What kind of frameworks, methods or approaches can help us to understand the teaching and learning processes involved in ESDGC?

Jane Acton BSc MA
Ethnobotanist
- Experiential
- High ratios: Max 12 participants c.2 staff
- Usually targeted
- Voluntary
- 100% outdoors in local woodlands
- Learner led
- 3 main themes: ecology and processes, survival skills, psychological reflection
- Minimum 24 hours eg 6 x 4 hours pw, 12 x 2 hours pw
- Measured quantitative and qualitative
Activities are iterative and designed specifically for the participants around 3 themes
- Survival skills, cooking over a fire, creative tasks and reflective play
- Games and activities designed to enhance inspiration from the woods
- Hot meals cooked over the fire
- Local community woodlands as near to participants as possible
Young people with ADHD, behavioural issues, grieving, at risk or already excluded from school
Referred via 3rd sector agencies
All families and teachers were met before and after the sessions
Adults with severe/enduring mental health

- 2 women and 6 men
- Referred by health professionals
- Diagnoses severe and enduring mental health issues including schizophrenia, psychosis and depression.
Impacts were measured using a set of well-being indicators and coded transcripts from interviews before, during and after the intervention allowed for baselines.

With the children Emotional Well Being checklists were used pre and post with children, parents and teachers.

With the adults Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scal used pre and post intervention.

Hopes and expectations were recorded and revisited.
Results  Quantitative:
Emotional Literacy Checklist Scores
Total 29 young people
Results: Quantitative WEMWBS

Nature Workshops Good from Wood Project
Well Being in Nature - Warwick and Edinburgh Well Being Scale

Score Before
Score After
Qualitative results:

1 woman with GPs consent was able to come off one her anti psychotic drugs
2 brothers became ardent recyclers at home even though as an issue this was not referenced in the content of our sessions
All adults passed Level 1 Forest School training. For all but one this was their first qualification
80% retention rate
Top 3 most referenced well being indicators for young carers were 'safe and supported within and through social relationships', 'developing oneself', 'connecting with others through shared beliefs and outlook'.

Top 3 most referenced well being indicators for adults with mental health problems were 'developing oneself', 'feelings of closeness to the natural world', 'optimistic about the future'.
One woman was able to make a fire in her fireplace at home for the first time.

She said:

“I carved a wooden spoon from some cherry wood, it's the sort of thing I wouldn't even have attempted before, but it was really good for me to sit down and make the best wooden spoon I could. It's in my kitchen, I use it!”
Results: Qualitative

Quotes from transcripts with young people:

'I wish I could come every day'

'This is the best meal ever because everyone has helped to make it and everyone is eating it'

'Can we have this meal every day?'

'The main thing about all of this is the teamwork'
Poem example, 9 year old boy:

To the west I see a river and the fields
To the north my brother and friend in another river
   Above I see tall trees
      Below I see my little nest
Inside I feel happy that I came
Teacher feedback:

*He seems calmer, not so aggressive, he doesn't seem as moody or grumpy and, yeh a calmer person and he's only had one or 2 management tickets this term both for not doing homework. Whereas last year there was a lot more name calling, naughtiness and lots more tickets'*
Acton, J. Carter, B (2016) 'The Impact of Immersive Outdoor Activities in Local Woodlands on Young Carers Emotional Literacy and Well Being’ Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing, Taylor and Francis

Acton, J (2016) 'Out of the Woods: spending time among trees in the open air could prove therapy for patients’ RCN Mental Health Practise, Vol 19, No. 5, February
Thank you

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'now I see the secret of making the best persons
it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth' Walt Whitman