This poster highlights two related yet different ‘social’ theoretical positions. Social constructivism and social constructionism provide a useful lens with which to make sense of children’s experiences, and this is lacking in the current literature specific to Forest School. The unique approach to outdoor learning that Forest School offers all outdoor practitioners is its child-centred and child initiated approach to activities. This presentation provides an applied and arguably useful pedagogical model utilising contemporary theories of play which are underpinned by social cultural theories of learning. Crotty (2003: 58) helps clarify the distinction between these two terms: reserve the term constructivism for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the ‘meaning making activity of the individual mind’ and to use constructionism where the focus includes the ‘collective generation [and transmission] of meaning’. Perhaps more generally constructivism is more internal, individual and of the self, psychological; and that constructionism is more external, collective and shared socially, sociological.

**Social constructivism**

- Constructivism is not a single unified theory either of knowledge or pedagogy.
- Piaget’s theory of cognitive and affective development laid the foundations of constructivism and his cognitive constructivism where the child creates their own sense of the world.
- **Social constructivism** - key beliefs a) knowledge is socially constructed, b) learners physically construct knowledge and it must be embodied for the learner to acquire it and c) learners symbolically create knowledge, by fashioning their own representations of concepts and meanings (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Learners construct meaning from reality but do not passively receive what they are taught in their learning environment.
- Constructivism - learning involves constructing, creating, inventing, and developing one’s own knowledge and meaning. All aspects of learning have a history based on real-life experiential learning and that it is not an individual process but the result of an aggregate of social relations embodied within the individual.
- John Dewey as a key influence - argued elsewhere (Ord & Leather, 2011) about the importance for outdoor educators of Dewey’s conceptualisation of the transaction of, and subsequent meaning making of, that experience.
- Role of the outdoor educator, Forest School practitioner or teacher is that of a facilitator who provides information and manages it” (Bruner, 1983: 60).
- Piaget’s conceptualisation of the transaction and learning involves constructing, creating, inventing, and developing one’s own knowledge and meaning. All aspects of learning have a history based on real-life experiential learning and that it is not an individual process but the result of an aggregate of social relations embodied within the individual.
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**Social constructionism**

- An epistemological position and aims to account for the ways in which phenomena are socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967), and the ways in which we understand the world are historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003) and is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of people in relationships (Gergen, 1985).
- Burr (2003) highlights the importance of language as a pre-condition of thought as well as a form of social action. As Wittgenstein proposed, descriptions and explanations of the world are created with linguistic exchange, or what he calls ‘language games’. Bruner would likely agree with Vygotsky that language serves to mediate between environmental stimuli and the individual’s response.
- Forest School is a social construction and has a range of activities (lighting fires, building shelters), as well as a range of processes (personal and social development, teamwork) dependent on cooperative relationships.
- Our 21st-century engagement with the outdoors is clearly a social construction, e.g. a key Forest School experience is the lighting of a fire and sitting around it for communal purposes. The ability to light a fire and sit round for warmth, cooking and basic physiological needs is something that 100 years ago was an essential element for peoples survival.
- Forest schools are our social construction, adapted from a Scandinavian approach to kindergarten education and imported to the UK and culturally constructed in a national and local social context.
- a Forest School approach allows us to take a critical stance toward our traditional, taken for granted OEd. Ways.

**Play**

- Wood (2010) discusses the continuing tensions in the rhetoric and reality of play in educational settings - attributed to the long-established ideological claims that have been made about the primacy of free play, free choice, autonomy, control and ownership, all of which are characteristics of children’s self-initiated activities.
- There continue to be problems in demonstrating to parents and other professionals that children are learning when they are playing.
- Wood (2010) proposes a model of integrated pedagogical approaches, which includes child initiated as well as adult directed activities, and reflects these social cultural theories of learning, with practitioners playing important roles in responding to children’s ranges of choices, interests and activities.
- Dewey believed that children needed support and structure, not totally free and student led (Gray & MacBlain, 2012).
- Bruner’s concept of scaffolding supports Wood’s model.
- “a process of setting up the situation to make the child’s entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it” (Bruner, 1983: 60).

**selected references:**