**North West tree care day, 29th April 2024**

**Fieldnote – Children’s geographer**

I arrived a little early, and walked towards the school. Educaitonalist rang to say that she, and the team had arrived, so I walked back and we caught up briefly. I helped Artist carry some of the filming equipment to the school.

There seemed to be a new signing in process – although I’d already shown my DBS check, they asked for these again. I didn’t have mine, but luckily it didn’t seem to matter.

We moved into the main reception area, where the 9the tree organisation) team joined us. For some reason I was quite conscious about what a big group (of adults) we were. I felt this when we went into the first classroom, too – I think because there were only around 15 children, as the Year 3s weren’t taking part. We almost seemed to overwhelm the classroom with our presence – although I know the children will be well used to having lots of adults in the room.

Ethnographer asked the children if they remembered us. Most of the children did, although it wasn’t quite clear whether they remembered the tree planting – some seemed to have done. Despite (as we discussed in other fieldnotes) the ‘scientism’ of children’s responses, when Ethngorapher asked them about the tree measuring, they remembered some of the instruments but seemed not to have remembered much about carbon (compared with how trees ‘breathe out’ oxygen). The second class, later in the day, did seem to remember more.

We showed them some of the films. I have to confess that although we got a lot out of the films, I’m not sure what the children made of them. We didn’t really have time to ask them – they seemed to watch with interest but I tried to imagine what I would get out of watching them – shaky footage, frequent swooping changes of direction, odd sounds (and the sound in the classroom wasn’t great). There’s nothing wrong with the films at all – but I just came away unsure as to what the children made of them.

We moved outside, where I was struck by the whole ritual of putting boots on. I found it interesting that the school has a polytunnel that seems to contain the children’s boots – I wondered if this were just a practical, logistical arrangement, or a necessary one given the school’s investment in Forest School – or even a part of that learning? Either way, putting boots on seems a key ritual before engaging with trees.

The tree care activity was introduced. As previously, the team had various conversations ‘at the edges’ of the activity, weaving some conceptual reflections with our observations of what was happening. The first part of the activity involved attempting to pull out grass and other weeds from around the new trees. This was very difficult without any tools (actually harder with gloves than without, also). Both children and adults struggled, and we often worked together. In both sessions, though, as soon as the children started collecting bark in buckets and placing it around the trees, the pulling of grass and weeds stopped. In fact, especially in the first session, I suspect that very little of the grass was collected.

I mused that in other contexts/environments the grass and other ‘weeds’ would have been desirable parts of a meadow. It made me think again of the question of ‘why focus on trees?’ – and what is the relationship between trees and other flora (and fauna)? Would the trees really not flourish with grass around them? Do they where humans don’t intervene? I seem to recall that there is some mixed evidence around the need to kill off grass around young trees…but I’m not sure what the evidence says…

The children in the first session seem to remember well where they planted ‘their’ trees. In the second session, it’s a shame that we can’t move to the hedge at the front of the school, where the children had planted trees – but again the children were very engaged with the activity. In fact, the children in the second group seemed more vocal and engaged with the whole process. They were also highly effective at transporting and placing bark around the trees (as they had been highly efficient at planting trees the year before).

We had a great discussion with one of the new teaching assistants, who was now delivery Forest School (forest school educator had left). I hope that we’re able to share some of our toolkits with her to trial at the school and gain some feedback.