

In this essay I will be discussing the benefits of the learning environment and through research I will be highlighting the reasons why children are excited to participate in outdoor learning. To further demonstrate my understanding within this topic, I will be planning an educational visit. The visit will include both pre and post activities to support the child's learning. To further support my essay I will be researching a variety of theorists and psychologists who support the importance of the learning environment.

Research suggests that to ensure effective learning, teachers require relevant subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and secure understanding of the curriculum. But teaching is more than this. To maximise the pupils development the teacher must recognise the importance of the learning environment. 'Pedagogy is about more than 'teaching' in the narrow sense of methods used in the classroom. (Donaldson, 2015, p.63).

It is evident that educational visits create excitement and enthusiasm for pupils, but why? Donaldson highlights that 'children and young people want lessons to be more relevant and engaging, with more practical lessons, more fun, more interactivity, and more out-of-classroom activities'. (Donaldson, 2015 p.17). While working in primary schools, I noticed an increased amount of enthusiasm for lesson outside of the classroom. Whether taking the pupils on an educational trip or simply taking the lesson outdoors. I found that it offered the children a sense of adventure and this excited the pupils.

The learning environment is not only about the space in which a child learns but what is in that space.

‘**Learning environment** refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. Since students may learn in a wide variety of settings, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments, the term is often used as a more accurate or preferred alternative to *classroom*, which has more limited and traditional connotations—a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example’.

The glossary of educational reform, 2014

RSPB, 2010 highlights some key benefits to learning outdoors which include; educational, health and wellbeing and social and personal.

“Most practitioners report that learning outdoors promotes children’s engagement and enjoyment in learning. This in turn impacts positively on children’s personal and social development, general behaviour and wellbeing. Children persevere with activities for longer periods outdoors and will attempt new things more readily. They learn to co-operate and apply their thinking skills to real problems.” (Estyn, 2011)

One advantage of taking the classroom outdoors is that children are actively engaged and excited in the lesson. The pupils idea of learning is sitting at desks or within a classroom. When you take that away the children think they are no longer learning as they associate being in the outdoor environment with play.

‘The beauty of teaching outdoors is that the children often do not perceive it as ‘learning’ and yet they learn some of their most valuable lessons there. The lack of walls means that they feel less inhibited – both physically and mentally – and it allows them to join up their thinking by applying it in a real-world context.’

(Woodland trust, 2018)

Obviously, teaching outside comes with its challenges. Children are naturally inquisitive which is an important part of their development. They are designed to explore and push boundaries and when given the freedom of the outdoors it will take the children time to re-establish boundaries and learn behaviours of different environments. Reggio explains that “The children are little researchers. They can and want to communicate with the surrounding world” (UKessays, 2018). It is the teachers role to guide their ‘natural curiosity’. It could be argued that teachers restrict children to the classroom environment to ‘control’ behaviour. Harriman (cited in Jennings, C, 2019) suggests that ‘Learning within four walls is surely an adult concept that has more to do with control than with children’s well-being.’ However, by allowing children the freedom it gives them the opportunity to learn in their own way. Not all children learn the same and by taking lessons outdoors it gives children the opportunity to work at their own pace and in their own space, it encourages them to take ownership of their learning and development, and develops skills such as decision making, thinking and creativity. Huang, 2018 states ‘Every child is unique in interacting with the world around them, and what they invoke and receive from others and the environment also shapes how they think and behave’. National research indicates that when the outdoor environment is used, achievement is higher (Lieberman, 1999). By taking the children out of the classroom it allows them to build on what they have been learning and put it into real life context. It allows the children to become immersed in the culture, history and environment.

The learning environment must be set up to allow the children to be active in their learning. ‘ Schools play a vital part in preparing students for their future roles as active and informed citizens. (Quinn and Owen, 2016, pg2). This has been recognised by Donaldson, 2015 in his report, successful futures where he highlights the four purposes of learning.

The concept that children should be active in their learning is something that Kratz stressed. She believes that learning should be centred around ‘the child’s interests, and based on their ideas, questions and experiences’ (Pound, L, 2014. p32). She believes that a child should be active in the process of what they will be learning. Kratz closely followed the work of Reggio. ACECQA, 2016 highlight the Reggio approach, describing the environment as a “third teacher”. This stresses the importance of learning environment. His approach allows children to become the centre of the learning process and encourages children to become active in their learning. Allowing a child to become part of their learning, gives them confidence, and makes them feel safe and secure.

Montessori (cited in Montessori school in Newark) states that “The environment must be rich in motives which lend interest to activity and invite the child to conduct his own experiences.”. Issacs, (2012) explains Montessori’s theory and suggests that if a learning environment is set up targeting the appropriate age, children are capable of teaching themselves. She believes that children should have the freedom to explore to enhance their development and creativity.

“The world’s greatest discoveries have been made because people were playing around with an idea. The freedom of thought allowed for by play may unlock the learning potential which more confined approaches to the curriculum leave behind.” (Taylor and Baulter, (1993), cited in CCEA, 2014)

It is argued that the learning environment has a significant impact on a child’s academic ability and wellbeing.

‘Over the course of their education, children spend over 7,800 hours at school. With such a huge amount of time spent in the classroom, schools provide an ideal environment for promoting good emotional wellbeing and identifying early behaviour changes and signs of mental distress. For children experiencing

adversity at home, school can also provide a consistent, protective and therapeutic environment, which can help them to cope. (NCB, 2018).

Research suggests that the outdoors boosts confidence. Estyn, 2016 has reported that ‘children who are quiet will take up leadership roles’, those who were reluctant to walk developed ‘stamina’ and ‘resilience’. The children show ‘enthusiasm and eagerness’ to learn and no longer notice the rain. They have ‘developed imaginative play’ and have learnt to work together.

Another important factor to consider when thinking about learning environments, is risk. In a recent documentary Doctors, Chris and Hand van Tulleken discuss children’s development from around the world and explores key areas such as risk-taking. In the documentary they focus on risk and suggest that it is important to expose children to risk from a young age, so they can respect it. They went on to explain that if a child has no understanding of risk, when they enter adulthood the risk will become greater. (*Planet child*, 2019).

Play Wales, (2019) states, All children and young people need and want to take risks physically and emotionally as they grow up, no matter what culture or background they come from, or what impairments or behaviour they may come with.

For Part B I will be discussing the rationale and details of the educational visit I have planned. For my educational visit I have chosen to go to the beach. The class I will taking are year 2, age 6-7. There are 27 pupils in the class. One of the pupils in my class is a wheel chair user. I have had to consider this when planning my educational visit. I have had to ensure there is appropriate access to and from the beach. Equal opportunities and inclusion is vital when organising educational visits. To overcome this I have arranged for a sand buggy to be hired from the beach. I have chosen this age group because I feel the activities planned will be beneficial for their development. The activities I have chosen allows the children to using thinking skills and encourages the children to co-operate and work as a team. I also feel that the visit exposes the pupils to risk. I feel that this is an appropriate age to introduce risk to the children. Children of this age are often aware of their surroundings and I feel that by given them an opportunity to experience risk in a safe, controlled way, allows them to make safe choices for the future. I feel that at this age they are able to understand consequences and listen to and follow instructions carefully. The beach visit removes pupils from their natural comfort zone which in turn builds confidence and self esteem. The pupils will be in a large, exposed area where their safety in paramount. The pupils will feel a sense of responsibility as they are trusted to be in that environment.

Research suggests that children in the foundation phase benefit from learning through play. 'Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills.' (Unicef, 2018). Therefore, The activities I have planned takes advantage of the space the beach has to offer and allows the pupils participate in activities which will give the children a hands on experience and experience learning through play.

I have chosen the beach because it links in with what the class term topic; under the sea. If feel that by taking them to the beach, it gives the pupils the opportunity to experience what they have been learning in real life context and allows the children

to explore the coastline. As well as giving the children to opportunity to explore the tidal pools and furthering their knowledge on their class topic, it also gives the pupils an appreciation for the natural beauty and encourages the pupils to respect the planet. 'Children who value nature and understand their relationship to it are more likely to become adults who act to preserve it'. (Learning through landscapes, 2019). To further their understanding I feel that it is important to the children to experience it for themselves. I believe that it is important to excite the pupils and given them an appreciation for the world. 'Regular positive interactions within nature help children develop respect and a caring attitude for the environment'. (White, 2004)

During this term the children have been learning all about 'the sea', Using the topic, under the sea, the pupils have developed their literacy skills, numeracy skills, as well as covering all of the seven areas of learning. The pupils have gained a good understanding of the topic and I feel that an educational visit is the next important step in developing their knowledge. However, an educational visit would also be a good way of introducing a topic and acting as a hook to engage and excite the class. It is crucial that the organiser and leader visits the location before hand. When at the location the teacher must identify any risks and complete a risk assessment which should be authorised by the head teacher. (see appendix 1)

Once you have chosen your location, you must plan the activities and learning objectives (see appendix 2, 3 and 4) and complete an itinerary with details and timings of the day. (see appendix 5)

Giving the parents notice is vital. This is can achieved by sending out letters to the parents several weeks leading up to the visit. In the letter, it is important to add as much information as possible, including times, dates, purpose of the trip and what to bring. It is important that the parents consent to the trip and if necessary a contribution should be collected. (see appendix 7)

Once you have established how many pupils will be attending the visit, you must adhere to regulations regarding pupil:adult ratio. To assist with this you may want to ask parents to volunteer to come along on the visit to supervise.

For my trip I will be following Welsh government guidelines, and will have a ratio of 1:8. ‘ One adult to eight children aged 3 - 7 years’. (Welsh government, 2012).

It is important that you think about any medical needs or additional needs that your pupils may need. When planning for the visit you must ensure that there are equal opportunities. ‘the concept of belonging is linked to a strong sense of identity’. (ACECQA, 2016)

Other things to consider before your educational visit:

- How much the visit is going to cost?
- Name tags
- Informing coastguard
- Ensuring there are alternative arrangements for adverse weather. i.e rain, snow, wind.
- Organising the bus
- Provide alternative arrangements for pupils not attending.
- Create a list of all pupils names and emergency contact
- Lunch - if pupils need packed lunch or if they can purchase food.
 - if pupils have free school meals, organising the canteen to prepare packed lunches.

Before the educational visit it is important to discuss with the class what they would like to get out of the visit. It is important to engage the children and is a good opportunity to assess learning to find out what they already know and what they would like to find out.

I have planned for several activities leading up to the educational visit. (For further information on activities and curriculum coverage see appendix 3)

The pupils will be arriving at school as normal and register in the classroom. A register will be taken at several intervals throughout the day.

The pupils will be asked to get into pairs. It is important to establish any pupils who get travel sick to ensure they are sat at the front of the bus. To prevent travel sickness, no eating or drinking will be allowed on the bus. The bus journey from school to Whitesands beach is approximately 45mins.

During our time at the beach the pupils will have a carousel of activities to engage in. It is important that the day is organised and runs smoothly. Details of the day would be planned and shared with any adults attending. The adults supervising must be updated if any changes to the itinerary occur. (see appendix 5 for the Itinerary). The activities have been planned to further develop their skills and knowledge and understanding on there term topic.

The pupils will be split into three groups of nine. The teacher will already have arranged the groups to address social, behaviour and academic ability. The activities allow for several aspects of the seven areas of learning to be developed. (For further information on the curriculum coverage see appendix 4)

During the visit it is important that expectation are set before leaving school. Clear boundaries should be set. This should include behaviour when out in public, health and safety and code of conduct. It is important to discuss this with the class in detail because once they get to the beach it will be loud and he children will be very excited. However, the pupils should also be reminded when they arrive at the location.

As my visit is at the Beach and part of the activities will involve marine life I felt that it is vital that the pupils must adhere to the marine code of conduct. (see appendix 10)

The aims and objectives of the learning across the curriculum:

- Working co-operatively.
- Addressing Behavioural issues.
- Raising self esteem and confidence.
- Encouraging responsibility.
- Putting learning into real life context.
- Giving children the opportunity to appreciate the natural environment.
- Teaching children about risk
- developing thinking and decision making skills.

For the purpose of this assignment the main objective for this trip is to; use and apply knowledge, skills and understanding in different, realistic and exciting contexts and to encourage responsibility for the environment.

When planning for a class trip there are a number of protocols and policies you must adhere to and things to consider. You should familiarise yourself with the school policy regarding class trips. This document should be carefully constructed following county guidelines. (see appendix 6)

Things to consider when planning a school trip:

- **Understanding the risks-** Before the educational visit a risk assessment must be carried out. (see appendix 2) Children should be made aware of the risks and expectations of behaviours clearly set before the visit.
- **Equal opportunities and inclusion** - make sure you cover the needs of all children.
- **Health and safety regulations**
- **Responsibilities for the visit** - group leader, first aid, point of call. Headteacher. It is the group leaders responsibility to ensure that they have the correct ratios adults:children.
- **Insurance** - make sure that the schools insurance for the pupils covers the activities
- **Consent and first aid consent from parents or persons with parental responsibility.**
- **Safeguarding policy**
- **Policies for recording and reporting incidents and accidents**

Additionally, as I am organising a trip which involves marine life it is important to check the marine code. This will highlight any relevant information and codes of conduct.

It also important to inform the coastguard of the visit, location and details of the activity.

It is important to give the pupils the opportunity to discuss the educational visit when they return. Planning appropriate follow-up activities will facilitate student learning and will give purpose to the visit. (for further information on post visit activities see appendix 3)

For my own, professional development it is important to evaluate and reflect on the visit.

- Did the visit support the children's learning?
- Did the pupils meet the learning objectives?
- Did the visit run smoothly?
- What could prevent complications in the future?
- What would you change next time?

I feel that the educational visit I have planned has supported the children's learning and encouraged them to develop skills. It is apparent that children are enthused and excited when they are actively part of the learning process and this is a key skill in preparing them for the future. To support this Mcleod, S, 2018 draws attention to Vygotsky theory, like Piaget, believed that children learn actively and develop their knowledge and thinking skills through hands on experiences. However, it is essential that the teacher organises the learning environment so that the children are able to achieve this and feel safe and secure in their surroundings. It is important to understand that no child is the same and it is crucial to offer a variety of learning techniques to meet all learners needs. I believe that educational visits gives opportunities and new experiences that a classroom could not offer. Life is not inside a classroom therefore, to prepare children for their future it is important to teach them in the environments in which they will be living. "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."(Dewey, 1916, p. 239).

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