

Slide 1,

The aim of this presentation is to show a rounded view of how outdoor contexts can support learning.

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- What outdoor learning contexts are, and where they may take place
- How different theories are relatable to current practice.
- The way in which children assess risk and the need for safeguarding.

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- It allows children to gain new skills, knowledge and understanding in a variety of settings.
- Engaging in outdoor learning connects children of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, making them aware of each other and their surroundings

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- The Foundation Phase Outdoor Learning Handbook (2009) highlights the importance of Children in Wales using the outdoors as a resource for learning, promoting discovery and independence.

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- Where can outdoor learning take place?
- Here are some of the outdoor settings we have identified, although any outdoor experience can be educational...
- Pether (2012) suggested that outdoor learning was previously associated with creative or progressive schools, but outdoor learning has now become a part of mainstream education.
- According to the Education Committee (2010), 'learning outside the classroom is not just about one-off trips. It should provide young people with a wide range of experiences which progressively build children's knowledge and understanding of subject disciplines, systematically complementing learning in the classroom.'

- We are all going to discuss one of these outdoor learning environments in more detail, she has chosen to talk about the playgrounds.

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What is a Forest School?

According to The Forest School Association (n.d)

- They offer an... .. This takes place in a forest or natural setting, usually within the school grounds or a nearby location.
- A forest school gives the opportunity for... .. promoting learning through doing which is beneficial for younger children and kinesthetic learners.
- Knight (2014), suggests that allowing children to connect with nature, has a positive impact on... .. and gives a sense of freedom.
- not only encourages independence and confidence but also teamwork
- Forest school offers a level starting point and is... .. regardless of age, ability or socio-economic status.

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- According to the Forest School Association (no date), Forest school is most effective when children visit as a regular part of their learning, increasing confidence and creating an enthusiasm which often impacts their view of the outdoors throughout their lives.
- These sessions are led by an accredited Level 3 qualified Forest school practitioner, who facilitate the activities whilst continuously observing and promoting reflective learning. All practitioners have to be first aid trained and follow necessary policies and procedures set out by the Forest school commission. There is also a higher staff, pupil ratio.
- Children are constantly assessed through activities, once the forest school practitioner is confident in their ability, the pupil is given the opportunity to use new equipment giving them a sense of achievement and responsibility.
- Forest School is an assessed risk environment with clear boundaries and rules that have to be followed. According to the Forest School commission, the rewards outweigh the risk. Children have access to an environment, a variety of

tools and can partake in activities that they have potentially never encountered before.

- During a child's time in Forest school, all aspects of the curriculum are maintained, just within a different setting. The difficulty of the tasks increasing with the child's ability.

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- Here are a variety of activities that could be seen in a forest school.
- Bishops Down Primary (no date) The majority of these examples are cross curricular which coincides with 21st century learning.

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Dewey's constructivist learning theory is evident in Forest Schools today.

- Wood (2011) suggests - a pragmatic learning style means reality must be experienced in order to adapt and learn.
- An example of the pragmatic learning style could be that in a controlled environment, children sitting around the firepit can experience the heat, smell, sounds and colours of the fire, rather than it just being explained to them. This allows the children to discover the different aspects of the fire and reflect on the dangers.
- His Democratic view is teachers and children have an equal voice in the learning experience.
- Wood (2011) also details Dewey's democratic view describes teachers as facilitators not dictators, he believes learning is a lifelong journey. The Forest school association also value this theory as they see their leaders as reflective practitioners, meaning they continue to learn, even when teaching.
- Smith (2001) suggests that Dewey promotes a child-centred approach, so learning is relevant to the interests and needs of a child. A forest school offers various different activities at any one time, giving children an option of which activity to participate in.
- Dewey was part of the progressive movement with forest schools being a prime example of learning through doing, using hands-on, experiential learning.

- Although we have identified specific theorists, as a group we have considered other theorists that link to outdoor learning.

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- According to Arthur and Peterson (2012) Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development highlights the importance of children learning from others. This can be internalised which instils the knowledge.
- This theory can be seen in most outdoor learning environments as the children are shown by a more knowledgeable other. Whether by a teacher or when in collaboration with peers, different knowledge and experiences are shared. An example of this could be, using an educational visit to a museum, this allows children to expand on the topic they have focussed on in the classroom. The museum guide can offer a 3d experience, allowing children to take part in different activities, including problem solving tasks, giving children the opportunity to further their learning.
- This is what Vygotsky referred to as 'scaffolding', allowing children to build on what they already know. (Beames, 2012)
- McLeod (2018) suggests Vygotsky believed that social factors influence a child's learning from birth, for example, children may already have an impression of the outdoors, determined by their parent's opinion.
- Although we have covered different outdoor learning contexts and theorists, we have also considered other aspects. Ellie has focused on risk and safeguarding.

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- According to Bilton (2010, p. 1) 'The outdoor area is a complete learning environment, which caters for all childrens' needs – cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and physical.' Therefore, providing a vital range of resources that are inclusive for all. Outdoor learning offers so many opportunities for children with special education needs and disabilities, who may not have access to otherwise. Many parents feel overprotective of their children's additional needs and prevent them from venturing outdoors.

- The outdoors takes away the academic stress and pressure of the classroom, although the children are still learning, it is not as obvious as they seem to have more freedom of movement.
- Homan (no date) suggests that the outdoors offers a wider range of stimuli for children, giving opportunity to use all of their senses as well as their co-ordination.
- Noise levels in the classroom can have a detrimental effect on children with special educational needs and disabilities (Bilton, 2010, p. 20).
- According to Brewer (2016), the outdoors can provide an escape, offering children space and the option to play with things at their own level. Brewer suggests that it also helps children with SEND be more positive about adaptation, with the ever-changing weather, temperature and seasons, children learn to cope, which transfers onto other aspects of learning.

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When challenging behaviours arise, moving outside for a simple change of environment can often make a big difference.' (Homan, no date)

- There is a point in every child's school life where things may seem a little overwhelming. Some children may get upset, some become disruptive or aggressive, others may become more introvert. Using outdoor learning as a tool can help ease the situation for teachers and students.
- The confines of a classroom highlight the visible boundaries, potentially adding to a child's stress, as a result it increases the tension. Taking children outdoors, gives time to calm down and regain focus, thus impacting the concentration levels and behaviour when returning to the classroom.
- Outdoor learning can also reduce anxieties and boost confidence for children who may otherwise be disengaged within the classroom (Outdoorclassroomday.org, 2016).
- A survey completed by the Natural Connections Project (Natural England, 2016) found that 85 per cent of the 125 schools involved saw a 'positive impact' on the childrens' behaviour when partaking in outdoor learning. The study also found that fresh air can help improve motivation, not only for pupils but for teachers too with 79 percent of teachers noticing a difference in their teaching practice.

- Although schools have recognised the link between outdoor learning and behaviour, parents still have mixed views, this leads us on to parent's attitude.

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- This could be due to school closures, not all children have access to a school where they live. Another factor could be that parents would prefer them to go to a different school, for example a faith school.
- Bilton (2010, p. 13) states that 'the car has given freedom to adults but less to children.' People rely on transport to get them to and from their destination and although children may have the opportunity to take part in more extra-curricular activities than in previous years, less people walk to them.
- In current times, there is a higher awareness of 'stranger danger'. In recent years, there has been a bigger emphasis on safeguarding, for example, schools are no longer allowed to let the children walk home before a certain age or without parents' permission. Local police officers visit schools to discuss and advise on what should be done if children are in a vulnerable situation (schoolbeat.org, n.d)
- With the rise of technology, children don't need to leave the house to play with others, they can play online with children anywhere in the world. By not playing outside, they miss out on face to face contact. This in turn, has an impact on their communication skills and increases their chance of becoming obese. (Wheway, 2017)
- Another contributing factor in the decline of children going outside to play, are the fears, phobias and anxieties they experience. If a child has no desire to play outdoors, it can prevent their ability to assess risk and reflect on what they might have done differently. (Plymouth University, 2016)
- The Health and Safety Executives Chair's Blog (2012) stated that recent 'generations have it seems gradually been deprived of that connection with the outdoors and the education that it afforded them.'

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- We have covered other points of outdoor learning, including risk and safeguarding, health and well-being, special educational needs, disabilities and behaviour and parent's attitudes.

- The outdoor environment is a great additional resource, not only for academic purposes but for life skills too.

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