

BREEZE Forest School at Scotswood Natural Community Garden

Final Project Report (2022)

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Overview

The Breeze Project was developed in response to a growing local need for services to support children and young people with mental health and wellbeing needs. The project was designed to work in collaboration with local schools who identified small groups (5-12) of Children and Young People (CYP) experiencing social and emotional difficulties, who attended weekly forest school sessions. The project was initially planned for 3 years but was extended to 4 years due to interruptions caused by the Covid pandemic.

Over the 4 years of the project we worked with the following schools:

- School A: Additionally Resourced Centre within a mainstream primary school for children with Social and Emotional Needs
- School B: Specialist Secondary Provision for students with mental health issues
- School C: Specialist secondary provision for students with learning disabilities
- Schools D: Mainstream First School (cohort of Looked After, Post Looked After, and children with SEN)
- School E: Mainstream Primary School (cohort of children with social and emotional needs relating to home environment and SEN)
- School F: Mainstream Primary school (cohort of children with social and emotional needs relating to home environment and SEN)
- School G: Mainstream Primary (International New Arrivals, mainly Roma children from Czech Republic and Slovakia)
- School H: Mainstream Primary (cohort of children with social and emotional needs relating to home environment and SEN)

Note: Froebel Trust funding was mainly used for School A, School E and School F, and funding the research element. This report covers the whole project but focuses on those aspects funded by Froebel Trust

The objectives of the work supported by Froebel Trust funding were:

1. Children experience an improvement in their emotional wellbeing through participation in weekly forest school session
2. Children and young people develop the emotional and behavioural skills necessary to engage in learning
3. Forest School is recognised as an effective strategy for impacting on children and young people's emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.
4. Links between Forest Schools and Froebelian principles are more widely recognised.

The project plan was that with each school in the first year of their involvement in Breeze, the Forest School practitioner from Scotswood Garden would begin by planning, delivering and reviewing sessions in collaboration with school staff and that concurrently two members of school staff would complete the FS training (one at Level 1 and a second at Level 3).

By the end of the school year, schools would take over the delivery of the project with Scotswood Garden providing distanced support whilst also supporting a new school to get started the next year.

We planned to carry on supporting 2 schools from our pilot year, and work with 3 more schools.

In reality some staffing changes and unforeseen circumstances, mainly due to COVID-19 pandemic meant that following happened:

2018-2019 (Year 1)

- School A has two staff trained in FS and delivers sessions weekly at Scotswood Garden with original group plus some new class members.
- School B: staff member trained to Level 3 leaves the school and so while new staff member engages with Level 3 training, the school delivers outdoor learning sessions and co-delivers some FS sessions with a FS practitioner, the group of young people (YP) is not consistent.
- Schools C and D work with Scotswood Garden to co-deliver Breeze weekly, and concurrently staff engage in Level 1 and Level 3 FS training.

2019-2020 (Year 2)

- Schools A, B, C and D all deliver their own FS. School E begins co-delivery with Scotswood Garden with one member of staff starting Level 3 FS training.
- March 2020 – first national lockdown, schools are closed for all children apart from key worker and vulnerable; school A continues weekly FS for six children in school, schools B and C continue outdoor learning and Forest School inspired sessions for those children in school and schools D and E suspend FS sessions.

2020-2021 (Year 3)

- In September schools re-open, School A delivers FS sessions weekly at school with 12 children. During third national lockdown (Jan-March 2021) when schools again close to all but key worker and vulnerable children, children in the ARC are offered part-time places and FS sessions continue for those attending school.
- School B delivers weekly FS sessions at Scotswood Garden, break during national lockdown although continue to offer outdoor learning sessions to vulnerable children attending school.
- School C deliver FS sessions. During Jan-March they suspend Breeze but do a lot of outdoor learning and FS inspired sessions with those children in school.
- School D co-delivers FS sessions to various groups containing the original cohort and children in their “bubbles”. Sessions are led by Scotswood Garden FS practitioners as the FS trained school staff are no longer available due to school bubbles and staffing issues.
- School E did not return to the Breeze project after the pandemic.
- Scotswood Garden staff work with school F to run weekly sessions for two different groups of children with high levels of needs, many of whom had experienced bereavement during the pandemic. We provided level 3 training for 2 teachers from this school.

2021-2022 (year 4)

- Unspent funding is used to provide ongoing support to 5 schools who deliver sessions either at Scotswood Garden or on school grounds (school E does not have capacity to continue involvement).

- We develop a network for the schools to continue to support each other, and welcome 2 new schools (G and H) to the network, and help them set up forest schools as an intervention for emotional wellbeing.
- Remaining funds are used to support training for one teacher from school G.

Conclusions

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the project was carried out by Newcastle University's Centre for Learning and Teaching using a Theory of Change, and thematic analysis of the data (see attached report). The evaluation used a theory of change methodology to articulate the anticipated pathways to impact drawing upon practice, research and theoretical knowledge and through detailing individual steps of change and how each step may lead to future steps. Once a theory of change is constructed, data is identified that may confirm or refute an individual step of change; data may be quantitative and/or qualitative and one individual step may have a number of identified data sources. Theory of change further allows us to track change as it happens, rather than waiting for long-term goals that can take many years to come to fruition (Dyson and Todd, 2010; Laing and Todd, 2015).

A theory of change was developed through in-depth interviews with each participating school and Scotswood Garden at the start of each school's involvement in Breeze; as these theories were formed through shared conversations, experiences and knowledge, there are similarities between each school's theoretical model. The theories of change were revisited over the project to assess whether or not change was happening as anticipated and where new knowledge suggested adaptations to the model these were made on a school basis. The focus in theory of change is to clearly articulate and evidence how change happens over time. Each school's model can be seen within the case studies in the following sections.

Data collection was decided in collaboration, with the schools, Scotswood Garden and the researcher all participating in collecting data. It was important that all participants in the project felt comfortable and able to play an active part in the research and further that the research did not place an unnecessary burden on the project or participants. With these parameters in mind, individual data collection plans were developed for each school, please see individual case studies. Wherever possible multiple sources of data were identified for individual steps of change; being able to triangulate data allows us to examine the likelihood of an action from a number of perspectives and gives confidence in findings. This is particularly important when looking to evidence outcomes that are not easily measured, for example whether children develop positive self-narratives can be assessed by examining testimony from children themselves, school and FS staff, parents/carers and researcher observations.

Due to Covid disruptions the researcher was only able to undertake the Theory of Change and thematic analysis for schools A,B,C & D, and has only been able to write about schools A & D to date.

The data analysis found substantial evidence to support the following statements:

- Children become more comfortable with and able to interact with peers and a range of adults (for example improvements in communication, negotiation and compromise)
- Children become more aware and sensitive to the emotions and needs of others
- Children become less anxious and more able to behave appropriately at forest school
- Children develop an understanding and relationship with nature
- Children are able to persevere at an activity/task, develop interests and experience success
- Children are able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks at FS (in groups and/or independently)
- Children able to use skills and interests developed at FS within the classroom and school life

These were all steps of change identified in the theory of change, towards the ultimate outcome of improved emotional wellbeing and developing emotional and behavioural skills necessary to be ready to learn.

Summary

The data is complex; however the analysis of each step in the theories of change shows that regular forest school sessions support children and young people to:

- Develop the emotional and behavioural skills necessary to be ready to learn
- Improve their wellbeing

Lessons Learned

Many valuable lessons were learned along the way, we have written these up as tips or advice to share with others.

Clarify what you are trying to achieve through the project and carefully select children and young people who you think will benefit:

Think about what the project offers and how that meets a need identified in the children and young people (CYP). Needs might include: CYP struggling with social interactions; CYP struggling with mental health issues especially stress and anxiety; CYP struggling to make sense of what has happened/is happening to them (trauma, major life events); CYP struggling with the classroom environment .

Attendance at Forest School is not conditional:

Attendance at Forest School should not be used as a reward or punishment, and a CYP should not be excluded from Forest School due to their behaviour (unless the leader feels s/he cannot keep CYP safe). The aim of the project is to address issues around emotional wellbeing, this is just as important (if not more so) when CYP are struggling. All behaviour is recognised as a communication of a CYP's needs. The CYP we are working with are experiencing a high level of need (as listed above) which we are trying to meet. Excluding the CYP from the session does not allow us to meet these needs and help the CYP improve their behaviour or emotional wellbeing.

Providing freedom with (some) structure:

Children and young people decide how they spend their time during a Forest School session, with adults in a supportive role. This means we do not follow a scheme of work although there are likely to be some routines to sessions, such as coming together to welcome the group, share and discuss plans and reflect on experiences. Some CYP can initially find this freedom difficult (particularly older young people who have become used to structured learning) and may need support to follow their own interests.

Continuity of staff and children:

To address issues of emotional wellbeing we need to establish a relationship of trust and shared understandings between all members (adults and CYP) of the Forest School group. Bringing in new people (CYP or staff) can undermine this process and cause anxiety for CYP in the group, so it should be handled carefully with thought and preparation. However, in appropriate circumstances it can be a positive, providing opportunities for existing members to become 'experts' and to help newer members.

Timetabling the sessions:

Longer sessions (2.5 hours or more) lead to greater impact as CYP have time to really get immersed in their activities, develop skills, work through issues (disagreements with peers), stick with a problem (like lighting a fire) and achieve success. If a session is shorter than 2 hours the outcomes will be compromised. Not all CYP will be able to manage a full day initially so it may be necessary to build up to it. In our experience we have started to see impact after one term, however, to really embed these changes we recommend (at least) a full school year.

Transitions:

Many of the CYP we work with struggle with school and/or have a difficult home life, therefore the end of the session can often create anxiety or sadness which is communicated through withdrawal or attention seeking behaviour. This should be treated sensitively and with understanding. Coming together for food and concentrating on plans for the following week can help. CYP may struggle to adapt back to the stricter environment of the classroom and this should be taken into account when timetabling the session.

High adult to student ratio:

Our research has found that higher staff ratio (1 adult to 2 or 3 children) leads to a bigger impact on the CYP involved. Being available to support CYP through challenges related to activities or personal interactions can help in the development and practice of skills and attributes like perseverance, emotional regulation, empathy and compromise. Being there to support CYP to get positive outcomes will allow them to achieve, contributing to a positive self-narrative. We recognise that this places a big demand on staff time but believe that this kind of targeted support which meets the high level of need in the CYP and leads to significant outcomes, justifies this investment.

Finding a suitable site:

A good Forest School site is not too manicured, has trees, space, a variety of different terrains, and an abundance of loose parts (sticks, leaves, mud, pine cones etc.) offering lots of different play and exploration opportunities. CYP enjoy having spaces that are free from adult gaze, opportunities to climb and run, and a chance to observe a variety of fauna and flora.

We have shared our learning with a wide audience, through this booklet which was sent to every SENDCO in Newcastle upon Tyne <https://scotswoodgarden.org.uk/learn/forest-schools-research>

We also recently wrote some tips for the Froebel Trust website aimed at EYFS provision: <https://www.froebel.org.uk/children-and-nature/scotswood-community-garden>

Governance

A Breeze Advisory Group met termly to review and advise on the on-going delivery of the project; members included the Education Manager from Scotswood Garden (Menter), the researcher (Tiplady), staff from all participating schools (usually a member of the school leadership team and a member of staff delivering the project), Dr Wilma Barrow (Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology, Newcastle University), Jo Hume (Senior Lecturer in Primary Education, Northumbria University) and Professor David Leat (Professor of Curriculum Innovation, Newcastle University).

Outcomes

The project had following objectives:

1. Children experience an improvement in their emotional wellbeing through participation in weekly forest school session
2. Children and young people develop the emotional and behavioural skills necessary to engage in learning
3. Forest School is recognised as an effective strategy for impacting on children and young people's emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.
4. Links between Forest Schools and Froebelian principles are more widely recognised.

Objectives 1 and 2 have been addressed above, and in Lucy Tiplady's (2022) [Evaluation Report](#).

In the following sections, we address objectives 3 and 4.

Forest School is recognised as an effective strategy for impacting on children and young people's emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.

All of the schools involved have expressed a commitment to continue to use forest school to support the wellbeing of their learners (including school E who decided not to continue to participate in the Breeze Project), showing that they recognise the value of it. Local schools have shown an increased interest in the Breeze project (evidenced by the 3 new schools we have started working with).

This has been shared more widely with educators nationally through a variety of means. We shared our work at:

- British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, September 2018.
- Newcastle University B.Ed. course Nov 2018, and Nov 2019
- Institute for Outdoor Learning North East Conference Nov 2018, Esh Winning.
- Forest School Association national conference in October 2019, Surrey
- Northumbria University B.Ed. course Nov 2019, Dec 2020
- ESRC Festival of Social Sciences in November 2019. Newcastle.
- ESRC and EPSRC IAA Exploring Best Practice when Working with Schools, Newcastle upon Tyne, February 2019.
- Newcastle SENDCO network meeting, Online, November 2020
- Schools North East. Health MindEd conference, Online, 2021
- University of Sunderland SENCO Post Graduate Course 2021
- BERA September 2021 (online)
- Interview on Voice of Islam radio on 24/1/22

We have written a book chapter for a policy press book on wellbeing in the digital age (Supporting Digital Natives), an article published in Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, an article in The Outdoor Practitioner Magazine and a piece for the Froebel Trust website. We produced a booklet which has been sent to all SENCOs in Newcastle upon Tyne and downloaded over a thousand times from our website.

Links between Forest Schools and Froebelian principles are more widely recognised.

In our conference presentations and some of articles above we have covered the links between Froebelian principles and forest schools (the level of detail depends on the audience).

For example in our booklet we discuss Froebel's thinking on play and how this related to forest school. In our workshop for the B.Ed. students we ran an activity drawing out the links between [Tina Bruce's Froebelian principles](#) (Bruce 2020, pp.91-92) and the forest school principles.

The research findings **in bold below**, based on analysis of the data gathered over 4 years, demonstrate that Froebel's ideas on education are as relevant today as they were when he developed them. Furthermore the research demonstrates how they can be enacted in our schools systems, and helps us understand why they are key elements of children's learning and development.

Learning through Nature

Froebel emphasised the importance of learning through nature. Data collected throughout the project shows both how the natural environment created a fundamentally different space for the children to learn, and also how the natural world sparked curiosity and wonder in the children.

"Children also developed an understanding and relationship with nature; "I've seen newts sleeping ... come and see (YP, 2019), I love it here, it's so peaceful (YP, 2019) and this has also been seen to have an impact within the more general school environment: "Out on the yard you often hear some of the children talking about looking after nature, they have brought that back to

school. I've heard them telling other children within the school and they are thinking about the impact that they're having." (School, June 2019) "They've developed their bug hunting and identification and which trees to use, they are much more aware of what resources we've got in terms of plants and trees and how to look after them." (School, July 2021)".

Play

Froebel believed that "play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul." According to Froebel, in play children construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with it. Play has a similarly central role in Forest School and the research shows the immensely powerful impact of allowing children to play freely in a supportive environment.

All of the children were keen to express their enjoyment of Forest School, particularly the freedom to choose their own activities and have time to play: *"You have a lot more freedom at Forest School, you're allowed to run a lot"* (YP).

The space, time and value placed on play during sessions was evident from planning and reflection documents, observations and feedback from children and school staff.

"You get to play for the whole morning!" (YP)

"Play at Forest School is valued and encouraged and the benefits are clear to see in the children's joy and overall demeanour" (school)

"Session objectives: To encouraging children to play with each other and take turns, to encourage children to lead their own learning, to model behaviour and support children to build their own friendships, to have fun!" (Planning and evaluation document)

Childhood is seen as valid in itself, as part of life and not simply as preparation for adulthood. Thus education is seen similarly as something of the present and not just preparation and training for later.

In convincing school managers to join our scheme we emphasized the developmental benefits of forest school on the children and the skills it would give them to engage in curriculum learning, which are evidenced below. However as the project progressed, and especially after 2 national lockdowns, school staff, project staff and parents came to value it in the same way the children always had, as fun thing to do. The report states:

Sessions were undoubtedly enjoyed by the children with many expressing feelings of happiness and delight and parents and carers also feeding back how much their children enjoyed Forest School.

"Amazing, I don't want to leave" (YP)

"We love it!" (YP)

"I've been able to help out and had so much fun" (YP)

"He likes it and can't wait to go" (Parent/carer)

"Wednesdays are his favourite day as he gets to go to Forest School" (Parent/carer)

The whole child is considered to be important. Health – physical and mental is emphasised, as well as the importance of feelings and thinking and spiritual aspects.

Learning is not compartmentalised, for everything links.

The main objective of these forest school sessions was to improve the emotional wellbeing of the children involved, as we recognise that children will struggle with curriculum learning if they are

struggling with mental health issues like anxiety and depression; and if they have not developed in other areas such as emotional intelligence and self-regulation.

The research found substantial evidence that the forest schools led to an improvement in the emotional wellbeing of the children involved, especially with the children who were able to participate in forest schools over a longer time period. Furthermore there was substantial evidence that children had developed social skills and emotional resilience, all part of a child's holistic development.

"The whole FS has been amazing experience for her, and by extension, us ... It's given her solid foundations, happy memories of school and a real confidence boost. She now wants to be a FS teacher and work at Scotswood Garden. This is the first time that she has expressed any thoughts about her future" (parent/carer)

"He said to us that he is a much better runner at Forest School than he is at school! He has certainly become more confident to try new physical things" (parent/carer)

"It has been very positive for her mental health" (parent/carer)

There was also evidence of FS impacting in school through the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills that enable children to be ready to learn.

"We're noticing at school that Martha is more able to articulate what she is worried about, she can talk through issues, and that's come from those experiences at Forest School" (school)
"I didn't expect FS to make a difference to her academically but I think she is a more confident learner and definitely more engaged with school. Her teacher thought that FS had made a difference to her learning" (parent/carer)

There was evidence of children becoming more sensitive to the emotions and needs of others whilst at Forest School, for example in school A this was often in relation to playing fairly, looking after one another if someone was hurt, making sure everyone was offered food at snack times and praising one another's efforts and achievements. The children also regularly made gifts for others, particularly around special occasions such as birthdays.

As the class teacher was also the FS leader she was able to remind the children of these positive experiences at other times when they were experiencing challenges and frustrations. *"At Forest School they are really caring with one another and again that's nice to be able to refer back to"* (School, July 2021), School also began to notice the children using their new skills in class: *"They get a lot from playing together, learning to be together ... in the classroom too we are seeing that they are using words first to try and resolve issues"*. (School, March 2019). *"In the Forest School sessions they really are much more aware when someone's upset and more responsive to that in the classroom than they had been"*. (School, July 2021).

Conflict was commonplace within the unit in school A but the FS environment enabled the children to manage their behaviour more effectively; school staff reported a reduction in the number and intensity of conflicts on FS days and this was also noted by senior leadership. *"At Forest School they are a lot more willing to walk away from conflict and be distracted whereas in class they might refuse that support whereas at Forest School they are much more willing to go and do something else."* (School, July 2021)

"Our head teacher really sees the benefit, she often says Thursdays (FS day) are our calmest day, there's less behavioural challenges so she'll say Thursdays is when I book my meetings because I know I'm not going to be called upon to go to the ARC, we're not seeing the same sort of difficulties where we might need to call upon senior leaders to help". (School, July 2021)

Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations demonstrated how this (social and emotional development, awareness and sensitivity to the emotions and needs of others) was facilitated through discussions of the Forest School rule, 'look after others', emphasising the importance of considering others' feelings and helping one another, this was often modelled by adults in the playing of games and the sharing of food and drink and the children began to take on these practices themselves, checking that one another were ok, inviting others to play and sharing food. If a child was unkind an adult would quietly talk to him/her about the implications of their actions and they would be encouraged to think of a way to put it right.

"It was also obvious (and commented on by his class teacher and head teacher) that he showed more empathy and kindness for other children both at Forest School and more generally around the school at other times" (parent/carer)

"What have you learnt at FS?" "About being kind" (YP)

Children choose to focus on group games and play, this enabled the children to develop essential social and emotional skills, such as being able to communicate effectively in games, compromising, negotiating any disagreements and being able to successfully join or leave a game without conflict. The FS environment provided lots of opportunities for the young people to develop these skills and also for individuals to develop at different paces and stages according to their needs.

"This year the children are playing more imaginatively, developing social skills and beginning to manage their relationships better". (School, Nov 2018)

"He's more involved with the other children at Forest School than he is in the classroom, at Forest School you see a lot more of him wanting to join in, whereas he's happy to be on his own here (in the classroom) ... before he would happily sit in a den with an adult and let the games go on around him and never once interact with the others, he didn't even seem to notice that the games were going on, now he has that desire to play with them even if the game isn't really his idea of fun." (School, June 2019)

Intrinsic motivation, resulting in child-initiated, self-directed activity, is valued.

Our recently published academic journal paper highlighted the value of self-directed activity as children were both more motivated leading to greater engagement and learning, and meaning children were able to "take what they needed" from the sessions, meaning children developed in many different ways, in ways they were a necessary part of their learning and development. Our Forest School sessions always included the space and time for children to choose their own activities and play; some became interested in fire lighting and cooking or craft projects but the majority choose to play in groups, enjoying the space the FS area provided and engaging in imaginative play.

One recurring game observed by the researcher was tag or manhunt, during the final few weeks this evolved into a game the children called 'Infection' and involved one infected person who passed on the infection by tagging until everyone was infected. There were also a series of performances which the children devised themselves 'in secret' and then performed to the adults towards the end of the session. Children showed perseverance in their play and activities and in the final half term often returned to ideas and developed them over a number of weeks.

Staff supported the children in their interests and relationships with one another, particularly where individual children found these social skills difficult. *"Having that opportunity to play at Forest School, we're seeing more complex games emerging, working on conflict resolution and their relationships with one another (school) He absolutely loves to have time to play chasing*

games with his friends as he doesn't often get to play these kind of games at home as there aren't many friends who play outside around where we live" (parent/carer).

After the pandemic, children particularly appreciated the opportunity to follow their own interests and choices, *"We get to do anything, we choose!" (YP) " You can see them gaining confidence, especially with the newer children, as they begin to realise that they can do what they want to do, set their own agenda" (FS practitioner).*

In school A the fact that children have been able to choose their own activities and games has led to an enthusiasm that teachers and parents tell us is rarely seen within the classroom environment: *"Come and see my den, I made this, it's my secret place" (YP, 2019); " You can run around, we play hide and seek and eagle eyes" (YP, 2019).* Children also often took objects home from FS and parents reported that FS is one of the few things the children discuss about school at home, which the school further developed through sharing pictures with families on home learning apps.

Self- discipline is emphasised.

Children were able to develop self-discipline through the Breeze programme, as they were self-directed, and therefore motivated by their tasks, and the informal, outdoor environment helped them to contain their frustration, impatience and fear of failure, and see through challenging tasks. This was especially significant for these children who would often struggle to self-regulate when faced with challenges in the classroom.

Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations showed that a number of the children struggled to persevere at activities and tasks at the start of the project but all developed this ability over time; this was encouraged through activities which the children found intrinsically motivating such as building and lighting a fire, whittling, or imaginative games and play and over time the children were able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks and achieve success. Some of the older boys worked on their whittling skills and would make props for their imaginative play, often working on a particular piece over a number of weeks, whilst others would work on their listening and communication or leadership skills in group games. All of the children were encouraged to develop skills and interests important to them as individuals and were supported to achieve success. *" A child with ADHD for example found that he could focus for extended periods of time when whittling" (school) " All the children have had successes at Forest School and that helps to build their resilience in class where they often struggle" (school).*

All of the children from School A have struggled to engage in learning within the classroom; typical reactions to finding a task difficult would be to give up, withdraw or reactive aggressively. FS provides a number of opportunities that require perseverance but many CYP also find intrinsically motivating and all of the children were able to persevere at increasingly difficult and challenging tasks and achieve success over time.

"Everyone is putting up tarps but Hugo is struggling, becoming frustrated and shouting that he can't do it. After some time he calms down enough to be able to work with Mrs Coates and as he finishes the knot at the end declares 'Look Mrs Coates, I'm actually doing it, I'm finally doing it', later he tells another adult 'Look what I did with Mrs Coates'". (Researcher observations, April 2019)

"His confidence has massively increased. It was that fear of failure that sometimes stops him, that is something we see in school if he feels like he's got something wrong, that can be a trigger for shutting down, but at Forest School he's taking more and more risks, he perseveres at things. Like last week when making the hot chocolate with the Kelly kettle, he could not light it and if it was

something in class and he couldn't do it after a couple of attempts, not even that, he would give up, whereas the fact he kept going, kept going". (School, June 2019)

"Henry with the fire, over the course of the last few months he keeps coming back to the same activity and we are seeing each time an increased level of independence and what he can do with it, he keeps coming back to it and extending the experience so now he'll set everything up, collect the sticks, he know the safety things, will make quite a good attempt at laying everything out and once he gets it going, cooking on it. He will now see that whole activity through to some sort of conclusion, he's finally got that sense of purpose ... in class he finds independence incredibly difficult". (School, June 2019)

These positive experiences were always celebrated at FS and the school staff would encourage the children to reflect on their experiences both at FS and back in the classroom. School staff often encourage the children to reflect on their experiences during FS sessions, 'how did that go?', 'remember when you ...' Children and staff also celebrate one another's successes, particularly when it has required perseverance.

"We've been able to draw upon his successes at Forest School, that's how we introduced him to integration, his first integration was a Forest School session so he would be that little bit more confident ... we're seeing Terry managing more and more with his anxiety, he's actually experiencing successes and he's seeing times when he doesn't get it right first time and it doesn't matter. I think the Terry that we're seeing now is getting more and more able to cope when things go wrong". (School, June 2019)

"Seeing the children really engage in activities and that's nice to refer back to when we're back in class and a way to prove to them actually you can sit and do something". (School, July 2021)

The people (both adults and children) with whom the child interacts are of central importance.

Our project shows that forest school sessions are an effective tool to improve the relationships between children and their peers, and with their teachers. A number of factors contributed to this outcome including a change in power structures, a more relaxed environment for both children and staff, and the absence of pressure on the teaching staff to achieve certain learning objectives

Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations showed the progress children made in interacting with their peers and a range of adults. When the group first started FS a number of the children found it difficult to play with others, some found it hard to negotiate during games and there would be fallings out with children becoming distressed; this often resulted in one boy storming off and sometimes crossing the agreed boundary, another child would often shout and/or refuse to engage with the session. A couple of the other children would always choose to play on their own and appeared not to have the skills to integrate into others' play but would often stand back and watch. The high adult to child ratios meant that the children could be supported, either to manage their emotions and find resolutions together and/or to find ways to play with others. The children were motivated by their desire to join in with others and by the games themselves, by the end of the school year and into the 2019/2020 year all the children had formed a sense of group identity and were much more able to negotiate relationships and activities themselves or with minimal support from adults. The children were often at different stages socially and emotionally but all had made progress over their time at Forest School.

"He seems more confident now, there's that level of maturity in his relationships, he's had issues with emotional regulation but he's been allowed to work through that at Forest School ...the main benefits are in terms of his relationships with other children. He used to be quite scared of other children; Forest School has provided a safe space to work at friendships" (parent/carer).

“One child, who due to her attachment difficulties thought herself to be intrinsically bad and unlovable became a natural leader in the group as a result of the playful relational approach encouraged” (school)

Further, testimony from the school, children and parents suggested that sessions had also been particularly effective in supporting the children’s relationships with school staff who attended FS. *“I’ve noticed Emily has been speaking to me more than ever at Forest School, she seems a bit scared of me in school” (school). “Having each class teaching assistant involved has been very beneficial, it’s partly that relationship building and seeing another side to those children” (school). “It’s really helped her build a stronger attachment with the school staff who have come to sessions and also with the FS facilitators” (parent/carer). “I like the teachers” (YP)*

Breeze sessions were also seen to be an opportunity for children and school staff to build and develop relationships, for example in the case of one child who needed a lot of support for a medical condition and in another with a child who was struggling with relationships at school *“She likes spending time with Mrs Taylor who makes her feel special and valued” (parent).*

Both school staff and parents commented on the benefits of having the class teaching assistant (TA) involved in Breeze sessions, this enabled staff *‘to see another side to those children’* (SEND Coordinator) and also to be able to use the successes made at FS to encourage the children back at school. *“He has certainly become more confident to try new physical things. His teacher and TA have really encouraged him with this too this year, so it has been good for him to have his class TA with him at Forest School so she could encourage him to try things in school that he did at Forest School” (parent).*

The combination of opportunities to interact with peers and a range of adults and the children feeling more comfortable and at ease during sessions appeared to allow them to take risks and develop as individuals. *“His confidence with the other kids too, at Forest School he’s much more willing to say ‘do you want to do this with me’, whereas he wouldn’t necessarily do that in class”.* (School, June 2019). *“At Forest School he speaks to you and Harriet, at his old school he wouldn’t talk to any adult, even the adults in his own class never mind others. He wouldn’t even ask his key worker if he wanted the toilet, but to come over to you, rather than wait for you to ask him, that’s huge”.* (School, June 2019).

This emphasis on relationships was also seen to be beneficial following lockdown periods when many of the children were again re-adjusting and developing skills. *“After the second lockdown it was like re-introducing them to one another again and with really basic skills like sharing and looking after each other and we’re able to do that through Forest School” (School, July 2021).* *“We’ve had a very high turnover of staff this year and Forest School has been that chance for the staff to get to know the children and the children to know the staff in that more informal, working together time ... Forest School has been a really nice chance to sit and complete an activity one-to-one with someone who’s maybe a new adult and it means that in other opportunities during the week they’ve already started to build on those relationships ... they (the children) like to show the adults, come and I’ll show you how to put up a hammock, because actually they are the experts” (School, July 2021)*

Quality education is about three things: the child, the context in which learning takes place, and the knowledge and understanding which the child develops and learns.

The Breeze project shows how changing the context, allowed children to learn in different ways, and helped them overcome barriers to learning.

The Breeze Project enabled the children to learn in and experience an alternative physical and pedagogical environment as part of school, with testimony from the children, parents and school staff demonstrating that FS was viewed as less threatening and had less negative associations for

the children: *"You can relax and do things you want to do"* (YP). *"In all honesty it's the only bit of school he says he looks forward to"* (parent/carer). *"They definitely feel that it's a special place and thing to do"* (school).

There was clear evidence that children had been given the opportunity to learn in an alternative environment that was experienced as 'different' for many of the children and often had less negative associations. *"It's nice being in nature ... I haven't been in nature much before"* (YP) *"She says she enjoys it and it is better to be outside than in school"* (parent/carer). *"She has seen Forest School as being something different or a different experience"* (parent/carer).

This alternative physical and pedagogical environment allowed the children to learn in different ways and to respond to their own needs. *"The Forest School set up really suits Katy, that child-led learning style where she can move around and select her own activities, she's very much driven by what she wants to do and she finds it very easy to be creative, she loves the whittling, the woodwork, that day with the painting, and her confidence in things like tree climbing has massively improved ... In school she finds the structure difficult ... I think it's what she needs and although she's a Year 2 she's still very much learning at that Reception level and it is the only day in the week when she gets that style of learning"*. (School, June 2019) *"He loves to climb and playing chasey games, the fact that he can be free and move about as much as he likes at Forest School, I think that suits him really well"*. (School, June 2019). *"He gets a lot out of being in the forest in the sense of wandering around and the flapping. He finds sitting in the classroom and following the classroom day tricky, Forest School is a bit of a release, it's freer and he can regulate with the flapping and things and sit down in a hammock if he wants to, so it does suit him well"*. (School, June 2019)

The school believed that children were more relaxed in the FS environment and that for particular children this could be seen in a reduction of anxious behaviour: *"In school when he's anxious he barks, it can be quite a lot when he's anxious but we hardly hear that at all at Forest School, it's not never but it's a lot less frequent. Today I didn't hear him at all, which says a lot about how he's feeling and suggests that he's feeling less anxious, more comfortable"*. (School, June 2019).

Overall we can see that the project proves these Froebelian principles to still be true today, and gives us a model of how they can be put into practice within primary education settings in the UK.