Holly)

1 *“It’s about recognising the value in each person, so then what you are doing together*
2 *is building a learning community. It is about learning to communicate with each other,*
3 *it’s about connecting with each other and with nature and care for nature. So it’s about*
4 *connecting to your own emotions, connecting to other peoples and, connecting to*
5 *nature.” (Lucy)*

6 However, community building is not without difficulty and Hannah discusses the value of
7 having to communicate, manage conflict, and find solutions without adult intervention.

8 *“I think actually one of the things I’m interested in is how people work things out for*
9 *themselves if someone isn’t doing it for them. The social benefits of that and children*
10 *being able to organise and choose and struggle and have to reset and all of those things*
11 *with support, but not with someone who is a fixer. I think that’s a really interesting*
12 *approach and for me a lot of the social benefits come from having that freedom.”*
13 *(Hannah)*

14 By engaging in conflict, children learn the skills to work well with others. Jensen-Campbell et
15 al (2003) examined the importance of conflict in early childhood, concluding that constructive
16 conflict promotes pro-social behaviours and increased self-regulation. The evidence in this
17 study demonstrates that Forest Schools provide space for social and emotional development,
18 through the use of a community building environment. By entering an environment where
19 competition for resources is high, democratic interaction is encouraged, with space to engage
20 in critical dialogue, participants can learn, develop or improve the skills necessary to navigate
21 social nuances.

22 *“Yes, their social status in that cohort is up. And forest school is the only place you will*
23 *see some of them work with anybody else.” (Daniella)*

1 The focus on fostering community and connectedness supports participants social and
2 emotional development through; negotiation of resources; learning to manage conflict with
3 limited adult intervention; forming relationships beyond the classroom; discussing thoughts
4 and feelings. The experiences discussed above lead to a Sense of Community, which is
5 important for development and is integral to wellbeing (Pretty et al, 2006). Peacock & Pratt
6 (2011) suggest that communities can be considered within their particular situation rather than
7 representative of a whole ideal. In this study the evidence indicates that the strength of a Forest
8 School community is also situational and lies in the practices, constructs and agreed upon
9 norms created by participants. The findings show that Forest School communities are
10 constructed by the individuals in each group and there are psychosocial benefits to this.
11 Cicoganai et al (2015) agree that when children and young people participate in community
12 and extracurricular activities in school, there is an increase in their social, emotional and
13 psychological wellbeing. Yet, what enables the sense of community to build is how power is
14 distributed within the Forest School.

15 *A Power Shared Pedagogy – The Power of letting go of Control*

16

17 The concept of power was frequently discussed in relation to the child-led approach of Forest
18 School practitioners. The Forest School learning approach contrasts with the UK's standard
19 teaching style, which Leather (2018) argues is rooted in Victorian values i.e. the teacher in
20 control of the learning process. Forest School adopts a shared learning process with the leader
21 learning alongside students, requiring trust between participants and leaders.

22 Lucy encapsulates this approach to education.

1 *“If you as an adult are sitting on the ground in your waterproofs and you’re poking the*
2 *ground with the stick, you are wholly available and on their level and there is no*
3 *hierarchy.”(Lucy)*

4 Magraw and Dimmock (2006) found that the key to working with children outdoors was
5 establishing an equal relationship, allowing children to direct their learning, model positive
6 behaviour, and be led by process not outcome. The data in this study showed Forest School
7 Leaders were consciously sharing power within Forest School which included opportunities
8 for children to take the lead and teach others.

9

10 *“Part of our job is to support, rather than tell them what we know.” (Daniela)*

11 *“We had one boy, learned how to do square lashing and felt great and then I said “can*
12 *you go and show this person how to do it?” And he felt like king of the world”. (Harry)*

13 This type of effect featured in Tiplady’s (2018) research on the impact Forest Schools have on
14 emotional development. Tiplady noticed, when staff start to withdraw, children interact more
15 with their peers through shared learning, and expand communication skills. Tiplady & Menter
16 (2021) concluded that such a learner led pedagogy was critical to children and young people’s
17 wellbeing. Angelides and Avraamidou (2010), found that alternative and informal learning
18 environments (to the classroom), promoted equal social relationships where students could
19 lead, be led, and experience learning rooted in everyday scenarios. This approach offers
20 opportunities for connection between student and pedagogue. By changing the power
21 paradigms, learners and facilitators engage in new ways of pedagogy, promoting congruence
22 and trust. Facilitators act as role models, demonstrating how to express themselves.

23 *“...good modelling, it’s something I teach (others) when I do the Forest School training*
24 *because it’s actually... if you think about it... we don’t as adults model.” (Holly)*

1 *“Actually nobody admits to those children “you know what, sometimes I feel shit,*
2 *sometimes I really feel sad and want to cry.” And you can see their heads nodding.”*
3 *(Daniela)*

4 *“And that congruence is effective because the position you are in, you are giving*
5 *yourself permission to be much more honest and actually a lot of teachers can’t do that*
6 *because it’s being vulnerable and it’s quite hard to give power away when that’s the*
7 *dynamic isn’t it?” (Hannah)*

8 Eloquin & Hutchinson (in Knight, 2011), concur with the evidence of this research.
9 For these practitioners, role modelling can lead to increased self-awareness and improved self-
10 regulation. For Kemp & Pegden (2018), the Forest School focus on socialisation makes the
11 hidden curriculum (socialisation) explicit, with its emphasis on child-led learning and
12 pedagogic approach, encouraging self-directed learning and self-awareness. Power sharing in
13 the learning and taking a facilitating role in the educational process enables such social-
14 development.

15

1 **Conclusion**

2 This study explored the impact Forest School has on the social and emotional development of
3 children and young people. Through practitioner perspectives, it has highlighted key themes
4 that work cohesively to help participants and facilitators form Forest School micro-
5 communities.

6 Each Forest School micro-community is different, as each is constructed by individual groups
7 engaging in Forest Schools. Through the approach taken by facilitators, the outdoor
8 environment provides opportunities for development through the use of *Space*, via fostering a
9 *Sense of Community*, and a *Power Shared Pedagogy*. The co-created environment allows
10 participants to explore their own interests, increasing confidence, self-esteem, developing
11 physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively.

12 The study design was exploratory, seeking to understand individual experiences and therefore
13 cannot not be generalised across any group. Encouragingly, the findings in this research mirror
14 other studies in the field, sharing commonalities such as the importance of space and the
15 benefits of educative experiences beyond the formal environment of the classroom.

16 Despite the limitations, this research, whilst small scale, is unique and offers a new view of
17 Forest School as a community process. Therefore, the study provides new insights into children
18 and young people's wellbeing and development using Forest School, adding to the current
19 knowledge base. Further research is needed to continue exploring the benefits of Forest School
20 Micro-Communities and the impact these have on participants of Forest Schools.

21

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12

1 **Appendices**

2 Appendix 1: Interview Questions

3 **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

4

5 **Demographic questions** – Questionnaire. Before taking part, potential participants will be
6 asked to provide basic information to determine their eligibility. These questions include: Are
7 you a qualified forest school worker? Do you hold a level 3 qualification? Do you have at least
8 2 years of post-qualifying experience?
9

10 **Some additional information will be gathered to provide context for the data including:**
11 How many forest schools have you been and or are currently involved with? Then demographic
12 information will be collected including: Age and Gender

13

14 1. What inspired you to become a forest school practitioner?
15

16 2. Can you explain what forest school is to you?
17

18 3. What do you think is the impact of forest school on children?
19

20 4. 4b Can you describe what you think the impact of forest school is on children’s social
21 skills or social development?
22

23 4bi. Could you provide examples where a child has gained social skills at forest school?
24

25

26 5. Could you provide examples where a child has gained emotional skills at forest school?
27

28 5b. Can you describe what you think the impact of forest school is on children’s
29 emotional skills or emotional development?

30

31 6. Do you think that forest-school requires risk-taking, and if so, how does that impact on
32 children’s development?

33

34 7. What impact do you think forest school has on children’s general wellbeing?
35

36

37

38 8. What role can forest school play in the education of children in the future?

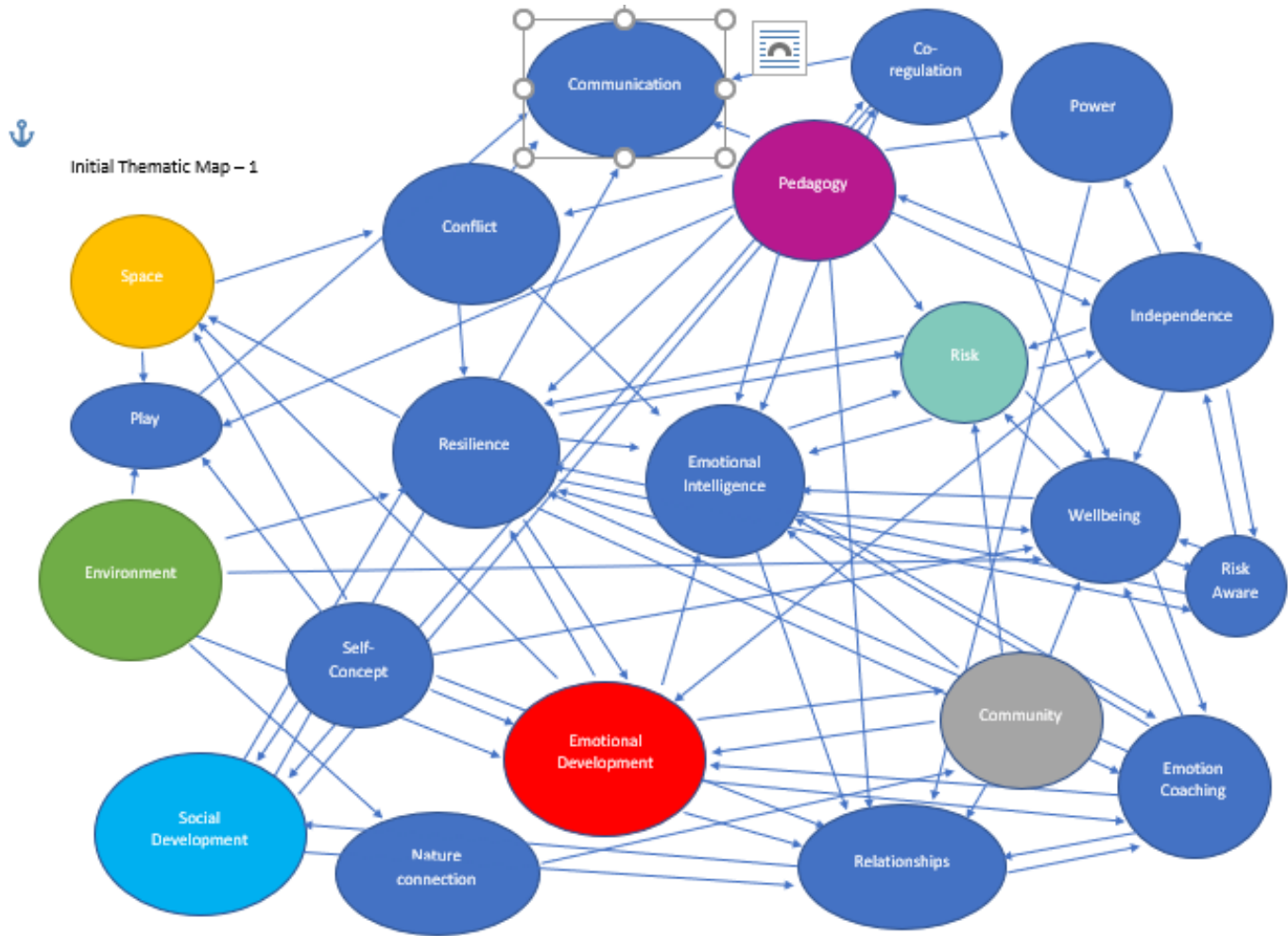
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3 Appendix 2: Initial Thematic Map

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