

# Action Research and advocacy for Forest School, with Sara Knight

Jon introduced the evening.

Updates from the FSA – Nature Premium Campaign

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/reconnect-children-with-nature>

[www.naturepremium.org](http://www.naturepremium.org)

Twitter - @naturepremium1

Instagram – @naturepremiumuk

Facebook – Nature Premium Campaign

Wednesday Webinars – possibly moving to the third Wednesday each month

Still open to topic suggestions.

Jon then introduced the theme of research, and Sara Knight.

“Why do your own research when there is so much out there?”

Sara

There isn't. There's many reasons: Covid, the Campaign. Now is the time to do it.

The only way to get people to subscribe to the FS ethos is through research.

3 layers of research

Peer reviewed – journals. Very hard work. Every academic has to generate this, so if you do the research data, it helps them with offering data for their analysis. The REF counts the number of good papers which translates into money for the university.

If you read an academic paper, the research takes two years.

2. Articles – in professional magazines. Books.

Pretty sound but wouldn't stand up to intense interrogation.

Used for informing, PGCEs and Forest School leader training.

Can be done quicker.

3. Basic Advocacy -should be done now. Anecdotal evidence. Talking to parents/teachers. Not sound research but the things that make Forest School come alive. Can be used to illustrate the research. Everyone should be doing it, and doing it now.

Its much easier to lay groundwork first.

1. What do I want to know/want others to know?

Impact of Transitional points? Trauma? Maybe you want to know about how it builds resilience or social inclusion? Counteracting obesity?

How do we prove these with data? Focus on one element – relevant to setting/practice/location?

How is it relevant to my world? How do I know what happens? Records? Time/duration/location of settings?

All variables in research – what you're measuring, and variables that affect

Note all the variables that affect your research.

2. Decision making process? Who is making this happen?

Children's voices. How do we capture children's voices? Technology? Selfies etc.

Data collection can be child led too.

Do you have other ways of collecting data?

Charts with childrens names vs timescale to annotate at different points in the session.

3. Ethical approval

GDPR

If you think you might publish – permission in writing from the setting/parents and children (only polite)

What data are you collecting? Even anonymised, it has sensitivity. Settings are usually identifiable. Pseudonyms/codes so the children cannot be identified.

Stored securely, the destroyed once the project is finished

Written ethics policy – for transparency.

4. Working towards a hypothesis – I think this is what my study will show.

Flexible research design, Ethnographic. Hypotheses shift.

In qualitative data, like we will do, the research questions can shift and alter, which is fine. Keep a record of the changes and why they have changed.

Policy makers don't really take as much notice of qualitative data. The more we can generate, the more patterns can be noticed, .

Use of a control group – can't really do that in education as it isn't ethical.

Grassroots data needs to be shared. Comparisons are going to be hard, but it will be important to see how children have been affected by the current situations.

Who can we affect?

Forest school lite vs full fat, could you give us an example please?

Would you recommend trying to make links to universities to help with action research? Have you any advice on this?

It doesn't matter if your sample is small. It is still relevant as long as there is enough across an average of groups.

Triangulation is also interesting – recording results by observation across different areas in the UK

Take into account cultural influences – what is unique about your sample group.

5. Validity – how robust is your data – try and avoid as much as possible, creating something that is self-fulfilling. There has to be a yes or a no answer – if you can only get a yes, it isn't valid or valuable.

The basic research done in 2003 is old. We need more and more recent.

Anything you read – what is the level of validity? Which level? Can I trust what I'm reading?

Can I work with other people? Yes.

What you can do as practitioners, is valuable collection of data. Collaborate with others to do the heavy analysis.

Sue Waite has a toolkit based out of Plymouth University "Good for Woods".

Leuven scales. Other measurements

What can weaken results?

Lack of in-depth analysis.

Funding – funding streams available

Critical – allow for weaknesses. Be objective. Look for weak links in the data.

Jon then introduced breakouts for discussion.

What is it that I want to know? For myself or for others?

Breakout room 1

Mental health

Impact on transition into post-Covid "normal life" – Fostering community connections

Secondary level

Funding from Children in Need – confidence, relational aspects. Resilience/risk

Scotswood community garden – the breeze project – Secondary children at risk of exclusion.

Proposals in universities – adds kudos to the works.

Institute for Mental Health

Concern in schools – catch-up curriculum.

Secondary schools – Funding – not just for an intervention.

Forensic level behaviour with secondary aged pupils – started to see early years schema forming.

Watch the age ranges on questionnaires – SDQ has the widest age range, Warwick/Edinburgh

Break out room 2

Doing our own action research:

How COVID has impacted on children's social skills? How they interact with each other. Thinking

about how much time they have had at home.

Looking at their emotional skills.

Why are we doing it? New faces at school and justifying it to colleagues.

Attitudes to learning – can these be changed? How happy are they to make mistakes?

How could we look at the willingness of children – making mistakes?

How does introducing FS to a school change the attitude and behaviour of the children?

Looking at resilience – so getting the data before Forest School sessions start in the school.

The impact does forest school on the family.

Looking at anxiety in children – how anxious you are at the beginning of the session – children are encouraged to mark themselves and then at the end of the session.

Breakout 3 - A lot of discussion around research looking at resilience and the impact of Forest School on the children's health, development and wellbeing, particularly mental health as a result of COVID-19. We also considered the impact of staff and volunteers attitudes around the children and outdoor sessions and how these might impact and influence the children.

Break out room 5 we talked about influencing SLT or nothing happens really. Talk at HT conferences. Need a specific topic very difficult to decide

Breakout room 6

We decided that we have the goal of achieving local advocacy by Christmas with a view to longer term research in the future

Breakout room 7

What do we want to know?

Demographics of students/families – European families attending

Nurseries: What days are they attending? Where do they attend on other days?

What years do we get Forest School done with? How can we promote FS with older year groups?

What impact are we having providing Forest School?

Environmental – does what we're doing impact on our students becoming custodians of the environment? Will the children care for the sites they've used as children when they're older? Will they remember how to play in the woods still as teenagers?

How do we reach those hard to reach families that we 'know' will benefit from Forest School most?

Other useful resources

Blob Tree

<https://emotionallyhealthyschools.org/primary/the-leuven-scale/>

10 Stage RIE (Resilience, Independence & Emotional awareness) progression – freely downloadable from [www.bluebellbushcraft.co.uk/education](http://www.bluebellbushcraft.co.uk/education) (published in the IOL's Horizons magazine – spring 2020)

The Question session

- Examples of Forest School Lite/Full Fat

A slightly unfair description because it is contextual and based on limitations in settings.

Mainly a question of school leaders not fully buying into the ethos – from Sara's experience, schools tend to not be on a "Lite" FS for long, because of the noticeable benefits long term.

- How to develop relationships with academics

Look at local universities and colleges – they may have published themes or interests

Look at the list of peer review papers.

Plymouth is a big centre for outdoor research – also Chichester & Edinburgh

Get in touch – say you want to do some action research and they may jump at the opportunity.

- I'm a post-graduate researcher (PhD student), I wondered if you have any advice as how I, as a researcher, can help bridge the gap between research and practitioner?

FSA Local Groups, newsletters. Etc.

- Effective ways of collecting data without making it onerous or time consuming.

Clare Walden's floor books.

Pile photos, comments, artifacts stuck into a page for the day. A way of snapshotting the day

Then look back for patterns etc.

- How old is too old for evidence?

Anything less than 5 years or up to ten years.

- Research specifically with SEND

Chapter in Forest School for All –

If there are children with specific issues – talk to them. They may be able to clarify and explain their needs.

Less verbal children?

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Forest-School-Autism-Practical-Guide/dp/1785922912>

Bill Lucas – lots of useful stuff.

The Community session

Jon finished off by thanking Sara, and reiterating that we need to all share our observations.

Song – It is Time Now

We shall be known by the company we keep  
By the ones who circle round to tend these fires  
We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap  
The seeds of change, alive from deep within the earth  
It is time now, it is time now that we thrive  
It is time we lead ourselves into the well  
It is time now, and what a time to be alive  
In this Great Turning we shall learn to lead in love  
In this Great Turning we shall learn to lead in love

Song

I fly into the forest

She holds me like a child

I feel my skin remembering

That inside I am wild.