

Chapter 9

‘All of the Wild’: Cultural Formation in Wales Through Outdoor Play at Forest School



Angela Rekers and Jane Waters-Davies

Abstract This chapter takes the specific context of outdoor play in the Foundation Phase in Wales to explore how children’s activity and participation is mediated through the socio-material affordances of muddy puddles at forest school. The research was underpinned by the cultural-historical tradition of making visible the sociocultural practices and individual participation which shape the child’s experience within an educational setting. The discussion in this chapter is centred upon the following questions: During forest school sessions for pupils aged 4- and 5-years old, what conflicts may be surfaced as classroom teaching staff aim to meet Welsh Government expectations for both outdoor play and self-regulatory skills development? How do these conflicts shape the child’s experience of participating in outdoor play? The analysis draws upon data gathered during 8 months of field-work; audio-visually-recorded observations and video-stimulated interviews with classroom teachers and forest school leaders are used to consider an episode of conflict during play in a muddy puddle. We explore, from child and adult perspectives, the institutional values of the Foundation Phase, demands for reception year practice and subsequent expectations about children’s participation, highlighting the mediating messages being given about ‘how to be’ and what competencies are valued in the activity setting of mud play.

Keywords Conflict · Motive orientation · Socio-material affordances · The Foundation Phase and Forest School in Wales

The original version of this chapter was revised: Acknowledgement has been included at the end of the chapter. The correction to this chapter is available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72595-2_12

A. Rekers (✉) · J. Waters-Davies
Institute of Education and Humanities, University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Carmarthen, UK
e-mail: rekerspower@yahoo.co.uk; jane.waters-davies@uwtsd.ac.uk

© The Author(s) 2021, corrected publication 2021
L. T. Grindheim et al. (eds.), *Outdoor Learning and Play*,
International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development 34,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72595-2_9

9.1 Background

Since devolution in 1999, the Welsh Government (WG) has established goals for education in its National Curriculum for Wales based upon environmental sustainability, the Rights of the Child and Wales' unique cultural identity, including the Welsh language, as an independent country within the United Kingdom (UK). Additionally, goals for play-based learning both in- and outdoors are included in the Foundation Phase Framework (FPF), the statutory curriculum for children between the ages of 3- and 7-years old (Taylor et al., 2015; Welsh Government, 2008/2015). Pertinent to the content of this chapter, it is worth noting the FPF was founded upon a concern to diminish the persistent attainment gap between pupils considered to be disadvantaged and their more advantaged peers, which is a feature of the Welsh education landscape (EEF, 2018; Waters, 2016). In the Welsh context of multiple deprivation, we acknowledge evidence about how this context shapes teacher behaviour, indicating that teachers, as the general population, tend to hold negative bias and associated low expectation about the potential attainment of those from socio-economically deprived backgrounds (Campbell, 2013, 2015; Welsh Government, 2017).

The FPF requires teachers to take an active, participatory role in children's play and activity, and to facilitate exploratory learning. The child is viewed as inherently curious and active in the search for meaning. However, teachers are also required to assess literacy and numeracy skills development and to support children's development of self-regulatory social skills. Baseline assessments and outcomes-based requirements of the Foundation Phase contribute to a 'top-down' pressure, which can contribute to practitioners' (mis)understandings of child-directed play (Siraj, 2014), and a lack of time for observing children's learning within self-directed play (Rekers-Power, 2020). There are also deeper tensions at work within the enactment of the FPF. The Foundation Phase practitioner needs to adopt a pedagogy based on a theoretical understanding of the child that is informed by sociocultural theory, rather than one that relies heavily on developmental theories (Waters, 2016). Yet, the accountability systems indicted above determine a conceptual understanding of the young child as needing to be developed into the 'school-ready' child. This chapter asks about the construction of the 'school ready' child, and offers a view that young children may indicate their developing self-regulation skills during playful behaviour.

Outdoor play is increasingly recognised as providing conditions for children's learning and development that are in alignment with FPF values (Bilton & Waters, 2017). Since the implementation of the FPF from 2008, forest school (FS) provision has been advocated as a means of providing experiential outdoor learning and play for young children on a regular basis (DCELLS, 2009; Knight, 2016; WAG, 2008). Historically in Wales, outdoor learning experiences have been located within the field of outdoor education, in the domain of one-off 'field trips', and/or residential centre provision for older students (Williams & Wainwright, 2014). Therefore, the FPF has created new cultural standards through expectations for *everyday*

opportunities for children to utilise the outdoor environment for learning and playful activity. This chapter uses empirical research findings to demonstrate some of the tensions inherent in the attempt to cultivate cultural conditions for outdoor learning.

Within the Welsh context there is a transitional 'Reception' year of education that marks the child's journey into statutory school at the age of 5 years. Pupils generally begin this Reception year when 4 years old. The Reception year sits within primary school and provides a rich time of cultural formation as the child negotiates and appropriates the standards of the distinct FPF early childhood curriculum within the school setting. This chapter demonstrates how cultural formation in the outdoors can be mediated by a conflict between (mis)understandings of outdoor play-based approaches and institutional demands for the young child to 'become' self-regulated in readiness for primary school. We consider the implications of such conflict for children's trajectory of self-experience.

In the research study upon which this chapter is based, the FS programme was delivered by a registered charity that provides year-long sessions for learners of all ages and abilities in local woodlands, as well as outdoor learning and play training for teachers and other professionals. As an institution, the charity's practice is informed by its values for delivering a learner-centred pedagogical approach based upon engagement with the natural world (Rekers-Power, 2020). Rather than following a set curriculum, FS practice is based upon a set of Six Principles (FSA, 2018). These principles, or values, situate the individual as holistically developing within an ecological community encompassing both human and non-human nature. There is an expectation that practice will be based upon learner (child)-initiated, leader (adult)-supported playful experiences. Moreover, there is the expectation that the natural environment will also initiate and shape activity.

As an alternative pedagogical model (Kraftl, 2015; Rekers-Power, 2020; Waite & Goodenough, 2018) or 'wilder' approach (Knight, 2016, p. 57) to outdoor learning, FS provides opportunities for children's appropriation of affordances not necessarily promoted by the indoor classroom or school-grounds provision. Indeed, one critical feature of FS is the opportunity for imaginative and developmentally appropriate risky play (Davis & Waite, 2005; Ridgers, Knowles, & Sayers, 2012). Although tensions lie in assuming all forest school leaders adhere to a particular value-system or pedagogical approach (see Leather, 2018), in this study the FS leaders had personal and professional values that aligned with an 'ecosocial identity' (McCree, 2020) based upon environmental ethics related to social ecology and deep ecology social movements (Rekers-Power, 2020). Although the charity was an institution based upon an alternative pedagogical approach founded in ecological understandings, it also aligned with the FPF intentions for outdoor, experiential play.

The tensions that are surfaced in this chapter centre upon the difficulties that early childhood practitioners may encounter when their understanding of outdoor play means they fail to recognise the extent of the skills being practiced by children in such play activity. The episode outlined in this chapter considers mud play as an *activity setting* (Bang, 2008). Mud play, usually in the form of 'mud kitchens' (White, 2011), is an increasingly institutionalised activity setting in early childhood

settings, due to conceptualisations of children having reduced opportunities to play outdoors and to engage in play with natural materials (Chawla, 2015). Indeed, in the pilot study, one young boy, when asked what he liked about forest school, replied: ‘All of the wild! Especially the mud!’ Yet, such wild play becomes a contested space in the episode presented here. The teacher in this study expressed concerns about the behaviour of some of the children in her class and in interview, she maintained that they ‘need to learn how to play without being so out of control’. This statement, with its implicit judgement that certain types of play and certain manifestations of self-regulation do not reflect the ‘school-ready’ child, sets the backdrop for the episode considered in this chapter.

The questions guiding the analysis of the empirical material presented here are: During a forest school session for young children, what conflicts in cultural formation may be surfaced, as new teaching staff aim to meet Welsh Government expectations for outdoor play if considered distinctive from other goals such as self-regulation? How do these conflicts shape the child’s experience of participating in outdoor play? This chapter, therefore, reflects upon an episode of playful activity at FS to explore, from the child’s and practitioner’s perspectives, the values and expectations of institutional practice in relation to outdoor play and how children’s participation is framed and shaped by these values and demands.

9.2 Theoretical Approach

The research project detailed the social and material affordances of institutional practice and the engagement of individual children in activity settings, in order to consider the cultural formation of children’s developing motive orientation and competencies as they actively negotiate the values, expectations and demands of institutions (Hedegaard, 2018). The study was underpinned by Hedegaard’s (2018) *wholeness approach* to studying children’s development using cultural historical activity theory. Hedegaard (2014) asserts that to study the child’s perspective, it is necessary to ‘follow how the child’s orientation in the world interacts with the demands that the child meets in the different institutional settings’ (p. 192). The demands and expectations of institutions are conceptualised by Hedegaard (2014) as ‘forces from the surrounding world on the child that guide the child’s activities’ (p. 192); yet, the child also is understood to be an active agential being who shapes their own activity by appropriating the affordances of the socio-material environment in line with their motive orientation (Bang, 2009).

The doctoral study built upon Bang’s (2008, 2009) conceptualisation of behaviour settings (Heft, 1988) and affordances (Gibson, 1979/2015) as the basis for an environmental affordance perspective analytic framework. In doing so, it is possible to explore the mediational affordances of *things*, *social others* and *self-experience*, in order to make visible the inter/intra-activity at work within cultural formation. *Things* are comprised of artefacts, or that which has deliberate institutional intention, as well as natural features, surfaces and substances, such as mud puddles,

which may/may not have deliberate institutional intention, yet the affordances of which may also be mediated in practice (Rekers-Power, 2020). The affordances of *social others* include the biotic lifeforms, primarily human, with which the child engages in socially-directed activity (Ibid). The notion of the *affording of self-experience* contributes to an interpretation of how the individual experiences the act of participating in activity settings, with existing and developing competencies and motive orientation in dialectic relationship with those which are valued within collective practice (Bang, 2009).

Transitions, crisis and conflict are all considered pivotal to the social situation of development as the individual participates in collective activities. As an individual within collective experience, the child develops motive orientations in relation to their perspective of these practices (Bang, 2009). The child's existing motive orientation can be most visible in episodes of conflict when they are unable to do what they want to do or when their activity appears to be in opposition to that which is promoted or valued by the practice situation (Hedegaard, 2018). This conceptualisation of conflict as a moment of intersection between individuals' motive orientations and between an individual and an institution demonstrates two central tenets of cultural historical theory relevant to the material presented here: one, that the individual is an active agent, experiencing and participating in culturally- and historically-situated institutional practice on multiple levels in the moment; and two, that analysis of these moments of intersection between institutional demands and individual participation has the potential to contribute to theorisation of both practice and participation.

9.3 Method

The empirical material presented here is from data gathered during a doctoral research project. The ethnographic study was undertaken in a primary school, catering for children between the ages of 3- to 11-years, located in the centre of a local authority-maintained housing estate in an urban, post-industrial town. Adjacent to the housing estate is 7000-acre woodland, where forest school sessions for the reception year children take place one day a week throughout the school year. During the project, the first author visited both the classroom and the forest school setting for one to two days per week during two school terms and collected data using observations, audio-visual recordings, interviews and video-stimulated accounts (Theobald, 2017). The material discussed below has been selected on the basis of *conflict* from the corpus of data that included 10 hours of video-recorded observations and 3 hours of video-stimulated interviews.

Participants included children, teaching staff and forest school staff. There were two reception year classes at the school; one class was led by an Early Years teacher (EYT), who had training in early childhood pedagogy, and the other by a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) whose previous experience had been working with children aged 9-11 as a teaching assistant. The episode presented here is from

the Newly Qualified Teacher's class; she is anonymised as 'Mrs Evans'. The Forest School Leaders (FSL) had youth work and play work qualifications, in addition to their Level 3 Forest School Leader training.

9.4 Material

In this episode of conflict, we consider both the visible conflict between children and adult, as well as the less visible conflict between societal and institutional values and the teacher's interpretation of subsequent demands; these conflicts provide opportunity to surface both the child's and the adult's perspectives. At forest school (FS), a group of children are playing in and around a muddy puddle. The FS Leaders have set up the FS site prior to the children's arrival; during this episode, they are engaged with other children who are lighting a campfire, climbing trees and using tools.

The available *things* with which the children in this episode engage are as follows: artefacts, such as waterproof jackets and wellington boots, buckets, spades, a drainpipe set at an angle between a tree and a rock, and plastic toys, i.e. dinosaurs, buckets and balls (Fig. 9.1). The features and substances with which they engage include the mud, the water, sticks and the space within and outside of the puddle. Some of the children are using spades for digging mud on the edges of the puddle; others are playing with the buckets, collecting water to pour down the drainpipe.

The *social others* include the children's peers as well as the teacher, a teaching assistant and the researcher. The adults stand on the periphery, observing the children's play. The classroom teacher and a teaching assistant are watching the



Fig. 9.1 The Muddy Puddle activity setting

children, as well as chatting with each other; the researcher is standing nearby filming with an iPhone.

Joshua, aged 5, enters the water to stand and balance on a plastic tray lying in the puddle (boy on the right in Fig. 9.1). He is smiling. Mrs Evans says sharply, 'Josh-u-a!' He turns to look at her, bites his lip, turns back to the water and scoops some up in a bottle. The teacher repeats his name.

From an adult perspective, confirmed by later video-stimulated interviews with adult participants, it appears that she is saying his name because she is concerned he is in the water with his camouflage trousers getting wet, as they are not waterproof, nor are they tucked into his wellington boots. Joshua's reaction, however, indicates that he does not understand why she is saying his name; yet, her tone is warning. Indeed, some children look up from their play to look at the teacher and follow her gaze to Joshua. Although Joshua does not have waterproof trousers on, he has worn camouflage trousers deliberately for forest school. These are the kind of 'trousers that [one of the forest school leaders] wears', he asserts later in a video-stimulated interview. This demonstrates his motive orientation to align with demands using FS leaders as role models, and her clothing as a guide, although this alignment is not recognised by the teacher.

Joshua gathers some water from the puddle into his bucket and walks around the far edge of the puddle (away from Mrs. Evans) and pours his water down the drainpipe. The water splashes onto a plastic dinosaur at the bottom of the pipe. Joshua smiles at the teacher. This activity appears to be acceptable as she stops saying his name in a warning tone and turns to talk to the teaching assistant.

Opposite the drainpipe, Chantelle, in a pink waterproof suit (far right in Fig. 9.1), approaches the puddle with a small container of water that she has retrieved from a nearby stream. She smiles at the teacher and says, 'I'm just gonna [sic] throw this in here.' Chantelle turns to the other children and shouts: 'Ok, guys, out of the way!'

The children who are digging stop to watch her. There is a big splash as the water is thrown into the puddle. Joshua is looking at Chantelle, smiling and laughing; the other children also watch the water's dispersal in the puddle with interest.

Chantelle looks in her bucket and throws out the little water that remains.

Mrs Evans says sharply to Chantelle: 'Do you think that's a good idea?'

Chantelle looks tentatively at the teacher, with a half-smile on her face.

Mrs Evans repeats the question twice more. Chantelle is still smiling at the teacher, but begins to back away, looking around nervously.

Mrs Evans continues: 'What would they say if they got soaked? What would you say if someone went and poured muddy water all over you?'

Chantelle continues to back away; but, Joshua has moved into the centre of the puddle, where the water Chantelle poured has landed.

Mrs Evans says to Chantelle: 'Think! Chantelle, think!'

Chantelle, looks down at her bucket, and says quietly, 'I can't.'

Joshua has filled his bucket with water. He calls, 'Look out!' and flips the water out of it up into the air. It lands on him and he smiles at the teacher. No one else is in

the puddle. Is he trying to draw Mrs Evans' attention from Chantelle, showing Mrs Evans that he knows to tell others to watch out, or demonstrating that if Chantelle had gotten him wet, he would not mind?

Mrs Evans turns her attention to Joshua. 'What would someone say if – What would *you* say if someone threw muddy – water over you?'

Joshua looks down at the muddy water. He shrugs, looking confused, half smile on his face, looking into the muddy puddle. Chantelle walks to the far side of the puddle so that Joshua is in between the teacher and herself, drops her bucket in the water, then retreats from the puddle to go play elsewhere.

Another boy, Joe, pours water down the drainpipe and Mrs Evans laughs. She says to the teaching assistant: 'Joe loves water play!' From her response, it appears that pouring water down the drainpipe is the preferred way of utilising full buckets of muddy water from a classroom institutional perspective, although she has not articulated this verbally to the children, and although it is at odds with the forest school institutional perspective, which allows space for risky play.

9.5 Analysis

9.5.1 *Conflict: Institutional Conditions for Outdoor Play*

There is some tension between how outdoor play is conceptualised from a forest school (FS) perspective and from a classroom/school perspective (Maynard, 2007). The forest school leader training incorporates sustainable use of natural resources and a play work perspective that supports the provision of resources as 'loose parts' (Nicholson, 1972). In interview the FS Leaders said that they evaluated mud play from three angles. These are related to sustainability: 'is the environment being harmed?'; safety: 'is the muddy puddle become stagnant and breeding harmful bacteria' or 'is the mud going in anyone's eyes?', and developmentally: 'in what ways is this activity supporting learning and development?'. Their response to the episode, as ascertained in video-stimulated interviews after the event, was that the children were enjoying themselves, taking care of each other, and throwing/pouring water to see how it landed indicating early scientific concept development. The leaders said there was not a 'right' way to play in the muddy puddle and that getting wet was part of the children's learning to manage risk and exploring properties of the natural world. Therefore, from the FS perspective, the children's activity with *things* was in alignment with FS expectations.

The FS leaders also saw alignment in the *social others* affordances aspect of the episode. They remarked that Chantelle warned the others to 'look out!' before she threw the water, which they perceived as demonstrating care for others, and that Joshua seemed to try to 'protect' Chantelle by diverting the teacher's attention from her to himself to demonstrate that not everyone would mind if someone got them wet. These perceptions of acceptable 'wild' play characterise the motive

orientations of the forest school leaders, in which there is room for social and exploratory play in which getting wet is an acceptable risk. The FS leaders asserted that they consider play, even risky play, as a means of practicing competencies in social skills and self-regulation (e.g., Bodrova, Germeroth, & Leong, 2013; Brussoni et al., 2015; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Whitebread, Jameson, & Basilio, 2015). The perceptions of the leaders when viewing this episode provide a basis for interpreting alignments between motive orientation of forest school and the children. Importantly, the forest school leaders' interpretations of the event align with the demands of Foundation Phase to provide opportunities for experiential play, risky and social play considered beneficial for children's learning and development.

The teacher's perspective, however, is in conflict with FS practice and is arguably in contrast with FPF values. Her perspective of the play appears based upon how outdoor play might be promoted on school grounds or her expectations for children's behaviour indoors, as demonstrated by the constraints she places on the affordances of water play. Careful play using artefacts in specific ways is encouraged; but, 'wild' play, in which children utilise the affordances of artefacts differently to expectation and might get themselves or others wet, is discouraged. The teacher suggested, in the video-stimulated interview following the event, that her response to the children's play was motivated by annoyance at the children for getting wet, as well as by concern about children learning to care for themselves and others – and, importantly, her perception that Joshua and Chantelle were not competently doing so. The teacher's motive orientation, as representative of the school institution, was focused upon controlling the activity and the children's participation therein, presumably in order to maintain control and ensure everyone was able to play without getting uncomfortable, e.g., wet. This suggests an orientation toward risk-aversion that, rather than supporting children in learning to manage risk, results in their confusion and disengagement. The teacher's response also indicates a cultural perspective in which the children's inter/intra-actions with the natural materials of the environment are less recognised or valued than the inter/intra-actions with human-fabricated artefacts, although both have cultural constraints specific to their intended 'uses'.

9.5.2 Conflict: Motive Orientations and the Personal Perspective

The conflict between the teacher and the children (Joshua and Chantelle) highlights how the institutional perspective, as enacted by the teacher, presents a dilemma for the children's participation. The teacher perceives the ways in which Joshua and Chantelle play with and in the muddy puddle to be problematic. In interview, she maintains that they 'need to learn how to play without being so out of control'. We may conjecture that, from her perspective, these children were not displaying what she would accept as 'school-ready' self-regulation; this may create concern or even

fear on her part of the children being 'out of control'. From an environmental affordance perspective, the children appropriate the affordances of the muddy puddle for *wading*, *splashing* and *throwing*, as well as *pouring*. Not all of these affordances are encouraged by the teacher. Although this way of participating is not necessarily out of alignment with forest school motive orientations for experiential and exploratory play with natural materials, the teacher would prefer that these affordances are constrained (Kyttä, 2003) at forest school as they would be on school grounds.

Similarly, the social others available in the activity setting – the teacher and peers – afford *watching*, *laughing* and *playing together*, which is in alignment with practice demands. Yet, because *throwing* of water and *wading* in deep water is not acceptable from the teacher's perspective, the teacher does not recognise the appropriation of valued social affordances. Indeed, her own social affordances for Joshua and Chantelle also include *reprimanding*, *rejecting* and *confusing*. The conflict highlights how what the teacher affords the children is not in alignment with Foundation Phase values for *supporting* and *guiding*. Due to this, Chantelle eventually disengages and leaves the activity setting. This results in a failure to support Chantelle's developing motive orientation, as an individual within collective practice, who is both capable of *looking out for her peers* and demonstrates a desire to be in alignment with institutional values by *looking to the teacher for approval*.

The socio-material affordances of the muddy puddle hold the potential to contribute to how Chantelle may begin to perceive of herself as a competent member of the class culture: as *one who looks out for others*, as *one who successfully plays*, and other self-experiencing affordances for cultural formation. Bang (2009) asserts that the developing of motive orientation in alignment with institutional orientation allows for a sense of self as one who has or is developing the competencies that are valued. Because Chantelle's personal actions in relation to the collective activity of muddy puddle play appear to be rejected by the teacher, an opportunity is lost to engage Chantelle in developing an understanding of what expectations there are for participation in the muddy play and how she might form motive orientations that are more clearly in alignment with institutional practice. The forest school leaders, who were less astonished by the 'wild' throwing of water, were better able to view Chantelle as socially and physically competent. Had they been present, perhaps they would have been able to laugh with her and praise her care for the others, thus reinforcing her self-experience as one who is capable of both playing well with natural materials and with others.

Joshua also seems to be without a clear understanding of how he might be able to participate in a way in which he might receive praise for aligning his motives with those of the institutional perspective(s). By continually looking to the teacher for approval, he also demonstrates a motive orientation to both play with the muddy water *and* please the teacher. Additionally, although he does not have waterproof trousers on, he has worn his camouflage trousers in order to fit into what he sees as a forest school dress code. They are the same as one of the forest school leader's trousers. The teacher's interactions with him seem to confuse him, rather than guide him.

Joshua also demonstrates motive alignment with school practice in regards to how to treat others. He seems to care for Chantelle by trying to deflect the unwanted attention from the teacher from her to himself, trying to make the teacher laugh and calling 'look out' to his peers. The teacher, Mrs Evans, however, displays disapproval toward his behaviour, rather than articulating praise or clarifying what is expected. His developing motive orientations of *dressing appropriately*, *caring for others*, *exploratory play with natural materials* and *playing well with peers* have been ignored. Later, however, the teacher offers approval and recognition toward Joe, a child whose ways of participating and his appropriation of the water play more visibly, and perhaps consistently, align with the teacher's expectations and demands. Although Joshua also appropriated water play similarly when he used the plastic tube in similar ways, his actions were not necessarily praised and specifically supported by the teacher. His ways of meeting the affordances of the activity setting, as an expression of his own playful interaction with available materials, were met with disapproval, thus reducing opportunity for him to understand how he contributes to and belongs in the institutional culture of the reception year.

The aligning of motive orientations is a way in which children begin to develop in relationship with the collective, institutional practice (Bang, 2009). The ways in which the child experiences *self* in relation to collective motive orientations contributes to the child's engagement with institutional practice. The child begins to be able to see oneself in relation to what is valued in practice, such as '*caring-for-others-able*' and '*playing-well-able*'. If the child's ways of participating are rejected without support for how to be in alignment or without acknowledgement of existing competencies, children are at risk of becoming disengaged and unable to understand how their participations fits in to the collective whole.

9.6 Discussion

Children's cultural formation occurs as children participate in everyday activities within institutional practices of home, care and educational settings. Kallestad and Ødegaard (2013) assert that cultural formation is 'the shaping of new meanings, identities and practice' (p. 75), recognising the dialectical activity that characterises both the individual's development and the sense of self as a participant within collective practice. From a cultural-historical perspective, the social and material conditions of institutional practice mediate children's participation; thus, the values, expectations and demands that characterise institutional practice may be viewed in relationship with the affordances of activity settings (Bang, 2009). Across the lifespan, individuals are confronted with the values, expectations, demands and standards of new institutions; conflict or crisis may arise particularly during times of transition as they learn to merge existing skills and motive orientation with the new standards.

The episode presented here indicates that young children are looking toward the adults to determine what values are being promoted and trying to understand what

is expected of them in relation to institutional values and demands. The FS leaders recognised the children's developing competencies in alignment with institutional values and expectations in these episodes; however, the teacher appeared focused on shortcomings and lack of specific competencies. This may be due to the newly qualified teacher's previous classroom experience in another school or her lack of professional development in play or outdoor play specifically. The Foundation Phase Framework can be aligned with international approaches to early childhood education and care predicated upon a commitment to play, most often valued for contributing to learning outcomes and cognitive development, as well as emotional, social, and physical development (Broadhead, 2006, 2009; Brooker, 2011; Pellegrini, 1988, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Silva, 2004; Wood, 2007a). Research on play also asserts its potential for enhancing the well-being of the child, as an individual and as belonging to a group (Aasen & Waters, 2006; Sandseter & Seland, 2016).

However, as Wood (2007a) notes, a shift from a pedagogy based on achievement of specific curriculum outcomes to one that requires a play-based approach is significant and full of inherent tensions. These tensions centre on the problematic nature of how play is understood (e.g. Wood & Attfield, 2005), the regulation of play within early childhood curriculum frameworks (Wood, 2007a, 2007b) and the reification of play within early years practice (Cannella, 1997; Stephen, 2012). The ambiguity inherent in the claims made in Foundation Phase documentation for 'well planned play' (WAG, 2008, p. 5), 'free play' (WAG, 2008, p. 5) and play that is 'structured with clear aims for children's learning' (WAG, 2008, p. 7), without any differentiation between these play forms, may illustrate further the challenges facing practitioners seeking to implement the Foundation Phase Framework.

The conflicts described in the muddy puddle activity surface a lack of recognition on the part of the teacher that the children are developing self-regulatory competences and aligned motive orientations by looking to her for guidance and caring for each other, even in risky play that may be perceived as 'too wild' or 'out of control'. This situation, we argue, may contribute to children becoming marginalised as badly behaved and subsequently disengaging from school learning if they perceive that they are failing to meet teacher expectations.

This chapter highlights the social and material affordances of institutional practice and the engagement of individual children in activity settings, in order to consider the cultural formation of children's developing motive orientation and competencies as they actively negotiate the values, expectations and demands of institutions (Hedegaard, 2018). The Foundation Phase was conceptualised as an alternative approach to formal schooling for children under the age of eight. The outdoor environment, when coupled with an alternative pedagogical approach such as play and nature pedagogies like forest school, allows for children's experiential learning through the medium of playful activity with natural materials. Hännikainen, Singer and van Oers (2013, p. 165) assert that:

[P]lay seems to be a valuable medium for children to participate in cultural life, to learn how to live together, to learn how to deal with authority, conflicts and power, and to appropriate basic cultural values, attitudes, abilities and knowledge.

The values of Early Years provision in the UK typically relate to learning and skills outcomes, which are shaped by accountability measures and meeting pupils' wide range of needs, so that children develop their competencies and realise their potential to participate as members of a classroom first and, later on, mainstream society. These values lead to demands and expectations for learning, participating and behaving, e.g., self-regulation and listening, in order to promote smooth transitions between pre-school, reception year and primary school. Importantly, play in the outdoors can be a valuable medium for children's participation in a cultural life that expands the range of affordances for cultural formation and 'participation in cultural life' (Hännikainen et al., 2013), including interactions with non-human nature in a more 'common worlds' pedagogical approach (Taylor, 2013). In light of Welsh Government goals for well-being and sustainable futures (Welsh Government, 2015), it is essential that alternative pedagogies, such as forest school, are able to not only create space for such experiences that allow for a wider range of socio-material affordances and ways of being, but that such pedagogies not be constrained themselves by lack of understanding or training.

Government policy for education is based upon the 'values, beliefs, activities and practices' (Tudge et al., 1999, p. 68) of wider mainstream society, which attempts to unify a diverse population toward a communal goal of civic engagement, opportunity and responsibility. These values and expectations, in turn, influences perceptions of learners' competencies (Aasen, Grindheim, & Waters, 2009; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002; Waite, Huggins, & Wickett, 2014) and significantly affects children for whom educational equity is most essential (Wood, 2007b). Hedegaard (2010) argues that values and demands may also lead to tensions between expectations for the child as a future being while also providing 'space' for children to be themselves in the present and to be viewed in terms of existing competencies. Arguably, a cultural framework that limits or does not recognise the role of children's interactivity with the affordances of natural materials, even while arguing for outdoor play, loses opportunities for children to develop sustainable ecological identities as part of the wider community of species as well as to develop an identity as a successful learner.

By observing diverse children's participation in relationship with the socio-material affordances of the woodland, teaching staff may be encouraged to consider how children are developing motive orientation in alignment with the multiple values of the Foundation Phase Framework. In doing so, teachers may be better able to support children's diverse ways of participating, in order that children who may be at risk from disengaging in school due to a perceived lack of alignment may be more inclusively engaged and find space to belong.

Acknowledgements A much-valued PhD studentship from the Wales Centre for Equity in Education and The University of Wales Trinity Saint David supported the research upon which this chapter is based.

References

- Aasen, W., Grindheim, L. T., & Waters, J. (2009). The outdoor environment as a site for children's participation, meaning-making and democratic learning: Examples from Norwegian kindergartens. *Education 3-13*, 37(1), 5–13.
- Aasen, W., & Waters, J. (2006). The new curriculum in Wales: A new view of the child? *Education 3-13*, 34(2), 123–129.
- Bang, J. (2008). Conceptualising the environment of the child in a cultural-historical approach. In M. Hedegaard & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Studying children – A cultural-historical approach* (pp. 118–138). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education.
- Bang, J. (2009). An environmental affordance perspective on the study of development – Artefacts, social others, and self. In M. Hedegaard, M. Fleer, & J. Tudge (Eds.), *World yearbook of education 2009. Childhood studies and the impact of globalization: Policies and practices at global and local levels* (pp. 161–181). London/New York: Routledge.
- Bilton, H., & Waters, J. (2017). Why take young children outside? A critical consideration of the professed aims for outdoor learning in the early years by teachers from England and Wales. *Social Sciences: Special Issue: Equality and Social Inclusion: The Role of Education*, 6(1), 1–16.
- Bodrova, E., Germeroth, C., & Leong, D. J. (2013). Play and self-regulation: Lessons from Vygotsky. *American Journal of Play*, 6(1), 111.
- Broadhead, P. (2006). Developing an understanding of young children's learning through play: The place of observation, interaction and reflection. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(2), 191–207.
- Broadhead, P. (2009). Conflict resolution and children's behaviour: Observing and understanding social and cooperative play in early years educational settings. *Early Years*, 29(2), 105–118.
- Brooker, L. (2011). Taking children seriously: An alternative agenda for research? *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(2), 137–149.
- Brussoni, M., Gibbons, R., Gray, C., Ishikawa, T., Sandseter, E. B. H., Bienenstock, A., et al. (2015). What is the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in children? A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 12(6), 6423–6454.
- Campbell, T. (2013). *Stereotyped at seven? Biases in teacher judgements of pupils' ability and attainment* (CLS working paper 2013/8). London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies.
- Campbell, T. (2015). Stereotyped at seven? Biases in teacher judgement of pupils' ability and attainment. *Journal of Social Policy*, 44(03), 517–547.
- Cannella, G. S. (1997). *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social justice bad revolution*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Chawla, L. (2015). Benefits of nature contact for children. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 30(4), 433–452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412215595441>
- Davis, B., & Waite, S. (2005). *Forest schools: An evaluation of the opportunities and challenges in early years* (Final Report). Available at: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/6/6761/Forestschoofinalreport2.pdf>
- Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). (2009). *Foundation phase outdoor learning handbook*. Cardiff, UK: Welsh Assembly Government. <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/fcb8539c-9be7-4883-8542-35d7b54b56f2/foundation-phase-outdoor-learning-handbook.pdf>
- Education Endowment Foundation. (2018). *Attainment gap report*. https://educationendowment-foundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Attainment_Gap_Report_2018.pdf
- Forest School Association (FSA). (2018). *Principles and criteria for good practice*. Available at: <https://www.forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/>
- Gibson, J. J. (1979/2015). *The ecological approach to visual perception* (classic Ed.). New York/London: Psychology Press.
- Hännikainen, M., Singer, E., & van Oers, B. (2013). Promoting play for a better future. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(2), 165–171.

- Hedegaard, M. (2010). Forward. In M. Fleer (Ed.), *Early learning and development. Cultural-historical concepts in play* (pp. vii–x). Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (2014). The significance of demands and motives across practices in children's learning and development: An analysis of learning in home and school. *Learning Culture and Social Interaction*, 3(3), 188–194.
- Hedegaard, M. (2018). Children's perspectives and institutional practices as keys in a wholeness approach to children's social situations of development. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2018.04.008>
- Heft, H. (1988). Affordances of children's environments: A functional approach to environmental description. *Children's Environments Quarterly*, 5(3), 29–37.
- Kallestad, J. H., & Ødegaard, E. E. (2013). Children's activities in Norwegian kindergartens. Part 1: An overall picture. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 9(4), 74–82.
- Knight, S. (2016). *Forest school in practice*. London: Sage.
- Kraftl, P. (2015). Alter-childhoods: Biopolitics and childhoods in alternative education spaces. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 105(1), 219–237.
- Kytä, M. (2003). *Children in outdoor contexts. Affordances and independent mobility in the assessment of environmental child friendliness*. PhD dissertation. Helsinki University of Technology, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies.
- Leather, M. (2018). A critique of forest school: Something lost in translation. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 21(1), 5–18.
- Mahn, H., & John-Steiner, V. (2002). The gift of confidence: A Vygotskian view of emotions. In G. Wells & G. Claxton (Eds.), *Learning for life in the 21st century* (pp. 46–58). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- Maynard, T. (2007). Encounters with Forest School and Foucault: A risky business? *Education 3-13*, 35(4), 379–391.
- McCree, M. (2020). Future shock, generational change, and shifting eco-social identities: Forest school practitioners' reasons to train. In A. Cutter-Mackenzie, K. Malone, & E. Barratt Hacking (Eds.), *Research handbook on childhood nature: Assemblages of childhood and nature research* (pp. 925–952). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer International Handbooks of Education.
- Nicholson, S. (1972). The theory of loose parts. An important principle for design methodology. *Studies in Design Education and Craft*, 4(2), 5–14.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (1988). Elementary-school children's rough-and-tumble play and social competence. *Developmental Psychology*, 24(6), 802–806.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2009). *The role of play in human development*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Pellegrini, A. D., & Smith, P. K. (1998). Physical activity play: The nature and function of a neglected aspect of playing. *Child Development*, 69(3), 577–598.
- Rekers-Power, A. (2020). *Exploring young children's participation and motive orientation in the reception year classroom and at forest school*. PhD thesis. University of Wales Trinity Saint David. <https://repository.uwtsd.ac.uk/1410/>
- Ridgers, N. D., Knowles, Z. R., & Sayers, J. (2012). Encouraging play in the natural environment: A child-focused case study of Forest school. *Children's Geographies*, 10(1), 49–65.
- Sandseter, E. B. H., & Seland, M. (2016). Children's experience of activities and participation and their subjective well-being in Norwegian early childhood education and care institutions. *Child Indicators Research*, 9(4), 913–932.
- Siraj, I. (2014) *An independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales*. Final report. London: IOE. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20340/1/140519-independent-stocktake-of-the-foundation-phase-in-wales-en.pdf>
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Silva, K. (2004). Researching pedagogy in English pre-schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5), 713–730.
- Stephen, C. (2012). Looking for theory in preschool education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31, 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9288-5>
- Taylor, A. (2013). *Reconfiguring the natures of childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, C., Rhys, M., Waldron, S., Davies, R., Power, S., Maynard, T., Moore, L., Blackaby, D., & Plewis, I. (2015). *Evaluating the foundation phase: Final report*. Available at: <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/150514-foundation-phase-final-en.pdf>

- Theobald, M. (2017). Children as research participants in educational research using video-stimulated accounts. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 86, 131–144.
- Tudge, J., Hogan, D., Lee, S., Tammesveski, P., Meltsas, M., Kulakova, N., Snezhkova, I., & Putnam, S. (1999). Cultural heterogeneity: Parental values and beliefs and their preschoolers' activities in the United States, South Korea, Russia and Estonia. In A. Göncü (Ed.), *Children's engagement in the world. Sociocultural perspectives* (pp. 62–96). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Waite, S., & Goodenough, A. (2018). What is different about forest school? Creating a space for an alternative pedagogy. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 21(1), 25–44.
- Waite, S., Huggins, V., & Wickett, K. (2014). Risky outdoor play: Embracing uncertainty in pursuit of learning. In T. Maynard & J. Waters (Eds.), *Exploring outdoor play in the early years* (pp. 71–85). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Waters, J. (2016). The foundation phase in Wales – time to grow up? *Wales Journal of Education*, 18(1), 179–198.
- Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). (2008). *Play/active learning: Overview for 3–7 year olds*. Cardiff, UK: Welsh Assembly Government. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/52aae98d-65ed-4065-9222-1a7876e150de/play-active-learning-overview-for-3-to-7-year-olds.pdf>
- Welsh Government. (2008/2015). *Curriculum for Wales: Foundation Phase Framework* (Revised 2015). Available at: <http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/150803-fp-framework-en.pdf>
- Welsh Government. (2015). *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents/enacted>
- Welsh Government. (2017). *Index of multiple deprivation indicator update*. Available online: <https://gov.wales/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation-indicator-update-2017>
- White, J. (2011) *Making a mud kitchen* (2nd Ed.). Muddy Faces. https://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/download/mudpack2016/books/Making_a_mud_kitchen_english.pdf
- Whitebread, D., Jameson, D., & Basilio, M. (2015). Play beyond the foundation stage: Play, self-regulation and narrative skills. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *The excellence of play* (4th ed., pp. 84–93). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Williams, A., & Wainwright, N. (2014). Camping on concrete: Professional development of adventurous activities in Wales. *University of Wales Journal of Education*, 17(1), 6–29.
- Wood, E. (2007a). New directions in play: consensus or collision? *Education 3-13*, 35(4), 309–320.
- Wood, E. (2007b). Reconceptualising child-centred education: Contemporary directions in policy, theory and practice in early childhood. *FORUM*, 49(1&2), 119–133.
- Wood, E., & Attfield, J. (2005). *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum* (2nd ed.). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

