

Running head: CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN
FOREST SCHOOL

THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

Exploring Parents' Perceptions of Young Children's Growth, Learning, and Development
in a Western Canadian Forest School

By

Saba Madarwala

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Education

KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA

August, 2022

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Carol Rees

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Victoria Handford

Committee Member: Dr. Patricia Liu-Baergen

Committee Member: Dr. Cory Jobb

© Saba Madarwala, 2022

Contents

List of figures and tables.....	iii
Tables.....	iii
Figures.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background and Rationale.....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Personal Rationale.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Question.....	4
CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Early Childhood Education.....	6
What are Forest Schools?.....	7
History of Forest Schools.....	8
Challenges associated with Forest Schools.....	8
<i>Issues in Developing Forest Schools</i>	9
<i>Safety Assessment</i>	9
Benefits of Forest Schools.....	9
<i>Children’s Growth in Forest Schools</i>	9
<i>Children’s Learning in Forest Schools</i>	11
<i>Children’s Development in Forest Schools</i>	12
Role of Educators.....	14
Parent’s Choice.....	15
Theoretical Underpinnings of Forest Schools.....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	16
<i>The Kindergarten</i>	17
<i>Froebel’s Theory of Engagement with Nature</i>	17
<i>Froebel’s Educational Approach and Forest School Pedagogy</i>	18
CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	19
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	20
Qualitative Design.....	20
Case Study.....	20
Locating Myself as a Researcher.....	21
Rigor in the Study.....	22
<i>Member-checking</i>	22
<i>Inter-rater Reliability</i>	22
Data Collection.....	23
<i>Interview Procedure</i>	23
<i>Participants and Site</i>	24

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Data Analysis	25
CHAPTER SUMMARY	26
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	27
Parents' Views of their Children's Growth	27
<i>Physical Fitness</i>	28
<i>Social-Emotional Wellbeing</i>	28
Parents' Views of their Children's Learning	31
<i>Effective Learning</i>	31
<i>Indigenous Ways of Knowing</i>	34
Parents' Views of their Children's Development	35
<i>Respecting Nature</i>	35
<i>Stepping-stone towards Kindergarten</i>	37
<i>Children's Autonomy</i>	39
Role of Educators	41
CHAPTER SUMMARY	42
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	44
Parents' Views of their Children's Growth	45
<i>Physical Fitness</i>	45
<i>Social-Emotional Wellbeing</i>	45
Parents' Views of their Children's Learning	46
<i>Effective Learning</i>	46
<i>Indigenous Ways of Knowing</i>	47
Parents' Views of their Children's Development	48
<i>Respecting Nature</i>	48
<i>Stepping-stone towards Kindergarten</i>	49
<i>Children's Autonomy</i>	50
Role of Educators	50
CHAPTER SUMMARY	51
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	52
Educational Implications	53
Recommendations	54
Limitations	54
Future Research	55
References	56
APPENDICES	62
Appendix A: Interview Questions	62
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter	63
Appendix C: Verbal Explanation	63
Appendix D: Participant Consent Form	63

List of figures and tables

Tables

Table 1: Summary of Froebelian Kindergarten and Forest School Philosophy	18
Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants	24
Table 3: Summary of Parents' Perceptions of their Children's Growth, Learning, and Development	27

Figures

Figure 1: Key Themes Emerging from Parents' Interviews.....	44
---	----

ABSTRACT

Forest School is an alternative early childhood education (ECE) approach that aims at taking the classes outdoors. The aim of this research is to reveal and understand the viewpoints of parents whose children are enrolled in forest school. The primary research question is “What are parents’ perceptions of their children’s growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in Forest School?” The study was conducted in a forest school in Western Canada. Qualitative research following case study methodology was used for this research. A total of five semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that parents viewed forest school as a stepping-stone for kindergarten which strengthened children’s autonomy and made them stewards of nature. According to parents, forest school supported children in their physical, mental, and emotional growth. Findings also suggested that parents considered learning in the forest school was effective and made children confident and independent. Interview data revealed that children learnt about the Indigenous culture in the forest school. Parents viewed educational philosophy of forest school as a valuable experience for their children. Thereupon, the researcher suggests detailed research about forest schools from varied lenses including parents, children, teachers, and policy makers and varied places across Canada and other countries.

Key Words: Forest School, ECE, Outdoors, Parent’s Perception, Growth, Learning, Development, Case Study

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my gratitude to Allah (S.W.T.) for His blessings and mercies in directing me through this path of immense knowledge and learning.

The initiation of this study would not have been possible without the thoughtful insights of Dr. Bernita Wienhold-Leahy, who encouraged and supported my learning during the early years of my master's program.

I could not have undertaken this study without my supervisor Dr. Carol Rees, who provided me with immense support throughout the research process. I am highly indebted to the intellectual and professional knowledge she shared with me on this journey. In addition, she encouraged me to voice my opinions and always stood by me with my decisions.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Victoria Handford, who supported me during difficult times. She provided me with a varied lens to examine my research and her insights helped me advance this project. Her timely support resolved many unforeseen complications in my research study.

In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Liu-Baergen for providing me with valuable suggestions throughout this research journey. Her positive words motivated me to perform my best. Furthermore, her timely and insightful advice strengthened this study.

I sincerely thank Dr. Cory Jobb for his logical suggestions and knowledgeable advice. His recommendations broadened this study's scope and helped me produce a sound study.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the director of Sprouting Knowledge Forest School and the parents who participated in this study. I am grateful to them for sharing valuable insights into this research.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family: my husband Sarfaraz Hussain for his patience, warmth, and support in encouraging me to follow my dreams in a foreign country. His constant motivation is the sole reason I have reached this journey's final stage. Special gratitude to my two little daughters, Mehrish Gulnar and Zaheen Sarfaraz, for always inspiring me to do well. Without their unconditional love and support, this study would not have been possible. Finally, I would also like to dedicate my thesis to my parents, whose sincere prayers and love for me helped me sail through this smoothly.

.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Young children today spend less time in the outdoors, which has led to a sedentary lifestyle (Fjørtoft, 2001). Such a way of living may negatively impact children's growth, learning, and development. Proximity to nature can improve behavior, increase resilience, enhance physical agility, and promote cognitive development in young children (Cooper, 2015). In addition, proximity to nature can support children's developing stewardship towards nature (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016). Time spent outdoors in nature influences children's over-all growth. According to Hand et al. (2017, as cited in Harvey et al., 2020), it is important that children's time spent outdoors be in natural settings as nature provides varied biodiversity, which may not be available in structured parks; however, it has been noted that children prefer private or public parks which do not serve the purpose of nature connection.

Background and Rationale

Since considerable research indicates the importance of children's interaction with nature, it is important to explore the reasons responsible for the small amount of time spent outdoors. Globalization is one of these reasons. Globalization has led to the bureaucratization of education. As the world economies struggle to reach the top, the pedagogy of profit has rooted itself firmly in the education system. This scenario of preparing children for future refutes Dewey's (1897) concept of raising the children socially and emotionally. In current times, children are considered assets on the balance sheet who will upturn the country's future. Neoliberalizing education to increase the readiness of children to enter the capitalistic world has become the main agenda of the developed and developing nations (Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019). In this inflexible corporate world, the goal of education has been reduced to the transmission of industrial knowledge and its acquisition and cultivation to produce factory models to increase the productivity of the economies. Such a myopic vision of young children's education destroys the creative skills of the future. As Freire (1968/2005) stated, "education is suffering from narration sickness" (p. 71). The current times of capitalism exhibit crisis in education, which has removed passion from intellect.

The education system today faces many issues because of the ill-considered aspects of learning and teaching. Standardized testing at varied levels of education has given rise to the miseducation of children (Pinar, 2004). The inclusion of standardized testing, increased focus on academic achievement, and lack of physical activities due to greater reliance on technology have led to disconnection with nature. As stated by Henry Giroux in an interview,

“Neoliberals believe that the curriculum should be organized around testing, creating passive students, and enforcing a pedagogy of repression” (Nevradakis, 2015, p. 451). The focus of education on academic achievement and success in science, mathematics, and technology has overshadowed the children's creative skills. Children are encouraged to spend more time accommodating the knowledge presented to them in the structured classroom (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019). According to Kiewra and Veselack (2016), the traditional educational system of teaching the children within the four walls of the classroom and not encouraging the children's exploratory skills are some of the many reasons for the decline in children's critical thinking and originality in the United States and other countries. In addition, the advancement in technology in recent years has resulted in disconnection from nature (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Kalpogianni, 2019) resulting in substantial negative impacts on the children, which has affected the children's responsibility towards nature. Tremblay (2018, as cited in British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019b) states a decline in the amount of physical activity in Canadian children compared to the time spent in front of the screen. According to HealthLink BC (2020), children between the ages of 2-4 should have a screen time of a maximum of an hour a day, and for children aged 5-17, it should be a maximum of two hours a day. However, a recent meta-analysis on the screentime usage of children revealed that only “1 in 4 children aged below 2 years and 1 in 3 children aged 2-5 years” (p. 379) are meeting the prescribed screentime guidelines (McArthur et al., 2022), which is threatening to young children's health. Apart from increased screentime, parental restrictions also negatively impact children's time spent outdoors.

Safety restrictions imposed on children's play are paradoxically ruining their health and future. “Stranger-danger” (Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019, p. 270) as a parental concern (Louv, 2008; Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019; Wyver et al., 2010) is one of the most important reasons for the decline in children's outdoor encounters. The exaggerated fear of this concern has created hysteria amongst parent communities in letting their children play outside (Holt et al., 2015; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997, as cited in Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019). For the protection of their children, parents supervise them at all times, which hinders their exploratory skills. Furthermore, possible hazards and risks of accidents affect parents' decision to let their children play outdoors.

Problem Statement

Early childhood is a phase when children bloom to their full potential. Therefore, choosing the kind of early childhood education environment for children is an important decision by every parent. The reasons discussed above influence parents' decision to choose a

type of educational approach which can protect their children from any danger. The fear of hazards and the pressure of raising children in a neoliberal world encourage parents to choose structured classrooms where their children can achieve academic attainment and thereby act as commodities to develop economic gain. Although parents' efforts to ensure their children secure well-paid jobs are a genuine concern for their children's security and future, this buy-in to the neo-liberal agenda can have serious consequences. With mounting research on the benefits of parental involvement on children's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001), little is known about the parents' perceptions of their decision-making on early childhood education (ECE) for their children. If we have to support the holistic development of the young generation, we must look for ways to protect the future generation from becoming robots. According to British Columbia Ministry of Education (2019a), holistic approach is "an approach to early learning that encompasses the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative nature of a child. A holistic approach focuses on the whole child, rather than concentrating only on individual components" (p. 102). Therefore, to change and enrich children's educational opportunities, we need to concentrate on two vital tasks. The first is to provide alternative educational approaches to parents for their children, and the second is to provide detailed information about various resources to help them make informed decisions on their young children's education.

Personal Rationale

Parenting is multidimensional and therefore requires parents to understand the breadth and depth of their children's early childhood educational approach. As a mother of two young girls, choosing the right kind of education for my children has been the top-most priority. However, as a result of my growing-up years in a developing nation with the pressure of 'learn well to earn well,' I raised my children with the same notion of being commodities for economic development. At the time of choosing early childhood education (ECE) for my children, there were only two options for me to choose from; first, a structured daycare for six hours a day, and second, to home school my children with extended family, and I chose the former as it seemed more appropriate, formal, and structured. However, what I lacked in my decision to select the right type of ECE was, firstly, my unawareness of the importance of ECE for the holistic development of young children; secondly, unavailability of other ECE alternatives, and lastly, absence of shared knowledge of other parents' experience. I believe the lack of other alternatives, less information, and unavailability of a detailed outline of the resources shaped my decision to settle with the closed structured daycare. However, while continuing my studies in Canada, I realized that there are many different options of ECE to

choose from in developed nations. My first encounter with the forest school approach happened while researching the state of outdoor education in Canada for an assignment. This late but exciting encounter with forest school alternative ignited in me the thirst to research its existence, approach, and pedagogy. While researching forest schools, I observed a vast body of research on the benefits of learning in nature. However, there is limited knowledge about how to promote this excellent learning alternative. My constructivist worldview supported my understanding of the multitude of positive impacts of forest school pedagogy but left me with a question as to how this pedagogical approach can reach a greater audience. Therefore, this study arose from my inquisitiveness to understand the viewpoints of the children's first educators, the parents. I believe comprehending parents' perceptions would not only add to the literature on forest school pedagogy but will serve the purpose of informing those parents looking for alternative learning environments for the holistic development of their young children.

Purpose of the Study

In Europe, UK, and North America, Forest School (FS) pedagogy has been an emerging and exciting education alternative (Dean, 2019) that parents of young children can choose. In contrast to the short-sighted business model of education, FS pedagogy is a dynamic methodology that places its foci on the holistic development of all the children (Kahriman-Pamuk, 2020). Research studies have reported substantial benefits to the growth, learning, and development of young children in Forest Schools, and in chapter 2, a review of the literature on these benefits is presented. This research can help parents make an informed choice, but I believe there is a gap in the literature regarding parents' perspectives on their children's growth, learning, and development in FS. For parents making decisions about their children's education, it can be beneficial to know about the views of other parents on the benefits of FS for their children. Developing an understanding of parents' perspectives and sharing these is therefore critical.

This study, therefore, aims to explore the opinions of parents who have enrolled their children in forest schools. This study's results will help understand why parents chose FS as an ECE for their children. This information will be of value to all parents considering FS education for their children.

Research Question

The aim of this research is to reveal and understand the viewpoints of parents whose children are enrolled in FS. This research aims to answer the question:

Q1. What are parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in a forest school?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I introduced the multiple issues that are hindering children's experience in the outdoors. There is a vast body of research indicating the benefits of nature connection for children. This chapter also presented the researcher's positionality as a parent in connection with the early childhood education. Forest Schools are alternative learning approach that introduces learning in the outdoors. However, the question of parents' perspectives of alternative ECE has not been clearly answered previously. This reason is the point of initiation for this study to understand the parents' views of how forest schools impact their children's growth, learning, and development. This research is critical as it will help in understanding parents' viewpoints which can be shared with all parents considering Forest School education for their children.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Forest Schools (FS) are a child-centric outdoor education initiative to support learning in the natural environment. FS are found in many countries around the world and more recently introduced in Canada. This research focuses on the perceptions of parents whose children are enrolled in an early childhood education program of FS in British Columbia, Canada. It aims to explore their views of the potential influence of FS on their children's growth, learning, and development.

As a background for this study, this literature review will focus on early childhood education (ECE), the definition of FS, the history of FS, challenges associated with FS, potential benefits of FS, including an overview of literature on children's growth, learning, and development within FS, the role of educators, and parental choice as potential areas that may be relevant. At the end of the literature review, theoretical underpinnings of the study will be explored including Gardner's naturalist intelligence theory and Froebel's theory of the power of engagement with nature.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood is a period of tremendous increase in every facet of growth, learning, and development. The foundational skills start to develop from birth to eight years. Every child is unique and has immense potential to develop multiple skills (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019b). There is an increasing body of evidence of the positive impact of early childhood education on the children's preparedness to enter school years (Phillips et al., 2017). Therefore, it is critical to lay strong foundations for the young population to develop holistically.

The history of early childhood education (ECE) in Canada dates to 1850s (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2003). The revised BC early learning framework (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019a) is pillared on several concepts, some of which are "learning is holistic," "environments are integral to well-being and learning," and "play is integral to well-being and learning" (p. 15). According to Cooper (2015), early childhood education should focus on the various aspects of growth, learning, and development of the young children. Learning does not occur in isolation; it is a social process and hence involves interaction with self, others, and nature. Children start forming reciprocal bonds with nature when they are in association with the outside environment. According to British Columbia Ministry of Education (2019b), play supports children in developing their intellectual potential, fostering autonomy, and enhancing curiosity. Childhood contact with the natural environment enhances nature stewardship

amongst children and encourages free thinking. According to Phillips et al. (2017), a constructive early childhood education is an enriching experience for children in all areas of growth. Research shows an increase in children's physical and social-emotional well-being in contact with the outside environment (Cooper, 2015). Therefore, a strong educational setting in the early years is vital. One such educational concept is learning in the outdoors which is integral to forest schools.

What are Forest Schools?

Forest Schools (FS) are schools where education takes place in local natural settings, ideally in a forest but may occur in any outdoor area with a firm nature connection. FS introduce children to new opportunities to learn in the natural environment (Forest School Canada [FSC], 2014; Larimore, 2016). FS programs are primarily arranged for young children for early childhood education. FS programs are sometimes offered as a half-day or full-time nature interaction (FSC, 2014). This educational approach is an exclusive style of learning where young children are presented with numerous opportunities to engage themselves in nature, play within it, and in the process carve their exploratory skills. FS are recognised by different names around the globe like "Nature Kindergarten, Outdoor School, Waldkindergarten, Rain or Shine School, Bush School" (FSC, 2014, p. 12). Although there are differences between schools, what is indistinguishable between them is their pedagogy which is child-centered play-pedagogy. FS can occur in varied natural surroundings like forests, farms, beaches, or parks, depending on the geography of the place (MacEachren, 2013). Children spend a majority of their time outdoors, irrespective of the weather and the season. Many FS work on the motto of "there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes!" (Green Hearts, 2014, para. 3). FS guidelines include remaining dressed appropriately for all the seasons. This guideline may look different in different parts of the world, depending on their geographic location.

Children have an innate inclination towards exploration and adventure. According to Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019), FS use the native environment to involve children in learning from play-based activities. FS's goal is to help children develop a tightly knitted relationship with nature by promoting play-pedagogy (MacEachren, 2013). According to Ridgers et al. (2012, as cited in Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019), FS pedagogy gives children the freedom to engage themselves in the fascinating natural environment where they can choose what they wish to play and how they want to explore. In addition, FS encourage children to play with natural materials in their raw form. According to Kiewra and Veselack (2016), providing children with opportunities to use loose materials like "sticks, logs, sand,

and snow” (p. 72) invites them to develop their creative world. Interacting with nature and exploring natural materials are foundational for children's learning.

Learning in the outdoors is not only limited to playing with available materials, but FS focus on the importance of outdoor education in cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development. Maynard (2007) states that FS pedagogy nurtures and embraces distinctive skills of confidence, resilience, and self-respect in children. Place-based education encourages learners to build strong relationships with self, nature, and others (FSC, 2014). The close allegiance with nature can make children compassionate and empathetic towards the environment. “The core of learning is not in the information... being predigested from the outside, but in the interaction between a child and the environment” (Finland's Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2003, as cited in Louv, 2008, p. 205). FS uphold the belief of providing children with ample time outside in nature for their holistic development. FS is a place that ignites creativity and supports individual learning along with collaborative teamwork.

History of Forest Schools

Forest Schools have been around for a long time in different countries dating back to the 1950s. They originated in the Scandinavian peninsula, supported by a cultural preference of staying outdoors. According to Dean (2019), it was Denmark that first officially recognized FS pedagogy. Froebel's research in the field of children's education influenced the principles of Scandinavian FS (Constable, 2014). An increasing number of Western countries are recognizing the benefits of learning in the outdoors. The history of FS in Canada is relatively recent. Marlene Powers was the founder of Carp Ridge Preschool, the first FS of Canada in 2007 (MacEachren, 2013). The province of British Columbia welcomed its first public forest school the Maple Ridge Environmental School Project in 2011 as a response to the age-old traditional education system (Blenkinsop et al., 2016). Since then, there has been a considerable increase in the number of FS in Canada predominantly in British Columbia and Ontario (Boileau & Dabaja, 2020). FS are considered as exemplary alternative educational approaches; however, there are some issues associated with their development and reinforcement.

Challenges associated with Forest Schools

Recent years have given rise to questions regarding the development of FS and the risks involved in the FS pedagogical approach. It is recognized that the advancement of FS has some challenges that revolve around developing FS and its pedagogy.

Issues in Developing Forest Schools

The development of FS requires detailed knowledge of the site where the education will occur (Constable, 2014). In addition, it requires regular monitoring of the landscape (FSC, 2014), to support designing new activities for the children. However, such intense assessing at regular intervals to make use of the place may lead to burn-out in the FS developers and risk FS existence and proper functioning.

Safety Assessment

Safety assessment is a critical concern for stakeholders that needs immediate attention (Constable, 2014). However, assessing the probability of injury is not easy as FS stand on the pillar of risk-taking. Therefore, maintaining a balance between healthy risky play and actual hazard overburdens the FS educators, as they have to maintain strict protocols and report everything that happens in FS to the developers and the parents (Constable, 2014; FSC, 2014).

According to Constable (2014), FS educators sometimes find it difficult to let children take complete control of the learning. As FS pedagogy takes place in the wilderness, the FS educators have a great responsibility towards the safety and well-being of children. However, letting children take complete control may give rise to unavoidable risks and increase parental fear. Although there are challenges in the development and pedagogy of FS, these are far outweighed by the multitude of benefits FS offer.

Benefits of Forest Schools

Evidence suggests that FS have the potential to positively impact children's growth, learning, and development. In this section we will look at each of these aspects in turn.

Children's Growth in Forest Schools

The unstructured play-based pedagogy of forest school provides children with ample opportunities to grow physically and emotionally (Cooper, 2015; Ernst et al., 2018).

Physical Agility and Nourishment. Playing in the outdoors and learning about the symbiotic relationships between plants and animals help develop gross motor skills and nutritional habits. Kahrman-Pamuk (2020) argues that children learn the act of balancing on uneven grounds, strolling for lengthy hours, and climbing on steep and rocky hills when learning in FS. These activities build muscle strength in children. Fjørtoft (2001) states that the natural world is dynamic and bestows a potential landscape that significantly improves young children's physical activity. The time spent in the natural environment affects physical mobility positively and weight gain negatively (Stone & Faulkner, 2014, as cited in Yildirim

& Akamca, 2017). FS focuses on using natural and open-ended materials like grass, wood, flowers, plants, puddles, slopes, and hills, which can help the children balance their gross-motor and sensory skills (Cooper, 2015). Moreover, learning about the nutritive values of flora and fauna motivates children to choose healthy eating habits (Waliczek et al., 2001, as cited in Cooper, 2015). Involving the children in growing vegetables and fruits ultimately inspires them towards long-lasting healthy eating patterns. Physical fitness achieved through FS in return supports children's emotional well-being.

Social-Emotional Wellbeing. According to Ernst et al. (2018), spending time in nature is directly proportional to resilience and inversely proportional to mental fatigue. In addition, it promotes self-regulation in young children. Unstructured play in FS pedagogy supports building self-confidence, reducing anxiety, and developing abilities to deal with adversity (Ernst et al., 2018). Nature-based education promotes the qualities of self-assurance, dignity, and emotional development. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms can be curtailed by staying outdoors (Cooper, 2015; Jacobi-Vessels, 2013). According to Yildirim and Akamca (2017), children learn autonomy and express their insights with conviction and independence when learning occurs in the outdoors. Thereby social-emotional well-being enhances children's positive encounters with various emotions.

Emotional Awareness. Early childhood is the critical period for laying the foundation to develop emotional awareness in children. Self-efficacy and self-regulation are closely related protective factors essential for the development of autonomy. According to Bandura et al. (1999), "a sense of personal efficacy is the foundation of human agency" (p. 258). The ethos of forest schools includes developing young children's social and emotional growth, learning, and development. According to Maynard (2007), forest schools provide an environment of challenges, possibilities, and problem-solving capabilities. Learning in FS encourages children to develop a sense of personal efficacy, leading to the development of self-regulatory mechanisms. According to Zimmerman (1989), self-regulation is the capability to regulate one's behavior, learning, and development. Child-initiated free play provides opportunities to children to face challenges and regulate their inner-self to develop coping mechanisms. Through children's belief in their own capabilities, they can achieve a high level of self-regulation. Child-led activities, teamwork, and peer bonding are the foundations of forest schools that support children in developing a sense of autonomy (Ernst et al., 2018). The forest schools' principles thus act as support systems for developing independent thinking, learning, and decision-making skills in young children.

Children's Learning in Forest Schools

The non-traditional learning approach of forest school supports children in self-directed and critical learning styles. In addition, FS provides children the opportunity to learn about the local culture of the land where the learning takes place (FSC, 2014). The forest school pedagogy supports children's skills of conceptualizing and synthesizing the knowledge.

Effective Learning. Forest school promotes a self-directed learning approach. Imitation play is an essential component of learning in a FS. According to Constable (2014), FS encourages children to develop their interests and carve out ways to achieve the desired goal. Such persistent efforts by the children support them in times of challenges. Learning in the outdoors advances problem-solving skills in children and thereby invokes numeracy and literacy inquiry as recommended by British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2019b). Love of nature supports scientific inquiry as stated by Constable (2014). Embedding FS pedagogy in the early years facilitates this unique kind of learning. Supporting children's creativity and imagination can also be achieved through spending time in nature.

Critical Thinking and Imagination. Louv (2008) stated that "given a chance, a child will bring the confusion of the world to the woods, wash it in the creek, turn it over to see what lives on the unseen side of that confusion" (p. 7). Abstract reasoning and exploratory skills increase manifold while playing and learning in nature. According to Yildirim and Akamca (2017), learning in the natural environment provides children with numerous opportunities to craft their imagination and dive deep into the various interactions in the environment. The FS pedagogy focuses on more free time for children to construct their play in the natural settings with teachers being only the facilitators in the process of learning. Such autonomy and flexibility encourage the children to discover their cognitive abilities. Creativity augments children's potential and, in return, brings societal development (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016). According to Jacobi- Vessels (2013), proximity to nature increases children's discovery, admiration, and observation skills. The richness of being outdoor promotes curiosity and ignites the joy of learning from the land.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Learning from the land is deeply rooted in Indigenous pedagogy. For Indigenous people, hands-on experience outside the concrete classroom is essential (Preston et al., 2011). Although there are differences in the perspectives of forest school pedagogy and Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching (Jhonston, 2020), there are some similarities. Similar to FS pedagogy, Indigenous land-based learning varies with the area's geography. According to Bowra et al. (2021), both rural and urban terrains of

Indigenous lands can be used as teaching grounds. According to FSC (2014), Indigenous pedagogy focuses on observation, reflection, and learning from the natural life present on the land. For Indigenous people, the land is the “first teacher” (Bowra et al., 2021, p. 133), and the ways of knowing and learning about daily life exist within the usual activities related to land. Indigenous knowledge, which is thousands of years old, works on the reciprocal relationship concept with nature (Bowra et al., 2021). For Indigenous people learning from the varied life that exists around them is important. According to Bowra et al. (2021), bilateral relation with nature is of utmost importance as it helps reflect on our actions and changes our attitude toward nature. According to FSC (2014), the Indigenous age-old traditional way of learning from the land can support the development of FS by enriching the FS through local Indigenous culture.

Children's Development in Forest Schools

The whole-body approach of forest school helps children develop a positive mindset towards others and self (FSC, 2014).

Children's Developing Attitudes to Nature. When Louv coined the term “Nature-deficit disorder” (Louv, 2008, p. 36), he envisioned the detrimental effects that humans have on nature. The 21st century children are growing up with detachment from nature. Much data has been recorded indicating that if a child has been in close vicinity with nature, he becomes a nature lover (Wells & Lekies, 2006, as cited in Cooper, 2015). “Biophilia” (Wilson, 1894, as cited in Turtle et al. 2015, p. 4) is the term which describes children's innate ability to connect with nature. Learning carried out in the natural environment promotes ecological awareness amongst children. The more interaction children will have with nature, the more they will empathize with the environment (Cooper, 2015; Kiewra & Veselack, 2016). Learning in the outdoors provides children with the opportunities to experience different life processes in the natural world, making them responsible for the environment. According to Constable (2014), children who learn in nature are more likely to develop stewardship towards nature, understand the environmental issues and find ways to tackle the problems. According to Turtle et al. (2015), FS pedagogy influences children's attitude towards nature and make them environmentally friendly individuals who feel connected to nature and work towards building sustainable environment. The children will understand the concept of ‘taking care’ if they see the strong interdependence between flora and fauna. Therefore, it is hoped that FS will help children develop into adults who will take better care of nature. Additionally, FS promotes children's whole-body development by preparing them for future through immersion in nature.

Preparation for School. Peer-interaction, pretend play, and expressing self are critical skills that must develop in early years in children (Cordiano et al., 2019). The immersion in natural places supports children to develop abilities which help them in their succession to school. FS provide learning opportunities for children in the form of collaboration with peers and adults, role-plays, and self-care (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019). According to Vygotsky (1967/2016), pretend play supports children in developing “abstract thought” (p. 20). This abstract thinking helps children in understanding the “rule-governed behavior” (Cordiano et al., 2019, p. 21). Children develop knowledge and skills to exercise their emotions and roles in the society at an early age. According to FSC (2014), FS promote play-based learning which enhances communication, fosters relationship-building, and articulates inner nature in children. Interpersonal and cognitive skills are stepping-stones towards school. Therefore, it is essential to develop these skills to prepare children for school and for their holistic development.

Holistic Development. The decline in children's time in contact with nature and how it negatively affects their well-being are evident. According to Jacobi-Vessels (2013), integrating and encouraging nature education in the traditional curriculum adds knowledgeable experiences for children and educators. Apart from academics, FS pedagogy supports whole-child development in nature (Williams-Sieghfredsen, 2012, as cited in Kahrman-Pamuk, 2020). A considerable amount of research indicates an upsurge in concentration, physical fitness, and resilience in children with the increase in nature interaction (Jacobi-Vessels, 2013). In addition, a growing body of research shows a multitude of benefits of play in children's development through FS. According to Bergen (2009):

1. Play serves as a channel of communication for children who are not always articulate in other ways.
2. Play enables them to examine materials and try techniques in artistic and creative endeavors.
3. Play helps them convey ideas and accomplish goals before their language skills are fully developed.
4. Play substance provides a filter that allows them to take risks without concern for world realities.
5. Play allows them to feel powerful in transmitting forceful ideas and producing exciting effects.
6. Play promotes an optimum learning environment within which they can function and flourish naturally (p. 416).

Pioneers in the early years of education, including Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Rousseau, and Froebel, have appreciated the role of play and nature interaction in the development of young children (Constable, 2014). Moreover, interaction with nature supports children in developing autonomy.

Children's Autonomy. Developing confidence and independence are integral to FS pedagogy. According to Maynard and Waters (2007), if children have a freedom of choice, they become confident and independent thinkers. The unstructured play supported by FS empowers the children to explore and make decisions independently. The child-centered aspect of FS promotes self-centered learning where children develop a sense of self-care and preparedness to function actively while learning. According to McCree et al. (2018), FS practitioners promote autonomy by supporting the children's interest and choice. The autonomy in return prepares children to deal with problems and find solutions. FS pedagogy provides interesting, challenging, and problem-solving environment which helps the children think independently and make choices confidently. The pedagogy of FS can further be explored by looking at the role of FS educators.

Role of Educators

According to FSC (2014), FS educators are enthusiastic nature lovers who share their passion with children by facilitating their experiences in the outdoor environment. The FS educator's role is multidimensional which includes encouraging children to develop constructive relationships with nature, providing students with multiple opportunities to learn on their own, offering them support to engage with the local biodiversity, and making them responsible humans of society. FS practitioners make learning enjoyable, valuable, and positive in the outdoors (Constable, 2014). The FS educators are facilitators of learning and fun, motivators of the little researchers, applauders of the children's discoveries and inventions, and the promoters of the children's creativity and imagination in the natural environment. Forest School Canada (2014) states that FS educators "act as stewards of the place, conscious of the group's interactions with it and their impact on it over time" (p. 18). The role of educators is not only limited to providing children with open, unstructured play, but they fuel children with a great amount of information about the local biodiversity, facilitates children's interaction with the same, and foster the enthusiasm of acquiring new knowledge of the ecology. Additionally, the perceptions of parents about the choice of education together with the educators can create wonderful learning opportunities for children.

Parent's Choice

Parents are the gatekeepers for choosing the right education for their children. Parents' viewpoints play vital role in children's growth, learning, and development. According to Beckett (2014), multiple factors influence parents' decision to choose an ECE for their children. There is a vast body of research on the benefits of parents' involvement in their children's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001) and parents' perceptions of the benefits of outdoor play (Parsons & Traunter, 2020). Parents are the collaborators in children's holistic growth and development. Beckett's (2014) study discussed that "friends, neighbours or family" (p. 71) influence parents' decision to choose an educational approach for their children. Parents who are actively involved with their children's early year education provide valuable learning experiences for the young generation. Parents echoed that participation in forest school has positively impacted children (Griffiths et al., 2010, as cited in Close, 2012). Parents' perceptions of the ECE, therefore, support the development of a better learning environment for children.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Forest Schools

Although there are several theorists who have influenced FS pedagogy (see theoretical framework), it is the guiding ideas of Gardner's naturalist intelligence which makes FS pedagogy unique. Gardner who proposed multiple intelligences believed that people possess different intelligences and should be presented with the information in the form which is most closely related to their intellectual power. Gardner added naturalist intelligence to the list of intelligences (Louv, 2008) based on the idea of different learning capabilities. According to Gardner (2000), naturalist intelligence is a person's ability to understand the presence of natural life in the environment and develop sensitivity towards nature care and environment. The conception of naturalist intelligence is well supported by FS pedagogy.

Learning from nature is an age-old traditional way of knowing things. Gardner (2000) believes the presence of naturalist intelligence dates to evolutionary theories where survival of the varied living beings was based on the organisms' intelligence of the natural living life around. Early age is the critical time where children's intelligence increases rapidly. Playing in nature thus, can prove beneficial in the growth and development of young children. According to Gardner (2000), young children have an undeniable affinity towards the natural world. Children gravitate towards learning about the living and non-living forms of life present in their environment.

Learning in the outdoors presents opportunities to children to develop their naturalist intelligence. According to Hyun (2000), restricting children's exposure to nature and experience in the environment may hinder their naturalist intelligence which will ultimately affect their attitude towards nature and its sustainability. Disregarding children's fondness toward nature may result in damaging relations with nature.

Learning in nature and naturalist intelligence are closely related terms. The former supports encouraging learning in the outdoors while the latter encourages presenting information in the naturalistic way. According to Armstrong (2009, as cited in Supriadi et al., 2020), naturalist intelligence can become a part of learning when children are encouraged to learn in the natural habitat. Learning outdoors promotes ecological awareness and caring attitude among children. Developing children's natural intelligence by encouraging their nature interaction make them environmentally literate individuals. Such compassionate minds embrace nature stewardship and are sensitive toward future environmental concerns.

Richard Louv's nature-deficit disorder (2008) is an indication of the depletion of children's nature interaction. Louv's belief is that children's connection with nature has been detrimentally affected because of many reasons. According to Louv (2008), Gardner's naturalist intelligence has provided a great argument for those who believe that intelligence lies only in literacy and numeracy. Naturalist intelligence encourages children to learn in the natural environment and uncover the hidden knowledge of the environment. Letting the children stimulate their natural intelligence will make them nature-lovers and responsible humans.

Theoretical Framework

The study of the importance of nature interaction in children's development has a long history ranging in different fields like sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, and health. Moreover, the essentiality of playing in nature as perceived by pioneers like Froebel, McMillan, and Steiner was related to the notion of autonomy, creativity, and self-directed learning. Therefore, I will review Froebel's kindergarten philosophy and theory regarding raising children with freedom and self-regulation.

Froebel discouraged memorization of knowledge and believed in the liberation of children's identity and inner thoughts (Gutek, 2015). Froebel opened his first school based on the principles of play in 1837 in Germany, which he later renamed "Kindergarten" (Weston, 2000, p. 15). The Froebel Kindergarten provided children the experience to explore themselves and nurture their latent skills.

The Kindergarten

Froebel's philosophy of kindergarten was dominated by the concept of idealism (Gutek, 2015). According to idealism, children are born with inner spirituality, and it is essential to externalize their inner self. Following Idealism, Froebel developed the kindergarten where children were autonomous and learned different skills naturally with dedication. According to Hermann (1926), Froebel's knowledge of education is a gift to humankind. Froebel asserted the importance of accepting gradational changes in children's growth and development and encouraged humans to be mindful of their effects on the children's character.

In Froebel kindergarten, play is placed at the top of the hierarchy. Froebel believed that play is a critical aspect of the growth of children. While playing, children learn to express their emotions, viewpoints of adults' life and work and form connections with society (Gutek, 2015). Playing in the outdoors was essential to Froebel. The kindergarten offered children time to explore freely by stimulating their senses (Tovey, 2013). A Froebelian educational approach involves freedom of expression, interconnectedness with nature and society, risk-taking behavior, dramatic play, and critical thinking. Such engaging skill-building activities bring out the hidden potentials of children (Hermann, 1926) and give them the confidence to express their thoughts and emotions. Scandinavian Naturbørnehavens' concept of playing outdoors was deeply rooted in the Froebelian educational philosophy of learning in nature (Constable, 2014; Williams-Sieghedsen, 2021). Froebel encouraged nurturing the children in nature for their holistic development. Kindergarten is the most powerful age where children develop the skills of inquisitiveness, observation, creation, and exploration.

Froebel's Theory of Engagement with Nature

Froebel emphasized the interconnectedness between children and nature. Froebel argued that children learn wonderful things in nature apart from just knowing about the environment (Tovey, 2013). Froebel's education system encourages using natural environment to help children make relations with the broader community. According to Tovey (2013), in Froebel kindergarten, children learn gardening through play, which supports their understanding of taking care of nature by learning about flora and fauna life cycles. Association with nature develops a sense of responsibility in children for a sustainable environment. Rich Froebelian play fosters child-centric activities which fill the children with wonderment. According to Tovey (2013), a Froebelian educational system involves learning from the four elements of life: land, water, air, and fire; additionally, the Froebelian approach focuses on the importance of free movement, adventurous opportunities, free play, and

unhindered learning. The child should experience nature “in all its aspects – form, energy, substance, sound and colour” (Froebel in Lilley, as cited in Tovey, 2020, p. 8). A wealth of hands-on experience, freedom to create, engagement with self and others, and meaningful learnings of varied curriculum like numeracy, literacy, and art are values of Froebelian approach in the natural surroundings.

Froebel’s Educational Approach and Forest School Pedagogy

The Froebelian educational philosophy has several ideologies which align with the current FS pedagogy. Both pedagogies are deeply rooted in bringing children in close vicinity of nature. The table below will enunciate the similarities between Froebelian learning and FS pedagogy.

Table 1: Summary of Froebelian Kindergarten and Forest School Philosophy

Froebelian Philosophy of Kindergarten	Forest School Philosophy
Play is foundational to learning (Constable, 2014; Gutek, 2015; Tovey 2013).	Outdoor play is the underlying principle of FS (Constable 2014; FSC, 2014; MacEachren, 2013).
Learning cannot be bracketed, and the sole purpose of learning is to make connections with nature and society (Hermann, 1926; Tovey, 2013).	Children have an innate ability to make connections with nature which is nurtured by FS (FSC, 2014; Turtle et al., 2015).
Children learn significantly through self-activity (Tovey, 2013; 2020).	Learning in FS is child-centric (FSC, 2014; Ridgers et al., 2012, as cited in Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019).
Educates children to be independent and interdependent at the same time (Gutek, 2015; Tovey, 2013, 2020).	Independent and collaborative work are instrumental to FS (Constable, 2014; FSC, 2014).
Believes children are innovative, curious, and powerful individuals (Gutek, 2015; Hermann, 1926; Tovey, 2013).	Children are competent, mighty, and innately capable (Child and Nature Alliance of Canada [CNAC], 2021; FSC, 2014).
Free-play, problem solving skills are essential for growth of children (Tovey, 2013).	Playing with natural materials in their raw form enhances children’s exploratory skills is a guiding principle of FS (CNAC, 2021; Constable, 2014; FSC, 2014).
Rich natural environment is important for learning (Constable, 2014; Tovey, 2013).	Availability of plentiful natural material is an essential component of FS (FSC, 2014; Tovey, 2013).
Froebelian approach encourages to develop confidence and self-regulation in children (Gutek, 2015; Tovey, 2020).	Develops protective factors in children (Ernst et al., 2018; FSC, 2014; Maynard, 2007).

Note. The table reviewed the resemblances in the ideologies of early year theorist Friedrich Froebel with the contemporary FS pedagogy.

Therefore, understanding the philosophy of Froebelian approach is essential in the development of FS principles.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter was divided into three broad areas. Firstly, I reviewed the understanding of early childhood education and its importance on the children's growth, learning, and development. Followed by early childhood education, a detailed account of forest school history was discussed. This section elaborated the beginning, development and the risks associated with forest schools.

In the second part of this chapter, I reviewed the forest school pedagogy in detail. This section elaborated the ways in which forest school supported children's growth, learning, and development in the outdoors. The section also discussed the benefits associated with employing forest school pedagogy in early years of education.

The last part of this chapter discussed the theoretical support and framework for nature-based education elaborating the Froebelian principles of kindergarten including positives of nature engagement and Gardner's naturalist intelligence.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research can be defined in multiple ways; however, the essence of research in any field of study is to inquire, investigate, and analyze the information in a methodical manner (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). This study involves the use of a qualitative research design and uses semi-structured interviews to collect the data and thematic analysis. This qualitative study will focus on parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development when enrolled in a forest school. In this section, I will elucidate the rationale behind using qualitative method, explanation of the use of semi-structured interviews, data collection and thematic analysis and efforts made to build trustworthiness.

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research is a process of understanding the uniqueness of the meaning of an experience of individuals in a natural environment (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research aims to develop a detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon. According to Merriam (2009), a qualitative researcher aims to comprehend individuals' interpretations of their lived experience. Braun and Clarke (2013), states "qualitative research is that it uses words as data, collected and analysed in all sorts of ways" (p. 3). The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the perceptions and perspectives of the participants through their meaning making. According to Merriam (2009), a qualitative researcher's role in data collection and analysis is critical as the aim of the inquiry is to understand the phenomenon. While inquiring in qualitative research, the researchers should be aware of their biases and subjectivities which can inform the elucidation of the collected data. For this reason, the researcher has included a section entitled "Locating myself as a researcher" (see p. 18).

Case Study

Case study is a research methodology which focuses on a detailed explanation of an issue within a bounded system (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). According to Miles and Huberman, a case is "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (1994, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Merriam (2009) concludes that "the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case" (p. 40). The above definitions, therefore, served my purpose of inquiry into parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development as a phenomenon in context of forest school. A qualitative case study involves the understanding of comprehensive meanings of the phenomenon. According to Stake (1995), case study is beneficial when the boundaries are clearly identified and the purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding (as cited in

Creswell, 2012). Therefore, a case study proved an excellent methodology for this research as it helped the researcher gain a deeper insight into the case of children's growth, learning, and development in a forest school through their parents' lens. Merriam's case study epistemology revolves around constructivism, where she believes multiple realities exist and reality can be interpreted in multiple ways (Yazan, 2015). As an emerging researcher, I find myself located close to the constructivist paradigm. Therefore, I believe it is essential for qualitative researchers to use subjectivity and look for understanding the meaning of an experience. The intention behind choosing Case Study methodology was to understand the phenomenon of parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development in forest school in detail. According to Merriam (2009), case study is concrete and contextual and helps in producing rich descriptions of a phenomenon. The descriptive style (Merriam, 2009) of case study makes this qualitative approach a well-defined methodology for the investigator. Through case study, I intended to gain a deeper insight into the knowledge constructed of the growth, learning, and development of children in context of forest school by parents' perceptions.

Locating Myself as a Researcher

Merriam (2009,) claims that "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 16). Therefore, it is imperative for the researcher to identify any biasness at the outset of the study and its potential effects on the interpretation of the research findings (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) states that the clarification of biasness can be accomplished by, "researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (p. 208). Therefore "reflexivity" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) is one of the strategies to ensure credibility in qualitative research.

I am an Indian female and a mother of two daughters. My educational qualification includes a master's in Environmental Sciences and Biochemistry. My interest in the field of Forest School and understanding the perceptions of parents are rooted into my background as a graduate in Environmental Sciences and a parent. Being a parent in this technologically advanced era, I am intrigued to understand why parents would choose nature over traditional learning for their children. Apart from that being in the field of Environmental Sciences, I always worked with nature only from within the college laboratory and never stepped out to understand the actual functioning of nature. I believe not experiencing the environment in its real sense left my understanding of nature and its uses fragmentary. Gaining education in India and raising my children in Indian educational culture which does not support

experiential learning to the fullest, I was encouraged to explore the topic of FS and the viewpoints of parents whose children are enrolled in the FS. As stated by Peshkin (1988, as cited in Merriam, 2009) researcher's subjectivities "can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 15). I believe my identity as a parent helped the participants and me to have transparent discussions around Forest School. Additionally, my qualification in Environmental Sciences proved beneficial in understanding the functioning of the FS.

Rigor in the Study

According to Merriam (2009), the purpose of the research is to produce trustworthy knowledge following the ethics protocols. Therefore, it is critical to observe reliable methods which can increase the rigor in the study being performed. The researcher should be able to solve the concerns of the outsiders through the study (Merriam, 2009). For this study, the trustworthiness was achieved through member checking and inter-rater reliability.

Member-checking

A strategy to increase trustworthiness is member-checking or respondent validation (Merriam, 2009). Member-checking involves "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible" (p. 229). Additionally, Creswell (2012) states that member-checking is a critical technique which supports the researcher to increase credibility to the research by getting the interpretations examined by the participants. In this study, I followed Merriam's process of member-checking by cross checking the preliminary interpretations with the participants. At the end of each interview, I reviewed my understanding of the interviews with the interviewees by asking them details of their explanations to enhance the trustworthiness.

Inter-rater Reliability

Consistency in qualitative research is defined as the concurrence between the data collected and the meaning generated (Merriam, 2009). Achieving consistency in qualitative research is difficult, given that reality is multi-dimensional, and people may experience same phenomenon differently. I used the method of inter-rater reliability to increase trustworthiness in this study. According to Creswell (2012), "intercoder agreement based on the use of multiple coders to analyse transcript data" (p. 210). For this study, I used Creswell's method of intercoder reliability. My supervisor Dr. Carol Rees acted as a second coder for the research findings who examined my interpretations of the result. Initially the

primary investigator and the second coder coded the data separately and discussed the emerging themes throughout the analysis.

Data Collection

Data is defined as pieces of information around the field of study (Merriam, 2009). For qualitative research the words spoken by the participants are considered as data (Merriam, 2009). Hence, the data for this study was collected by conducting face-to-face or video-conferencing interviews with the participants. As some interviews took place on the sight of the school that I have called Green Smile Forest School, permission from the Green Smile Forest School Director was reserved first.

Interview Procedure

The purpose of this study was to explore the parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development in a Forest School. According to Merriam (2009), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). Therefore, the purpose of using interview was to gain a detailed understanding of a phenomenon under study. For this study, I used a set of semi-structured interview questions to elicit the parents' viewpoints. According to Merriam (2009), semi-structured interviews are common ways of data collection for qualitative research as they help the researcher to gather specific data. As qualitative research is an emergent one, using semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to respond to new themes emerging in the interview (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews were the primary source of data collection in this study and hence it was critical for the researcher to follow certain guidelines that could help yield rich information from the interviews. For this purpose, I used Merriam (2009) principles for conducting the semi-structured interviews. According to Merriam (2009), asking good questions is critical to data collection. Therefore, to have information filled interviews, it is important to avoid asking certain type of questions. According to Merriam (2009), asking "multiple questions," "leading questions," and "yes-or-no questions" (p. 100) does not allow the output of detailed information. To make this study credible and description rich, I avoided asking the above types of questions. The interview questions were designed around the research question. To comprehend the viewpoints of the parents, suggested questions for semi-structured interviews are:

1. Has FS impacted your child's learning? And if so, in what ways?
2. Has participation in FS impacted your child's behaviour at home? And if so, in what ways?

3. Which aspect of FS has influenced the growth and development of your child?
4. Has participation in FS impacted your child's attitude towards nature? And if so, in what ways?
5. Is there anything else you would like to talk about FS that I did not ask you?

Probes are sub-questions that are asked to get into the detail of the answers to the interview questions (Merriam, 2009). Probing helped me gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and clarification of whether the participants understood the questions correctly. Some interviews took place at the site of the FS while others were online through video-conferencing platform and lasted for approximately thirty minutes.

Participants and Site

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research aims at gaining a detailed explanation of a chosen phenomenon; so, this study involved participants who could prove beneficial in understanding the phenomenon of growth, learning, and development in children in connection with nature. For this study, a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used. According to Creswell (2012), purposeful sampling involves choosing particular participants who can provide a detailed insight of the phenomenon. As this study involved parents' viewpoints of their children's growth, learning, and development in forest school, the FS chosen for this study was located in Western Canada which I have called Green Smile Forest School. So, the participants were parents whose children attended Green Smile Forest School. According to Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009), convenience sampling is used when the participants are willing to participate in the study. For this purpose, a recruitment letter was sent out to all the participants through the director of the Green Smile Forest School and those willing to participate contacted the researcher and were then chosen on first come-first basis. The interviews took place at the site of the Green Smile Forest School at Mc Royal Park and via video-conferencing and lasted for approximately thirty minutes. A maximum of five participants were chosen based on first come-first basis.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants

Pseudonym	Country	Relationship to child	Child's Age (years)
Kayla*	Western Canada	Mother	3.5
Susan	Western Canada	Mother	5
Daniel	Western Canada	Father	3 and 5
Teresa	Western Canada	Mother	4 and 6
Rena	Western Canada	Mother	4

Note. Kayla* identified their child as First Nations.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative data analysis occurs in conjunction with the data collection. This method helps in constant comparing of the data being collected and analysed. To analyze the data, I used Thematic Analysis (TA) following the steps of Braun and Clarke (2006).

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development in the forest school. For this reason, TA was best suited as it helped in uncovering the rich ideas behind the phenomenon. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), TA "minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79). Braun and Clarke argue that TA is an essential analytical tool for qualitative research because it is flexible in its approach (2006). Because of the descriptive nature of this study, the research focused on the emergence of themes from the collected data. Therefore, for the TA, an inductive approach was best suited for this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive analysis of data is a procedure that allows new themes to develop from the data and is not dependent on the preconceived notions of the researcher. I used Braun and Clarke (2006), six-phase thematic analysis for this study. The steps involved are:

Phase 1 involves getting acquainted with the data set. This involves collecting the data, transcribing it and then reading and re-reading the data to familiarise myself with the different aspects of the data. While reading the data it is important to make notes which later helps in comparing the data.

Phase 2 begins with generating initial codes. Codes are the area of interest for the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding helps in organizing the data into useful content. As it was an inductive analysis, the codes were derived from the data. I coded the data manually by making notes of the data.

Phase 3 is searching for themes and begins when initial coding is completed and checked for further codes. Themes involve the big ideas behind the different codes generated in phase 2. The initial codes may be grouped into single or multiple themes and will provide an overarching idea behind the themes.

Phase 4 involves reviewing and rechecking the themes. This step helps in authenticating the themes. Reviewing the themes helps in clarification and stratification of themes. For this step, I worked with my supervisor and discussed the emerging themes. This helped me attain trustworthiness for my study.

Phase 5 begins with providing names to the themes. This process helps to understand the essence of the themes and tell the readers the exact definition of the theme.

Phase 6 is the last step and involves writing of the report. The writing of TA helps to provide a concise image of the research being performed and the findings achieved from the same. The writing provides coherent and logical account of the data with enough evidence.

I followed the above steps and coded the interview data accordingly. After every step the progress was discussed with my supervisor who was a second coder for this study. The emergent themes were analyzed and determined together. The above steps ensured the cyclical process of the collection, interpretation, and analyzation of the data.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented a detailed record of the research methods, data collection and analysis process. As I wanted to explore parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development in forest school, I adopted case study methodology following semi-structured interviews for this study. The interviews were recorded, and transcripts were used for the purpose of analysis. For qualitative research and case study, I followed Creswell (2007, 2012) and Merriam (2009). In addition, for this study, I used thematic analysis following steps of Braun and Clarke (2006).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the thematic analysis of the descriptive data collected from five participants through semi-structured interviews during the case study at a Forest School in Western Canada. The aim of this research is to understand the viewpoints of parents whose children are enrolled in FS. The findings will cover the following research question:

1. What are parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in a forest school?

Table 3: Summary of Parents' Perceptions of their Children's Growth, Learning, and Development

Codes	Categories	Themes
Physical strength, being outdoors (fresh air), hiking	Growth	Physical Fitness
Peer-friendships, taking care of others, working with peers	Growth	Social-Emotional wellbeing
Expanding learning of nature, numeracy, vocabulary, literacy, expanding learning, hands-on learning	Learning	Effective Learning
Learning about Indigenous culture	Learning	Indigenous ways of Knowing
Respect towards nature, nature awareness	Development	Respecting Nature
Increased attention, imaginative play, pretend play, ability to understand instructions	Development	Stepping- stone towards kindergarten
Self-care/ self-preparedness	Development	Children's Autonomy
Teachers' efforts		Role of Educators

Parents' Views of their Children's Growth

Parents who participated in the study were of the opinion that forest school provided their children with ample opportunities to grow physically, socially, and emotionally.

Physical Fitness

When parents were asked about the impact of forest school on the physical growth of their children many mentioned the significance of regular hikes on building physical strength. For example, Susan commented:

They do go for walks in safe areas. But they were hiking up pretty like high hills, and before the snow they were getting a lot of exercise and strength in climbing hills and being active.

Another parent Teresa commented on the benefits of being outdoors and stated that:

I mean, I think they get a lot of exercise because they have to like go on these hikes and carry their backpacks and walk around. I mean, they're just outside for like the whole time so I think it's really good for them. I mean, they're both quite lean and muscular, so I think it's benefited them.

For Rena, their child's physical fitness was strengthened because of the varied aspects of exercise being performed at the forest school:

I mean, my daughter's very active and very physical to start with. I think that it's continued to help her sort of progress because they're playing outside on the uneven ground and slippery snowy wet conditions. I think there they do stepping across rivers and they're climbing on rocks, and they go for a walk every day as part of forest school. So, they do games and some learning, but then they always go for a walk or a hike during it. She has to carry the backpack during that time and the backpack has a lunchbox and her water and extra clothes and everything. So, I think it's you know helping to develop a sense of sort of activity and exercise and you know I think that's helping their physical development.

Some parents believed that getting fresh air is a critical component in their children's growth and enhances the children's physical strength. For example, Daniel commented:

So, putting them into a forest school where they're hiking every day, and they're not sitting there running around, getting fresh air and they're just not subject to being indoors for hours at a time reinforces some of the things that we've already instilled.

So, you know, did it change, or did it impact on them? Not necessarily, I think again, it really reinforced.

Social-Emotional Wellbeing

Parents disclosed the role of nature on the growth of mental and social-emotional wellbeing of their children. Many parents believed that the forest school is a happy place to

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

be for their children as it helps the children build social relations, improves communication, and induces calmness.

Many parents believed that the forest school helped their children in developing strong friendships, working with adults, and taking care of others. For Kayla, increase in their child's social skills was significant and they commented:

So, he's been in there for I guess he's going on month number four and in that time he has progressed. I would say a 110% has totally progress in his social skills. His ability to parallel play with others, interactions with adults, that kind of learning has been incredible for him.

Susan believed that forest school helped their child in strengthening emotions where the child can deal with sadness and overcome it. Susan stated:

When her friend from the forest school wasn't going anymore and you know she was sad. She learned, you know, sadness and a little bit of grieving because her friend was not there anymore, but she made new friends and new connections since.

For Daniel increase in their child's emotional strength was critical. Daniel stated:

The forest school's been emotionally, really valuable for both my kids like as I mentioned, I've had two children that have been in the school, and they've developed friendships.

Some parents believed that their children understood the importance of peer friendships and there was noticeable growth in taking care of others. For example, Kayla commented:

I feel like the goodbye train for instance in forest school. They have a thing what's called as the goodbye train. So, when the kids are trying to leave, they have to hop on the goodbye train that everybody sticks together. And it's important that everyone sticks together, and we support one another, and we leave.

Rena commented on the social aspect and stated:

I mean, I think that they are certainly encouraging social respect as well as social friendships right, like kids having partners and buddies. And I think when you're walking, you're supposed to be watching out for your buddy right, making sure that they're safe.

Some parents mentioned that they noticed a tremendous growth in their child's communication skills and working with peers after being enrolled in the forest school. For example, Daniel commented:

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Learning how to communicate, I mean, that's the biggest part of it, I think. For me is the growth that you see just by getting them into that environment a little bit earlier, I think is exponential.

Teresa emphasized that their child feels happy talking about their friends and commented:

You know the interactions with the other kids, and he would just like light up. And how they would just like play it was pretty obvious. And then with [my child] he just talks about a couple kids in particular. And just kind of, you know, lights up when he talks about them.

Another parent Susan commented on their child's enthusiasm in working with peers:

They were like walking across bridge, it's like little bridges and then there they made their own whole little houses. They'd put out the hammocks and the kids would hang out in the hammocks and play together, and you know they can make their own, they would make their own little houses and play in the house and with their friends.

Another parent Rena disclosed that forest school supported their child in understanding the meaning of working together and shared:

She tells me stories about I think the teachers help them make little forts. So, they hang blankets and stuff from the trees that make walls. And then they go in and out of the forts and [my child] tells me about the interactions while playing in the house with her friends and in the forest.

For some parents, forest school served as place of calmness and happiness for their children. When parents were asked about the impact of forest school on their child's behavior at home, many parents mentioned that their children felt happy and positive after attending the forest school. For example, Susan commented that:

Yes, it has been in a very good way it's you know when she goes, she has fun and she's a lot calmer and she's a lot happier when she gets home. She really likes going like so there's I can't keep her from not it's like she's always excited to go and then she's always happy when she leaves the school. She's always had a good experience.

Another parent Rena commented:

I think it's healthy. I think it's healthy for her to spend a lot of time outdoors. I think it's good for their mental health and she's happier outdoors.

Some parents mentioned that being outdoors relaxes their child and induces calmness. For example, Teresa commented:

So, I think just being outside in general for them, they just behave better. Like if they're inside for too long, then they just become wild animals and start acting out.

After like, just being outside playing all morning they're definitely like more well, they're tired and they're just more like relaxed. Like they don't have like all that angsty energy.

Kayla commented that being outdoors has helped their child in many ways and they stated:

I think its definitely become stronger and it's become his place of peace. He's able to go outside if he's angry or feeling upset, he needs to feel connected.

Parents' Views of their Children's Learning

The second part of the research question explores the parents' viewpoints of their children's learning in the forest school. The extensive description from parents revealed that forest school supported and extended effective learning and introduced children to the Indigenous ways of knowing.

Effective Learning

Parents disclosed that the outdoor environment of forest school supported their children in expanding vocabulary, literacy, numeracy, curiosity, and hands-on learning in nature.

When parents were asked about the impact of forest school on their child's literacy learning, two concepts surfaced which are elaborated as vocabulary and literacy in the outdoors.

For Kayla, identification of letters contributed to an increase in their child's literacy. Kayla commented:

He'll read different things like his name on his mittens. For example, you know, and I think that, that is a 3.5 literacy in some ways. You know like he's actually perceiving as words and letters on a page. He's telling me that he knows those and so that's really, that's really cool.

Another parent Susan commented:

I think they do stories with her; I think when they sit to have a snack, they'll tell stories, and they'll sing songs. But that's not her looking at the words that's her hearing words. The thing she'll tell me about would be, you know, now and then I'll hear her singing a song or saying a rhyme that I've never heard before. I'll ask her where she's learned that and she says at forest school or the games that she plays, those will come home, and she'll teach me how to play the games.

Some parents commented that their children learnt new nature vocabulary in the forest school. For example, Daniel commented:

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

The water is running you know quite rapid in the spring, that sort of thing, so as they're identifying the things that they're seeing and walking through the park, and you know, the instructors are really great about bringing you know, [the] species to identify and fossils and that sort of thing. So, I think they learn by seeing and doing and it and its things that otherwise children might not be exposed to in your everyday school structure.

Another parent Susan commented:

They do read books, but I don't think they do specific letters or anything in the preschool. So, like she's been learning about turtles. The other day and they had a shell and she explained it was, you know there was no turtle inside but there was just the shell and that they live in their shell. She was explaining very well, a turtle.

Parents also mentioned that learning in nature supported their children's numeracy in the outdoors. When parents were asked about the impact of forest school on their child's numeracy learning Rena commented:

Yes, I guess, I mean, they play lots of games. So, I mean, one game this I guess they do play, things like, you know, I think like what time is it, Mr. Wolf? and that involves numbers and counting steps. That would be the one thing I would think about that would involve numbers. So, certainly they involve numbers and counting with their games.

For Kayla, increase in the ability to count was significant and they commented:

I can see the difference in his ability, like I said, to want to learn, which I think has to do with, forest school, because this has transformed him as a human, you know, to become an independent learner. He was adding and subtracting which was amazing. Yes, he has had five things in front of him five grapes I think it was. He was counting his food and eats a grape and says now I have four grapes and eat another grape and says now have three grapes. So, that those really need to witness actually.

For Daniel, practical learning of numbers in nature was an important part of their child's numeracy learning and they commented:

When it comes to learning numbers and counting and that sort of thing, I mean, they start with the basics. It's very hands on, it's practical. They count, you know, they count sticks and rocks, and you know they count the locations that they go to the different areas in the park. They count the trails[that] they walked, that sort of thing.

When parents were asked about their children's learning of nature, many commented on the increase in the curiosity about nature specifics. For example, Daniel commented:

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

It's an appreciation. They notice things that I think they wouldn't otherwise notice you know looking for. You know plant roots and looking through rocks or fossils and you know looking for you know bugs and spiders and spider webs and things like that. I mean, again, kids inherently are curious, but you know they do look for those things.

Another parent Kayla commented:

Now, we'll look down on the ground and find tracks of different animals, that was a dog, that's a cat, that's a bird or a rabbit. We see coyotes on our property sometimes. So, he knows coyote tracks too and coyote scat too. So, he'll identify that as well. It's pretty remarkable.

For Teresa, identification in nature contributed towards curiosity and they commented "yes, like I said, they definitely come up with random animal facts. Or like plant identification has definitely come up."

For some parents experiencing the outdoors in different weather conditions was critical and Rena commented on the impact of forest school on nature learning:

Yes, definitely. I mean, I think that would be the biggest component. So, learning of nature would be you know experiencing climate. So, experiencing rain, snow, heat, cold. You know I think last year it hit minus 17, I think one day when she was here. So, I mean, I think that's an experience for kids to have to be outside for three hours in that sort of a climate.

For Susan, learning of nature included identification of specific plants and animals; along with understanding the lifecycle in nature and they commented:

Yes, she's more aware of the circle of life. She's aware that you know there are more plants, more animals. There's a park near us, that has some deer in it and she's like there's deer tracks. I'm like good job like she learned that in school if she got to see them, you know. There's deer poo, I'm like, yep, there's deer poo. She knows that you know. You know there's spring, summer and fall and winter and things die and come back. And she knows that animals do die, and they do have babies. You know the whole circle of life and plant that grows. It's like they were learning about, you know like plants, you know how they you plant a seed, you water it, it grows, you know, and then you know it dies usually in the fall, winter. And some of them come, then she would be like oh yeah, then there's some of them come back and some of them don't.

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Hands-on learning was another concept that was discussed by the parents. Some parents mentioned that experiencing learning practically is a significant component of forest school. For example, Daniel commented:

It's experiential things, again, things that nobody necessarily had to tell them wait that somebody didn't have to tell them would be proper English. But you know, if things that they've learned through being able to actually try something by being out there and doing it, you know they know when their shoes are on, and feel comfortable because the issue if that's not comfortable in an outdoor preschool, then starts to hurt, they'll have blisters after you know 2-3-4 hours. They know that they need you know extra socks, that kind of thing. My son, as I mentioned, in kindergarten this year and when it started to get wet outside, he wanted an extra pair of socks in his backpack to take to kindergarten, right? And that's something that was instilled in them in the outdoor school. So again, you know, I don't know that I would classify as really high-level things, but it's experiential learning and it's very practical learning that they do.

Susan commented on the numeracy and literacy learning and stated:

Plus being a tactile experience. And then you know, in the winter they get to play with the snow, make things up, you know be imaginative with their play and you know experience the outdoors with it.

Rena shared an incidence and mentioned:

That day we walked up to a creek and slowly by the end of the class, I think every kid and parent had their feet in the creek you know taking your shoes and socks off and just kind of playing in the water. And at the end of the day, we sat down and the teachers that made, you know, quote, unquote forest tea actually don't remember what they used in it to get some sort of natural plants to make it. So, it was all very nature based, experiential based.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Learning from the land was one of the themes that surfaced in the interviews. Some parents commented on their child learning Indigenous ways of knowing and learning from the land. For example, Kayla commented that:

I really appreciate about forest school that we're here and they have an Indigenous connection to this land. My child is a part of the First Nations community and here we live on the reserve.

When asked about the increase in learning of nature, Kayla also mentioned:

I would say that it's strengthen[ed] that part, right? That gets strengthened, his way of being in the world as a human, as a two-legged person. Learning and giving to the land too have just strengthened in himself. He is in his spirit, spiritual self, is interconnected with the land so strongly and that has strengthened, and I think in many other ways and other programs.

Another parent Daniel commented:

I mean, so the girls down at the local forest school they do try and acknowledge our Indigenous culture, I guess. In this city we have a lot of Indigenous land and culture. You know they sing in that language. They appreciate that we have that land to share with our Indigenous population, you know? So, my kids will come home, and they'll be singing a song in an Indigenous language that we don't understand. And I mean not to say that they understand it either. But that's one thing that they do and again is that directly related to forest school? No, but it's a cultural growth.

Parents' Views of their Children's Development

The comprehensive description of parents' views of their child's development can be divided into three themes: sense of respect towards nature, stepping-stone towards kindergarten, and children's autonomy.

Respecting Nature

When parents were asked about the forest school's impact on their child's developing attitude towards nature, they emphasized their child's deeper respect for nature, co-existence in nature, their child's deepening consciousness of the human actions on nature and influence on their parents' actions. Respect towards nature and nature stewardship was highly supported by many parents. For example, Kayla stated, "[my child] used to hug trees. Really respects nature and mother earth in lots of different ways, and participation in forest school, has only allowed that to grow."

Kayla also commented on nature stewardship:

Being caretakers of the land knowing that this land is not ours, that we share the land with all living beings and that everyone's equal and leaving garbage, it's not okay. He knows that too. That we are a part of a community that were interconnected, woven together and that makes us stronger.

Some parents emphasized their child's comfort with nature. When asked about their child's attitude towards nature, Susan replied:

She does respect it way more and she understands it a lot more than she was. And she sees it not as a scary place. She sees it as a wonderful, beautiful place. Like we can go

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

for walks in nature and she's like, this is a beautiful morning, and this is beautiful out here the trees and like.

For some parents, their child's awareness of nature being home of other living and non-living beings that are interconnected and the place of humans within nature was an essential character in their child's development. For example, Kayla said:

He looks at the mountains out of the mountain ranges now and talks about the snow, talks about the trees that are aren't they're noticing their place in the space around him being more aware of his surroundings and more self-aware of how he fits into those surroundings.

Daniel mentioned that their child is conscious of the varied lives occurring in the environment and commented "the world around them you know that there's life all around them. Plants aren't just features, plants are alive. Plants are a life form you know the creek bed supports life."

Another critical component that was emphasized by many parents was that participation in the forest school has made their child aware of the human impacts on the varied lives in nature. Daniel mentioned:

The value that they instilled through you know, the bugs and the plants and the life and the value of the creek bed and there's a particular spot in the park that was eroding due to some of the high waters and mismanagement. I think from the city's perspective where they learn that you know this provides like a home for other parts of life and that's something again that you know they definitely learned there and it's something they wouldn't have learned in the classroom.

Another parent, Teresa shared an incident and commented:

They found a dead owl there or a dead hawk one day. And they came home talking about that. The question was like what happened to this bird? What do you think? And then you know, forest schools right under that overpass. So then, couple ideas were that it got hit by a car so they all kind of like thought about that. So, I think that made them think just about like man's impact on nature.

Influencing parent's attitude also contributed as a significant component of learning into the forest schools. For example, Daniel shared:

So, I would say the impacts for us is that we're trying to preserve some of the values and some of the things that are being, you know, instilled in the kids at that age and continuing on with that so that it doesn't become a temporary lesson. It becomes a sort of, you know, a fundamental in their lives.

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Another parent Teresa mentioned that their child reminds them of taking care of the natural resources and commented: "I mean sometimes like they'll even remind us like, turn off the tap. You're wasting water".

Some parents also commented that their children have made them physically active and has increased their knowledge of nature.

Susan commented:

It's like she wants to spend more time outside. She wants to, you know, do more activities outside and she doesn't want to just stay in, you know in the house all day.

So, it kind of pushes us outside as well. We'll go for a walk at the park.

Teresa commented on how their knowledge strengthened because of their child's participation in forest school and stated:

Like the hike that we did and then [my child] pointed out what was poison ivy which I don't know if I had ever actually seen before? I'm like yes. Just pointing on different plants that are around here because I didn't grow up around here so I'm not familiar with them all. So, he's definitely like taught us some of that kind of stuff.

Overall, the parents noted their child developing a strong bond with nature. Parents commented that learning in nature has made their children nature lovers and conscious of their actions on the environment.

Stepping-stone towards Kindergarten

When parents were asked about a particular aspect of forest school that has impacted their child's development, three significant concepts were disclosed which are creativity in pretend play, imagination in free play, and ability to dissociate from parents in understanding the instructions. According to parents, the educational philosophy of forest school supports a child-centered approach where children develop individually. For example, Rena stated:

Some of the things that she does in forest schools is they bring, lots of pots and pans and spoons and stuff and, [my child] likes to pretend to make cakes, you know, out of dirt. She scoops in dirt and rocks and sticks and stirs them in a bowl and pretends to make cake.

Another parent Susan commented on the creativity and stated that:

And then her creativity, like she'll be outside. She asked me for some food color. She was making her own little kitchen outside playing by herself and creating her own little world. She was making a castle the other day with the snow, and they do that at the school. So that she's been applying it at home.

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Increase in imagination was another concept that many parents agreed upon. For example, Teresa commented:

So, they're really good at pretend play like their imaginations are really good. I feel like they need less entertainment sometimes, like they're very good at like making up games and activities on their own without much, without a lot of like, you know, fancy toys or a lot of like structure. So, I'd say forest school has been really good for that. I think just when we're out playing in the yard, like we don't have a lot of like outside toys. But they can just find like sticks and just things like around the yard, and they can just like make up games and like just do them for a while, like just playing in the dirt.

For some parents, the outdoor and unstructured approach of the forest school was essential for their child's development. Explaining the importance of free play one parent Teresa stated:

I mean, I think it's a really good program. There's I mean there's a lot of free play, which I think is good. Like they just need that at this age. Kids can't have like the structure, and they can't have the walls. They can't have four walls all the time.

Daniel commented on the open-ended structure of the forest school and mentioned:

But the forest school is a much more relaxed environment or less rigid environment is probably a better way to phrase it. Where they can, learn and you know it's a nice stepping-stone between not being in a school like structure and then learning some routine in some structure and then going into the school system.

For another parent Kayla the application of learning in the forest school at home was significant and they commented "And so, when he is at home, things like taking his plate from the table to listening skills, I guess it will come down to so cleaning up after himself, taking care of his toys."

Some parents mentioned the importance of learning in the forest school to be critical in supporting the child to become prepared in taking independent decisions without relying on the parents. For example, Daniel commented:

You come with necessities, but at the end of the day, you're learning to rely on somebody that , you know you've never taken instruction from before and I think that's hugely beneficial to the kids, especially at that age that there's you know, you have to learn and respect people that aren't your parents and you have to be dependent a little bit on yourself and on those people that you don't necessarily know that well and on your classmates as well, right? I think that's a big part of it.

When asked about strengthened abilities, Susan stated:

All the social aspect has definitely helped. I never had her in daycare or, so she's always been with family members, so the social aspect was being taught but being around other adults and being taught by them and having other kids, I think that really helps. She's, her confidence is up. She's not shy, shy as much.

Rena mentioned the leadership skills that are fostered in children in the forest school and commented:

Then you know they give different children opportunities to lead when they're hiking. So, [my child] does get a turn to lead the group with a friend, taking turns leading and following and respecting the rules while you're sitting there having a snack.

Children's Autonomy

When parents were asked about specific abilities that have developed in their child after being enrolled in forest school, three areas of growing autonomy were evident: preparedness, confidence and independence, and problem-solving skills.

According to parents, self-preparedness is one of the most important abilities that were developed in the forest school which the parents attributed to the outdoor nature of the learning. On this Daniel commented:

I mean just as simple as when we go out as a family and how they prepare themselves. You know shoes and backpacks and making sure that you know pants are covering shoelaces so that you know dust or debris, or bugs or whatever can't get into, you know, just little things like that. You know how they carry, like a backpack that has weight and if they know they've got a hike and carry it for a couple hours they make sure that their front buckles and things are done out right.

Another parent Teresa commented on increase in the adaptation abilities of their child and mentioned:

I think the tolerance for being outside is longer like. Just, you know, dealing with the elements is, they can be outside longer. That's a real benefit.

Kayla also commented on the strengthening of the adaptation abilities and stated:

But as he ascends deeper into nature, he wants to, you know, he will dress warmer. If it is cold outside, getting my child dressed in the morning has been a can be challenging. Getting him to wear the proper thing. But he has a healthy respect for if it's cold outside, we need to wear our warm boots. And so, he understands that now in his relationship towards be what the climate is outside.

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Rena commented "I think that being in forest school is helping her be comfortable and appreciate the outdoors. I think it's helping her prepare to be outside and to learn how to deal with you know different climate."

Confidence and independence also contributed towards children's autonomy. Many parents confirmed the development of confidence and independence in their child's decision-making abilities. For example, Kayla commented on their child being able to take decisions to meet his own needs:

I think in terms of growth and development, independence has been a huge one for him as he was three. And gaining more and more independence with this program helps him to have the confidence that he needed to help understand his own feelings and interpret them, and then be able to take care of his own needs.

Another parent Daniel commented:

I think there's a level of confidence that they have by being able to do these things on their own by being able to, you know, be outside. Again, dependent on themselves, independent on less instruction. I think confidence would be the biggest change.

Susan commented on their child's increase in confidence level and stated that:

She is not as shy and afraid of people as much. She's more open and she would talk to people if they talked to her. Before that she would just hide and like before when people would talk to her in like asocial situation either adults or other kids. She would be more timid, and not like, hi my name is [this]. Or somebody asking her questions, she would just hide behind me. Now she'll answer and be more confident.

For some parents, their child developed problem-solving skills and now have strengthened. They have developed their ability to find solutions to problems at hand.

According to Rena:

We were at the park, and she is you know her water bottle was almost empty, and she said, we could go collect the snow and put it in our water bottle. And that would turn into water you know. And I'm not sure where she's got those concepts from right? I wouldn't be surprised if they talked about that at forest school.

Kayla commented that for their child, developing the ability to understand his own needs was significant. Kayla stated that:

It could be when you're walking on your legs, you're feeling tired and you're just expressing that you're feeling tired to teacher instead of stopping crying and saying I can't walk anymore because my legs are tired, and I am going to need a break. So, understanding what his needs are and expressing those like that. It's huge and, you

know, he would never had those experiences, had he not been outside, outside for this long.

Role of Educators

Parents perceive that teachers' efforts contribute towards students' success. Many parents elaborated on the role of forest school educators and their unwavering support to the young population.

For Kayla, teacher's knowledge of land and sharing it with their child was important and they mentioned:

And I feel that the teacher is having a sense of responsibility towards the people who have stewarded this land is really important to instill in my child. And I feel that's a huge piece of it where we talk about the land that was here before all the other people came. And I really appreciate that they are instilling that in this group of kids this young. Just talking about residential school. I'm not sure if they do exactly that, but they talk about the names of the rivers, the names of this place, that real name, not the English name and that's important to me that they do that.

Another parent Daniel commented:

I quite enjoy all the instructors, they are, I mean really well intentioned first and foremost. I think they care immensely about the children and about their development and about, you know, teaching them how to preserve what we have and what we sort of take for granted in this world. And I think for the most part, you know, the instructors communicate what's necessary to the parents and we sort of. I don't know what other families are like, but we were sort of no news is good news if we don't hear anything from the instructors, we assume that our children are learning and progressing well. We also have the confidence in them that if there was a problem, they would bring it to our attention.

Some of the parents expressed that the educators' behavior towards children is commendable. For example, Rena stated: "They are very pleasant, they're very calm. They're just kind of like the biggest emphasizing experiencing what's around you." Another parent Susan commented:

They've been wonderful there. They've been, they're kind, they're considerate. They're you know, I've never had an issue. She's never said she didn't like her teachers or any problems with any teachers or kids. Like they managed the kids very well.

Another parent Teresa appreciated the forest school instructors for the positive attitude they practiced with their child and commented:

I mean, I think they're great. I mean the parents aren't there to like see how they teach exactly, or like how it all goes. It's just kind of like the drop off and pick up. But they were always like available and communicated very well with like what was going on. I mean there was a couple like behavior incidents with my older son, which is just him. Not unique to a forest school at all. But they're very really good at talking about it, and just, you know, seeing if there's any concerns. And then we tried to work together with, like you know how can we support him to? How about it? A more positive experience. So, they're really good with communication and just very patient.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has chronicled the data analysis procedure and identified eight themes under three broad categories of growth, learning, and development. The findings were guided by the research question to understand the parent's perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in a forest school.

The first part revealed the parents' perceptions of their children's growth in the forest school. Two themes emerged in this section which were physical fitness and social-emotional well-being. Parents viewed forest school's educational philosophy as an important factor in strengthening their children's physical strength through hiking and spending considerable amount of time in nature and having fresh air. Parents were also of the opinion that being in the forest school has promoted their children's communication skill, encouraged them to form new relationships, made them emotionally aware of their own feelings.

The second part of the findings section elaborated the parents' views of their children's learning in the forest school. Parents viewed that forest school encouraged effective learning in their children. The unstructured educational system supported the children in learning numeracy and literacy. Parents also viewed that their children became curious of the varied processes of nature through the hands-on learning experience in the forest school. Indigenous ways of knowing was another theme that emerged in this section. Parents believed that forest school helped their children in learning about the Indigenous culture and community around them.

The third part of the findings covered the parents' perceptions of their children's development in the forest school. Parents' views were that their children's developing sense of stewardship towards nature was strengthened because of being enrolled in forest school. Parents observed their children's growing interest in understanding the meaning of co-existence in nature and human impact on nature were critical to their development. The findings also revealed that forest school proved to be a brilliant stepping-stone towards

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

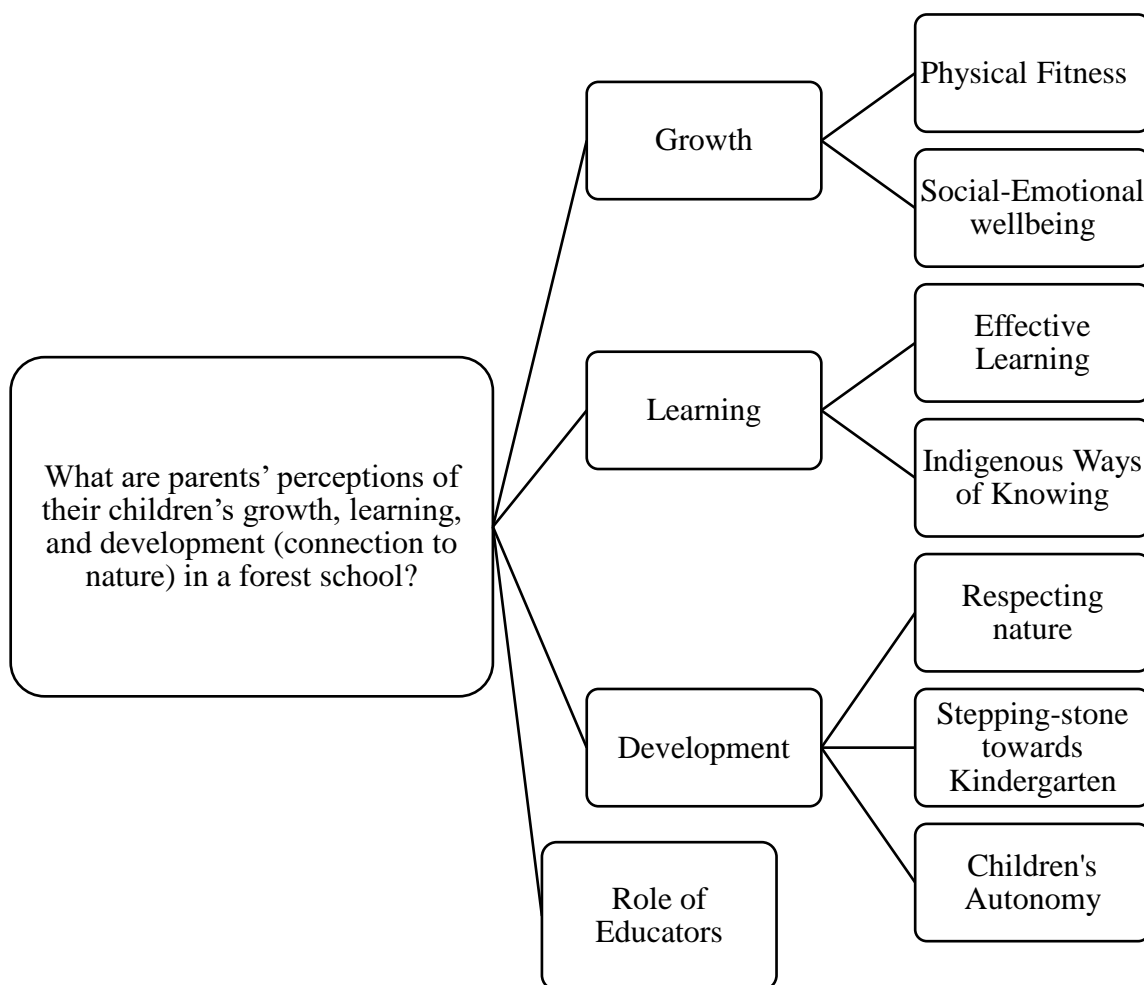
kindergarten where children were creative and imaginative. Moreover, parents viewed autonomy as a skill that developed impressively in their children.

The last theme elaborated the parents' views of their children's forest school's teachers. The role of the educator was critical, and parents had positive experience with their children's teachers. The theme furthered that, teachers were well intentioned, had great ability to share knowledge with children, and their calm behavior towards children supported children's growth, learning, and development in forest school.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

I begin this chapter with a quote from a parent Kayla “It's a great school for them to be at the start.” The above quote was a unanimous call from all the parents. The parents, who participated in this study acknowledged that enrolling their children in the Green Smile Forest School has been a positive learning experience. This indicates the significance of nature learning as an essential component of early childhood development. This study was designed to explore parents’ viewpoints of their children’s growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in the Green Smile Forest School. I collected qualitative data using semi-structured interviews and analyzed them using thematic analysis. This chapter will follow the structure of the themes that emerged in the findings chapter. The findings of this study will be discussed in relation with the past literature that was summarized in the literature review chapter.

Figure 1: Key Themes Emerging from Parents' Interviews



Parents' Views of their Children's Growth

How the Green Smile Forest School supported children's physical, social, and emotional growth were some of the main themes that emerged during the interviews. The majority of parents viewed that forest school strengthened their children's growth in a variety of ways which led to a healthy lifestyle.

Physical Fitness

Previously, Fjørtoft (2001) argued that children's physical activity improves because of the varied natural landscape. In this study parents expressed that hiking, exercising, and fresh air were critical factors that influenced physical growth in their children. This study revealed that for parents spending time in nature and performing various physical activities resulted in the children becoming more active and physically stronger. This study extended the literature of Fjørtoft (2011) where parents opted for the Green Smile Forest School because of its philosophy of learning in the outdoors where they carry their backpacks and hike, walk, and exercise on uneven terrains. According to the parents, the unstructured learning environment provides ample opportunities for children to grow physically. Another critical component that parents brought up was the benefit for the children to feel the fresh air. This aspect shows that parents consider having a healthy life essential for their children's proper growth.

Social-Emotional Wellbeing

As argued by Ernst et al. (2018), unstructured play in a forest school can boost children's social and emotional strength. In my study most parents believed that the forest school was a happy zone where their children built strong friendships, developed communication skills, and developed a sense of calmness. This study further reinforced the concept of self-regulation and ability to form emotional bonds (Bandura et al., 1999; Zimmerman, 1989) with peers and adults. During this study parents emphasized that their children understood the meaning of taking care and took responsibilities to help their peers. The example of the goodbye train strengthened the idea of forming strong bonds. For parents, the Green Smile Forest School served as a place of initiation and continuation of new emotional relationships.

Another critical component that surfaced in the interviews with parents was that the forest school enhanced children's communication skills. As previously argued in the literature from Forest School Canada ([FSC], 2014), play-based pedagogy of forest schools can promote communication by encouraging articulation of inner thoughts. This concept was

supported in this study where parents emphasized that being enrolled in forest school encouraged their children to share stories, ask questions, and interact with peers. Parents believed that learning in the Green Smile Forest School encouraged children to think deeply and critically. The forest school's educational philosophy also supported children to have meaningful and concrete discussions with peers and adults.

When parents were asked about the impacts of the forest school on their child's behavior, the majority commented that forest school filled their children with positivity and calmness. Previous research suggested that Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms can be curtailed by staying outdoors (Cooper, 2015; Jacobi-Vessels, 2013). Though this study cannot confirm the above claim, parents did emphasize that forest school promotes calmness in their children. Parents revealed that time spent at the Green Smile Forest School suppresses anger and induces feeling of positivity and happiness in their children. Some parents also believed that forest school served as a place of peace for their children which supported their children's mental growth and stability.

Parents' Views of their Children's Learning

How forest school supported children's learning was another component that was explored in this study. According to the parents, forest school supported their children's learning into two main themes: effective learning and Indigenous ways of knowing.

Effective Learning

The majority of parents commented on the novel ways by which the forest school supported their children's vocabulary development, literacy, numeracy, curiosity, and hands-on learning. According to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2019b), outdoor learning can encourage children to think critically and rationally and thereby support literacy and numeracy learning. Parents commented on the different aspects of learning in the forest school that enhanced children's literacy and vocabulary. Parents communicated that story telling sessions in the forest school encouraged their children to identify new words.

Additionally, some parents viewed learning in the forest school encouraged children's active listening. This active listening was proved when children shared the minute details of the stories and their everyday forest school experience with their parents.

According to Constable (2014), scientific inquiry is enhanced by being in nature. This claim was elucidated in the study when parents commented on their children's acquired knowledge of nature vocabulary. Many parents mentioned that their children discussed with them names of fossils, plants, and animal species which they encountered in the forest school. Another component of learning that emerged in the interviews was numeracy. Though

parents commented that the children did not learn numeracy in a traditional way on a number-line but learning of numeracy in the forest school was a unique experience. The different types of outdoor games being played in the forest school supported children's counting techniques. The study also strengthened the idea that learning in the outdoors helps the children to express their thoughts independently (Yildirim & Akamca, 2017). Parents suggested that forest school imparted education of numeracy to children in a practical way where children counted the food they eat and measured the distance of their walks in the forest school. The unique environment of learning that occurs in forest school encourages the children's curiosity about the nature (Jacobi- Vessels, 2013). This claim was highly supported when parents shared examples of their children sharing animal facts, identifying different animals by looking at their paw prints and scat, and looking through different living and non-living beings. Some parents extended the above claim and mentioned that learning in the forest school also enhanced their children's happy encounter with the varied weather and climatic conditions. These encounters helped the children to experience extreme climate and understand the life cycles of living beings around them. For parents embedding forest school in the early years generated curiosity-driven children.

A majority of parents commented on the hands-on experiential learning to be the most effective way of learning in the early years. The child should experience nature "in all its aspects – form, energy, substance, sound and colour" (Froebel in Lilley, as cited in Tovey, 2020, p. 8). This claim was well supported when parents explained that children were aware of their needs and requirements during a day in the forest school. The findings of this study also concur with the Froebelian philosophy of having rich natural environment critical for learning. The tactile experience of touching, imagining, and creating things in the outdoor was well appreciated by all the parents. The parents elaborated the above report by sharing examples of their children doing the things by experiencing and touching.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Previously Bowra et al. (2021), stated that Indigenous ways of knowing in nature encourages humans to develop a reciprocal relationship with nature where individuals learn to respect and have positive attitude towards nature. This claim was supported by parents' viewpoints where they mentioned that forest school inculcated the value of bilateral relationships. For some parents the Green Smile Forest School strengthened their children's connection to nature and helped the children understand their existence in the world. Moreover, the parents viewed the importance of the Green Smile Forest School having a connection with the Indigenous land. The parents appreciated that being on an Indigenous

land provided their children with ample opportunities to learn the Indigenous culture. The above viewpoints of parents extended the literature where Bowra et al. (2021) stated that any part of the Indigenous lands can be used as teaching grounds. Another critical component that arose during the interviews was that learning in the forest school which is located on an Indigenous land also helped the children to learn the language and culture of Indigenous community. The parents mentioned that the forest school practitioners made every effort to help children understand the significance of co-existence and developed a sense of community. These viewpoints extended the claim of Forest School Canada [FSC (2014)], which stated that the Indigenous pedagogy focuses on observation, reflection, and learning from the natural life present on the land.

Parents' Views of their Children's Development

Another key component of this study was to understand the parents' viewpoints of their children's development in the forest school. The study revealed three themes which were critical to development in children which are respecting nature, stepping-stone towards kindergarten, and children's autonomy. This research reinforced the claim made by Williams-Sieghfredsen (2012, as cited in Kahrman-Pamuk, 2020) where the researcher mentioned that forest school pedagogy enforces holistic development of the children.

Respecting Nature

Learning in the natural environment promotes nature awareness among children. This study of parents' perceptions of their children's connection to nature reinforced the term "Biophilia" coined by Wilson (1894, as cited in Turtle et al., 2015, p. 4) which reciprocates to children's natural ability to connect with nature. The majority of parents viewed the process by which forest school helped their children to become nature steward as an excellent developmental goal. The study suggested that parents perceive forest school broadened the children's outlook towards nature and children started to appreciate and feel comfortable in the outdoors. The interviews elaborated how children's development in terms of taking care and respecting nature was integral to forest school educational philosophy. Another claim that was highly appreciated in this study was of Turtle et al. (2015), which states that the influence of forest school pedagogy on children makes them nature friendly, aware of human impacts and influence their own actions toward the environment. During the interviews, parents discussed multiple incidences where the children shared ideas about keeping the earth clean, avoiding littering, and taking responsibility towards a cleaner environment. Froebelian's philosophy of making connections with nature and society (Hermann, 1926; Tovey, 2013) was also strengthened through this study. During the interviews parents

commented that their children became conscious and aware of their natural surroundings and their own presence in the natural world. Turtle et al. (2015) claim of children becoming aware of human impact on nature and thereby working together to building better community was reinforced in this study. The parents discussed that their children were inquisitive to learn about how humans' actions deteriorate the natural environment. The children also reciprocated the mannerisms of taking care of nature in their homes and influenced the parents to become nature stewards. A majority of parents appreciated that the Green Smile Forest School made nature stewardship a fundamental concept in their children's lives. The parents revealed that their children inculcated in them the habit of being outdoors and physically active. This result reflects those of Bergen (2009) who found that play empowers children to communicate their ideas rationally.

Stepping-stone towards Kindergarten

A discussion on a particular aspect of forest school that influenced children's development revealed that parents' view forest school as an influential first step towards kindergarten. As mentioned in the literature review, the evidence of the positive impact of early childhood education on the children's preparedness to enter school years are many (Phillips et al., 2017). The findings from this study are in alignment with the above report and is explained by three critical components creativity, imagination, and ability to dissociate from parents. The child-centric approach of forest school was highly appreciated by all the parents. Consistent with the literature, this study found that pretend play encouraged the children to create a self-learning environment. Parents discussed that the children's creativity increased manifolds after being enrolled in forest school which supported their children to move a step closer to become autonomous. Prior studies including Cordiano et al. (2019), Louv (2008), and Vygotsky (1967/2016) reported that pretend play is critical in the holistic development of children as it fortifies the exploratory skills. The finding from this study supports the above reports where parents mentioned and appreciated that their children's imagination was constantly evolving where the children did not need a structure to entertain themselves. The importance of child-centric free play and unhindered learning as was enunciated by Froebel (Tovey, 2013), is well elaborated by parents of forest school. The parents viewed open structure of forest school as pivotal as it did not confine the children in four walls. The free-play philosophy was well appreciated by the parents when they mentioned that it was important for them to provide their children an environment which is less rigid. An interesting category that emerged in the findings was parents' views that learning in a forest school made their children self-sufficient where they were able to part

ways from their parents at a very early age. The findings suggested that children develop control over themselves and learn how to lead and follow in the forest school. Although it is a small study, the analysis indicates that forest school helped children in taking their own decisions without much assistance from their family.

Children's Autonomy

Several reports have indicated that forest school pedagogy reinforces the concept of self-preparedness, confidence, independence, and problem-solving skills in children (Ernst et al., 2018; Kiewra & Veselack, 2016; Maynard & Waters, 2007; Yildirim & Akamca 2017). Parents stated that children became autonomous in choosing what they want to do and preparing themselves for situations. The examples shared by parents indicate that children learn the ability to adapt because of long outdoor hours in varied climatic conditions. The above finding restated the Froebelian educational approach of risk-taking powers in children (Hermann, 1926). Another significant concept that was revealed during the interviews was increase in children's confidence and independence skills. Previously Maynard (2007) reported the increase in children's confidence and independence because of the opportunity to choose the learning. According to the parents, the forest school pedagogy of free-play in the natural habitat provided the children ample opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The findings suggested that forest school empowered children to make decisions confidently through rational and independent thinking. Consistent with the literature, this study found that forest school encouraged children to take risks and solve problems independently. The parents' comments indicated that there was a significant increase in how children developed abilities to deal with issues at hand and learnt life and survival skills. Parents viewed forest school as an opportunity which supported their children in understanding the risks involved and find solutions to the problems at hand.

Role of Educators

Parents' statements suggested that forest school instructors are excellent facilitator of their children's growth, learning and development. A majority of the parents acknowledged the vast amount of knowledge that the instructors possess of the local land and how beautifully the instructors inculcated those values in children. These findings are in alignment with previous study. FSC (2014) reported that forest school practitioners take every effort to facilitate children's enjoyment and experience in the outdoors. Another interesting finding suggested that forest school educators are compassionate, passionate, and considerate with children. Parents viewed the above qualities immensely essential for their children's overall growth and development. Parents' comments also revealed that educators encouraged the

children to become responsible humans socially, emotionally, practically, and globally. These findings further support the ideas of Constable (2014) and FSC (2014) which reported that forest school practitioners are well-intentioned and passionate nature stewards who motivate, promote, and applaud children's growth, learning, and development.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I discussed all the interview findings, reviewed them along with the past literature and interpreted them into three broad categories and eight themes: (a) parents' views of their children's growth into (i) physical fitness and (ii) social-emotional wellbeing, (b) parents' views of their children's learning into (i) effective learning and (ii) Indigenous ways of knowing (c) parents' views of their children's development into (i) respecting nature, (ii) stepping- stone towards kindergarten, and (iii) children's autonomy, and (d) role of educators. Many of the findings in this study were consistent with the previous literature, however, there were some phenomena which were distinctive and were analyzed and interpreted in this chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study began with an inquiry into understanding the perceptions of five parents who enrolled their children in a forest school that I have called Green Smile Forest School. The findings of this study helped in comprehending the parents' viewpoints of their children's growth, learning, and development in a forest school. The results of this research were in alignment with the literature discussed in this study. Nevertheless, there were some interesting viewpoints revealed by the parents that enriched the literature and has given a way into future research.

The parents differed with the norms of raising their children in a structured classroom environment. The parents' viewpoints did not support the concept of standardized testing and aligned with the curriculum theory of Pinar (2004) which rejects the "business- minded school reform" (p. 16). On the contrary, parents considered nature as a wonderful school for their children to attain desired learning. Though it was expected and was revealed in the study that parents considered physical exercise and staying outdoors critical for their children's holistic development, however, what was additionally interesting was when parents commented that having fresh air is significant in their children's growth. Fresh air is a surprising element in that we did not see reference to fresh air in previous studies. This part of the findings reinforces the idea of understanding the importance of the basics of living in the outdoors and is contrary to the belief that parents deem a set pattern of education indoors as safest for their children.

A potential parental concern that was discussed in the introduction was "stranger-danger" (Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019, p. 270). In the beginning of this study, it was anticipated that parents would share their thoughts of any fear of their children being in association with strangers in the outdoors. However, it was astonishing to know that parents did not show this fear and on the contrary, they appreciated and encouraged their children's engagement and connection with peers and adults. The parents surprised the researcher by sharing the thoughts that they like the educational philosophy of forest school which encourages their children to develop love and care for others. In addition, the parents considered the risk-taking philosophy of forest school to be extremely critical in their children's overall development. These thoughts give new insight to the area of forest school pedagogy and encourage the research community to further investigation in the area of forest school philosophy of developing this care for others and care of self which is part of the mechanism of self-regulation in early years.

An interesting finding of this study disclosed the parents' views of the importance of their children learning about the circle of life. Though the literature supported the benefits of forest school on the social-emotional well-being of children; however, the parental emphasis on their children learning about sorrow, departing, happiness, and the joy of coming together is valuable to be thought upon. This parental observation and sharing encourages the research community to work towards comprehending children's understanding the meaning-making of life through living close to nature.

As a part of this study, it was expected that parents would discuss about the concerns that they have in having their children transition to a traditional school. It was surprising that none of the parents weighed neoliberal education heavily for their children. On the contrary, the parents supported Dewey's (1897) concept of "education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (p. 7). The parents' thoughts on their children being involved with self, others, and nature as a way of holistic development suggests the importance of learning in nature. In addition, the parents denied the idea of preparing their children for capitalistic gain. The parents' viewpoints about the current educational system aligned with Freire's (1968/2005) idea that "education is suffering from narration sickness" (p. 71). This segment of the parents' perceptions encourages the educational community to move beyond producing robotic children and emphasizes the inclusion of the nature-based pedagogy along with the traditional educational philosophy for raising a self-regulated, autonomous, confident, and independent younger generation.

The perceptions of the parents involved in this study provided a detailed understanding of the functioning of this forest school (Green Smile Forest School). This research, therefore, is a starting point to delve deeper into comprehending the multi-layered benefits of forest school incorporation in early years. This study deepens the understanding and the advantages of these parents' involvement in their children's growth, learning, and development in early childhood. It is hoped that this study can support prospective parents, policymakers, and administrators to make knowledgeable and reasonable decisions about the importance of Forest School pedagogy for early year's education.

Educational Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the parents' perceptions of their children's growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in a forest school. The findings revealed that parents considered forest school as a potential early childhood education approach for their children. The findings implied that parents expect early childhood education to be flexible, open-structured, and experiential to support their

children's holistic development. For children to get involved in nature and take their growth, learning, and development to a more whole-body approach, it is essential to understand what parents would want their children to be involved in. This study supported in revealing the parents' perceptions and their opinions of what would be a commendable alternative educational approach for their children. The study disclosed the multiple benefits of forest school pedagogy; hence involvement of parents is critical which will support the prospective parents in choosing the right educational approach for their children. Additionally, understanding the demands, expectations, and suggestions of parents would inform early childhood education policymakers to make informed decisions for younger population. This study will also support and enhance the understanding of forest school practitioners to collaborate with parents on a larger scale. By involving the parents in the everyday practice of forest school would help the practitioners to gauge the expectations of parents for their children and a promise for a long-lasting and stronger learning environment.

Recommendations

As the primary researcher for this study, I have realized that early childhood is a critical phase and hence should be supported with all things positive and strong. While this study reported the benefits of forest school according to parents' lenses, it would be beneficial to recommend some suggestions:

1. conduct regular workshops in traditional schools for teachers, parents, and administrators to make them aware of this alternative learning approach;
2. incorporate forest school philosophies in the regular educational curriculum;
3. invite forest school practitioners to talk about the way of teaching and learning in nature with traditional schools' teachers and parents;
4. encourage teachers and parents to get involved and take short courses in forest school practices to enhance self-understanding.

Limitations

The study was conducted to understand the parents' viewpoints of their children's growth, learning, and development (connection to nature) in a forest school; however, it has limitations.

For this study, I applied a combination of purposeful and convenient sampling. Though purposeful sampling was a must because of the given nature of the study, however convenient sampling did have some limitations. As this study involved only one forest school in a small city in Western Canada, the number of participants is not enough to generalize the results from this study. Also because of the convenient samplings, only those participants

were chosen who contacted the researcher earlier than others to participate in the study and so the first come-first serve basis hindered the participation of other parents. In future, it would be recommended to have a large-scale study where many parents from different forest schools across Canada could participate and voice their opinions.

Another limitation of this study was data collection method. The data collection involved one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants. Given the exploratory nature of the study, it would have been beneficial to have focus group interviews. The focus group interviews would have revealed specific and detail-oriented viewpoints of the participants which could have furthered this study.

Moreover, though I located my identity at the outset of this study, yet my own background of being an Environmental Science graduate and a mother could have brought biases in designing the interview questions for this research. Also, a human cannot be extracted from their subjectivity, my own viewpoints of Forest School pedagogy and limited knowledge of research methodologies would have acted as a biased approach during analysis of the data and generating themes out of the interviews.

Future Research

This study is qualitative research conducted using semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with only five participants. In future, to get a clear understanding of the benefits of forest school, it is recommended to have an elaborative study involving more parent participation and different forest schools across Canada.

Another suggestion would be to have a quantitative study to quantify the viewpoints of the benefits of forest schools' educational philosophy through parents' lens. The quantitative study will provide statistics to ministries to include forest school pedagogy into the traditional curriculum.

Moreover, it is also essential to understand the viewpoints of children and teachers. Such study will elaborate the understanding of any issues or problems that are faced by the people who are on the grounds experiencing the actual learning.

References

- Bandura, A., Pastorelli, C., Barbaranelli, C., & Caprara, G. V., (1999). Self-efficacy pathways to childhood depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(2), 258-269.
- Beckett, L. S. (2014). *An investigation into the factors that influence parental choice of early education and care* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Birmingham.
- Bergen, D. (2009). Play as the learning medium for future scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. *American Journal of Play*, 1(4), 413-428.
- Blenkinsop, S., Telford, J., & Morse, M. (2016). A surprising discovery: Five pedagogical skills outdoor and experiential educators might offer more mainstream educators in this time of change. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 16(4), 346-358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2016.1163272>
- Boileau, E. Y. S., & Dabaja, Z. F. (2020). Forest school practice in Canada: A survey study. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 23, 225-240.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-020-00057-4>
- Bowra, A., Mashford- Pringle, A., & Poland, B. (2021). Indigenous learning on Turtle Island: A review of the literature on land-based learning. *The Canadian Geographer*, 65(2), 132-140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12659>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006): Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. SAGE.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2019a). *British Columbia: Early Learning Framework*.
https://mytrainingbc.ca/ELF/resources/EarlyLearningFramework_2019_Web.pdf
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2019b). *Play Today: B.C. Handbook*.
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/play-today-handbook.pdf>
- Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. (2021). *Learn about Forest/ Nature Schools*.
<https://childnature.ca/about-forest-and-nature-school>
- Close, M. (2012). *The forest school initiative and its perceived impact on children's learning and development: An investigation into the views of children and parents* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Cardiff University.

- Coates, J. K., & Pimlott-Wilson, H. (2019). Learning while playing: Children's forest school experiences in the UK. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(1), 21-40.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3491>
- Constable, K. (2014). *Bringing the forest school approach to your early years practice*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Cooper, A. (2015). Nature and the outdoor learning environment: The forgotten resource in early childhood education. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 3(1), 85-97.
- Cordiano, T. S., Lee, A., Wilt, J., Elszasz, A., Damour, L. K., & Russ, S. W. (2019). Nature-based education and kindergarten readiness: Nature-based and traditional preschoolers are equally prepared for kindergarten. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 6(3), 18-36.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). PEARSON.
- Dean, S. (2019). Seeing the forest and the trees: A historical and conceptual look at Danish Forest Schools. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 6(3), 53-63.
- Dewey, J. (1897). *My pedagogic creed*. E.L. Kellogg & Co.
<https://archive.org/details/mypedagogiccree00dewegoog/page/n22/mode/2up>
- Ernst, J., Johnson, M., & Burcak, F. (2018). The nature and nurture of resilience: Exploring the impact of nature preschools on young children's protective factors. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 6(2), 7-18.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1) 1-22.
- Fjørtoft, I. (2001). The natural environment as a playground for children: The impact of outdoor play activities in pre-primary school children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(2), 111-117. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.tru.ca/10.1023/a:1012576913074>
- Forest School Canada (2014). *Forest and Nature School in Canada: A head, heart, hands approach to outdoor learning*. <https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/FSC-Guide-1.pdf>

- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum, 43-183. (Original work published 1968)
- Gardner, H. E. (2000). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*. Basic Books.
- Green Hearts. (2014). *Nature preschools*. https://greenheartsinc.org/Nature_Preschools.html
- Gutek, G. L. (2015). Friedrich Froebel: Founder of the kindergarten. In G. L. Gutek (Comps.), *Philosophy & History of Education* [Custom textbook] (pp. 151-170). Pearson.
- Harvey, D. J., Montgomery, L. N., Harvey, H., Hall, F., Gange, A. C., & Watling, D. (2020). Psychological benefits of a biodiversity- focussed outdoor learning program for primary school children. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 67, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.101381>
- HealthLink BC. (2020, May 27). *Media and your child: Making choices*. <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/abx2677>
- Hermann, M. (1926). Froebel's kindergarten and what it means. *The Irish Monthly*, 54(634), 201-209. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20517891>
- Hyun, E. (2000). *How is young children's intellectual culture of understanding nature different from adults?*. American Educational Research Association. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED441010>
- Jacobi-Vessels, J.L. (2013). Discovering nature: The benefits of teaching outside of the classroom. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 41(3), 4-10.
- Johnston L. (2020) Forest school pedagogy and Indigenous educational perspectives. In P.P. Trifonas (Eds.), *Handbook of Theory and Research in Cultural Studies and Education* (pp. 227- 239). Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56988-8_63
- Kahriman-Pamuk, D. (2020). An exploration of parents' perceptions concerning the forest preschool. *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education*, 10(2), 237-250.
- Kalpogianni, D. E. (2019). Why are the children not outdoors? Factors supporting and hindering outdoor play in Greek public day-care centres. *International Journal of Play*, 8(2), 155-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21594937.2019.1643979>
- Kiewra, C., & Veselack, E. (2016). Playing with nature: Supporting preschoolers' creativity in natural outdoor classrooms. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 4(1), 70-95.

- Larimore, R. (2016). Defining nature-based preschools. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 4(1), 33-37.
- Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder* (2nd ed.). Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin.
- MacEachren, Z. (2013). The Canadian Forest School movement. *Learning Landscapes*, 7(1), 219-233.
- Maynard, T. (2007). Forest schools in Great Britain: An initial exploration. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 8(4), 320-331. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2007.8.4.320>
- Maynard, T., & Waters, J. (2007). Learning in the outdoor environment: A missed opportunity?. *Early Years*, 27(3), 255-265.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140701594400>
- McArthur, B. A., Volkova, V., Tomopoulos, S. & Madigan, S. (2022). Global Prevalence of Meeting Screen Time Guidelines Among Children 5 Years and Younger: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 176(4), 373-383.
doi:[10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.6386](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.6386)
- McCree, M., Cutting, R., & Sherwin, D. (2018). The hare and the tortoise go to forest school: Taking the scenic route to academic attainment via emotional wellbeing outdoors. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(7), 980-996.
DOI:[10.1080/03004430.2018.1446430](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1446430)
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nevradakis, M. (2015). Henry Giroux on the Rise of Neoliberalism. *Humanity & Society*, 39(4), 449–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597615604985>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, (2003). Thematic review of early childhood education and care Canadian Background Report. Canada.
- Parsons, K. J., & Traunter, J. (2020) Muddy knees and muddy needs: Parents perceptions of outdoor learning. *Children's Geographies*, 18(6), 699-711.
DOI:[10.1080/14733285.2019.1694637](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1694637)
- Phillips, D., Lipsey, M. W., Dodge, K.A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M. R., Duncan, G. J., Dynarski, M., Magnuson, K. A., & Weiland, C. (2017). Puzzling it out: The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects. A Consensus Statement. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1-16.
- Pimlott-Wilson, H., & Coates, J. (2019). Rethinking learning? Challenging and accommodating neoliberal educational agenda in the integration of forest school into

- mainstream educational settings. *The Geographical Journal*, 185, 268-278.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12302>
- Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?*. Louisiana State University.
- Preston, J. P., Cottrell, M., Pelletier, T. R., & Pearce, J. V. (2011). Aboriginal early childhood education in Canada: Issues of context. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 10(1), 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1476718X11402753>
- Supriadi, M. A., Astra, I. M., Japar, M., & Fitriyani, F. (2020). Learning achievement: Outdoor learning model and naturalist intelligence. *Jurnal Riset Tindakan Indonesia*, 5(2), 47-53. <https://doi.org/10.29210/3003655000>
- Tovey, H. (2013). *Bringing the Froebel approach to your early years practice*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Tovey, H. (2020, March). *A Froebelian Approach: Froebel's principles and practice today*. Froebel Trust. <https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf>
- Turtle, C., Convery, I., & Convery, K. (2015). Forest schools and environmental attitudes: A case study of children aged 8-11 years. *Cogent Education*, 2(1), 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1100103>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2016). Play and its role in the mental development of the child (N. Veresov & M. Barrs, Trans.). *International Research in Early Childhood Education*, 7(2), 6-18. (Original work published 1967)
- Weston, P. (2000). *Friedrich Froebel: His life, times and significance*. University of Surrey Roehampton.
- Williams-Sieghfredsen, J. (2021). *Fruits of the forest*. Teach Early Years.
<https://www.teachearlyyears.com/images/uploads/article/danish-forest-schools.pdf>
- Wyver, S., Paul, T., Naughton, G., Little, H., Sandseter, E.B.H., & Bundy, A. (2010). Ten ways to restrict children's freedom to play: The problem of surplus safety. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 11(3), 263-277.
<https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2010.11.3.263>
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 134-152. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2102>
- Yildirim, G., & Akamca, G. O. (2017). The effect of outdoor learning activities on the development of preschool children. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(2), 1-10,
<https://doi.org.10.15700/saje.v37n2a1378>

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning.
Journal of Educational Psychology, 81(3), 329-339.

APPENDICES



Thompson Rivers University

900 McGill Road

Box 3010

Kamloops, BC

V2C 0C8

Telephone (250) 828-5000

Appendix A: Interview Questions

To comprehend the viewpoints of the parents, suggested questions for semi-structured interviews are:

1. Has FS impacted your child's learning? And if so, in what ways?

Prompts: Has FS impacted your child's numeracy learning? And if so, in what ways?

Has FS impacted your child's literacy learning? And if so, in what ways?

Has FS impacted your child's learning of nature? And if so, in what ways?

2. Has participation in FS impacted your child's behaviour at home? And if so, in what ways?

Prompt: Is your child developing a sense of responsibility towards nature? And if so, in what ways?

For example: Does your child remind you to always throw the garbage in the bin?

3. Which aspect of FS has influenced the growth and development of your child?

Prompt: Has FS impacted your child's physical development? And if so, in what ways?

4. Has participation in FS impacted your child's attitude towards nature? And if so, in what ways?

5. Is there anything else you would like to talk about FS that I did not ask you?

The interviews will begin with these questions. Supplemental questions will be added as needed.



Thompson Rivers University

900 McGill Road

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Box 3010

Kamloops, BC

V2C 0C8

Telephone (250) 828-5000

Dear potential participant,

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research project that I am undertaking as part of my Master's in Education program at Thompson Rivers University. My research focus is to understand parents' perceptions of the growth, learning, and development of their children enrolled in Forest School. As a parent of children enrolled in Sprouting Knowledge Forest School, you are in an ideal position to give valuable information on your experiences.

The interview will be either face-to-face at the site of Sprouting Knowledge Forest School in Peterson Creek Park or via video-conferencing and will take place for 40 minutes. Your responses to the questions will be recorded. All recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential. Personal identities will not be revealed at any time in the study.

There is no compensation or incentives for the participation. However, your participation will be greatly appreciated and will benefit our knowledge of Forest Schools. The findings will help the research community to understand the voice and expectations of parents choosing this alternative learning approach for their children.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at madarwalas20@mytru.ca or by phone at 236-979-7555.

Thanks,

Saba Madarwala



Thompson Rivers University

900 McGill Road

Box 3010

Kamloops, BC

V2C 0C8

Telephone (250) 828-5000

Appendix C: Verbal Explanation

Hello, my name is Saba Madarwala. I am in Master of Education program at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, Canada.

For the purpose of data collection, this interview will be recorded. Do you consent for this? Firstly, I will briefly introduce the research. The title of the research is “Exploring parents’ perceptions of a Forest School in Western Canada”, researcher Saba Madarwala.

Introduction: Although there is lots of research on the benefits of Forest Schools, little is known about parents' perspectives. This study will focus on the viewpoints of parents whose children are enrolled in Forest School.

In this study, I will ask you a range of questions to understand your perception of your child’s growth, learning, and development in the Forest School. The interview will last for approximately 40 minutes.

The data you provide will form the basis of my MEd thesis.

Your identity will be protected, and any data shared will remain strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a password protected laptop and a password protected hard-drive and will be used only for this study and will be deleted after five years.

The participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study and/ or may not answer any question at any point of time without suffering any consequences. If you wish to withdraw, the data will not be used for this study and will be deleted.

If you wish to obtain the executive summary of this study, you can contact me and let me know how you would like me to share it.

Do you have any questions?

Do you consent to be interviewed for this research?



Thompson Rivers University

900 McGill Road

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Box 3010

Kamloops, BC

V2C 0C8

Telephone (250) 828-5000

Title of Research Project:

Exploring parents' perceptions of a Forest School in Western Canada

Researcher: Saba Madarwala, TRU 00677336, M.Ed. candidate, madarwalas20@mytru.ca, 236-979-7555, Supervisor- Dr. Carol Rees, crees@tru.ca

Project Description:

Research Purpose: Childhood is the critical phase for children's development of positive attitudes to nature, stewardship, and awareness of human impact on nature. In addition, experience in nature can support better physical health, mental processes, and appreciation of self and others. Outdoor education has been an emerging and exciting issue in Europe, UK, and North America (Dean, 2019). One example is Forest Schools. The Forest School pedagogy is a dynamic method which places its foci on the holistic development of the child (Kahriman-Pamuk, 2020). Although there is substantial research in the field of benefits of Forest Schools, little is known about parents' perspectives. This study will address this gap in the literature by focusing on the viewpoints of parents whose children are enrolled in Forest School.

Research Procedure: This study will use interviews to understand parents' perceptions of Forest School. The interviews will be conducted either face-to-face at the Sprouting Knowledge Forest School running in Peterson Creek Park or via video-conferencing. The interviews will be conducted for approximately 40 minutes. During the interviews,

participants will be asked to reflect on their experience of how their children's growth, development, and learning are affected in Forest School.

Consent: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Saba Madarwala, TRU 00677336 for the purposes of her Thesis in Master of Education.

Participation: My participation will consist of either a face-to-face or video-conferencing interview during which I will answer questions pertaining to the research topic. The interview will be approximately 40 minutes and will be conducted either at Sprouting Knowledge Forest School in Peterson Creek Park or via video-conferencing. The audio of the interview(s) will be recorded for transcription as part of the data collection for the research project.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help create a body of knowledge about the Forest School education. The results of the research study will help the research community to understand the parents' viewpoints of the Forest School. I will be able to read the summary of the findings and use the information to help my understanding.

Risks: There are no known risks in this study.

Use of the data: I understand that the data will be used for the thesis and potential conferences, or academic journals, or other publications.

Anonymity: My identity will be protected through anonymity in the interview transcription and no names will be used for the purpose of thesis or other publications.

Confidentiality: The information I will share will remain strictly confidential. The data collected (audio recordings of interviews and transcripts) will be kept securely on a password protected electronic device (laptop and hard-drive). The data will be kept secured for five years. After that all electronic data will be discarded using secure electronic data disposal.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any question at any point in time without suffering any consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all the data from my interview will be destroyed and will not be used for this study.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Saba Madarwala of the Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development at Thompson Rivers University. If I have any further questions about the study and the procedure, I may contact the researcher.

CHILDREN'S GROWTH, LEARNING, & DEVELOPMENT IN FOREST SCHOOL

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____
(print name)

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____
(print name)

If you have any concerns about this study or need to file a complaint, please contact my supervisor Dr. Carol Rees at crees@tru.ca , and/ or the Chair of the Faculty of Education (Dr. Howe) at ehowe@tru.ca or by phone 250-371-5526, and/ or TRU's Chair of the Research Ethics Board at TRU-REB@tru.ca or by phone at 250-828-5000/ 250-828-5120 .

Copies of The Consent Form and The Summary of The Research Findings

If you would like to receive a copy of the executive summary of completed project and any information during the course of the research, or wish to view your transcript, please contact me (Saba Madarwala), and tell me the way you prefer to receive them.