

An exploration into: Can Forest School support a Child's Emotional Resilience

Abstract

The question chosen to explore is: Can Forest School Support a Child's Emotional Resilience? The benefits of spending time in the outdoor natural environment has a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing, enabling peace and contentment. Can forest school support a child with the building of resilience and confidence? For children to become emotionally resilient they need to learn that making mistakes is good in order to learn and progress. The reason this research project has been chosen is because it is interesting to see how children use their emotional resilience for different interactions, learning to become self-aware and to self-regulate. Children through these actions learn to express emotions, learn to be empathic towards, value and respect the emotions of their peers. The sample for this research will be four children that have been picked from stratified sampling, the children will be one boy and girl the being the youngest, and one boy and girl being the oldest in their cohort. The reason for this sample is to see how they all experience emotional resilience differently regardless of their age and gender. The method types that will be used are; Qualitative method, visual methods through observation also encouraging the children to take part in the research themselves by involving them. Through observation, unstructured and semi-structured discussion to assist with the collection of data needed for the research project. Ethical considerations will all be taken with importance for ensuring the children are safe during the time the research would be carried out, the children will have the right to express themselves and to share their voice and perspective through their experiences, The children involved in the research will have been given consent from their parents and/or guardian to take part, the children also have the right to decide if they assent in the research themselves.

Literature review

The purpose of this paper is to research how forest school can support a child's emotional resilience, if there is an impact on how a child can regulate their emotional response when faced with emotional challenges. From the Journal (What is resilience, The Canadian journal of psychiatry, 2010) Resilience is how a person can withstand adversity without developing any negative or mental health outcomes. So, to be resilient is to have the

ability to overcome challenges and to face these challenges head on, to problem solve for a positive outcome. The book (Resilience for today: gaining strength from adversity,2003) Also suggests that the idea of resilience is the human capacity to deal with, to overcome and to learn from, or even be transformed by the inevitable adversities of life. The book also suggests that children have difficulty in becoming resilient and learn how to become resilient through the help of adults. It also suggests how children will not accept help from just any adult but from an adult that the child has come to trust, respect, love of has bonded with the adult. Suggesting that trust is a key factor to promoting resilience through role modelling, setting the foundations and becoming the basis for promoting other resilience factors. The purpose of this paper is to look at emotional resilience, how children learn to manage their emotional reactions, when they face challenges or have obstacles to overcome. How will this help to develop reflective thinking, by children having the capacity to develop the skill to manage their own emotional reactions in the face of difficulties, (The guide to developing emotional resilience,2015). The Journal of, (The impact and effect of emotional resilience, 2018) suggests that there are individual factors that influence emotional resilience such as, self-awareness, reflection, personal development, positive thinking and cognitive flexibility. Children's emotional reactions from not being able to control their emotions and that can have a negative impact on the child such as, anger, anxiety, extreme levels of emotional reactions are rage, panic, down or depressed, stated in the journal of (The covid-19 pandemic and mental health, 2020).

Forest school is an outdoor setting, that is a safe environment that is not always necessarily limited to a woodland area, an environment that is used in all weathers, (The forest school association,2018) Forest school is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, the environment and sessions need and require planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing, these are all integral elements of forest school. The Journal ("Our forest school isn't just the school: micro-communities for social and emotional development", 2023). The environment in which forest school takes place is to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world. Aiming to promote and develop holistic development, to encourage resilient, confident, independent and creative learners. Forest school gives the opportunity for children to take supported risks that are appropriate for environment and the individuals, Forest school supports children and young people to develop socially and emotionally, (Roger. A Heart, & Maria Ferndnanda, 2013)

How can resilience be facilitated at forest school, by allowing two factors, the environment and the staff that support it, for example the forest school environment facilitates learners through imagination, provides loose parts to use for problem solving, creation and the opportunity to improvise, to adapt and overcome which is a challenge itself. The natural environment of forest school exposes children to the natural elements, experiencing all types of weather, when children are in nature, they are exposed to a lower stimulus allowing for them experience a less sensitised environment. The staff that are supporting forest school or the forest school leader, when invited to play should encourage children to explore, to help solve problems and setbacks, teach coping strategies and to provide the children with helpful input. The adults in forest school should be continually modelling

resilience and should empower the children by helping to shape self-awareness, self-esteem and motivation. Can forest school support a child's emotional resilience, by becoming a key component of mental wellbeing, to reduce anxiety and stress, learn through resilience to achieve the ability to solve a problem that they are presented with, to learn how to deal with pressure, to experience interaction with risks. Allowing the child to develop the lifelong skill of resilience through individual experience. From the book (Building Confidence, Resilience and Emotional Intelligence in young children) suggests that forest school supports both confidence building and resilience because of the opportunities that forest school offers for managing risk; climbing, building, balancing, carrying resources, using tools, fire lighting and many more options. Whenever a child takes a risk, they not just building physical strength but also their abilities to grow confidence and self-esteem. The book also suggests that when children are given the opportunity to take risk or react to the mud on their hand or in their hair, they learn to decide to overcome that challenge or to have a melt down because they need to learn from the experience develop emotional resilience to learn to regulate their emotions and become more self-aware. The classroom settings in schools are becoming more natural and calming, natural resources are being used more and more in the early years setting, to bring calming effects into the classroom, to support children with self-regulation within the classroom setting (Benefits of Montessori Education, no date).

Methodological considerations

To begin the process of the Methodological Considerations, a selection of children will be picked from stratified sampling, (Sampling Methods, no date) dividing the cohort into groups to select the children through their birth dates. For this research, four children from the Early Years cohort will be picked from the Reception class setting, the children will be picked from the same cohort and will be the oldest boy and girl and the youngest boy and girl in this setting. The children are picked from their date of birth and the research should be inclusive, this includes any child that has SEND. The Stratified sampling was chosen for the research to pick the oldest and youngest children, male and female to show how differently they will use their emotional resilience through actively taking part in and how they interact with forest school. Qualitative research would be used to collect data by observing the children show their feelings and emotions and how they manage these through their own experiences and perspectives, these emotions can be happy, excited, worried, scare anxious or even proud. To use observation in this research, a scaffold must be prepared by the Researcher for to use in the research and to also include two practitioners taking part in the observations, also using an emotional resilience scale to support alongside the scaffolding. The pros of using an emotional resilience scale will allow the research to show which areas of forest school the children overcame their emotions, how they were able deal with their emotional reactions. Using

a scaffold will set the guide for what is being observed so that each adult knows what evidence the researcher is looking for and that all adults involved know exactly what they are doing with the view to be learning more about emotional resilience. Observations can have disadvantages if there is not a structured plan to follow as each adult could be watching and observing the children differently, resulting in perspectives that do not match the research intended to be studied. The Mosaic approach reading by Alison Clark, (2005) suggests that and combines the traditional methodology of observation and interviewing supports the child to have self-reflection. Other methods of data collection from visual methods to be included in the study will be recordings of the observations, photographs also taken from the observation, note taking from all adults involved guided from the scaffold. As part of collecting data informal conversation with practitioners to share information. (The Mosaic approach reading by Alison Clark, 2005) suggests that and agrees that children should be able to take part in the methodology of observation (Clark and Moss, 2002; Clark, 2003), developed the study of the mosaic approach to include the 'voice of the child' empowering the children to be involved and part of their research will allow them to reflect on their emotions and feelings supporting for semi-structured discussion and open-ended questions when expressing how they felt about their experiences in forest school. Allowing the children to have a viewing time to watch their observation through the recording taken will also support how they learn about their emotional resilience. Having the children draw a picture or a map of forest school showing themselves in forest school and asking them to use certain colours to express their feelings, for example: Blue for calm and relaxed, Green for happy, orange for frustrated and red for angry. The children can use the colours then to talk about how they felt, why they felt that way and how and what they did to problem solve or overcome the emotion. (Clark A, (2005) Using the mosaic approach to see and listen to young children's perspectives. (From the Journal, The Emilia Approach-Advanced Reflections, 1998) Reggio Emilia suggested that children should be able to translate their voice through drawing, allowing for discussion as the children can read their drawings and explain to an adult their emotions. When taking place with the semi-structured discussions, the children could be asked questions such as, how did you feel when you climbed up the tree? Did you feel brave or scared? How did it make you feel when your friend helped you build your fort? Did you like working as a team? Did you think it was kind when you were helped up after you fell over? Depending on their experiences all four children will have different answers to different questions, Child A, Child B, Child C, Child D, the discussions that they will all have will be individual them, using the observation videos, the photographs taken and the picture they drew will all show a perspective of the feelings they experienced. Having these different types of evidence will help for better understanding of their emotional resilience for both child and adult. The child could be asked how they felt at the time, and could they face a challenge if they experience one by reflecting and talking about what steps they could take differently, were they happy in their interactions or did they feel, frustrated, maybe they might not know how they felt at the time of their experience. It is important for the research that when researching we are not biased by remembering the Hawthorne and Halo effects by not just assuming that just because of a child's age and gender that they will react with the emotions that would think to expect

from a particular child. Children behave and react differently to each environment they are in, allowing adults to see their different capabilities. (The article, Halo Effect in Peer Review, 2019) When observing the children, the evidence observed may be surprising as there may be a child whose experience were not quite what they were expected to be, for example Child B is extremely confident in a classroom setting but has very low confidence in the forest school environment resulting in a lot of emotional behaviour, not as confident in an outdoor environment as Child D who struggles with their emotional resilience and not able to self-regulate inside the classroom setting. The quantitative method for this research is not necessary as the research is reliant on the qualitative method. Triangulation in research is the use of more than one approach to a question and is considered to be a credible and trustworthy method but is mostly effective when using both quantitative and qualitative methods together, however triangulation has its disadvantages as there are criticisms of using the triangulation method in research as the method does not always differentiate the data assuming it to be the same, researchers prefer the mixed method. (Article, Understanding triangulation in research, 2013). When taking place with the semi-structured discussions, the children could be asked questions.

Ethical Considerations

Before this research can begin the Ethical considerations must be taken into account, the BERA Guidelines (BERA, 2011, p.5) states that educational researchers should operate with the view to follow these guidelines. There are ethical considerations involving research that must be taken into account, (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) from the Article (Ethical Research with children, 2013) There are 5 areas of ethical concern to consider such as (1) assent or willingness to participate, (2) informed consent and assent from parents and guardians, including consent to visual methods, (3) issues of disclosure, (4) power imbalances and, (5) presentations of the child. (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004 also suggests that 'procedural ethics and ethics in practice are necessary for the research of ethics and "procedural ethics" seeks to involve approval from ethics committees and review boards. The importance of ethics in practice refers to the everyday issues that may arise. While conducting research, supporting to prevent risks to participants and researcher, the researcher must know how to respond or act in a moment. The participants must be treated with dignity and their assent or willingness to participate is fully consented, (Dockett, Einar Dotti & Perry 2009, Dockett & Perry 2011; Mishra, Antle & Regehr, 2004) all agree with these ethical considerations.

The Mosaic approach places a great emphasis on the child voice, in response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 2015) from the (European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 2020). (Roberts-Holmes, G, 2018) suggested that acting on children's input, views and opinions, gives them a sense of happiness and self-respect by having their voice listened to. Listening to children, to what they are telling you, ensures that the evidence of the research being studied can respond to the children's right agenda. In the view to explore, Can Forest school support a child's

emotional resilience? The chosen participants will be introduced to the research to gain knowledge about the time they would be spending in forest school and the activities that they will be partaking in. Parents and/or guardians will receive information on the research their child has been chosen to participate in along with a consent form explaining that there will also be visual observations, with recordings and photographs to share with the child and themselves if they wish to view them. Confidentiality and Data protection agreements will be signed by the researcher. As both a practitioner in the school also the researcher has access to an allocated iPad that is pin protected, all staff laptops are encrypted and protected with a bit locker pin and log in. At the school involve where the research would be carried out, the researcher would be expected to follow in accordance their data protection policy and the privacy policy, All staff involved will also need to have a current DBS to be a part of the research .The observations and photographs will be transferred to the school's hard drive that is encrypted, Only the researcher and allocated staff would have access to view any type of visual methods. The Researcher will follow the school's policy regarding confidentiality and data protection, the identity of the children will be kept confidential, by only referring to them as such as Child A, Child B, Child D any evidence that is recorded will have the children listed. The (Protecting confidentiality handbook,) suggests that agreements must be done to protect a person and what will be done with their data (Sieber,1992) if a researcher was to identify a certain school that they were researching at then it could be possible for the participants to be identified. Confidential agreements with the school, university and the participants should be signed to enable the research to be carried out. To carry out this research the university (UWTSD, Research Ethics & Integrity code of Practice, July 2017) As a researcher it is expected that the highest ethical standards are maintained, ensuring that the values of honesty, rigor, openness, care and respect are carried out during research to meet these aims. This code of practice applies to all that attend the university including academics and staff. The code of practices states that any kind of research carried out must abide by this policy, the procedures and guidelines are overseen by the University's Ethics Committee, also working with the University's Data Protection Officer. The participants' parents and practitioners involved with the research being carried out will be aware of the strict guidelines that the research must be conducted under, there will be a copy given to read with the consent forms. It is important for the research to be able to be conducted so that the parents and/or guardians have access to all the information regarding the research and guidelines the research will be following. During the research each child will have the right to freedom of thought and expression, in accordance with their age and maturity, (Roger A. Heart, Maria Fernanda). During the research the children will have the freedom to express themselves within safe limitations to secure that they are safe, such as taking the risk of climbing- will they be able to get themselves down safely, the materials that they may use to build with, to make sure that they are suitable, to limit risk of accidental injury, A risk assessment should be carried out to ensure that any child, member of staff participating will not come under any risk, such as not being forest school trained and lighting a first school campfire or not teaching the children the rules so that they know not to walk across basecamp an onto a unsupervised campfire. Forest school should support managed risk where the child is allowed to find their limitations on what the children

themselves would consider to be a risk that they will find challenging so they may not attempt for themselves until they are ready.(Investigation of forest school, 2020) suggests that there could be a fear of blame for practitioners that are partaking in forest school who are not trained and may feel anxious, if that was to be the case then this feeling of anxiousness may pass onto the children which then will have a negative effect on the children resulting in experiencing negative emotional resilience instead of learning how to build on their emotional resilience to build their ability to control their emotions, forest school should be fun , well- structured and a positive environment.

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