

Front cover:

For this assignment I will be submitting the following:

1. A photo
2. A learning journey
3. A risk assessment
4. A piece of academic writing

Within this paper I have used Gemini to remove any children that was once in my photos.

I have also used Gemini to put my reference list in alphabetical order. I have kept previous copies of this.

Section 1:



A. Maher (2026a)

Section 2:

Learning journey:

It is a sunny summer's afternoon; early years practitioners are preparing to take a group of 6 children down to the local beach. The beach is a short walk away from the setting and the children (2–4-year-olds) will be taken on a 1:1 child to staff ratio.

The stream scattered with pebbles and rocks of varied sizes becomes a favourable option; many children wander over to take a closer look. Once there, child A walks into the water without hesitation, the rocks beneath her feet are both unsteady and slippery however she remains balanced, moving slowly. She bends down and reaches in the water to pull out a pebble, the pebble is about the same size as her hand, she looks at it closely and then reaches back into the water to pull out another pebble, this time the pebble is small. She holds the pebble in her hands and closes her hand around it, the nearby practitioner imitates the child and pulls out a bigger pebble, she says, "look I have a big pebble, what do you have?" the child replies "I have a big rock!" they continue discussing size and shape and the practitioner goes to fetch a bucket for the child to continue collecting the pebbles as she insists on

trying to hold them all. Once the child's bucket is full the practitioner asks, "Shall we take a closer look at them?" the practitioner and the child go and sit on a sanded area and pour the pebbles out, "It's a tiny one!" the child shouts. The practitioner picks up another small one and says "I have a tiny one too! Shall we see if we can find a large one?" the child examines the pile and pulls out a large pebble "Wow that is a large pebble!" the practitioner announces, "It's heavy" replies the child. "Is your tiny pebble heavy?" the practitioner asks, "It's not heavy," the child replies, "If it's not heavy then it must be light." the practitioner explains. According to the Welsh Government (2021) the natural outdoor world provides a wealth of opportunities for children and young people to explore mathematical and scientific concepts through hands on experiences. During this activity, the practitioner is scaffolding the learning by introducing comparative words discussing the weight of the pebbles, introducing mass and density through talking about heavy and light. The child is exploring physical forces as she manoeuvres her way through the water and the small current with slippery rocks, learning to move steadily and slowly to prevent any slips, trips, and falls.

Another child has decided to explore a large rock that has been embedded between the side of the stream and sand. The rock is large enough for the child to climb and crawl upon. Child B manages to climb up onto the rock with ease and stands confidently on top saying "I did it!" standing proudly. The practitioner replies with "you've climbed so high!" He stands for a short minute examining the world around him before turning and saying "ready, steady.... go!" child B stands in position and makes a big jump from the rock onto the sand area nearby. The practitioner says "WOW you did a big jump! Look at the big footprints you made in the sand! That's because you landed heavy!" the child replied with "They are big ones!" the practitioner suggests standing on the rock and dropping a pebble to see if it has the same impact "if we drop a pebble from up here, do you think it will land heavy too?" the child excitedly rushes around to find a pebble and puts it on top of the rock, he then climbs up and hold the rock up high, the practitioner climbs up too and is also holding a rock, "1,2,3" they both drop the pebbles into the sand, they climb down and explore what happened to the pebbles. The child says, "my rock is heavy!" the practitioner replies with "what makes you say that?" the child responds with "it's a heavy footprint!"

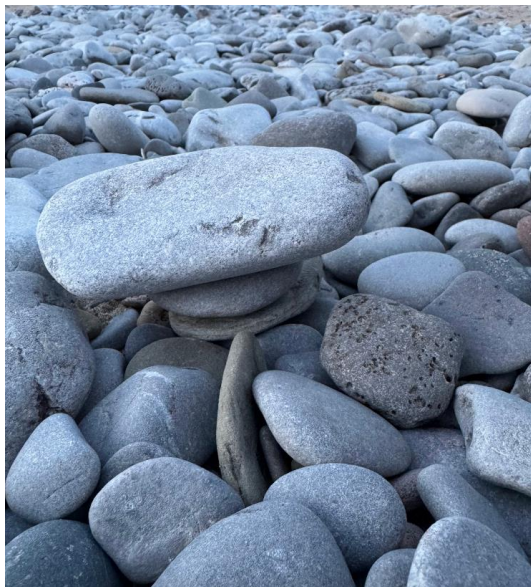
Throughout this activity child B is learning to explore what their body is capable of, through the physical demands of climbing and pulling themselves up onto an uneven rock surface, to maintaining balance on top of the rock before considering the distance and spatial awareness from their position of the rock to the jump down onto the sand, before finally making the jump. The child is analysing the space around them. This aligns with the Welsh Government (2022) which explain spatial exploration and positioning to be core elements of mathematical development within the early years. Scientific conversations were brought in through the practitioner explaining that the jumps he made was heavy, and that they made large footprints in the sand. Opportunity for language development was high here with practitioners using many words to describe the actions witnessed such “crawl, jump, climb and balance.” As well as reinforcing positivity, practitioner are encouraging children to think about evaluating their own thinking and understanding. These conversations between practitioners and children allow children to think about their own risk assessment of the situation. Metacognitive talk was high here with practitioners encouraging children to think about which rocks were safer to climb and jump from and asking questions such as this one “how did you know it was safe to jump from this rock?” to which the child replied, “it's a big one!” and “how did you know you could make that jump?” with the child replying, “I'm a big boy!”

Child C had started using their hands to dig down in the sand near the edge of the stream, the first handful of sand was dry and slipped through his fingers, the more the child used his hands to dig the sand became wetter and more stuck to the child's hands. “what's happened to your hands?” the practitioner asks, “they are all sandy!” the child exclaims holding up his hands. “How did that happen?” the practitioner asks, “I'm digging in the sand!” the child answers. The practitioner picks up a handful of dry sand, and the sand falls, she shows her hand to the child and says, “my hands aren't sandy,” the child looks at the practitioners hands and at their own, the practitioner repeats the process again and the child copies, whilst picking up a handful of dry sand “the sand is dry!” the practitioner explains. The further down they get the practitioners hands start to get sandy too, she shows the child her hands whilst saying “look at my hands, they are sandy like yours!” the child examines both sets of hands and says, “my hands are sticky.” The practitioner looks at the hole and notices that water is forming where she's been digging, she says to the child, “I have

water in my hole, do you think the water is making the sand wet and sticky?" the child replies, "I think so!" whilst looking into his own hole. The practitioner reaches for a bucket, she asks the child, "shall we see if we can make sand castles?" the child excitedly replies "yes" he takes the bucket and starts using the dry sand to fill the bucket, collecting handfuls and dropping it in until its almost full, "is it full yet?" the practitioner asks, "not yet!" the child answers. Once full the child says, "It's ready!" and attempts to turn it over, as he does so the sand starts to fall out, the child bangs the bottom of the bucket and lifts it off slowly, watching as the sand all falls down. The child looks disappointed and says, "it's not working." the practitioner says, "perhaps the sand is too soft, what do you think will happen if we use sticky sand?" the child looks up blankly. The practitioner continues, "shall we try?" the child collects the damp sand from the holes that have previously been dug up, he uses his hand to push the sand into the bucket, the practitioner notices and says, "you're using your hands to push the sand in really tight!" the child continues and says, "it's full!" the child attempts to pick up the bucket and notices "It's too heavy!" the practitioner explains "the wet sand has made the bucket so heavy!" together they flip the bucket over and the child taps the bottom of the bucket, they lift the bucket off and can see an almost perfect castle. "I did it!" the child says, the practitioner explains "the sticky sand pushed together will make the same shape as the bucket, where the soft sand just falls. She holds some wet sand in her hand and pushes it together to form a ball, she shows the child and says "look, the sticky sand makes a shape!" and then uses the soft sand to show all the sand falling and then explains "The soft sand is too soft to make a shape." the metacognitive talk is encouraging the child to think about the properties of the sand, considering why the castle was not formed on the first attempt. Both mathematical and scientific concepts are witnessed with the child exploring volume and mass with the sand in the bucket.



A.Maher (2026b)



A.Maher (2026d)

Section 3:

During the beach session, practitioners will ensure that there is always a work mobile phone that is fully charged with them. The phone will hold all the contact information of the children and staff that are attending, including emergency contacts. A secure folder will also contain children's emergency contacts and any allergy information, including medication. A first aid kit with a full inventory included will also be in attendance. All staff attending will hold a first aid first aid certificate. During the day, the ratio will be on a 1-1 basis. During the day children will be required to wear a hi vis jacket, the jackets will be printed with the work phone number in case of any emergencies.

Hazard identified:	What could happen?	Who could be at risk?	What are the benefits?	Potential measure	Rating after measures
Quick, deep moving costal water, tidal streams, and hidden currents	<i>Risk of children and adults being submerged or drowning in the sea.</i>	Children and staff	Exploring the natural environment: - Playing near water offers unstructured play, boosting creativity and exploration. -It enhances both mathematical and scientific concepts e.g. learning about weight, measurements, sinking and floating, balance, and coordination. It supports physical development, walking through water, lifting, and carrying water and collecting water, transferring water. encourages exploration and discovery as it is extremely sensory, there are different textures in the sand with it being wet and dry, different textures of mud, the water being warm or cold.	Constant 1-1 supervision Strict rules around children staying in shallow stream area. Boundaries firmly established before any exploring can commence. Colourful flags in place to distinguish boundaries. Hi vis vests always worn.	

Loose pebbles and rocks, uneven surfaces, sharp shells, and rocks	<i>Children and staff tripping and falling over small rocks and pebbles underwater, children could put small stones in mouth or up nose, children throwing stones could lead to minor bumps and injuries</i>	Children and staff	Being at the beach can be a sociable event with children coming together to build forts or sandcastles setting up systems and roles e.g. one collecting water, one digging one collecting shells and sticks – a lot of collaborative play Opportunity for cognitive development, thinking about structures and the way sandcastles and forts may be constructed Exploring pebbles offers opportunity to discuss shape, size, pattern, and texture, these can offer language opportunities through comparing and classifying, talking about weight and volume and offer opportunity for counting as well as	Children reminded of rules and the importance of following safety instructions. E.g. pebbles and stones stay low on the ground. Appropriate footwear to be worn to prevent stings and foreign	
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			exploring the law of opposites. Pebble play can also support fine motor development, such as grasp and squeezing whereas smaller pebbles can support pincer grip which is needed for holding a pen and help with writing later in life. Larger pebbles can be used for creative opportunities; these can be painted on or used for mark making.	objects going into feet. The area to be fully inspected and hazardous items removed and disposed of appropriately Hand sanitiser, water and wipes packed if needed.	
	<i>Sealife in the water – e.g. jellyfish, weaver fish, and crabs in shallow pools</i>	Children and staff	Children can see real life creatures in their own habitat allowing them real life experiences, this promotes language and broadens cognitive development, law of opposites and descriptive words could be used here. children could be inquisitive	Children to wear suitable shoes to prevent standing on any sharp items such as crabs, barnacles, and small rocks. Adult	

			and curious asking questions and sharing ideas and thoughts. Children have opportunity to discuss similarities and differences between the creatures and themselves, talking about homes and features, what makes us the same and different. Mentioning claws for crabs and how jellyfish are see-through. Children can learn about taking care of other living things, learning about how we can observe and be gentle, however we must leave the creature safely in their environment. Children reminded of the dangers some creatures may have such as pincers and stingers, this allows opportunity to educate and promote risk awareness	1-1 supervision constantly. Adults to model non touch for unfamiliar sea creatures, and gentle touch e.g. the back of the shell of a crab to avoid pincers. No touch policy for jellyfish in place.	
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Large uneven rocks	Trips falls and impact hazards: <i>Children climbing onto and falling off the rocks</i> <i>Uneven surfaces on rocks</i> <i>Rocks becoming slippery</i>		Children can explore large body movements developing physical ability such as climbing, pulling themselves up, crawling and jumping. Children can explore spatial awareness, learning to negotiate and avoid obstacles through moving up and over large rocks. Children are learning risk and challenge and can explore their own capabilities without fear of failing. Children can explore balance and coordination	Children to have constant 1-1 supervision, rocks to be examined to see if they are suitable for climbing with adult support e.g. not slippery and algae free Staff members to ensure that sand is beneath the rocks to catch any falls that could occur Staff to be aware of tide times and ensure its safe to be climbing rocks at that time Children to have their hands free when climbing and exploring Children to wear appropriate shoes at the beach and when climbing Adults to demonstrate jumping safely and children to observe this before	
Sand in eyes and mouth	Children could throw sand and it could go into		Accessing sand allows children to develop their	Children reminded not to throw sand at any other	

	their or someone else's eyes or mouth		fine motor skills through scooping, digging, pinching, and pouring. Gross motor development through scooping, collecting, and manoeuvring sand in buckets, also through carrying around buckets and spades, digging large holes making full body movements and using core muscles. Gaining a sense of body awareness in terms of balancing and moving on uneven surfaces. Mathematical concepts such as measuring, filling, considering structures, weight, and sizes. Scientific concepts such as mixing sand and water together, talking about wet and dry – law of opposites. Looking into	person. children reminded to keep sand away from faces. First aid kit containing eye solution, fresh water brought along so wash out eyes and mouth if needed.	
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			cause and effect, what happens if we use dry sand what happens if we use wet sand when constructing buildings. Sand offers open ended, imaginative play, encouraging social skills such as collaborative working, conversation, and idea sharing. Fantastic opportunity to add in unfamiliar words for learning, enhancing a richer language.		
Moving vehicles in car parks and drop off zones near beach area	A Collision could cause severe or even fatal damage to a child if hit by car		Children to learn about road safety when out in the natural world – firsthand experience. Opportunity to access the beach environment in a controlled and well thought out way, appropriate risk assessment in place, high staff to child	Child to have constant 1-1 supervision by an adult Boundary flags in place for children to know the area they are expected to stay in Base set up at a suitable and safe distance from any nearby roads. Children to hold practitioners'	

			ratio offering a supportive and encouraging learning experience.	hand during road crossing, safe route established pre trip, safe pathways to be used wherever possible. Children to always wear hi vis vests. Sensible crossings at suitable points only.	
A large open beach space and access to the public.	A child may wander off and around the beach and get lost, they could become separated during a group situation leading to a safeguarding risk		Opportunity to introduce stranger danger, children to have the opportunity and trust to follow guidance and instruction-listening and being respected whilst showing respect also. Children to experiment with spatial awareness and learn safe distances from adults and practitioners in different scenarios and situations.	Child to have constant 1-1 supervision by an adult Boundary flags in place for children to remain safe, frequent head counts to ensure numbers of children are correct, especially during periods of transition. E.g. toileting. Marker flags identifying safe areas. Practitioners to have read the missing child policy and be aware of what protocols to follow if this were to happen.	

Section 4:

Within the early years, the outdoor environment offers children endless opportunities to explore and discover many mathematical and scientific concepts through hands on learning. However, the environment alone is not enough, the role of the adult is key in transforming everyday moments into rich learning opportunities. This is highlighted within the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021).

The outdoor areas of early years settings have the potential to provide rich environmental affordances (Gibson, 1979) children can see the potential within an area, without perceiving an object by its label. For example, a child looking at a tyre may see endless learning opportunities and experiences they can get just from this one item, rather than using it for its single purpose, they may use it to push, jump in and out of or transport items with etc experimenting with spatial awareness, momentum and forces. This is where there are learning opportunities to explore mathematical and scientific concepts in the outdoors. However, Bilton, Crook and Waite (2017) emphasise the importance of the practitioner in facilitating this by prompting children to reflect on how they can navigate and manoeuvre these environments, bridging the gap between understanding and physical play. Although Piaget (1952) offers a unique perspective, describing young children as being independent scientists, learning and exploring mathematical and scientific concepts through self-directed, hands-on interactions with their environment. DeLisi (2015) explains that Piaget's theory believes adult interaction can dampen the child's intrinsic desire to explore and discover for themselves, using trial and error to learn and discover. Within the early years pedagogy, practitioners are encouraged to find the balance of honouring a child's autonomy and independence in their own learning alongside using scaffolding to deepen mathematical and scientific concepts that may not otherwise be noticed. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2025) highlights high-quality early years interactions rely on scaffolding techniques such as modelling language and using open ended questioning to help young children articulate mathematical and scientific concepts during play opportunities.

Nicholson (1971) theory of loose parts shows that environments that are rich in movable materials have a significant chance of enhancing experimentation as well as problem solving in a creative way. Within the outdoor environment loose parts – such as planks, crates, guttering, and tarpaulin offer endless opportunities for mathematical and scientific discoveries. An example of this could be creating a stable staircase using crates, to stack upon one another to support a child using building blocks to build a tower taller than herself and the practitioner, experimenting with balance and gravity as well as stability, positioning, and measurements. However, a critique of loose part play states that loose play alone is potentially not enough for children to develop their awareness of science and mathematical concepts by themselves, this type of play requires facilitation to prevent it becoming another form of exploratory level play. This leads on to the vital role of the experienced practitioner, rather than taking on the role of a supervisor and imposing strict instructions that puts forward adult led learning, they need to engage as an effective practitioner, knowing when their cue is to step in and scaffold learning. Through using open ended questions and engaging in metacognitive conversations Trina et al. (2024) practitioners can support children with thinking about learning such as “what do you think could help us reach the top of this tower?” these kinds of conversations prompt children to think about why and how things happen, and how their actions can influence outcomes. This directly reflects Vygotsky (1978) zone of proximal development which explains that children's cognitive ability is extended when a practitioner provides targeted support during tasks that children cannot yet do independently. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (Welsh Government, 2021) which emphasises that practitioners should be actively extending children's mathematical and scientific vocabulary through real life experiences. It's the practitioner's timely verbal interactions that turn everyday play opportunities into meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the adult is not present to restrict or redirect the play that is present but to unlock the potential of the child.

In addition to large loose parts, natural materials in the form of water, mud, and sand offer sensory exploration for outdoor mathematical and scientific investigation. Within these open-ended environments, children experiment with physical concepts, including fluid dynamics, gravity, and changing states of matter, while simultaneously

exploring mathematical attributes of capacity, weight, and volume. A practical example of this would be, a child playing in the mud kitchen with natural materials such as sand, water and mud, she would be naturally exploring scientific concepts through pulling the mixture from a bucket and using her hands to mould and smooth it out to form a small mountain structure. Through experimenting with these materials, the child is showing elements of a constructivist theory (Waite-Stupiansky, 2022) where experimenting with the properties of materials, friction as well as considering structural formation is all needed for the child to keep the mountain in formation and not collapsing under the force of gravity. Mathematical concepts are also present here with the child exploring three-dimensional shapes.

However, as Trina et al. (2024) notices unassisted sensory play can easily become more of a repetitive act of pouring and filling without the shared language support of adults. To elevate this interaction beyond a routine sensory act the role of the enabling adult (Welsh Government, 2021) is to engage in sustained shared thinking (SST) (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) to deepen cognitive value.

The practitioner's role is to sit alongside the child and mirror her actions rather than stepping in to redirect or correct play. The adult is responsible for scaffolding learning through introducing mathematical and scientific language that link to the play. An example of this could be a comment on the process, "I notice that as you apply pressure and smooth out the sides, the base becomes wider and more stable." Furthermore, the practitioner could offer some metacognitive questioning such as "what do you think would happen to the mountain if we had used dry sand?" this type of question encourages test predictions and engage in problem solving in real time.

Despite the clear pedagogical benefits of adult-scaffolded outdoor STEM play, implementing these strategies in early years practice presents real-world challenges.

One of these barriers relates to practitioner confidence and subject knowledge in mathematics and science. While early years educators routinely feel confident facilitating creative arts and literacy, research by Park et al. (2023) highlights a whilst early years practitioners know that STEM play is important, there is a clear divide between recognising its value and actually feeling confident enough to implement it outdoors every day, also known as STEM anxiety. As reinforced by the Education

Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2025), when adults lack confidence in their own spatial or scientific reasoning, they are significantly less likely to initiate spontaneous metacognitive questioning or introduce specialised vocabulary, causing rich outdoor experiences to be left without further exploration.

Another challenge faced by practitioners is the pressure of time. As Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) explains, sustained shared thinking requires a calm, unhurried environment where adult interactions can be of high quality and importance. However, within an early year's environment there seem to be many operational pressures, such as child to staff ratios, time constraints, and demands of the setting (such as toileting and feeding) meaning the environment is typically rushed and chaotic. Similarly, in the outdoor environment it is likely that monitoring safety and behaviour is forced to be prioritised over rich cognitive investigation and exploration. This could mean that the presence of the adult could inadvertently become a supervisory role, where overseeing the safety of the children takes precedent over deep engagement.

Finally, some practitioners fear or hesitation towards risky play (Sandseter, 2007) explains a significant barrier to STEM inquiry in the outdoors. Children that can engage with heights, are able to make high speed movements and access heavy loose parts can physically test the concepts of gravity, momentum, and structural stability. However, when practitioners display risk adverse attitudes that is often driven by fear of injury, they are more likely to step in and interfere or restrict this type of play proceeding. Often, they will ask children to not climb so high or to remove buildings that are being created which stops the children in their flow of natural exploration and experimentation, interfering with trial and error. This culture of preventing accident happening before the children have had a chance to explore what they can do with their bodies and learn about their capabilities takes away the rich environmental affordances the outdoors has to offer, which in turn reduces the potential Scientific and mathematical investigations and turns them into controlled learning activities. (Gibson, 1979)

The child centred nature-based approach to mathematics and science aligns with Froebel's philosophy. Froebel shared that open ended engagement with the natural materials of the outdoor environment allows children to discover mathematical

patterns and geometric relationships and physical laws. (Tovey, 2020) These views are now aligning with the curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings (Welsh government, 2021) who promote the outdoor environment as an essential learning space rather than a place just for fun. This is displayed through the enabling adult, the effective environment, and engaging experiences on offer. Froebelian approaches run throughout the curriculum with emphasis on children exploring through first hand experiences allowing opportunity for mathematics and science. Practitioners are urged to act as attuned facilitators who build on observations to support interests, model language, and question to deepen knowledge.

In conclusion, the outdoor environment offers unmatched affordances (Gibson, 1979) for nurturing young children's mathematical and scientific concepts. Throughout this essay discussions have considered open ended outdoor provisions ranging from loose part play to mud, sand and water play that provide rich sensory experiences allowing a range of mathematics and science to be discovered. The importance of self-directed play has been considered with emphasis on the support and enhancements that could be made with an attuned practitioner available to support and scaffold learning (Wood et al.) (1976; Vygotsky, 1978) without interfering and whilst sharing sustained thinking. (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Continuing with real life barriers of practitioners such as, time restraints, fears of risky play and lack of self-belief in providing quality mathematical and scientific concepts and being able to facilitate this to a high standard. Finally discussing links to Fredrick Froebels theory and the curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings in Wales in the implementation of the importance of the outdoor environment in the early years and the mathematical and scientific opportunities for children.

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Maher, A. (2026a) personal image [photograph]

Maher, A (2026b) personal image [photograph]

Maher, A (2026c) personal image [photograph]

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