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# Playing with Words...connecting through story

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## About me

I am a lecturer, researcher, volunteer practitioner, mother of four grown-up children and wife to an ecologist. I am also a professionally qualified youth and community development worker, and experienced environmental educator. I love being and playing outdoors – I love wildlife, especially Wolves!



With qualifications in both Natural Science and Social Studies, I have sought out ways to close the gap between the disciplines, and to cross the divide, identified by Ingold (2000: 1-2), that "...separates the 'two worlds' of humanity and nature".<sup>1</sup> Transdisciplinarity enables us to focus on approaches that aim to capture people's imagination and their attention – for example: through stories, fables, poetry.

## My Doctoral Study

### *Making Sense of Nature: A Creative Exploration of Young People's Relationship with the Natural Environment.*

- This was a qualitative study that considers how young people make sense of facilitated outdoor learning experiences. I used creative approaches, both to present my findings and to elicit data.
- One of my main approaches was the use of stories, to illustrate key points and to explore particular issues in more detail.

## Key Findings from Doctoral Study

Key things I have discovered are the importance of wonder, playfulness,<sup>2</sup> creativity, inclusion,<sup>3</sup> being responsive and interactive – being prepared to join children and young people at their level<sup>4</sup> - and perhaps more surprising, kindness.<sup>5</sup> I had not expected to find something as simple as that. Being kind to yourself, to others, and nature.

One of the main findings from my doctoral study was that the use of stories within outdoor learning can be an effective way to foster familiarity, comfort and develop connections.

**Contributions to knowledge** include a new conceptualisation of the different forms of story, and a new methodological approach (HEAR) to explore outdoor learning experiences.

**Contributions to practice** include the development of a new toolkit providing guidance for practitioners on how to work effectively outdoors, with young people identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.<sup>6</sup> These outcomes are founded in young peoples' perspectives and grounded in practice.



## About my project

This poster introduces my post-doctoral research project and continues my aim to understand young people's relationship with nature through inter/transdisciplinary research. The world is not a cut-and-dried finished article, it is messy, complicated and tough. I invite you to see my research as a formative, ongoing conversation that is open-ended and unpredictable. I am looking to generate discussion topics, to continue and extend the conversation.

## Phases for research

- I plan to conduct two phases of primary research: first, at the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE) seminar in Plymouth to gain a European perspective.
- Secondly, in Alberta, Canada I aim to gain an international perspective through delivering and reflecting on a 'playshop' I have been invited to present at the International Play Association (IPA) conference. I will be conducting field work in Alberta, either side of the IPA conference, to explore public environmental education programmes.
- In late 2016, the Canadian Parks Council launched a new strategy to connect young people with Nature in Canada. Called 'The Nature Playbook' (Canadian Parks Council 2016), it utilises a story-based approach, with the aim of guiding and inspiring actions that all Canadians can take to connect a new generation with Nature. I want to see how this is used in practice, and if it is transferable to UK based initiatives.

## Acknowledgements

- UoC Research Office for awarding me an Early Career Researcher Grant for this study.
- Mentors – Dr Heather Prince, Dr Kaz Stuart and Dr Julie Taylor
- Conference organisers and co-facilitators.



## My methodology

The essence of my approach to transdisciplinary research is to be exploratory, collaborative, creative - and playful. I am creatively transdisciplinary in how I conduct my work (research process) and how I interpret my findings (research outputs). I am utilising the innovative methodology from my doctoral research, which blended hermeneutics (H), ethnography (E) and action research (AR) to create HEAR, and presented my findings through a storied-approach.

My work emphasises the importance of communication, how we talk to and with people, and how we talk about the natural environment.

## Planned outputs

My 'Playing with Words' project will include auto/ethnographical writing: reflecting on my experiences has the specific purpose of enabling me to understand how this may impact on the way we work (in practice) and on the way, we conduct and present research.

I am particularly interested in how other countries address the 'predator/carnivore issue', which is relevant to re-wilding initiatives in the UK (and Europe).

### Planned outputs (as a minimum) 2017

- 3 x conference presentations at EOE
- 1 x Playshop at IPA

### 2018

- Practitioner Article
- Academic Journal Article
- 2 x Conference Presentations
- Book proposal



## References

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