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The Place of Forest School within English Primary Schools: Senior Leader Perspectives

Focussing on the place of Forest School in English primary schools, we explore the perspectives of school leaders. We use Biesta's model of educational purpose as a critical lens to consider possible justifications for the inclusion of Forest School in the curriculum. Four distinct accounts, based on an analysis of in-depth interviews, illustrate a range of participant responses: risk, intervention, respite and the right thing. One of these, we contend, represents a tentative step towards a form of resistance on the part of a school leader in the face of current pressures to follow a diminished set of educational purposes.

Key words: Biesta; educational purpose; forest school; primary schools; England

Introduction

A recurrent theme in primary education in England, reflected in recent issues of this journal, is the attempts on the part of some schools to incorporate an outdoor learning component within their curricula. A cursory search of 'outdoor learning' in this journal identifies numerous articles as well as a 2009 special edition focused entirely on outdoor and experiential learning from international perspectives. This range of research reveals some of the diverse ways in which outdoor learning is known including: Outdoor Education (Cosgriff, 2016), Outdoor Play (Maynard, 2007), Learning Outside the Classroom (Waite, 2010) Learning in Natural Environments (Edwards-Jones, Waite & Passey, 2016), Natural Schooling (Malone & Waite, 2016) and Forest School (O'Brien 2009, Harris, 2017). What these approaches share, is a belief that the outdoor environment offers children something particularly beneficial in terms of learning however this is defined. Unsurprisingly, however, the purpose of outdoor provision within the school curriculum is contested; whilst some see it as a means of delivering prescribed objectives, others see it 'as an alternative vision of education, essentially different from traditional schooling rather than an extension of what normally happens in schools' (Rea and Waite 2009, 2).

Where Forest School is the form of outdoor learning adopted by schools, this tension is particularly acute. As a movement whose origins lie outside formal schooling, Forest School in England has a strong identity and its advocates espouse a set of educational purposes, which may be at odds with other primary education goals. Forest School as defined by the Forest School Association (FSA) is,

> an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees. Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education (FSA 2018).

Whilst Forest School is strongly aligned with the values that underpin good early years practice and has consequently succeeded in establishing itself in that sector, its relevance for 'all ages and all client groups' (Bridgewater College Forest School cited in Maynard 2007, 320) is less clear (Harris, 2017). Tracing the roots of Forest School back to 'early years pioneers' such as Froebel and McMillan, Maynard (2007, 328) describes it as a 'reworking of an old ideal'. Based on an analysis of ideas expressed by Forest School practitioners –

together with associated web-based material – she identifies the 'primary aim' of Forest School as being 'the development of children's self-esteem, self-confidence and independence skills'. She also identifies a 'secondary aim', which is to encourage children to 'care for and respect the natural environment' (323). As a 'specialised learning approach' (FSA 2018), Forest School is child-centred and there are good prima facie reasons for anticipating a mismatch in primary school contexts where curriculum content is the priority. This potential for conflict is exemplified by the work of Knight (2017, 289), who describes Forest School as 'a space of otherness, where the children decide what it is they need to do rather than the adults deciding what needs to be done'. Such sentiments may be at odds with the demands of a typical primary classroom where, however keen they might be to devolve decision making to pupils, teachers have little scope themselves for defining the curriculum agenda – e.g. see Alexander (2016).

Some primary schools, nonetheless, regard Forest School as having the potential to sit alongside the formal primary school curriculum in a complimentary way, supporting the delivery of prescribed objectives rather than just countering their negative effects. O'Brien, (2009, 54), for example, highlights the potential of Forest School to address goals in English, maths and science, arguing that it could be 'embedded in the routine of many schools'. The FSA (2018) are less explicit, recommending only that 'where appropriate the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and/or school education'. However, Waite, Bolling and Bentsen (2016, 8) suggest that the purpose of Forest School is increasingly 'being … associated with specific learning outcomes in order to increase … uptake'. In practice, there is some evidence to suggest that linking Forest School activities with formal curriculum objectives, is either not seen as a priority or is regarded as something that must remain contingent on the child's own interests. Harris's (2017) study of experienced practitioners working with primary schools found that they emphasised other aspects of learning, in particular, in the area of personal, social and emotional development. Indeed 'Forest School sessions were often seen as quite separate from classroom teaching, often being led by different people' and it was this sense of separateness that was significant (286). However, as Harris's paper exemplifies, much existing research and policy relating to the educational purposes of Forest School focusses on the perspectives of Forest School leaders and others outside of mainstream teaching. The voices of teachers and senior leaders with responsibility for the curriculum have remained on the periphery and understandings of the place of Forest School within the primary curriculum consequently remain partial.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the debate about the place of Forest School in primary schools by using a particular conceptualisation of educational purpose (Biesta 2016, 2015a, 2015b). We are not the first to draw upon the work of Biesta in relation to outdoor learning. In setting out the rationale for their conceptual model – designed to frame a comparison between English Forest School and Danish *udeskole* – Waite, Bolling and Bentsen (2016) acknowledge Biesta's (2012) critique of 'learnification', a process that has contributed to the disempowerment of teachers. They nonetheless justify their preference for the concept of 'outdoor *learning*' (as opposed to 'Outdoor Education' for example) by claiming that 'the outdoors' adds something (including 'greater co-construction of learning') to the learning encounter, and by implication they reduce the role of the teacher to that of a facilitator. As the discussion below demonstrates, this fails to take on the full implications of Biesta's multidimensional analysis of educational purpose in the context of primary education. Here, by focusing on the perspectives of senior leaders who have engaged with Forest School, we seek to reaffirm the position of teachers and teaching within the wider discourse about outdoor learning.

The paper starts with an exploration of Biesta's model of educational purpose. Following this, we give a brief description of the research design and an overview of the participating schools. From our data, we present four accounts that illustrate a range of possible justifications for the inclusion of Forest School in the school curriculum, which we consider in relation to Biesta's model. We then take the analysis a step further by considering our participants responses in relation to Biesta's notion of 'a good education' and the idea that educators have a "duty to resist". We consider how schools might re-orient themselves towards a 'good education' away from the current one-sided emphasis on 'qualification.' The significance of this study for teachers and Forest School practitioners is that Forest School has potential, not as a bolt on or alternative to the rest of the curriculum but as a set of practices, alongside others that support the fulfilment of generic educational goals. This depends, however, on the extent to which schools are prepared to engage with questions of educational purpose. Whilst we focus specifically on Forest School in an English context, our arguments are applicable to other forms of outdoor/additional learning experiences within school contexts nationally and internationally.

Three Domains of Educational Purpose

In this paper, we draw upon Biesta's (2016) three-part model of educational purpose as a critical lens through which to view Forest School within the primary context. According to Biesta, education systems across the globe have witnessed the effects of a process that he names 'learnification'; the main consequence of this has been to curtail the scope available for teachers and schools to ask important questions about purpose. 'Learning', an abstract noun that refers to a process, is all too often used empty of content in statements that purport to justify practice; this can be seen, for example, in general comments about 'children's learning' where it is simply assumed that because 'learning' is taking place this must be a good thing. As the FSA definition quoted above illustrates, Forest School is implicated in this process. Biesta's intention is to shift attention away from 'learning', a concept that is centred on the individual, to 'education' which is a relational term implying a minimum of two participants. Biesta (2015b,76) insists that 'the point of education is that students learn *something*, that they learn it for a *reason*, and that they learn it *from someone*'; and, for Biesta, the most important question concerns the second of these things since it is only after purposes are established that decisions can be made about appropriate content and relations. In order to assist teachers, policy makers and society with the task of specifying the purposes that should underpin a 'good education', Biesta (2016) provides a set of parameters in the form of a Venn diagram depicting three interconnected domains of purpose: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. We argue that this model provides a particularly useful lens through which to examine questions of educational purpose in schools where Forest School is introduced. We therefore set out in detail each of the three domains and consider how they might be exemplified in a Forest School context.

The domain of qualification is about 'the transmission of knowledge, skills and dispositions' (Biesta 2015b, 77); it provides children with capacities, both general and specific, to act in the world. It is not difficult to identify a range of purposes – defined in terms of knowledge, skills and dispositions – that are embraced by Forest School and other outdoor learning programmes; consider for example the case of environmental art. As Biesta explains, however, in many countries including England, schools are currently constrained by an accountability agenda that imposes a set of 'qualification' purposes that are narrowly defined in terms of achievement in a limited number of subject areas. This one-sided emphasis on 'qualification' not only risks the possibility of doing harm by eclipsing purposes in other domains (for example, the goal of fostering a sense of belonging in the domain of

socialisation or autonomy in the domain of subjectification). It also reduces, within the domain of 'qualification' itself, the opportunities that teachers might have to fulfil a broader set of purposes – e.g. with respect to areas of the curriculum such as the arts. Hence, Forest School, as a vehicle for the delivery of curriculum objectives, can be used either to reinforce the current emphasis on core subjects (O'Brien 2009), or to broaden the curriculum.

The domain of socialisation is about the ways in which children and young people 'become part of particular social, cultural and political 'orders' (Biesta 2016, 20); both explicitly (e.g. through ritual and routine) and implicitly (i.e. through the 'hidden curriculum') schools pass on norms and values, to their pupils. As Biesta (2015b) points out, even when educators pay no attention to the domain of socialisation it nonetheless operates by default through a 'hidden curriculum', sometimes producing results that are neither desirable nor intended. Where a school focusses exclusively on a limited and tightly specified range of 'learning objectives', as described above, it cannot help but socialise children into valuing certain forms of knowing above others. Conversely, schools can and do plan explicitly for socialisation through policy and practice in relation to matters such as inclusion and behaviour management, as well as by explicitly offering access to 'traditions, cultures, ways of being and acting' (4) in subject areas such as citizenship and environmental education. The introduction of Forest School in a primary context invariably has consequences in the domain of socialisation whether these are planned for (e.g. working co-operatively on tasks) or happen unintentionally (e.g. learning how to read adult expectations as they vary between indoor and outdoor contexts).

The domain of subjectification is 'to do with the way in which children and young people come to exist as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than objects of the actions of others' (Biesta 2015b, 77). Whereas socialisation results in an individual who can identify with various 'orders', subjectification refers to a process that, in ideal circumstances, allows 'children and young people to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting' (Biesta, 2016, p.21). As Biesta (2015b) stresses, just as education is always about socialisation so too is it always about the 'formation of the person' and when educators ignore the domain of subjectification the consequences can be negative; this happens, for example, when children are offered few opportunities to make genuine decisions about important school matters that affect them. The domain of subjectification is associated with 'qualities such as criticality, compassion, grown-up-ness and autonomy' (4). At first glance,

these qualities appear to resonate with the Forest School Association's fourth principle, which speaks of 'fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners' (FSA 2018). It is important to note, however, that Biesta is as critical of the developmentalism that underpins the FSA's thinking, as he is critical of 'learnification' and its one-sided emphasis on qualification. A key to understanding this argument is the quality of 'grown-up-ness'; described by Biesta (2015a) as a core educational value and a way of being in the world, it should *not* be seen as the end state of a developmental process. Building on his definition of 'grown-up-ness' and view of what a 'good education' consists of, Biesta makes a case for 'the special and unique task of the school' (1). We return to this in the discussion.

The research

For this study, senior leaders from a number of rural primary schools were interviewed about their reasons for considering the adoption of Forest School. Prior to the interviews taking place the schools had recently engaged with a specific Forest School provider; in this respect they shared a common starting place. Although relatively small, this "opportunity/theoretical sample" (see Dowling and Brown 2010, 27-28) produced a rich dataset for analysis. Following Holstein and Gubrium's (2016) guidelines and recognising 'the constitutive narrative activity inherent in all forms of interviewing' (79) we focussed in both design and analysis on both 'the *hows* and the *whats* of the interview process' (73). Through the interviews we were particularly interested in exploring what Biesta *et al* (2017, 40) call 'teacher talk' – that is the vocabulary teachers use to 'make sense of the situations they are in', in this case in relation to Forest School. All interviews were conducted on the school premises by one of the research team and were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Participants were interviewed individually with the exception of school L where the two Assistant Headteachers were interviewed together. All participants were given a pseudonym.

The data was analysed through a two-stage process: first by individual to maintain 'the coherence and integrity of the individual's response' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, 551); and second as a whole set to identify themes running across the individual accounts. Four individual accounts of the purpose of Forest School in primary school were selected to illustrate the distinct understandings evident across the dataset. We recognise that these

accounts are situated, reflecting individual values and attitudes as well as the opportunities and threats facing the schools. Some important contextual information is provided in table 1.

In the following section, we present the four accounts in relation to Biesta's (2015b) three domains of purpose, tentatively placing them on his Venn diagram (Figure 1). We name each account using terms that our participants used to refer to strategies for incorporating Forest School in the curriculum. These are:

1. Risk – school emphasis remains on qualification (Forest School is not adopted as it is only understood as contributing to socialisation)
2. Respite – emphasis placed equally on the domains of socialisation and subjectification (to rebalance the emphasis on qualification)
3. Intervention – emphasis placed on socialisation and qualification (the latter is addressed through the former)
4. Right Thing – emphasis placed centrally on overlap between of all three domains

The presentation of the four accounts is followed below by an exploration of two themes, or dimensions that are evident within and across the accounts – agency and curricular correspondence.

The Purpose of Forest School, Four Accounts

Forest School as a Risk

The first account presents Forest School as a risk. Mr Gallio and Mrs Mackey are both assistant Headteachers at school L, a large rural primary school recently graded by Ofsted as Requires Improvement (RI). They emphasised the extreme pressure that the school is under to perform which means that engagement with Forest School is felt to pose too much of a 'risk'. The extent to which their decisions are determined by a focus on outcomes within the domain of qualification is illustrated by the following:

> Mrs Mackey: All the time the teachers are expected to answer the question 'what are the children learning?
>
> Mr Gallio: Yeah
>
> Mrs Mackey: What are the success criteria?

> Mr Gallio: What's the impact

> Mrs Mackey: Yes, what's the impact? Yeah, constantly

> Mr Gallio: There's so much accountability now isn't it…Teachers are just so accountable now for levels of progress and better percentages

In spite of their initial engagement with the Forest School provider, developing Forest School is something which both teachers said is 'not on our agenda at all. ' Mr Gallio explains this further in relation to the overriding priority of improving attainment:

> 'You wouldn't **risk** taking a child outside if it potentially affects your 85% of children making expected progress…**taking that risk** to prove that actually the benefits of it on the children's attainment, because there is a bit of a **risk**, you don't really know. There's no evidence to suggest that being outdoors supports, no one really knows, but you can tell just by the look on their faces that they are happy, but is that enough? I don't know.'

Throughout the interview it became clear that, for the school leaders at this school, the contribution of Forest School was viewed as being limited to a socialisation role for children identified as experiencing some kind of behavioural challenge. For example, Mr Gallio goes on to explain:

> 'We have some kids here who would really benefit from an hour or two outside…I think that would be perfect for them because the classroom environment can get too much for them…and actually for those children who struggle with behaviour'

Neither of the senior leaders understand Forest School to have any connection with their overriding priority, which is to improve attainment; hence their lack of interest in offering it.

Forest School as Intervention

In the second account, Forest School is understood as contributing to goals that fall within the domain of socialisation but indirectly address goals within the domain of qualification. School S is a small rural primary school that is rated outstanding by OFSTED and is led by Headteacher Mrs Gill. The school has a level 3 Forest School leader who delivers Forest School sessions on the school site as well as in surrounding woodland. Since its inception there has been a strong emphasis on Forest School as an intervention, and Mrs Gill refers to it as an '**outdoor approach to intervention**.' The focus is on children who are not performing well academically,

'[children] that perhaps struggle in the classroom, particularly with subjects like the maths and the English…'

Forest School is seen to provide specific (e.g. kinaesthetic) ways of learning that enable particular children to access concepts and/or skills that are more commonly offered through less concrete forms of 'chalk and talk'. The role of the Forest School leader, who is also a Learning Support Assistant, is,

'to plan the different interventions that each of the children have in the different classes, so she's going to start off in Class 4 first and she's going to look at those children who are perhaps not working at their expected level in certain areas…the child is still remaining a little bit below where we would potentially like them to be. So she's going to have a look at how we can use the outdoor environment to support the learning, giving them more kinaesthetic approaches as opposed to the chalk and talk'

Forest School is understood as supporting specific goals within the domain of qualification, that is as a way of delivering prescribed curriculum objectives.

'I think there's a lot, there's an awful lot to be sort of gained from using the natural environment to support learning. Working in smaller groups is possible so you can develop language. But also, not being afraid of doing things outside and doing things perhaps slightly differently as well'

Although the school is graded by Ofsted as an 'outstanding' school, Mrs Gill acknowledges that 'there are pressures for us at the minute.' This pressure to maintain performance is clearly driving the way the school is choosing to position Forest School as a form of intervention.

Forest School as Respite

In the third account, Forest School is presented as 'respite' – as a way of rebalancing the curricular offer within the school. Mrs Miller is the headteacher of school R, a small rural primary school with fewer than a hundred pupils in relatively affluent area, which is rated by OFSTED as outstanding. As she explains,

'our children are higher achievers academically and they don't tend to come from a range of backgrounds as in we don't have an ethnic mix, we don't have any children with complex needs on the SEN register, we don't have any behavioural problems and we don't have anybody on the pupil premium register.'

She explains her decision to develop Forest School clearly in relation to the pressures of the priority curriculum, a necessary respite for high-achieving children.

> 'I think one of the reasons that we kept the Forest School going is because we just had this awareness to the demands that they [the children] had and that they needed a break…**we actually called it respite**. **The Forest School was going to be their respite** because they just, just the demands that they have now of what they have to learn and how they have to learnt it, for me was just too complicated.'

The introduction of the new national curriculum in 2014 was felt by Mrs Miller to have increased the demands on children and led to concerns about levels of wellbeing in the classroom. In spite of the challenges of the new curriculum, Mrs Miller is confident that academic provision (qualification) at the school is effective and describes the school as, 'secure in what we're doing, we can begin to relax a little bit.' This relative sense of security and freedom from performativity seems to be important in terms of the schools adoption of Forest School. It has enabled the school to reflect on the children's individual needs and to rebalance the curriculum accordingly.

> 'The resilience was low and the independence was low, the self-esteem wasn't always as high as I would like it to be. The ability to assess risk was low, very low because a lot of our children are very much mollycoddled'

The role of Forest School here falls predominantly within the domains of subjectification and socialisation for the school. The children in this school are understood as lacking character traits such as perseverance and independence and Forest School has been developed to build these. The decision to develop Forest School wasn't, for the headteacher, 'anything personal…it was more to do with the needs of the children in this school.' Given Forest Schools very clear role in providing a counter-weight to the externally enforced focus on qualification, it is not surprising that there are few attempts to make curricular links or to use Forest School to deliver national curriculum objectives. Forest School is understood as,

> 'more to do with wellbeing and engagement…it isn't used as a tool to improve academics…there is no objective. There are no expectations.'

This view has much in common with the Forest School leaders in Harris' (2017) study who emphasised the 'other' learning associated with the Forest School.

Forest School as 'The Right Thing'

The final account presents Forest School as 'the right thing' aligning it with some notion of a good education. The purposes of primary education are understood as being multi-faceted and Forest School is seen to contribute across all three domains of educational purpose. Mrs Nolan is the executive headteacher of two small rural primary schools (both rated good by Ofsted) as well as being a qualified level 3 Forest School Leader. She explains her commitment to Forest School,

'I feel it in my bones basically that **it's the right thing to be doing on so many levels.**'

The school have been engaging with Forest School for five years and all children in both schools attend Forest School for one term (one day a week) each academic term. Class teachers accompany the children to Forest School and Forest School leaders make explicit curricular links back to work being undertaken in the classroom. Forest School is understood as playing a pivotal role in the delivery of curricular objectives and supporting the academic performance of children in the school.

> 'Whatever year group we are taking out, we try and find out what they are doing, so we try to match what we do in the woods to their curriculum. So we do try and keep in touch with the curriculum.'

The outdoor environment offers practical grounding for curricular concepts and tasks that support academic achievement.

> 'some of the older boys are reluctant writers…they will quite happily write about their experiences in the woods…we try to, as primary school teachers, usually link, make links from anything to anything'

Forest School is also understood as operating within the socialisation domain providing particular opportunities for collaborative working. Mrs Nolan recognises that it may be particularly beneficial as a form of intervention for children who are 'disengaged,' although she considers the socialisation benefits to operate more widely for all participants.

> '…we've taken out children of all ages and the adults and I can see it working for everyone in so many ways. It's that kind of inclusion and learning together and learning from each other and actually respecting each other…it's a very positive experience'

There is also a strong understanding of the way in which Forest School might contribute to the development of autonomy in children through the opportunities it offers – a goal in the domain of subjectification. Arguably, Forest School provides a space in which certain aspects

of 'grown-up-ness' can be practiced. One example discussed by Mrs Nolan relates to taking responsibility for oneself where she argues,

> 'it's about the children taking responsibility for their own risk, it's about fire, about, you know, cooking food, about keeping warm, wearing the right kind of gear'

Another, example relates to the development of respect for the natural environment.

> 'the children here have got much more of an appreciation of that [the seasons]…and certainly respect the environment, respect the animals and certainly we have an ethos again that we are going into the woods…and that we should be leaving the woods, the beach, hopefully the way we found it'

Mrs Nolan recognises that there are no guarantees but that her role as a senior leader is to provide opportunities for the children to recognise and respond to their responsibilities as citizens.

The Purpose of Forest School: Two Dimensions

In order to throw further light on the four accounts we consider them in relation to two dimensions – agency and curricular correspondence. The first concerns the relative degree of 'agency' expressed by the participants in terms of shaping the curriculum. The idea of 'agency' is recognised here as being relational and contingent so that 'the achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations' (Biesta & Tedder, 2007,137). Whilst agency should therefore not be conceived of in terms of a fixed or even developing capacity in the individual, it is nonetheless valid to consider the extent to which our participants see themselves as being agentive in their specific senior management roles. The second dimension we refer to as 'curricular correspondence' where a high level of correspondence indicates a perspective that regards the aims of Forest School as entirely consistent with those of the school curriculum and a low level of correspondence indicates a perspective that regards them as divergent and separate.

In order to explore our participants' thinking in greater depth, we consider how each account might fit within four quadrants formed around the intersection between these (see figure 2).

When the two cases 'Risk' and 'Intervention' are compared, some subtle differences become apparent. These are the cases in Figure 2 where school leaders are categorised as exhibiting a relatively low sense of agency. To begin with, it is important to note a difference here in what might constitute a 'sense of agency'. In the account we have labelled 'Risk', the exchange between Mr Gallio and Mrs Mackey appears to convey a sense of being weighed down by the pressures of accountability. By contrast, Mrs Gill whose account we named 'Intervention' feels under pressure to perform but nonetheless conveys a strong sense of being in control; Forest School for her has a specific part to play in her overall endeavour to meet the externally imposed requirements to perform. Clearly many factors are at play here not least of which is the fact that Mrs Gill is a long-standing 'successful' headteacher whereas Mr Gallio and Mrs Mackey are both assistant headteachers relatively new to the role. A crucial difference, however, lies in their conceptualisation of the potential role of Forest School used as an intervention. Mr Gallio, after rejecting Forest School as being too great a risk, concedes that it could be of some benefit to some children; i.e. those who 'struggle with behaviour' for whom the classroom is 'too much'. Mrs Gill would probably concur with this sentiment, but she provides a more complete rationale for using Forest School as an intervention – one that is primarily focussed on its potential to enhance cognitive development. Clearly in her mind the potential that Forest School has for developing children's language and cognitive abilities is something that should be taken advantage of but only in the case of children who struggle to progress within the conventional classroom. This account has been categorised as having a high degree of 'curriculum correspondence' since Forest School indirectly supports work towards achievement in the priority curriculum; as some would argue, however, this might involve a compromise through which the essence of Forest School is lost (e.g. Knight, 2016).

When comparing the accounts of 'Intervention' and 'Respite', further subtleties arise. Whilst these two schools are similar in a number of ways (e.g. they have similar intakes and are both rated outstanding) they have adopted very different approaches to the adoption of Forest School. Mrs Miller, whose account we have named 'Respite', is able to offer Forest School as something that falls outside the formal curriculum; it is not seen as a 'tool to improve academics' but as a compensation for or mitigation of the effects of an excessively demanding formal curriculum. In terms of agency, we have placed 'respite' at the higher end of the continuum although it could be argued, as in the case of 'intervention', that Mrs Miller

remains firmly under the ambit of the performative agenda even though she recognises its potentially harmful effects. What emerges in the interview is a disconnect between the idea of Forest School having 'no objective' and the clearly stated aims that come through when she talks about the qualities of 'resilience', 'independence' and 'self-esteem'. Here, 'curriculum correspondence' is evidently low since the Forest School curriculum, which is about goals within the domains of socialisation and subjectification, is seen as being separate from the curriculum proper which is only about 'academics'. In contrast with Mrs Gill's 'Intervention' approach, Mrs Miller focuses on the experiences of all children and unlike Mrs Gill she does not appear to consider any possible overlap between the goals of Forest School and the formal classroom.

The final account is the 'Right Thing'. Mrs Nolan expresses a deeply felt commitment to Forest School clearly believing it to be something that all children should be offered as part of their school experience. As regards 'curriculum correspondence', she talks about matching the Forest School experience with the content of class-based work and like Mrs Gill she sees Forest School as being particularly beneficial for some children – for example, in motivating 'reluctant writers' by providing a stimulus. Also, where she talks about curricular goals beyond the formal – including children being able to risk assess and children developing a respect for the natural environment – unlike Mrs Miller she sees these as an integral part of what primary schooling is for. During the interview, Mrs Nolan repeatedly stresses her desire to provide for every child, explaining how this has involved a degree of compromise since logistically it has been difficult to achieve the Forest School requirements, for small group sessions over an extended period in an authentic natural environment. She nonetheless exhibits a very pragmatic and strongly agentive approach through the innumerable day-to-day decisions she has to make. This approach is only possible, however, because it is underpinned by a firm belief in the fundamental rightness of what she is doing – a strong sense of direction for where the school is going. This is not to say that Mrs Nolan has resolved the tensions outlined at the start of this paper. Indeed, she explicitly struggles with the challenge in a school setting of remaining true to the principles of Forest School as she sees them. Her aim is, nonetheless, one of wanting to pull together the disparate elements of the whole curriculum.

Discussion: Towards a 'good education'?

Accepting Biesta's case for a multidimensional approach to educational purpose, it is possible to read into Figure 2 a possible trajectory from the bottom left quadrant towards the top right representing a shift towards a greater sense of agency and an increasing understanding of the possible place of Forest School within the primary curriculum. For a movement of this kind to take place – arguably a movement towards 'a good education' – the tensions highlighted at the start of this paper need to be addressed and, as the accounts reported in this study demonstrate each school context presents its own unique challenges. In this section, as signalled earlier, we return to Biesta's ideas about a good education, his concept of grown-up-ness and the role of the teacher. In particular we outline Biesta's (2015a: 1) argument for 'the special and unique task of the school' since this provides us with the means to clarify, in relation to our four accounts, the possible place and purpose of Forest School within the primary curriculum.

In making decisions about the curriculum, including those aimed at developing outdoor learning experiences, we argue that educators should start with an understanding of the multidimensional nature of educational purpose. Whilst all three of Biesta's domains described earlier are necessarily always present and whilst sometimes trade-offs need to be made, a 'good education', in essence, depends on educators who can pay attention to all three. As Biesta (2015b, 10) points out, 'qualification is not the only thing that counts … [and] socialisation and subjectification … need to be taken care of'. In all four of the above accounts, there is a sense in which Forest School is seen to offer a means of rebalancing the curriculum away from the current overemphasis on qualification; the underlying tension between the aims of Forest School and the aims of the priority curriculum nonetheless remains. The task of bringing these aims into alignment represents an enormous challenge for any school; our contention is that this challenge can only be met through a thorough, comprehensive and multidimensional review of the school's educational purpose. Achievement along the dimension of 'curricular correspondence' rests on a deeper understanding than that expressed in the notion of 'cross-curricular links' or the idea that maths objectives can be addressed during Forest School sessions. Questions need to be asked about the contradictions inherent in juxtaposing two very different ways of thinking about educational purpose and inevitably adjustments need to be made. Mrs Nolan, in the account

we labelled 'right thing', comes closest to doing this. Fully signed up to the FSA's principles, she is confronted by the need to compromise the purity of Forest School in order to fulfil prescribed curriculum goals; wrestling with this dilemma she nonetheless works hard to embed Forest School within the routine life of her two schools. Conversely, in the case of 'respite', where the Forest School experience is offered as a discrete package, the question of compromise does not arise. Here, a strong adherence to the FSA's principles is possible but their potential to challenge existing classroom practices, particularly in the domain of subjectification, is effectively foreclosed. Missing from all four accounts is a clear articulation of what a 'good education' consists of and of how this might be achieved through schooling.

We return, therefore, to Biesta's (2015a: 1) argument about 'the special and unique task of the school' and the role he ascribes to the teacher. Biesta sees schools not simply as institutions that fulfil a function for society, but as places 'in between the home and the street' where it is possible for children to practice 'what it means to be in the world in a grown up way' (1). The idea of 'grown-up-ness' stems from Biesta's critique of developmentalism; arguably, this is the perspective that underpins the FSA's principles. Even though 'development' is typically associated with notions of creativity, autonomy and the fulfilment of potential it, like unqualified 'learning', should not automatically be assumed to be, a good thing. Contra extreme versions of child-centeredness, Biesta (2016) argues for a 'pedagogy of interruption', which posits a clear role for the teacher whose primary task is *not* that of a 'facilitator'. It is the educator's responsibility to challenge pupils, to *interrupt* the developmental impulse, driven as it is by immediate desires (Biesta 2015a); the teacher's task is to ask whether what the child desires is indeed 'desirable for their own life, the life we live with others, and the life we live collectively on this planet'. In this way, the 'pedagogy of interruption' has the potential to decentre the child and to move them 'towards a non-ego-logical way of being in the world' (8); that is a 'grown-up' way of being in the world. What this might look like in a Forest School context is given by the hypothetical example of a teacher interrupting the free play of children whose negative impact on the environment might be deemed excessive. The implication for teachers is not that they should switch roles from 'teacher' to 'facilitator' as they step into the woods with a group of children; but neither should they bring with them an undue emphasis on transmission and control derived from the pressures of delivering the priority curriculum.

By creating a place of 'refuge where other ways of being and being together can be practiced' the school, according to Biesta (2015b:10), is exercising its 'duty to resist' the demands that are placed on it by society. Following this, we are able to conceive of Forest School initiatives as instances of resistance in a world where school is increasingly regarded, especially by government, exclusively in instrumental terms. Hence, it is interesting to consider the extent to which our four cases constitute acts of 'resistance' to the prevailing 'strong, secure, predictable and risk-free' externally defined conception of educational purpose (Biesta 2015b:10). Clearly, the case we labelled 'risk' demonstrates an acceptance of, and compliance with the performativity agenda; resistance is confined to the participants articulation of their dissatisfaction with the pressure that they are under. Both the 'intervention' and 'respite' cases have adopted Forest School but apparently only as an add-on, as something that does not threaten to compromise the aims of the priority curriculum and in the case of the former the motivation is precisely to support those aims; once again, it would be stretching the concept of 'resistance' to use it here. In the final account, where Forest School is seen as the 'right thing', there is evidence of a more multidimensional approach to educational purpose. To the extent that the inevitable consequence of this would be to reconceptualise the whole curriculum, this account contains within it the seeds of resistance. A component of what might make this possible is the strength of Mrs Nolan's vision for the future; in Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson's (2015) terms, this involves the 'projective' or future oriented dimension of agency. Which is not to say that Mrs Nolan's vision is fully worked through or comprehensive. What it does mean is that she is prepared to think about, discuss and struggle with a myriad of education purposes and given her record, at least to some extent, she is capable of taking her staff with her. If primary schools are conceived of as spaces for children to practice being grown up, then everything about the curriculum needs to be thought through in relation to this overarching goal, including the extent to which Forest School (and/or other outdoor programmes) might make a distinct contribution. Schools who are prepared to engage fully with this task will recognise the potential benefits of Forest School, not as a bolt on or alternative to the rest of the curriculum but as a set of practices, alongside others that support the fulfilment of generic educational goals.

Conclusions

Arguably, the adoption of a multidimensional approach to considering the purposes of primary education that includes within its remit an appreciation of the possibilities that outdoor experiences offer, would in the long run lead to a more secure and sustainable place for outdoor learning within the primary curriculum. Indeed, our analysis suggests that the embedding of Forest School specifically (but also outdoor learning more generally) in primary schools depends for its success upon the continuous interrogation of its purposes within a whole curriculum approach guided by a strong vision on the part of school leaders. In relation to the existing priority curriculum there is a case for resistance and where the introduction of Forest School is considered there are reasons to challenge the assumption that it is only beneficial for certain children. Furthermore, it should be stressed that when Forest School or other forms of outdoor learning are introduced in the form of self-contained packages that sit alongside the rest of the curriculum this might provide a modicum of balance, but it is unlikely to be transformative in the long term. Here we have considered how schools might re-orient themselves away from the current one-sided emphasis on 'qualification' and towards a 'pedagogy of interruption' where it is possible for children to practice 'what it means to be in the world in a grown up way' (Biesta 2015b, 10). We have argued from our data that the case of the 'right thing' has taken some tentative steps in this direction. In future work, our aim is to expand the scope of this enquiry by engaging a wider range of primary schools and their leaders.

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