

Research Project: Case Study based on an Electives Experience

An exploratory case study arising from practice (noticing) and investigated further through identified research tools. The assignment concludes with the identification of an intervention which can be piloted throughout Professional Teaching Experience and evidenced through reflection in the Professional Learning Standards. (4000 words)

Target 1	Include targets from your previous assignment at the top of every submission.
Target 2	Read more widely and use more of the literature to support some of the key points. Avoid using too many direct quotes in your writing and paraphrase instead to demonstrate your understanding of the literature.
Target 3	Include more criticality in your discussion and consider the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of your arguments based on the literature. Make use of the Academic Phrasebank Being critical (manchester.ac.uk) to help you with this.

Aim, focus and purpose of the research / Research Context (201 words)

This assignment aims to address the research question 'How do Forest School experiences affect learner's engagement within a primary school setting?'. This research was of a personal interest, having grown up close to many forests and woodlands, and experienced the positive impacts that spending time in these environments can have. Additionally, observing learners participate in Forest School sessions, during professional teaching experience, provided the opportunity to witness first hand how these sessions can benefit learners and enhance lessons within the classroom environment, which is an aspect I wished to explore further within my research. This research took place within a primary school setting in south west Wales, which has a designated Forest School area within the school grounds, as well as a designated Forest School Leader to run these sessions. In order to conduct this research, both a Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 class were observed, before and after their participation in Forest School sessions. Questionnaires were also conducted, to get a clearer understanding of Staff and learner's perspectives, specifically about how Staff feel Forest School experiences can affect learner's engagement within the primary school setting, and how learners feel Forest School experiences impact their own engagement within the classroom.

Overview of relevant literature (approx. 500 words)

According to literature, Forest School is "based on a Scandinavian approach to education that emphasizes the significance of learners having contact with nature" (Dietrich, 2017, quoted in O'Brien & Murray, 2007, p. 250). This educational approach is deeply rooted in a child-centered philosophy, aiming to provide learners with opportunities for play, exploration, and risk-taking. Through these experiences, learners can develop confidence and self-esteem, which are crucial components of their overall growth and development (Forest School Association, 2022). The skills gained within Forest School settings can be vital in helping learners to thrive within a classroom environment, allowing them to apply these skills to both academic and social situations. However, there are debates within literature about

the implementation and impact of Forest Schools within the UK. One viewpoint discusses how rapidly the Forest School approach has been introduced in the UK. For example, some literature argues that this rapid implementation may lead to practitioners incorporating Forest School ideas and theories into educational settings, without fully understanding the underlying principles. Mark Leather (2018, p. 6) suggests that this lack of understanding could potentially affect other curricular opportunities within Forest School. Without this understanding, it becomes challenging to maximize the benefits that learners can gain from their Forest School experiences, and as a result, the application of these skills and knowledge in traditional classroom settings can become much more difficult. Despite these concerns, the Welsh Government has expressed strong support for the Forest School approach, emphasizing that the Forest School methodology "complements the Foundation Phase pedagogy" (2009, p. 6) and "provides practical, hands-on learning experiences which encourage learners to explore and challenge themselves" (Welsh Government, 2009, p. 6). As well as expressing support for Forest School experiences, the Welsh Government has established specific requirements to ensure the quality and effectiveness of Forest School programs. They state that individuals wishing to lead Forest Schools must obtain a Level 3 Forest School leader qualification. This qualification ensures that practitioners and staff have undergone training in order to equip them with the practical and theoretical knowledge needed to run a Forest School successfully (2009, p. 6). By following these standards, this aims to ensure that learners in Wales who participate in Forest School receive an enriching and meaningful experience that complements their classroom learning. This approach can help learners develop essential life skills that can benefit them, both academically and socially.

Explanation of Case Study (353 words)

This research adopts a case study methodology. Whilst a case study does not have a solid definition, Collins (2024) states that case study research is "a written account that gives detailed information about a person, group, or thing and their development over a period of time". In the context of educational research, case studies can be used for a number of different purposes. For example, exploring an initial research question through the use of a case study methodology can help to build ideas in order to provide a foundation for future research to take place (Hassan, 2024a). Case studies can also be used to make comparisons and evaluate findings which can result in a more in-depth perspective on a particular research focus (McCombes, 2019). Case studies can be considered highly effective research tools, as they can allow for detailed study to take place in real-life natural environments, such as primary schools or outdoor settings (Crowe et al., 2011). However, the use of a case study methodology can also result in a number of challenges. This could be due to the absence of a well defined protocol or procedure on how case studies should be carried out (Krusenvik, 2016), which can result in findings that cannot be generalised or applied to broader groups (Drew, 2023). This is due to the nature of case studies, where research is often focused on small, specific samples. These samples, as well as natural contexts can also make it very difficult to repeat case study research, which can be a limitation to this type of study. However, they can also allow for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for a more thorough analysis and explanation of findings (Zainal, 2007). In order for this case study research to have as representative a sample as possible, Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 learners will be observed within two natural contexts, and Key Stage 2 learners will complete a questionnaire. To further secure a

representative sample, these learners will be selected using a random sampling method, which can also help to ensure that this research is non-biased (Gaille, 2017).

Research methods (1201 words)

This research study includes four naturalistic observations of both Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 learners. Observations are a research methodology “where researchers observe participants in their natural settings without interference or manipulation” (Hassan, 2024b), and can be a vital part of data collection for studies that require information regarding ‘real-life’ or natural environments (Hassan, 2024b). This is due to naturalistic observations not involving any intervention or manipulation of participants or the research setting, which can help to provide an in-depth insight into natural behaviours and interactions within the context of the research (McLeod, 2024). This is one of the many benefits to observations being used as a research tool. For example, naturalistic observations can enable results with high ecological validity, due to lack of interference from the researcher (Tutor2u, 2024). As well as high ecological validity, observations require minimal resources and can help to direct a foundation for future research depending on findings and results (Atema, 2022). However, observational research can also present a number of challenges. For example, in order to remain in line with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018), it is essential that all participants taking part within the observation are informed about the research taking place before participating. Although, due to participants knowing that they are participating within research, this can introduce limitations to the research through impacts such as the Hawthorne Effect. This phenomenon refers to individuals changing their behaviour as a result of knowing that they are being observed or are taking part in research (American Psychological Association, 2024), which has the potential to hugely alter results as the observed behaviour is not authentic. Another limitation to observations, in particular, when using a random sampling method, is there is the potential for important details, or external factors about individual participants, to be missed. Without being able to take significant factors such as these into consideration when conducting observations, results can be skewed, or become inaccurate (Atema, 2022). Although these limitations within observational studies cannot be mitigated entirely, a way to reduce these effects can be to design a research study with these impacts in mind (Longe, 2006). This can help to ensure that any external factors or anomalies can be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions from data findings, so as not to impact results. In order to fully consider any limitations, as well as reduce the effect that any external factors can have on findings, this study uses an observation grid (See Appendix 1) based on the Leuven Scale of Engagement (See Appendix 2). Both of these observation tools aim to identify specific behaviours displayed by learners, in order to conclude whether or not pupils are engaged within the environment in which they are learning. Some of these behaviours include: looking away or visual disengagement, clear signs of concentration or focus, and staying on task. Whilst it may not be possible to entirely mitigate external factors, it can help to compare learners against the same behaviour criteria, as this can help to narrow down which behaviours to pay particular attention to, in order to draw the observation focus closer to the research question enabling a conclusion to be drawn, as well as highlight any behavioural anomalies displayed by particular learners, so that these results can be omitted from the study so as not to skew findings. These naturalistic observations will be used in order to address the research question ‘How do Forest School experiences affect learner’s engagement within a primary school setting?’ by observing signs of engagement and

disengagement within a Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 classroom setting. These observations will take place before and after learners within these classes participate within Forest School sessions, and compare these results in order to draw a conclusion on whether there is any impact on the engagement in the behaviour displayed by learners within the classroom environment after they have participated within Forest School sessions.

A second research method included within this study is the use of learner and Staff questionnaires. A questionnaire, in the context of a research study, "is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions designed to collect data from respondents" (Hassan, 2024c). Questionnaires can be a beneficial way of effectively collecting and analysing data from broad samples, as well as reducing the impacts of the Hawthorne Effect, as participants are able to remain anonymous, so may feel less obligated to alter their responses (Stevens, 2025). The use of anonymous online questionnaires can also help to mitigate the Hawthorne Effect, as well as researcher bias, due to participants being able to complete questions using their own words. Therefore, the researcher is unlikely to interpret answers in a biased way due to anonymity of the questionnaire, and participants are not directly influenced by the researcher (Kuphanga, 2024). In addition to reducing external factors, questionnaires also allow for collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, through the inclusion of both open and closed questions. This can lead to more representative data and findings to help further support information gathered within research studies (Murphy, 2023). These factors can make questionnaires a highly effective research tool to use within a study. However, questionnaires can also have several limitations if specific considerations are not made in order to eliminate these potential negatives. For example, it is common for questionnaire response rates to be low (Mazikana, 2023), which can make findings unrepresentative as participants "who voluntarily respond, and those who do not, may have different opinions or predominant characteristics that affect the research" (Pozzo, Borgobello, and Pierella, 2019). A secondary challenge that can arise when using questionnaires within research can be participants' misinterpretations of lack of understanding of questions. "Researchers do not have the option to follow up on ideas and explain issues when using questionnaires" (Mazikana, 2023), which can lead to unrepresentative and inaccurate data, as answers given by participants may not be their intended responses to the questions asked. To attempt to mitigate any of these potential drawbacks through the use of questionnaires within this study, online questionnaires were sent out to as wide a sample of potential participants as possible, and more learners than the minimum required sample for the research were asked to participate. This helped to ensure that even if response rates were low, the required sample was still met in order to receive a suitable amount of data. To address any potential misunderstanding of questions, the questionnaires were trialled before the study took place to check for any initial misconceptions, and a mix of open and closed tick box style questions were used. This gave participants the opportunity to elaborate on their initial answers to the closed questions, which helped avoid any misunderstanding as participants were able to re-examine their original answers and make any changes if necessary. To further address any potential misunderstandings within the learner questionnaires, verbal instructions (See Appendix 3) were provided to learners during completion, explaining in detail what each of the questions were asking and providing more detail if necessary. All of these precautions can help to ensure that data collected is as authentic and representative as possible, due to measures taken to ensure a higher response rate, and clear understanding of questions.

Data Presentation and Analysis Method(s) (approx. 300 words)

- Explain the method(s) that you will use to report your data. Refer to relevant literature to support your decisions.
- Include information about any processes that you carried out to ensure trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) if relevant.

Ethical considerations (337 words)

This study followed the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018), which meant a number of vital factors had to be implemented at all times in order to keep the research participants safe. These factors are recorded within an Ethics Form (See Appendix 4), which specifies the procedures to be implemented at all times in order for the research study to remain within the guidelines. For example, one of these considerations was ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants at all times. This was achieved by anonymising data at the source during observations, and ensuring that any questionnaires were completed anonymously. This made certain that any data collected could not be traced back to participants, thus keeping participants' information confidential and their identities anonymous. A second vital factor in regards to the ethics of this study was gaining consent from parents or guardians of any learners participating within the research. This was carried out by providing consent forms (See Appendix 5), in order to inform parents or guardians of all research their children would be participating in, as well as to provide their written consent to the researcher. Although all learners participating within the study had written consent from their parents or guardians before participating as they cannot give full consent themselves, a vital component of any research involving learners and young people is gaining learner assent to ensure that they are also happy and comfortable taking part. This was achieved through the use of a verbal disclosure (See Appendix 6), detailing what would be expected of participants, and stating that participants could withdraw from the study at any given time without providing a reason, as well as providing instructions on how to withdraw should they wish to. Staff completing online questionnaires also had to complete a compulsory disclosure form (See Appendix 7) before participating, which gave details on anonymity and the right to withdraw before and during questionnaire completion, as due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, data could not be removed once submitted.

Results / Analysis of results / Discussion (approx. 450 words)

- The content of this section will depend on the research methods that you have used.
- Once you have presented the data and discussed it, you should consider:
- What does the data mean? What did I find out?
 - What does that mean for my class/the participants/the school?
 - How does this link to literature?

Conclusions (approx. 200 words)

- Critically examine the work that you undertook when preparing for your research study; for example:
 - Would the methods of collecting data be reliable within your context?
 - How valid would the methods be?
 - Would the findings be able to be generalised?
 - What would you like to do in future in terms of carrying out research?
 - How might this link to the Professional Standards?
- Would need to look at long term impacts, only observed immediate.

- Too many external factors due to nature of the school.
- Findings cannot be generalised, too small sample size.

Recommendations (approx. 150 words)

- What recommendations would you make in light of your research?
- Is there an intervention that you would like to put in place to address an issue that you have found?
- How might your findings be taken forward to inform further research?

In light of this research,

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Observation Grid

Observation Grid - Learner's Engagement Before Forest School Sessions				
Time -->	1-9 mins (each learner observed for 2.5 minutes)		10-19 mins (each learner observed for 2.5 minutes)	
Engagement behaviours observed:				
Visual engagement	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Visual disengagement (e.g. looking out of the window)	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Remaining seated	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Standing when not instructed	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Remaining focused	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Losing focus	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Clear signs of concentration	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	

Restlessness	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Fidgeting	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Staying "on task"	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Becoming distracted	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Speaking "in turn"	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Speaking "out of turn"	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Making "on task" verbal contributions	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	
Withdrawing from class conversations	A: B: C: D:		A: B: C: D:	

Appendix 2 - Leuven Scale of Engagement

Level	1	2	3	4	5
Engagement	Extremely Low <i>the child shows hardly any activity</i>	Low <i>the child shows some degree of activity which is often interrupted</i>	Moderate <i>the child is busy the whole time, but without real concentration</i>	High <i>there are clear signs of involvement, but these are not always present to their full extent</i>	Extremely High <i>during the observation of learning the child is continually engaged in the activity and completely absorbed in it</i>
Examples	No concentration: staring, daydreaming; An absent, passive attitude; No goal-oriented activity, aimless actions, not producing anything; No signs of exploration and interest; Not taking anything in, no mental activity	Limited concentration; looks away during the activity, fiddles, dreams; Is easily distracted; Action only leads to limited results.	Routine actions, attention is superficial; Is not absorbed in the activity, activities are short lived; Limited motivation, no real dedication, does not feel challenged; The child does not gain deep-level experiences; Does not use his/her capabilities to full extent; The activity does not address the child's imagination.	The child is engaged in the activity without interruption; Most of the time there is real concentration, but during some brief moments the attention is more superficial; The child feels challenged, there is a certain degree of motivation; The child's capabilities and its imagination to a certain extent are addressed in the activity.	Is absolutely focussed, concentrated without interruption; Is highly motivated, feels strongly appealed by the activity; Even strong stimuli cannot distract him/her; Is alert, has attention for details, shows precision; Its mental activity and experience are intense; The child constantly addresses all its capabilities: imagination and mental capacity are in top gear; Obviously enjoys being engrossed in the activity

Appendix 3 - Verbal Instructions

- ## Appendix 4 - Ethics Form

 University of Windsor OFFICE OF INFORMATION ACCESS	SECTION C: Internal and External Disclosure Materials	PAGE 11 OF 18
1. Please list the source of published information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	2. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	3. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.
4. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	5. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	6. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.
7. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	8. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	9. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.
10. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	11. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	12. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.
13. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	14. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.	15. Please indicate the source of the information that has been reviewed in relation to the collection of personal information. If the information is not published, please indicate the source of the information.

[illegible][illegible]

INFORMATION SHEET
 PROJECT TITLE: How do Forest School experiences affect learner's engagement within a primary school setting?

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Ffion Winfield, and I am currently a student teacher at Pontarddulais Primary School, studying for a BA in Primary Education at Yr Athrofa, University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

I would like to invite your child to participate in my research project titled "How do Forest School experiences affect learner's engagement within a primary school setting?".

Through your child's participation, I hope to understand how Forest School sessions impact children's engagement within the classroom.

To gather this information, I will be observing your child before and after their Forest School sessions and taking notes on any changes in their engagement, as well as asking children to complete a short anonymous questionnaire about how they feel Forest School impacts their engagement within the classroom.

All information collected will be anonymous, and your child's participation is completely voluntary. You or your child can withdraw from the study at any point before or during the observations and/or questionnaires. However, once the data is collected, it cannot be removed due to the anonymous nature of the study. Your child will also be asked for their agreement to participate.

After analysis of the data collected from the observations and/or questionnaires, I would be happy to share the findings of my research with you upon request. The results will contribute to one of my university assignments and will be stored securely on the University OneDrive. All raw data will be destroyed after the assignment is marked.

Thank you in advance for your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me using my university email address:
2200182@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,
 Ffion Winfield

PARENT CONSENT FORM
 PROJECT TITLE: How do Forest School experiences affect learner's engagement within a primary school setting?

Name of Researcher: Ffion Winfield

Please initial box

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 26/11/2024 – 29/11/2024 for the above study. ☐
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my child at any time before or during the study, without giving any reason. ☐
- I understand that my child can choose to withdraw at any time before or during the study, without giving a reason. ☐
- I understand that the information given by my child will be used in a university assignment. ☐
- I understand that my child's name will not appear at any time. ☐
- I agree for my child to take part in the above observation study. ☐
- I agree for my child to take part in the above questionnaire study. ☐

Child's name _____ Parent signature _____ Date _____

When completed, please return to your child's class teacher by the 26th of November 2024.

Thank you.

Appendix 6 - Verbal Disclosure for Learners

Learner's Questionnaire Assent & Questionnaire Script

- *You do not have to do this questionnaire if you do not want to.*
- *There are no right or wrong answers for any of the questions.*
- *Please do not put your name on your questionnaire.*
- *This questionnaire is anonymous, which means nobody will know who has completed which questionnaire or know what answers you have written.*
- *You do not have to answer all of the questions if you do not want to.*
- *This questionnaire is about how going to Forest School changes how children pay attention and participate in their classrooms.*
- *Even though there are 8 questions, you will only need to answer up to 4.*
- *If you change your mind and don't want to take part in the questionnaire anymore, you will not be in any trouble and do not have to give a reason. You can just turn your questionnaire over and put your pen down and I will come and collect it.*

Appendix 7 - Staff Disclosure

1. If you would like to take part in my research, please read and agree to the following statements:

- Participation in this questionnaire is entirely voluntary.
- This questionnaire will be completed anonymously and all information will be kept confidential and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).
- You will not be obligated to answer all of the questions should you wish to participate.
- This questionnaire focuses on learner's engagement within school after they have participated in Forest School sessions.
- This questionnaire consists of a total of 8 short questions, however, you will only be required to answer a maximum of 4 should you wish to participate.
- This questionnaire should take no longer than 5 minutes of your time in order to complete.
- You can withdraw from this questionnaire at any time before or during completion, but not after responses have been submitted. This is due to the anonymous nature of this questionnaire, meaning data cannot be removed once submitted.
- If choosing to participate, please submit your responses by 4pm on 28/11/2024.

★

☐ I have read and agree to all of the above statements.