



February 23, 2011

**FOREST SCHOOL LEVEL 3 PRACTITIONERS AWARD EVIDENCE  
PORTFOLIO**

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## Discussion and Review of Current Forest School Philosophy and Aims in light of its recent Historical Development. ( Unit CAK056 Learning Outcome 1; Assessment Criteria 1.1)

The roots of what we in England now know as Forest Schools can be traced back to Scandinavia, 'Friluftsliv' literally 'fresh air life' was originally a Norwegian expression and is a concept deeply ingrained in their culture (Knight 2009). 'Friluftsliv' is also an integral part of the Swedish national curriculum; this approach is extended to all age groups in Scandinavia including the pre-school age group with 'skogsmulle' in Sweden and 'Naturbørnehaven' in Denmark.

### *Skogsmulle*

The Swedish approach to Forest School style programs for pre-school children began in 1957 with Gösta Frohm (Joyce 2004) who at the time was head of the Swedish Society for Outdoor Life (Friluftsrämjandet). He believed that from a very early age children should have opportunities to learn about sustainability and the environment (Joyce 2004).

### *Bringing Forest School to the UK*

*The children set their own agenda, cook [on open fires], listen to storytelling, sing songs, and explore at their own level. They are able to climb very high into the trees on rope ladders and swings, and sit and whittle sticks with knives, alone. (Trout 2004).*

This was an observation made during the trip to Denmark in 1994 by the early years department of Bridgewater College which began the formal development of Forest Schools in this country. Within the UK forest schools expanded slowly, with the nursery at Bridgewater running forest school sessions, and later with Edexcel as their examinations board developing a suite of courses to transmit the forest school ethos (Knight 2009) and train new practitioners. However it was not until 2002 that a large organisation endorsed Forest Schools, it was then that The Forestry Commission stated "access to green space is not just about 'the environment'. For young children there is perceived to be great benefit in teaching most subjects in a natural environment" (O'Brien, Tabbush, 2002). Since then Forest Schools had continued to find favour in this country and throughout the world, Skogsmulle schools are found in Japan, Latvia, Russia, Germany, Norway, and Finland (Joyce 2004) and within the UK there are now dozens of providers of Forest Schools programs and training for practitioners.

### *Philosophy and Aims*

The best way to illustrate the philosophy and aims of forest schools is with this diagram:

Figure 1: The Natural flight of steps



(Friluftsförbundet 2006)

Although it must be noted that many agree that environmental education is a secondary aim of Forest Schools with a child's social and emotional development being more central to the Forest School ethos.

## The Role of the Forest School Leader in Promoting a Childs Social and Emotional Development. (Unit CAK057 Learning Outcome 1; Assessment Criteria 1.2)

The Above 'natural flight of steps' illustrates the hoped for progression in a child taking part in Forest Schools from a disinterest and poor understanding of nature or worse a fear of nature to a good understanding of the natural world. This improved understanding will allow young people to have an influence on society but perhaps more important than their newfound understanding are the social skills that will allow them to put their views across. Without the emotional development and promotion of social skills that Forest Schools facilitates a child may develop a lifelong interest in nature but never be able to articulate that to a wider audience.

There have been several studies commissioned by the forestry commission which indicate that benefits of Forest Schools for the participants can be summarised by these seven headings:

- Increased self-esteem and self-confidence;
- Improved social skills;
- The development of language and communication skills;
- Improved physical motor skills;
- Improved motivation and concentration;
- Increased knowledge and understanding of the environment;
- New perspectives for all involved.

These benefits were also observed to be imported back to children's other settings and homes. (O'Brien and Murray 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; Borradaile 2006; Hughes and Jenner 2007; Knight 2009)

*Case Study:*

*One child who was very intimidated if asked to speak in front of the class-volunteering to explain the rules of a game to a group of visiting children from another class and doing a very good job.  
Another child who was reluctant to engage in the classroom and also reluctant to do any physical activity, he became extremely motivated both in the woodland and back at the school, he played with a number of different members in the class (Archimedes Training Ltd.).*

The social and emotional development of children is fundamental to the ethos of Forest School and the Forest School Leaders role in all this potential development in their students is an important one, with such great potential for development the Forest School Leader has a great responsibility to give children the best experience they can. Much will depend on the choice of activity's, the preparation of material and the forest school site, the leaders own experience and expertise of nature and their approach to delivering the Forest School program, but also not least the way they interact with the children and demonstrate social skills. One of the most important roles of a Forest School leader with regard to the emotional development of children will be combatting low self-esteem by helping

children succeed at tasks and increase their confidence. There is a need for children to be provided with small, achievable and progressively more challenging tasks which they are likely to succeed (Maynard 2007).

*We believe that if children feel good about themselves then they will become more confident and so you can give them little challenges knowing they will achieve...and begin to feel that they can push themselves (Bridgewater College).*

Choosing appropriate activities for the age group and ability of children will be key in promoting this improvement in self-esteem.

Another of the keys in encouraging the social and emotional development of children involved in Forest School is that they are encouraged to take part in activities which may be perceived as risky. These activities help children gain a sense of responsibility for their own actions and towards others (Maynard 2007). Not only does taking part in these activities help increase confidence and ability but with success will also allow a Forest School leader to praise real achievement which is more beneficial to a child's self-esteem than heaping indiscriminate praise (Baumeister et al 2003).

A leader's responsibility then is primarily to facilitate real achievement in an environment which will allow children to conduct their own explorations and manage their own learning building their self-esteem, confidence and independence and encourage them to build relationships with other their own age as they discover the need for working as a team to achieve more than they may have been able to alone. A leader will at all times demonstrate exceptional social skills in dealing with colleagues and children and at all times act as a role model for the children giving praise for successes and help when required. In carrying out these programs in a natural environment all the social and emotional development goals of the program can be met while increasing the children's understanding of the natural environment and environmental issues.

## Child Development in Forest Schools (Unit CAK057 learning outcome 2; assessment criteria 2.1)

Children and young people are living in the 'most intensely stimulating period in the history of the earth' (Robinson 2010) however for many young people much of this stimulation comes in the form of video games and TV, Forest School is an excellent way of introducing children who may not have the opportunity before to the most stimulating environment that exists, THE OUTDOORS!

Many educational professionals advocate the use of displays, posters, and other things which enrich the environment in their classroom, even including music, and scented candles to create a sensory rich environment (Jensen 1998). But the perfect environment for learning already exists THE OUTDOORS!

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory identifies distinct stages in a child's development and suggests that at the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of Psychosocial development which takes place during preschool years children begin to assert control over the world through play and other social interactions, successful development at this stage equips a child to lead others and feel capable. Forest school activities which focus on the social development of a child should then ensure that these requirements are met and the very nature of Forest Schools, encouraging children to learn and develop through play which the individual or group of children directs themselves means that this development will be aided by taking part in Forest School programs. In fact the word used to best describe the activities during this period of a child's development which will most help his or her development is EXPLORATION (About.com 2011). This stage of development is where children will develop initiative and if in a Forest School setting they can develop the initiative to break their normal boundaries and take part in more adventurous activities it will set them up for life to be proactive and enthusiastic about achieving their potential. It is my opinion that because of the modern shift towards sheltering young people from the outdoors environment and trying to put more and more control and restraint on activities which may be perceived by parents and policy makers as risky that need to explore is not met and even young people well into secondary school and even beyond would benefit massively from being given a chance to take part in Forest Schools where the boundaries are different and they have the opportunity to take the initiative and make of the experience what they want whether that be self-motivated and governed activity or learning specific skills or subjects which are relevant in an outdoor setting but also in everyday life. Erikson's theory goes on to break down the development of a person up until maturity and death and there is no reason that Forest Schools in one form or another could not help development at any stage this process.

Another relevant theory within Child development relevant to Forest Schools is that of Jean Piaget, but it is my opinion that this theory is relevant to Forest Schools only in that Forest Schools goes against Piaget's theory. Piaget theorised that intelligence developed in the same way across individuals however Forest Schools gives participants the chance to choose their own way to develop, with a much more open agenda than classroom based learning participants can choose to work as groups or individuals and there is also a lot of choice as to exactly what they do with their time on a Forest School course, with the teacher being there purely as a facilitator to allow the

participants choice of activity to be possible. Unlike a classroom where despite any teachers best attempt at ensuring differentiation between the needs of individual learners, teaching in a classroom setting does put a limit on this however in a Forest School setting there is no such limitation and differentiation can truly be seen working as it should with learners who want to learn outside learning outside, those who prefer to be inside retiring to a shelter or building their own, those who work best in groups developing the social skills to gather likeminded people around them to form a group and chose activities to be involved in while people who are more comfortable working on their own can do so. It is also an excellent pressure free way of breaking boundaries such as helping those who work poorly in groups develop better teamwork skills.

With so much stimulation in the outdoor environment it is impossible for children not to benefit and develop as a result of any outdoor activity but the Forest School program with it's balance of education and adventure makes the most of that opportunity.

## Health and Safety in Forest Schools (Unit CAK055 Learning Outcome 3: Assessment Criteria 3.1, 3.2 Learning Outcome 4: Assessment Criteria 4.1, Unit CAK058 Learning Outcome 5: Assessment Criteria 5.1, 5.2, 5.3)

**Health and Safety regulations often mean children are prohibited from certain activities these days, and activities that were classed as 'normal childhood activities' 20 years ago, are no longer permitted (BBC Birmingham 2009).**

To some extent Forest Schools attempts to redress this imbalance and allow children and young people access to 'nature' and to teach children to become more self-reliant and to increase their confidence in the woods, part of this process is encouraging the learners to manage their own risks as they take part in activities. This does not negate the need for adherence to relevant Health and Safety legislation nor mean that Forest Schools is above Health and Safety.

For any organisation offering Forest Schools activities whether on their own site or as a mobile operation visiting schools, youth groups or nursery's there must be a comprehensive Health and Safety policy which should address all the following points:

- Site suitability
- Ground Rules for learners
- Risk Assessments
- Tool Use
- Essential equipment and resources
- Communications with parents
- Compliance with Legislation
- offsite ratios
- Insurance
- Contact forms and emergency procedures
- Transport (where relevant)
- Protocol for safety briefings

Particular activities which may be specifically addressed in a Health and Safety policy for a forest school organisation include fire lighting and shelter building (see appendices for Health and Safety Policy for Survival Hobbies, this document was not written specifically for forest schools but covers all the courses and activities which Survival Hobbies delivers).

With regard to relevant legislation the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) applies to the employees of an organisation and the Health and safety policy applies as much to the instructors as the learners.

The health safety and wellbeing of the students is paramount and in line with legislation all instructors and employees with access to children must have a satisfactory enhanced CRB check because under the rehabilitation of offenders act 1974 an organisation must request CRBs if it is a "child care organisation" under the Children Act 1989:

- A "Child Care" organisation is defined under the Children Act 1989 as providing activities outside the home for more than 2 hours at least 6 times per year. In which case Ofsted has to be notified in writing and National Day Care Standards also apply.

and/or:

- If you employ paid or unpaid staff that have unsupervised access i.e. work directly with children, young people.  
(safechild 2011)

For an example of a full health and safety policy suitable for an organisation delivering forest school courses see appendices.

## Account of Forest School Course for Holbourne House Nursery

(Unit CAK056 Assessment criteria 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)

Lesson plans for a weekly forest school course follow including a brief evaluation of each session (for risk assessments for the activities described in these lesson plans see appendices)

### Session 1: 11/07/2011

<i>Learner Aims</i>			<i>Teacher Aims</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce group to Forest School site</li> <li>• Introduce group to range of activities available</li> <li>• Set boundaries for safety and general use of the site and for activities</li> <li>• Break old boundaries, ITS OK TO GET MUDDY</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn names</li> <li>• Choose subjects of child development study</li> <li>• Allow children 'Free Play' opportunities to gauge their levels of ability and interest, also to allow time and aid accurate timing of activities for future sessions</li> </ul>		
<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Learner</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Notes</i>
0700	Check and Prepare site, with activity tokens and scavenger hunt.	Check and Prepare site, with each one teach cards, spider web,			spider web, animal pairs, blind trail
0900	Greet group, distribute name badges and introduce to site, introduce planet earth	Greet group, name game, distribute name badges and introduce to site	Personalise name badges	Leaf Name badges	Use leaves as name badges for first session, two teams hazel and sweet chestnut,
0930	Each one teach cards and blind trail will form a tour of the entire site culminating at the spider web	Introduce native animals through each one teach cards, progress to blind trail	Develop basic knowledge of native animals and principles such as camouflage, learners will have a chance to have an input on what the activities will be	Each one teach cards, blindfolds, rope	
On completion	Snacks?				

n of site tour/scave nger hunt					
1100	Play camouflage	Explain why prey and predators might need to hide, help learners choose which animals to be	Play camouflage Chose a predator to be and a prey to hunt try and get as close as possible to the prey		
1130	Free Play	Supervise learners, providing for activities if necessary, answer questions help where necessary	Free play		Prepare for activities such as den building/leaf collecting
1200	Lunch				
Remaining time	Free Play				

### *Session Evaluation*

- Some children seemed very keen to explore on their own and collect leaves and catkins, and also were happy to develop Each one Teach into their own activities including den building, They built a squirrel dray from collected dry leaves.
- Discussing animals during Each one Teach set the scene for 'camouflage' and tracking but may have been to advanced, later activities to involve less talking and more prompting the children to make their own observations about the animals and focus on simpler concepts like size, colour and food.
- Spider web went very well, but needed to be lower level as the children were too small to climb or help each other through the upper webbing.
- For this age group less talking, more games and activity.
- Using leaves as name badges went well and the children enjoyed finding the trees that matched their badges.
- Blind trail did not work as well as hoped, the children didn't seem to understand the concept of leading each other around the trail, but they did enjoy it!
- Planet Earth worked well in getting the children's attention.
- Although time was set aside for free play due to time constraints much of this was used up in other activities, but it would be beneficial in future to ensure there was time dedicated to free play.

## Session 2: 18/07/2011

<i>Learner Aims</i>			<i>Teacher Aims</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team Building</li> <li>• Campfire cooking</li> <li>• Trust games</li> <li>• Free Play</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take less control over free time more choice for the children.</li> <li>• Help Children understand safety around fire.</li> </ul>		
<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Learner</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Notes</i>
0700	Prepare site, light fire in preparation for cooking activity				Log tracking, spiders web, blindfolds, Fire things,
0900	Greet Group, distribute name badges,	Planet earth	Recall how to play and respond to 'Planet Earth'		
0920	Fire Safety	Explain Boundaries and rules for fires	Listen and recall rules for 'round the fire' practice moving safely around the fire circle.	Fire Pit, fire wood, cooking supplies, marshmallow sticks.	Water and Burns kit on hand
0930	Children will make their own pizzas	Supervise and assist	Choose ingredients for their individual pizzas,	Dough, other ingredients. Dutch ovens, cooking utensils	Pizzas will cook in shifts between two dutch ovens.
1030	All pizzas will be cooked ready to start snack time by 1030 while they are cooking the children can cook marshmallows and play 'hey what you doin'	Supervise, assist and demonstrate marshmallow cooking. Demonstrate and supervise 'hey what YOU DOIN'	Cook marshmallows and take part in 'hey what you doin'	Marshmallows, sticks for toasting.	Snack time and marshmallow toasting will conclude by 1100
1100	Camouflage in the grass field	Supervise and join in with camouflage	Choose predator and prey animals and play camouflage		
1130	Free Play and team building to include games such as hug a	Supervise, demonstrate where	Free play	blindfolds	

1200	tree, and trust falls.	appropriate			
Remainin g time	Lunch				
	Free play				

### *Session Evaluation*

- Campfire cooking and pizza making overran considerably but not to the detriment of the activity, everyone seemed to enjoy it.
- 'Hey what you doin' was not appropriate for the age group, they did not understand it at all.
- Camouflage and spiderweb still most popular activities and although during the last session camouflage was only played in the woods on this occasion we used the long grass in the hay field and this proved to be even more fun for the children.
- More time was dedicated to self-directed free play during this session which worked very well, with several children making collections of sweet chestnut catkins, leaves and nut shells, this could easily be incorporated into an activity in the future.
- A lot of the team building was left out of this session due to time constraints and the children seemed to be too small to effectively take part in 'trust falls'
- Time did allow the log tracking activity to take place

**Session 3: 25/07/2011**

<i>Aims</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Art</li> <li>• Team Building from last session including hug a tree</li> </ul>					
<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Learner</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Notes</i>
0900	Greet group, distribute name badges, planet earth, camouflage	Lead group straight into camouflage in the hay field	Play camouflage		
1015	Fairy Plates	Supervise to ensure children collect items for their fairy plates safely	collect items they think will please the 'fairys'		Children can use cut stumps in the wood as their fairy plates to arrange a collection of woodland items.
1045	Snack time				
1100	Hug a tree				
1115	Painting/Environmental Art	Supervise to ensure children collect items for their paints safely	Collect items such as leaves and mud to make 'paints for their paintings	Blindfolds	
1200	Lunch				
Remaining time	Free play or camouflage				

*Session Evaluation*

- The hay field had been cut but this led to even more interesting games of camouflage with the learners building cover out of piles of cut grass, it even progressed onto a game which had the children build nests of grass and play as 'birds' with other children designated as foxes try and provoke them to move and give up their 'eggs'.
- Playing in the hay field overran quite considerably but was enjoyed by all
- Hug a tree was not as popular and seemed to be similar to the blindfold trail on the first session where the children did not seem to grasp the need to support a blindfolded partner.
- Fairy plates went well with some quite lavish fairy houses including slides and cups from acorn cups
- Painting would be more effective in autumn so berries are available or with an older group so with a little effort pigments could be made using plant materials

## Session 4 : 01/08/2011

<i>Aims</i>					
<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Learner</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Notes</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journey sticks</li> <li>• Tracking</li> <li>• Environmental Art</li> <li>• Free Play</li> </ul>				
0800	Check site, prepare equipment				
0900	Greet group, distribute name badges, prepare for mornings activities				
0915	Begin day with games/free play in the Hay field	Supervise and assist in Free play and games in the hay field	Explore and develop their own games,		Prepare to play camouflage etc
0945	Farm Walk and Journey Sticks	Distribute equipment for journey sticks explain the activity, demonstrate journey stick, lead and supervise farm walk	Make their own journey stick	Journey sticks, string	Supervise to ensure children only collect 'safe' things to add to their journey sticks. (see risk assessment;)
1030	Snack	Prepare next activity while nursery leaders supervise lunch			
1100	Tree faces	Prepare one tree face, explain activity and assist where necessary	Make a tree face using clay and things collected from the woods	Clay	Allow children to choose whether to work as a group or as individuals
1200	Lunch				
Remaining time	Water squirt defence game/Free Play	Demonstrate activity supervise and	Take part in games and free play	Water squirters, blindfolds	

		encourage free play			
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### *Session Evaluation*

- Journey sticks were beyond the ability of all the children, if a more simple activity could be devised which didn't require them to knot string it may have been more successful some lost interest very early on. HOW TO HOLD THEIR INTEREST?
- Farm walk went poorly, although the children were able to see buzzards and kestrels very clearly on the walk journey sticks did not hold their interest perhaps a prepared trail with activities/tokens along the way perhaps combine the farm walk with each one teach. HOW TO MAKE EACH ONE TEACH APPROPRIATE FOR 4 YEAR OLDS?
- The cut grass in the hay field had been bailed leading to more independent development of games and activities by the children, I'm the king of the castle seemed popular and camouflage/123 where are you were also popular.
- The children enjoyed making tree faces and some very elaborate sculptures where created.
- Water game was restricted due to time and only one round was played, but seemed popular and will be played again on the next session

## Session 5: 08/08/2011

<i>Aims</i>					
<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Learner</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Notes</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camp Fire Cooking</li> <li>• Marshmallow Toasting</li> <li>• Each One Teach</li> <li>• Free Play</li> </ul>				
0800	Check site, prepare activities				
0900	Greet group, distribute name badges, prepare for days activities	distribute name badges, prepare for days activities			
0915	Free Play in Hay field	Supervise			
0930	Games in the woods to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each One Teach with new animal cards</li> <li>• Spiderweb</li> <li>• Water squirt game</li> <li>• Free Play</li> <li>• Treasure Hunt</li> </ul>	Supervise and demonstrate where necessary	Free Play in Hay field  Take part in activities	Water squirter, spiderweb, Animal cards, 'tresure'	Each One Teach adapted: each child takes a card and identifies a 'classroom' they can make their own rules for the classroom and must 'teach' the other children and adults one fact about each animal they have. Treasure hunt to find ingredients for cake baking on camp fire.
1015	snack				
1030	continue with activities				
1100	congregate at fire pit	<b>Recap of Fire rules and boundaries</b> Demonstrate fire lighting with cotton wool and firesteel, supervision of learners taking	Firesteel firelighting	Firesteels, cotton wool	Close supervision of children during fire lighting. Only two children at one time per adult

1130	Preparation of campfire meal, hotdogs and cakes baked in dutch oven also marshmallow toasting	part in fire lighting Supervision of children during marshmallow toasting	Add 'treasure' (chocolate chips) found during woodland treasure hunt to cake mix, toast marshmallows	Marshmallows, toasting sticks, ingredients cookware.	
1200	Session concludes				

### *Session Evaluation*

- The bales from the hay field had been collected and left little opportunity for games but the children were happy to continue their 'FREE PLAY' in the woods
- With this being the final session learners were keen to keep their name badges.
- All the games in the woods went well, the spiderweb was again popular, and the children managed to convince the adults that there wasn't really a giant spider in the spider web and the web was really made of string.
- The adaptation of Each One Teach went reasonably well, although I had hoped that the children would focus on facts they could glean from the pictures on the cards such as size, shape, colour, what they thought the animal or bird felt like, but several children asked the adults to help them read the card so they could give more information, which was satisfying to see their interest in the animals but led to the game dominating the time spent in the woods on this session.
- One Child who had not attended before seemed very reluctant to join in or to talk but did take part in more practical tasks and was given an opportunity to demonstrate to the other children how to use a firesteel.
- Camp fire cooking worked very well with the exception of the cake baking, for some reason the cakes did not cook very well, with one batch being burnt and a second batch tasting very smoky, whether due to the type of wood being burnt or a new batch of tinfoil I don't know. The children enjoyed their hotdogs and marshmallows cooked on the fire though.

## Evaluation and Critical Analysis of Forest School Course (Unit CAK056; Assessment Criteria 2.2, 2.3)

This was the first time I had worked with children this young so my first priority when preparing material for this course was to adapt activities I was used to doing with older children. I found that some trial and error was needed in adapting these activities and that many of my first attempts were still too advanced for this age group. The children adapted well to all the activities including most of those which were a little beyond their ability and after the first few sessions had the confidence to make their own interpretation of the activity so that they could bring it within their grasp if I had not made it simple enough. It was pointed out that I could have included a short demonstration in the introduction of the activity where appropriate to further aid comprehension.

Some adaptations which have resulted from my experience running this course include:

- Low level spider web, I have used a large spider web with age groups up to adult before where the team game would be for all members to pass through a different whole in the web including ones up to 8-10 feet from the ground with the assistance of their team. For the purpose of this course for younger children a ground level spider web would be much more appropriate.
- Each One Teach Pictures, For older age groups Each One Teach with written information about a bird or animal on the back of a picture card is an excellent way to involve learners in learning about wildlife. For this age group cards without written information and with perhaps cartoon illustrations to enhance the appearance of the card and draw attention to identifying features of the animal or bird in question or to its habitat, prey or predators would be more appropriate.
- Journey cards: Instead of using a stick with a string attached a piece of heavy duty card with a strip of wide double sided tape can be used for collection of leaves/berries etc.. I didn't try this with the group but think it would be effective and much more child friendly as there are no knots to tie.

I found it difficult to find age appropriate camp fire games for the children to play around the campfire, also closer liaison with the nursery staff and having an activity prepared that they could run should it be necessary would have been very beneficial especially with regard to the camp fire activities, as I was often busy taking care of cooking around the campfire. Also for future reference a second member of staff should always be present around the campfire especially where one is busy with cooking. One camp fire game in particular that I tried didn't work at all well and it may be easier to stick to campfire songs and marshmallow toasting.

I noticed during the duration of the course that some children enjoyed some activities more than others, I could have predicted this beforehand but in retrospect I could have allowed a choice of activity for the children to choose from, and run them simultaneously. Perhaps made more 'free play' time available with a choice of activities set up for them to take part in as a group or as pairs or even individuals as and when they wished. Saying that though with children this young the more structured approach I took may have been best. I have had mixed results with allowing older groups

this level of freedom with some enthusiastically taking part in any activities available or carrying on with their own 'thing' (I have seen great results come from self-directed time on bushcraft courses) but have seen others take the typical 'teenager attitude' of not being enthusiastic about anything and achieving very little. For the younger children perhaps a gradual acclimatisation to this type of freedom in the woods would be beneficial, and this is where I think much longer courses would be particularly beneficial. For example if a course was to be run weekly for a whole term (30-35 weeks) even very young children by the end of that period would be able to have reached the level of being able to perform simple tasks using tools such as bow saws and would reach a level of independence that is not common among younger children these days.

I did find that this group of children seemed to be hampered when it came to free play by not being very imaginative. They would happily follow my lead in an activity but didn't seem to come up with very many of their own ideas. For example during Each one Teach on the final session they were tasked with picking a tree which would be their 'classroom' and I asked them to each think of one rule that the other children and adults would have to follow while they were in the classroom. I did an example and asked everyone to knock before entering the classroom, I gave one more example saying that they could ask that everyone hold their hands on their head while in the classroom. Of the eleven children present not one made up their own rules in each 'classroom' it was either knocking or hands on heads. I don't know if it would be a generalisation to say that children nowadays are less imaginative than they used to be, perhaps with TV and computer games there is less need for children to develop an imagination but it would be great to see children acting the part of animals as they learn about their behaviour and habitat, I threw myself into it and to illustrate some of the characteristics of a certain animal we were discussing pretended to be one (a sea otter breaking shells while floating in the water was one example) but didn't see any of the children pretending to be animals at any point.

The one time that the children's imagination was apparent was during craft activities especially Fairly Plates where the most elaborate of fairy mansions were built from moss, twigs and leaves, with sticks becoming waterslides, acorn cups becoming cups and bowls, tree stumps becoming houses and berries and nuts becoming sumptuous banquets. Perhaps in future courses finding a way to bring this level of imagination to free play could be aided by focusing some more of the structured activities on being imaginative and hoping it bleeds through into free play.

Activities such as:

- environmental art,
- fairy plates,
- blobsters,
- storytelling,
- tree faces,
- even silent sits where children are encouraged to represent sounds they may hear in the woods on a piece of paper using symbols of their own invention.

I believe that a child's imagination is a wonderful thing, and certainly a much better way of entertaining a child than a computer game or television.

In retrospect I would have liked to extend the free play opportunities to more of a 'free explore' possibly with the inclusion of age appropriate field guides to allow a chance for the children to explore the woods and fields under their own initiative (with appropriate supervision of course) allowing them to find out what they can about the plants and animals in the area, collecting things, leaves, catkins etc.. Even telling stories of their adventures at the end, the problem with this particularly at this site although not unique to it was the presence of broken glass and other potentially hazardous litter from illegal use of the site. However thorough a check of the site there is no way to collect all the broken glass and there is a limit to how much of the area can be cordoned off. Also restricting the area too much would detract from the 'free explore' principle. This 'free explore' would I feel be a very valuable activity for the children and would certainly be a great help in meeting the environmental and educational objectives of a forest school.

I found throughout the course that my language slowly adapted to the age group, at first I found it hard to deliver instructions and information at the level of the learners and struggled to not expound on a topic beyond the comprehension of the children. Again this is because I am used to working with much older children and adults in a college setting. By the end of the course however I had at least begun to adapt my language and delivery to the age group but it will take more practice.

Prior to the course I met with the nursery leaders to discuss potential activities and needs of particular children, with this in mind I prepared the repertoire of activities that I later delivered. My plans were adapted from week to week as I became more familiar with the group I was dealing with and as the children expressed an interest in a particular topic or activity. For the same reason some activities were dropped from future sessions as it became apparent that the children did not engage well with it or as more appropriate activities were chosen. As I have already mentioned the greatest task in designing the course and including elements to meet the needs of the group was adapting my usual repertoire of activities and indeed my whole approach to the age group in question. I feel that this was reasonably successful in that the children engaged with the vast majority of the activities and indeed were able to demonstrate their own initiative in many cases and rise to the challenge to take part in activities which due to my delivery or poor choice were really above their usual ability. With critical review of each session afterwards though I was able to bring the sessions into line with the needs of the learners more effectively once I had gauged their individual needs and interests, this was a process that was on-going throughout and during the sessions with changes and adaptations being made constantly. From simple things like in paired games where one child is required to wear a blindfold and the other to lead, swapping the blindfold from one child to another as it becomes apparent that one child is not comfortable being blindfolded, to one boy who was very quiet and unwilling to talk but was very happy to show the other children how to do something being given a specific task to demonstrate a skill. Differentiating the needs of the learners was easier with this young age group than older learners as they make it very clear what they want/need "excuse me but I'm getting a bit bored" leaves little room for doubt that that particular activity is not holding the interest of that child. As the course progressed some children who were uncomfortable with certain activities at the beginning of the course (such as blindfold games) with encouragement and patience took part later in the course quite happily, fulfilling another goal of Forest Schools as they gained in confidence self-esteem.

## Child Development Study (Unit CAK057; assessment criteria 1.1, 1.2)

Included in the critical evaluation of each session upon completion a review of the development and progress of two particular learners was carried out to assess their development as a result of participation in Forest Schools. I feel that it is in the long term 30-35 week courses or even in regular on-going involvement with Forest Schools that the real development will be noticed over a longer period of time but even in these short weeks the two subjects of this study demonstrated considerable development and growth in self-confidence and confidence in their new 'Forest' environment.

### Child A

Child A was obviously distressed at the thought of being left by his mother on the first session, although I'm not sure if that is a normal response to being dropped off at nursery or if it was because of the new surroundings at the Forest Schools site. Throughout that first session he seemed less willing than others to join in especially on the blindfold trail which he did not fully take part in and even on the spider web which was very popular with the other children. Although he did not cry throughout the session as I feared he might when I saw him getting dropped off he certainly was not entirely comfortable or happy.

However in contrast the following week he seemed much happier and enthusiastically took part in the first activity of making preparing pizzas to cook on the camp fire. His enjoyment of the first activity and the snacks no doubt seemed to carry over into the rest of the day and he was much happier and even enthusiastically took part in the spider web.

Over the following weeks although there were a few more tears on one occasion as he was dropped off he was always quick to join in the activities and I saw him more and more with a huge grin on his face as he raced around to hide in the grass or take part in an activity. He seemed to be more comfortable working on his own than in a group and managed to make a spectacular tree face on the fourth session with no help, I allowed the children where possible to choose whether to work as small groups or as individuals for activities such as Fairy plates and craft activities such as the tree faces and he seemed to benefit from this as he could work on his own. However during the more active games such as camouflage he seemed inclined to stay with another person as they ran to hide and was certainly happier doing the hiding rather than the seeking.

By the end of the course he had certainly developed a lot in confidence and seemed very comfortable in the woods and even with a blindfold on to take part in the water squirt game (although being able to squirt people with water may have been an incentive to put on the blindfold) something he had not been willing to do on the first session.

### Child B

One of the quieter children during the first session although keen to take part there was certainly no sign that she would be willing to volunteer for tasks. Although she was obviously quiet I didn't think much of it until one of the nursery leaders mentioned that she was normally particularly quiet and reserved. It did not take her long though even during the first session to become excited about taking part in the activities and by the third week she was volunteering for tasks and asking for assignments during activities and interacting very well with the other children. She almost became one of the louder children and took a very active part in all the activities and was one of the more active and creative during free play making collections of leaves catkins and other things she found in the woods.

She worked particularly well with the other children during craft activities and took particularly well to the environmental art activities and made one of the most successful journey sticks during the fourth session.

By the final session she was certainly not the quietest and showed no shyness as she took part in Each one Teach telling other children all about the animals on the card she had selected, and approaching me with requests. She enthusiastically took part in camouflage and was especially keen of being the 'seeker' or predator seeking out the 'prey' the hidden children.

## Items to be used in a Forest School Setting (Unit CAK058; Assessment criteria 4.1, 4.3)

### Spider web



This spider web was created as a temporary feature of the Forest Schools site for use by the children taking part in the Forest school course. There are many ways it can be used. Most effective with older groups where it is central to an excellent team game, the team must all get from one side to the other without touching the web and without using a hole more than once, to use the topmost holes requires some ingenuity and exertion from the team members as they lift their teammates through the holes. For younger children this lower level web was built and with assistance from adult leaders proved very enjoyable for the children, in retrospect and even lower one would have been better. As a permanent feature of a site these webs can be made quite elaborate. For relevant risk assessment see appendices.

## Name Badges



Simple name badges for adults and learners certainly help to identify children for the first session or two. It can be fun to allow children to personalise their own name badges. On the first session of the course make shift name badges were made from large leaves which the children wrote their names on. From the second session onward these more permanent name badges were used and the children kept them at the conclusion of the course.

## Benches



These simple benches were constructed for use around a camp fire on a Forest Schools site, easy to make and very secure the long benches can be given extra security by a loop of wire attaching the bench to the legs, although not necessary and possibly undesirable as it makes the bench harder to

relocate may be desirable from a safety point of view to give extra stability and avoid trapped fingers.

The simple round lengths could be used as effective seats or as pot stands for camp fire cooking or as props for activities such as Toxic River.



### Bow Saw



Both a useful tool in the forest school setting and an excellent activity for older groups;



First take a green stick much longer than the saw blade itself and warm it over your fire to loosen the fibers in the wood and make it easier to bend, Next begin to bend the stick across your knee measuring as you go against the length of the blade, make sure there is still plenty of spring in the stick so that the handle you make will hold the blade taught, if the blade is not tight it won't cut.



When you have created a curve that is the right size cut off any excess length in the stick and make two notches in each end, one to accommodate the blade of the saw and the other perpendicular to it to accommodate a small hardwood dowel which will secure the blade in place.



Prepare a small dowel for each end of the blade, it will have to be whittled from hard wood as the flex of the wooden handle will put a lot of pressure on the dowel.



Insert the dowels into the holes at each end of the blade and slot the blade and dowel into the notches you have made.



The first end will be easy as for the other end you will have to bend the stick over and slot the opposite end of the blade and the dowel into their notches, this might be quite difficult so be careful not to get your fingers trapped as you locate the blade in its notches.



**The finished article in action**

## Shelter Building

Shelter building is a great activity for Forest Schools and even if there is no plan to do any shelter building during any given session it is important that a Forest school leader can confidently build a range of shelters. In line with risk assessments carried out for Forest school activities a few major health and safety points regarding shelter building include:

- Overhanging branches and dead tree tops. These are known as 'widowmakers' in forestry circles quite rightly as even with no encouragement from high wind they can often crash down without warning. proper survey of a shelter building site should be made before shelters are constructed to ensure there are none of these overhanging hazards.
- Guy lines:



This picture clearly illustrates the need for care when pitching shelters which require guy lines young children are particularly likely to forget about guy lines so brightly colours lines possibly with coloured tassels attached. Glow in the dark lines are also available.

- Hazards on the ground:



One site I use is a well-established farm shelter belt planted with a mixture of broad-leaved tree species but this belt covers what was an old dairy and still present are a lot of the concrete foundations and ironmongery from the old building mostly now covered and almost invisible under the loss and ground flora they still present a trip hazard and could inflict very severe injuries if someone was to fall on something like this.

- Structural integrity of the shelter:

Especially with regard to natural shelters which may have heavy poles or a considerable weight of material above the occupants of the shelter the shelter itself must be very secure and strong with the frame ideally being made of green wood for strength and any necessary lashings being made very securely.

### Shelters

Some shelters I have been involved with building either on my own or as part of a team can be seen bellow:



A large lean-to shelter and outdoor classroom under construction the shelter incorporates a fireplace made entirely from natural material in small broad-leafed copse surrounded by an area of coniferous plantation. The roof/walls of the shelter are made from strips of cedar bark left over after a harvester had cut a block of cedar.



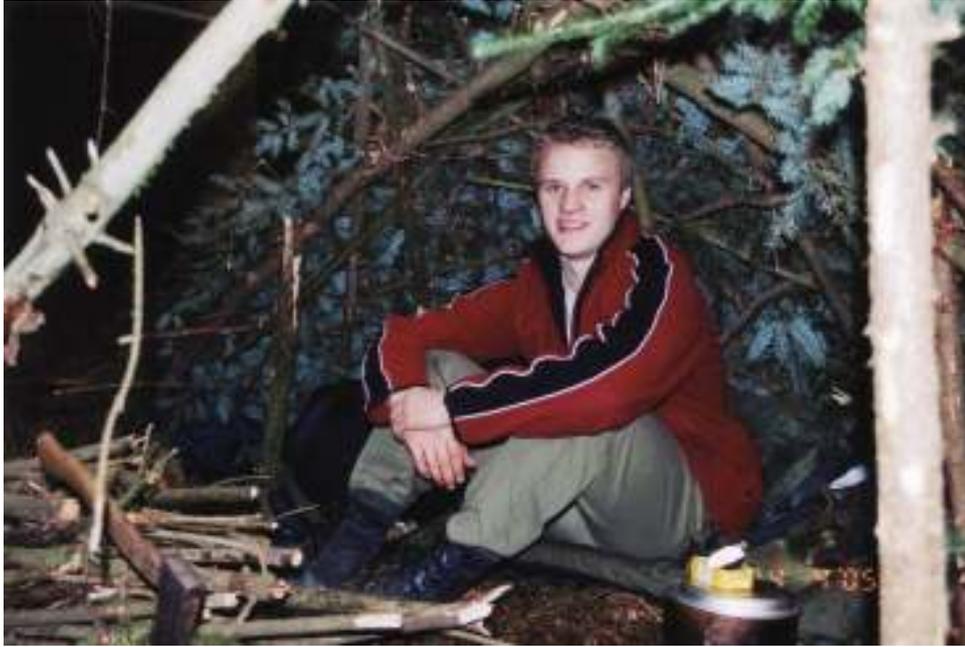
The completed shelter in use



A thermal A frame shelter under construction, a strong green wood frame allows a considerable weight of dead wood from the forest floor to be used to build up the walls of the shelter before leaf litter can be stacked to a depth of 1-2 feet. This kind of shelter will keep you warm even without a sleeping bag if you fill the inside with dry leaves or grass.



This is the inside of a large dining shelter built to accommodate up to fifty children at a residential environmental education centre.



This is a simple individual shelter incorporating a hooped half dome shaped lean-to type structure and a bed, I build this shelter over the course of a couple of hours and it kept very heavy rain off me for the following five days (the roof was made of almost three feet of spruce boughs and other material).

## Tools

The tools selected for use during forest school activities is going to depend on a number of factors;

- The planned activities,
- The age of the group,
- The ability of the group,
- The length of the forest school course, (even very young children if they are taking part in Forest School activities for a whole term)

The following tools will be useful to almost all forest school leaders;



Small whittling knife; the smaller knife on the right is a very useful first knife to use as an introduction to edged tools for children and teenagers. In my experience most of the injuries that occur when inexperienced people use knives are due to bad technique and are often minor piercing wounds inflicted with the point of last inch or two of the knife blade. I have therefore started to use the smaller of the two knives shown in this picture as the standard knife which I use with groups all the way up teenagers and young adults. Using these smaller knives aids the development of fine motor skills and allows students to do all the tasks that a larger knife can do, anything that does require a larger blade can be undertaken with the appropriate specialist tool such as a billhook or saw. These knives in the forest school setting are perfect for a number of tasks including:

- Preparation of sticks/skewers for campfire cooking
- Simple craft/whittling tasks such as making whistles, tongs, spoons.
- Food preparation
- Collection of small resources such as material for cordage
- Other simple cutting tasks.



The bow saw is going to be a very useful tool for forest school leaders, not only is it a traditional countryside tool but given it's design a forest school leader can easily assist a young participant using the opposite end of the handle. Also as shown on pages 27-29 they can be easily made in the woods and in fact this is an excellent activity for older Forest School participants. In the forest school setting the bow saw is perfect for a number of tasks including:

- Firewood collection/preparation
- Processing of wood for craft projects
- Preparation of wood/timber for building and shelter building projects



I always carry a small folding spade when leading groups, when having groups at my own site it is a great tool for shovelling dirt to extinguish camp fires and for building pit ovens.

*Potato Peelers??*

I'm not convinced of the usefulness of the potato peeler in introducing children to carving or knife use, the only thing you can realistically do with a potato peeler is to peel bark from sticks and even then only if it soft. Simple tasks like the preparation of a stick for marshmallow toasting lend themselves excellently to being a child's first experience with knife use and if suitable supervision and assistance is provided there will be no safety issues. If the course is long enough even young children can become confident in the use of edged tools.

**Specialist Tools**

### *Billhook;*



The billhook has been used traditionally by countrymen in this country for hundreds of years for a multitude of tasks, from hedge laying to coppicing. There are many different designs of billhook associated with specific tasks or areas of the country. The billhook seems to be used quite a lot in Forest school settings possibly because it does not have the overtly offensive image of a machete and is safer to use than an axe but it is in fact quite a specialist tool and many of the tasks that it is pressed to are not really suited to it. However teaching Forest schools participants about the management of the countryside would be an excellent part of an extended course including tasks such as coppicing and it is at these tasks that a billhook excels and where it becomes truly useful to the Forest School practitioner. In the forest school setting bill hooks are perfect for a number of tasks including:

- Woodland management tasks such as coppicing
- Craft tasks such as making mallets

### *Other knives;*



The chisel pointed knife is another one I have used with younger groups having ground the chisel edge away to remove the sharp edge the knife proved very safe to use but the point of a knife is very useful and any advantage in safety was outweighed by the fact that the knife did not perform all the tasks that it needed to. The bright orange knives are great for keeping an eye on where tools are and

I have used these extensively with groups and continue to do so but the smaller knives have become my first choice for activities with younger children.

### *Axes;*



For older groups taking part in forest schools axes are a useful tool, they are very versatile and are essential for chopping firewood and producing larger carvings and carrying out greenwood work projects which can be an excellent part of courses for older participants and/or on extended courses. Axes require close supervision from an experienced leader as it is easy for inexperienced users to pick up bad technique and given the force with which an axe is swung the potential for severe injury is high if the correct techniques are not taught early on. In the forest school setting axes are perfect for a number of tasks including:

- Firewood collection and preparation
- Craft tasks
- Building and shelter building projects

### *Specialist carving tools*



For older groups who are likely to be taking part in extended courses and learning more advanced woodland skills specialist tools like the spoon knives in the picture or chip carving knives and gouges may be useful for producing spoons and bowls and carving simple designs and patterns.

### *Penknives*



A must have tool for the forest school leader for any number of simple tasks but perhaps not for the forest school participant. Even securely locking penknives have a certain flex at the hinge of the knife which does not promote confident use or aid the development of technique. Also given the nature of any folding knife even those which lock there is the chance that the lock could fail or not be applied correctly leading to injury.

A fixed blade knife is the best choice for forest schools if the participants are old enough to be trusted with the knives small locking knives in sturdy sheaths can be safely carried by each participant, and will always be on display and easy to keep track of. For younger participants the knives can be shared out at the appropriate time and collected again afterwards. Penknives are not only harder to keep track of but also can especially if they are used regularly unfold by mistake causing potential injury.



## Fire and Cooking



Taking part in firelighting is quite often the highlight of a young participants forest school experience to make it as memorable as possible there are a number of different techniques and methods that can be used to make to most of the situation.

### *Firesteels*



Firesteels and cotton wool are the common sense choice for firelighting with forest school participants; I have had success with this method even with very young and severely handicapped participants.

### *Flint and steel*



Survival and safety school 2011

For more of a challenge a traditional flint and steel and charcloth or natural tinders may be suitable for older more able participants.

### *Friction Fire*



For an even greater firelighting challenge for forest school groups friction firelighting is an option. This is really only an option for older groups as a certain level of strength and dexterity is required although it may still be suitable as a demonstration to younger or less able groups.

### *Natural Tinder*

For an extra challenge participants can collect natural tinder rather than using cotton wool and other tinder provided by the forest school leader.

*For the Forest School Leader*

The weather will not always be kind to you or your groups during your forest school course and the forest school leader should always be equipped to get a fire lit despite bad conditions, if this means carrying matches or a lighter then you will have to include these in your kit. But being able to get a fire lit under even bad conditions will certainly impress your students.

*Food Hygiene*

If food preparation is going to be a regular part of your forest school course then the forest school leader should have some degree of food hygiene training, such as a food safety certificate. From the point of view of an organisation offering forest school courses, the organisation must comply with current legislation regarding food hygiene and preparation, and as such should be expected to train staff to allow them to safely and hygienically prepare food for participants.

In the forest school setting there is particular need for care with regard to food preparation as any food prep is going to take place outside increasing the risk of food poisoning from micro-organisms including bacteria, viruses and moulds found far more commonly in soil and leaf litter than in a clean kitchen. An added concern is that although anyone can get food poisoning some people, including children, are more likely to have serious symptoms (Bupa 2010).

See Appendix 2 for a publication by the scouts of how to ensure hygienic camp cooking.

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