

Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-017-0007-0>

Editorial

Mark Leather and John Quay

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* for 2018, also the first of many to be published in partnership with Springer. Many thanks to all involved in helping to make this partnership happen. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a healthy professional community to support a journal.

This special issue is focused on the brand and approach to outdoor and environmental education in the early childhood years known as Forest School. The first article in this issue – Mark Leather’s *A critique of Forest School: Something lost in translation* – forms the lead article, which other authors have responded to. The arguments Leather articulates were first presented at the sixth *International Outdoor Education Research Conference*, held at the University of Otago, New Zealand, in November 2013. Continuing discussions were the impetus for this special issue, with contributions from around the English speaking outdoor education world. As Sara Knight (2009, p.14) suggests, if we wish to move our Forest School knowledge, understanding and pedagogical approach forward, “there must be robust discussion and debate.” It is in this spirit that the special issue addresses questions around Forest School, with the hope that this will catalyse further robust debate.

Following Leather’s article is a contribution from Sara Knight, arguably the most prolific and influential author on Forest School to date, who shares how the Forest School Association in the UK has started to address some of the theoretical and practical issues raised in Leather’s critique. Knight highlights the work of the Good from Woods project as an empirical example providing evidence for the efficacy of Forest School approaches to education.

This example is also used by Sue Waite and Alice Goodenough who explore how perceived differences between everyday educational contexts can benefit the wellbeing of participants in forest education across different ages. Waite and Goodenough draw on Forest School principles, empirical evidence and the theory of cultural density to examine how Forest School can present important cultural and material contrasts in English young people’s experience and argue for the importance of this function. Hence they critique aspects of the dilution of Forest School principles, arguing that in England, and perhaps other cultures where outdoor experiences have become relatively rare, it is important that Forest School is valued as a site of divergence from more common learning spaces and situations.

The next four articles move the discussion beyond the English context with contributions from Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Amanda Lloyd, Son Truong and Tonia Gray argue

that while Forest School offers children valuable outdoor experiences, it does not necessarily acknowledge local place, environment or culture. They explore an alternative place-responsive approach and discuss some findings from investigation of a year-long outdoor program that was implemented and evaluated in an Australian primary school. Ame Christiansen, Siobhan Hannan, Karen Anderson, Doug Fargher and Lisa Coxon bring a wealth of experience to their exploration of place-based nature kindergarten in Victoria, Australia. They respond to concerns regarding the direction of Forest Schools and the commodification of Forest School practices in the UK as raised by Leather, and the suggestion that a similar model of Forest Schools has spread to Australia. Christiansen et al. argue that the proliferation of nature kindergarten programs in Victoria has followed a more organic trajectory which is less about emulating a set of imported practices, and more about responding to local conditions and influences. Sophie Alcock and Jenny Ritchie draw upon critical early childhood scholarship to theorise the impact of forest schools emerging in Aotearoa, along with influences from the forest school movement evident in existing New Zealand early childhood services. They consider how the imported Scandinavian/European/UK model of forest schools might fit within this context and argue that traditional Indigenous Māori worldviews and knowledges give meaning and contextualised authenticity to forest school approaches in early childhood education in New Zealand. Continuing the argument for a consideration of indigenous cultures, Zabe MacEachren explores the importance of First Nations pedagogies in Canada for indigenizing Forest Schools. Canadian Forest Schools are in the early stages of incorporating First Nations' pedagogies as part of a countrywide effort to decolonize and indigenize educational practices. MacEachren explores the importance of learning through imitation as traditionally practiced by First Nation peoples in Canada. She examines the ability of educators to offer young children the opportunity to observe adults involved in complex hand work, paying specific attention to First Nations' use of cradleboards and tethering straps as an initial way to nurture the sensory awareness and focusing ability of toddlers.

The last two articles in this special issue offer some alternative ways of theorising forest school practice. Vinathe Sharma-Brymer, Eric Brymer, Tonia Gray and Keith Davids argue that application of the Ecological Dynamics approach will guide affordances for Forest School practice. Sharma-Brymer et al. discuss how Ecological Dynamics offers a theoretical framework that has the potential to guide Forest School practice and clarify its effectiveness. Specifically, they suggest that notions of affordances combined with analysis at the level of person-environment relationships could guide future design and implementation of activities. Alun Morgan's article explores the potential of woodland as a milieu for outdoor and environmental learning in the context of the rise of Forest Schools in the UK. Whilst broadly supportive of these developments, Morgan adopts a critical stance in arguing that the notion of the forest as a literal and metaphoric wild and expansive space of risk, excitement, freedom, exploration and intimate contact with nature, which underpins the original Forest School concept, appears to be giving way to a diluted sense of controlled spaces and activities for curriculum enrichment, a process he refers to as "scolonisation."

As a whole, these articles contribute significantly to discussion concerning outdoor and environmental education in the early childhood years, drawing on the impetus provided by Forest School in the UK. We commend the issue to you in the spirit of continuing discussion and debate, conveying our sincere thanks all involved in its production: a real academic community effort.

Mark Leather and John Quay

Special Issue Co-Editors

Mark Leather is a senior lecturer in *Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* at Plymouth Marjon University. He adopts an experiential pedagogy with as much fieldwork with students as he can manage. He is equally at home in the forest, on the hill, but especially on, in or near the sea. Mark enjoys connecting people to themselves, others and the environment especially teaching on under-graduate and post-graduate programmes. His research and writing originates and finishes with the intent to inform and improve outdoor practice especially when it challenges conventionally held norms and beliefs found in outdoor and environmental education.

John Quay is an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. He taught outdoor education in secondary schools before embarking on an academic career. His research interests have grown from his experiences of teaching at schools, bringing the perspectives he gained teaching outdoor education to broader issues of schooling, education, and beyond.