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1. Put in to a Harvard reference list

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Editor <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-editor> on 24th, 25th and 26th September 2024 to check for spelling and grammar. I used the prompts:

1. Check for spelling

2. Check for grammatical errors

3. Formal writing technique

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

ECEY5005: Awe and wonder, science, mathematics and the outdoors.

Awe and wonder in the early years is described by Amin (2023) “as a powerful feeling that leaves a mark. It moves, inspires, and motivates us. Wonder in a child is an inner desire to learn that is ready to be awakened”

Part one

(Source: Jarrett, 2024)

Part Two

In the above environment there are 3 areas that could be explored, the water, the pebble shore line and the shrubbery.

This area would be visited by a group of 12 reception children who are mixed ability with both English as a first language and English as an additional language. The children would be accompanied by two adults, consisting of a teaching assistant (TA) and a Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA).

Area 1: River and Water Areas

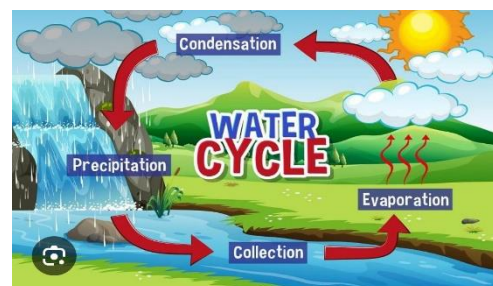
Maths development could include exploring capacity with various containers of different sizes and shapes for children to fill and pour the water. They can explore concepts like full, empty, more, and less, as well as compare capacities.

Practitioners can ask questions such as "Which container would hold more?" or "How many full cups would it take to fill this container?" This develops skills in volume, comparison, and estimation.

With the right preparation, children can explore floating and sinking by using natural resources like rocks, sticks, and leaves, as well as everyday objects like pencils and building blocks. Practitioners can ask children to predict whether an object will float or sink and extend the activity by revisiting the children's prior knowledge.

Children can add different materials like oil, soap, or sand to the water and predict what will happen, then observe the outcomes. Predictions can be recorded, and children can mix the water to see if it causes further changes. Practitioners can ask children to explain what they observed. This activity promotes critical thinking, prediction, and testing skills

If it rains, children can explore the water cycle by discussing questions like "Where does the rain come from?" and "Where does the water go?" Children can also explore concepts such as evaporation, condensation, and precipitation by observing the river and the clouds.



Eurokids (2023)

In addition to maths and science, water play helps children develop sensory and observational skills as they explore the movement of water using their senses. Practitioners can also introduce new vocabulary related to maths and science, such as capacity, volume, absorb, dissolve, and evaporate.

Many activities involving water require children to share resources, take turns, and work together to solve problems, naturally developing social skills and cooperative learning. Using water in these ways provides a multisensory experience that

engages children's natural curiosity and lays a strong foundation for both maths and scientific thinking.

Area 2: Pebble Shoreline

The pebble shoreline offers a great opportunity for counting and number recognition. Children can collect pebbles and count them, group them by colour, size, or shape, and paint numbers on pebbles using water and their fingers to encourage number recognition and formation. Skills in counting, grouping, and sorting can be developed.

Children can also sort pebbles by size, colour or texture, creating patterns and sequences. Practitioners can encourage them to explain their sorting and patterns, which helps develop skills in sorting, classification, pattern recognition, and sequencing. Children can compare the weight, size, or length of pebbles using tools like scales or rulers or by simply comparing by sight and touch. Practitioners can ask questions like "Can it be small and heavy?" and encourage children to predict and reflect on the weight of pebbles. This allows children to begin understanding size, weight, length, and comparison concepts (for example, bigger, smaller, heavier, lighter) in an outdoor setting.

Pebbles can also be used to explore early maths problems like addition and subtraction, providing an alternative for children who struggle in a classroom setting. For example, practitioners can ask, "If you have three pebbles and find two more, how many do you have now?" or "If you give away one pebble, how many are left ?"

The pebble shoreline offers opportunities for simple science experiments, such as dropping pebbles into water to explore concepts like displacement and buoyancy. Children can predict whether pebbles will sink or float, then observe the results. This hands-on activity encourages curiosity, develops problem-solving skills, and introduces basic scientific knowledge in a fun and engaging way, fostering a love for exploration and learning.

In group settings, children can work together on pebble-related tasks, promoting teamwork and communication skills. They can also build simple structures or create artwork like pebble mosaics or faces, encouraging creativity and spatial reasoning. The shoreline not only supports maths and science learning but also promotes social

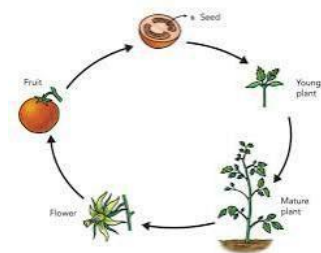
interaction, cooperative learning, problem-solving, fine motor skills, creativity, and spatial awareness.

Area 3: Shrubbery

In the shrubbery area, children can explore counting, sorting, and number recognition. They can count the number of leaves, branches, or flowers on a shrub and classify shrubs by size, shape, or colour. Children can also classify shrubs based on their height or leaf type, with practitioners guiding the activity by asking questions like "Which bush has bigger leaves?" or "How can we find out?"

This activity can also lead to measuring, using tools like tape measures or non-standard methods such as sticks or hands. Children can compare the width of leaves or the length of sticks, further developing skills in comparison, measurement, and observation. Patterns and sequences can be created using leaves, flowers, or shrubs, which helps children develop pattern recognition, sequencing, and spatial arrangement skills. Children can also observe plant life cycles, noting seasonal changes in shrubs, leaves, and flowers. Practitioners can ask questions like "What do plants need to grow?" or "What happens if a plant doesn't get sunlight?" This starts early understanding of life cycles, and seasonal changes.

Practitioners can encourage children to reflect on the importance of plants and the animals inhabiting shrub areas, promoting environmental awareness. By asking questions about ecosystems, children develop a deeper understanding of how plants support life and the connections of nature. This can develop curiosity, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility toward the environment around them.



Science4fun (2017)

Children can create art using natural materials from shrubs, such as leaf rubbings, collages, or sculptures. This activity supports creativity, enhances fine motor skills, and encourages an appreciation for nature. Integrating shrubbery into early years education not only makes learning engaging and enjoyable but also strengthens children's connection to the natural world, helping them develop a deeper understanding of their environment.

This environment provides numerous links to the curriculum, as summarised by the Welsh Government (2022) in the "What Matters" statements. Science statements

aim to promote curiosity and an understanding of the diversity of the world around us. These goals are strongly supported by independent and guided learning in this environment. Maths and numeracy statements focus on size, measurement, property, space, and reasoning. Although the focus is on maths and Science , Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM,) this outdoor environment supports other areas of development, such as social skills through collaboration with peers. Language and literacy skills are also nurtured, especially when practitioners engage children in open ended questioning and discussions.

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:	Local River and Shoreside	Date:	10/09/24
Assessor:	Michelle Jarrett	Review date:	10/03/25

Experience exploring outdoor space in photograph	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Hazards and associated risks	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk after precautions RATING: L/M/H
Unpredictable weather.	Observe different seasons, how they look , how they feel how the weather can change the environment.	Sun burn , heat stroke, dehydration, Hyperthermia. Strong Wind blowing debris and branches off trees causing injury.	Adults and children	Ensure all are dressed appropriately, with Sun or woolly hats, coats, gloves, wellington boots, in days prior to the trip and on the day of the trip keep an eye on the local weather forecast. Staff to be aware of the signs of sunburn and heat stroke and know how to treat it .Ask parents to apply sunscreen before coming to the setting. Remind all children to bring a water bottle with them, Practitioners to be aware of the signs of hyperthermia and how to prevent it. First aid kit to be kept with each adult, kits to be checked for stock before leaving the setting.	M
Exploring the area, water pebbles, plants, trees, insects,	Children can develop skills through hands-on, sensory-rich experiences that engage their natural curiosity and creativity. It will promote physical activity on the uneven surface enhance the skill of balance (vestibular), social interaction, and a deeper connection to the natural world, enhancing well-being and cognitive development, Children can see stages of life cycle and the circle of life as well as the plant cycle.	Uneven surfaces causing trips or falls with knee or ankle injury. Water areas can be more slippery with risk of injury or drowning. Pebbles could be a choking hazard. Toxic plants could be ingested or be an irritant to the skin. Insect bites.	Adults and children	Remind children before leaving the setting to become familiar with the surfaces before they run on them, ask children to repeat rule back to ensure understanding and what they must do if they get hurt. Tell children that wet areas in the environment will be slippery and more care must be taken, and they must not approach the waters edge without an adult present for safety. Children to be told that nothing is to be put in their mouths. Once arrived at the outdoor area identify to children which plants could cause injury or discomfort . cones should be used to prevent children going near plants of particular concern. Children to be reminded to handle insects with care and that they are living and what they should do if they think that they have been bitten. Practitioners to be aware of any children that have allergies and steps to follow in the case of a reaction.	L

Experience exploring outdoor space in photograph	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Hazards and associated risks	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk after precautions RATING: L/M/H
Using pebbles for addition	Children will be able to use natural resources to apply addition knowledge, Moving the pebbles will develop fine motor skills. Working in pairs will support social skills and working collaboratively	Pebbles as a choking hazard. Dropping pebbles on fingers or toes. Insects under pebbles.	children	Remind children not to put anything in their mouths. Appropriate footwear should be worn. This activity should be a case of moving pebbles at a low level, and none should be dropped from any great height.	L
Exploring water	Children can mix the water and add other resources to see the effect that it has on the water, drop different items in the water to see the cause-and-effect, they can use the water to look at reflection and use as a mirror comparison, Children can look for life in the water and investigate habitats.	Slipping on the wet surface. drowning in even the shallowest of water, dropping items that they throw on toes or hitting another child, being bitten or stung by any animals in the water.	Children and Adults	A practitioner to always stay by the water's edge to make sure care is being taken and to intervene for safety reasons if needed. Make sure that there are first aiders available to support if there are any slips. Remind children where to drop and throw items (away from others) to reduce risk. Remind children about handling any pondlife and to seek help if they feel they have been hurt.	M
Independently exploring(with-out an adult)	Allows free flow of curiosity and independently led learning with peers. To apply previously learnt skills in a chosen environment. Independent exploration allows children to take risks and learn their own boundaries. Further their physical development.	Children get lost. Slip, fall, trip with potential injury. Touching poisonous or irritant plants. Bites or stings from insects	Children	Before leaving the setting tell children that they must stay in the coned area , remind children that the yard whistle will be blown when they must immediately return to a central point. Use walking feet until they are familiar with the surfaces. Use pictures to support children in knowing what plants they should not touch and who to get help from if there is medical problem.	M
Members of the public, observing how others use outdoor areas.	An opportunity to observe how the outdoors is used by other people and how they can use it out of school time and why they should look after the area.	Members of the public could be smoking, drinking alcohol or using inappropriate language. They could have dogs off the lead.	Children and adults	Remind children that they are going to a public place, and they may see other people, but they should only talk to the adults from the setting with the hi vis vests on with the school logo. Practitioners to be vigilant of members of the public and their actions in case they need to move anyone on who is not acting appropriately.	M

Part 4

The outdoors has been recognised as a resourceful learning environment since the 1970's. Machan (2016) has researched much data on the early use of outdoor areas and how over the last 50 years there has been a decline in children simply playing outside and therefore the need for outdoor learning to be introduced into schools and early years settings. The research does highlight the fear that parents have of children playing outdoors with concerns mainly focussed on safety.

For children to gain the most from an outdoor environment there must be practitioners who can supervise without hijacking an activity, make purposeful observations that can support future planning and be led by pupil voice, being mindful to ask open ended questions. Williams (2016) discusses the importance of supporting outdoor play and how practitioners can become reflective thinkers alongside the children and how the practitioner will become more than an observer of the children but be an eager facilitator ready to intervene when it will benefit the children. Williams recognises the scaffolding theory of Vygotsky and how the adult supporting learning can support a child in developing further with open ended questions and allowing for peer interactions.

During outdoor play, the practitioner plays a pivotal role in facilitating and enriching children's learning experiences. Their primary function is to create a safe, stimulating environment that encourages exploration and curiosity. Practitioners should offer challenges that are slightly beyond the child's current ability, stepping in when needed but allowing children to solve problems and make discoveries independently.

Practitioners must facilitate open-ended activities that promote cognitive, physical, and social development that encourage children to interact with natural materials like pebbles, water, and plants, which fosters sensory experiences and deepens understanding of scientific concepts. Waite (2011 p41-44) discusses further all the areas of learning that can be reached during outdoor play, whether it is a planned activity or independent play, and how a good sense of wellbeing is often achieved from the outdoors which can promote the ability to absorb new information and surroundings.

Practitioners should encourage children to ask questions, developing critical thinking and language development by introducing new vocabulary related to their outdoor

experiences. In addition to facilitating learning, practitioners should act as role models. Participation in play, whether by asking open-ended questions or joining children in exploration demonstrates positive attitudes toward nature, and curiosity. This can also promote safe risk-taking by allowing children to engage in physically challenging activities, supporting their confidence and resilience. Practitioners can use outdoor play as an opportunity for assessment, observing children's interactions, problem-solving abilities, and social behaviours. This helps in planning future activities that meet children's developmental needs while promoting their autonomy and love for learning in a natural setting.

Pound (2014) has explored Piaget's theory of cognitive development and how this emphasises hands-on, experiential learning, which is support with learning in the outdoors . Piaget believed children learn best through active exploration and discovery, making outdoor play a natural extension of his theory. Piaget put much time in testing his theory with results showing that teaching should match the child's individual needs and practitioners can support their learning with open ended questions, this approach has helped support the development of the Welsh curriculum Thomas (2018) discussed in their research how Piaget's research fed in to the development of the Foundation Phase and the importance of an attuned adult to support development. Vygotsky also identified that outdoor learning was beneficial to early years development, Vygotsky highlights the role of social interaction and adult guidance in learning. Outdoor settings can provide opportunities for collaborative problem-solving, and peer interaction, which can help children expand their knowledge and skills. Bradbury (2019) further recognises that unlike Piaget, Vygotsky believed in the important of families and communities and that imagination were important for child's development. However, in contrast to Piaget and Vygotsky Simandan (2024) found that although Skinner did not totally disregard outdoor learning, he did favour structured environments where behaviours are shaped through rewards and punishments., Skinner's approach suggests that controlled, predictable environments (often indoors) are more effective for reinforcing specific behaviours and skills, the behaviourism theory that Skinner's research could be applied within the indoor setting by rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour.

Muddy Faces (2024) promote the use of loose parts play, a theory that they recognise was first developed by Simon Nicholson in 1972. Loose parts play meets the rights of a child from the UNICEF(2022) article 31 “That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”

Loose Parts Play is described by Welch (2019) as when children have “*no prescribed method of play, items can be used entirely at the discretion of the child. Children can explore, create and imagine in all the senses of those words and assign their own purpose and meaning to the objects.*”

Loose parts play allows for creativity and Imagination because loose parts do not have a specific purpose, children are free to use their imagination to transform them into anything they desire. Otto and Thornton (2022) have explored the Montessori approach and the benefits of implementing it in an early year setting , recognising that loose parts play is mostly natural resources, but this does not always have to be the case and that button and fabric during indoor play can also support holistic development. Hall *et al* (2014) recognise how the Regio Emilia approach works with outdoor learning and loose parts play and how again according to Regio Emilia practitioners and adults should work alongside children for guidance and support in their learning not just as a teacher.

A stick might become a wand, a bridge, or part of a structure. It can promote problem-solving and critical thinking through the process of arranging, sorting, and combining different materials, children develop skills in critical thinking and problem-solving as they figure out how to bring their ideas to life. Loose part play can develop both fine and gross motor skills, handling small loose parts improves fine motor skills, while larger parts like logs or tyres enhance gross motor skills. Using loose parts with peers, children have the opportunity to work collaboratively, negotiate, and communicate with their peers, which helps develop teamwork and social interaction.

Practitioners should provide materials and create an inviting environment but should not dictate how the children should use the parts. The role of the adult should be to observe and support when invited into the play, by asking open ended questions practitioners can further develop learning and understanding and can offer additional items that may expand the activity without limiting creativity.

In Wales most outdoor play is within the school setting or locally off site for a session of the school day, in Scandinavia, there is a different approach. The role of the practitioner within the early years of the Scandinavian approach is much more hands on alongside the children and occasionally as a role model. SBS Dateline (2016) compiled a study of the Scandinavian Kindergarten with the support of Roberts and De Jong, they found that even though parents were sending their children to an outdoor school, they had concerns but over time have learnt to trust the system, the adults and the children. The adults at the outdoor classroom, model the activities alongside the children with developing confidence, where both fine and gross motor skills are developed. The adults are providing opportunities that the children would not have access to in a standard playground. Practitioners who teacher at a higher level of education are in support of the outdoor kindergarten and feel that it does not hold them back, with some adults expressing that they do not feel that at kindergarten age children are ready to learn with pens and pencils from books.

Regardless of the learning happening outside or inside, activities still need to be assessed to allow for future planning and progression for each learner. Welsh.gov (2015) gives guidance on the six reasons that should be considered when planning a lesson or activity and the progression of learning that can be met and how the rights of a child can be met by following the steps to planning and assessment. Welsh Government (2022) highlights that the individual child should be at the centre of any assessment process with the four purposes encompassing them and any activity that they undertake. The report continues to advise that assessment should, support learners, understand progression steps being met and identify progress over time not just progress in a snapshot. The report highlights that it should not only be the practitioner that carries out the assessment, it should be done collaboratively with learners, practitioners, and families to gain a true picture of a child's individual learning journey.

Assessing students during outdoor learning requires creative approaches that balance observation, interaction, and reflection with the natural environment. EYworks Limited (2023) analyse several different ways to assess children within the early years to ensure that practitioners capture a true picture of the child's development and learning story. Some of the assessment methods that EYworks detailed can be used for Maths and Science Technology Engineering and Maths

(STEM) for effective assessment during outdoor activities. Assessment methods such as video or photograph, observation notes, tick lists when assessing for a particular criterion. Children can feed back in a variety of ways, practitioners can give the opportunity to allow for self and peer assessment. Feedback from children can help a practitioner shape their future practice by understanding what was right and wrong in the activity for the children. By using a variety of these methods, practitioners can gain a holistic understanding of their student's learning, focusing on both academic achievement and personal growth in outdoor environments.

It is evident that outdoor learning provides a valuable opportunity for children's holistic development, offering cognitive, physical, social, and emotional benefits that are often more traditional indoor classroom settings. The role of the practitioner is central in facilitating these experiences without taking over the child's learning, allowing for natural exploration, creativity, and problem-solving. The Scandinavian approach to outdoor education highlights the potential of these environments, where even with initial parental or early practitioner concerns, outdoor classrooms have shown to develop both fine and gross motor skills while increasing confidence. This is echoed in the Welsh curriculum, where the focus is on child-centred, progression-based assessment that supports long term development. Outdoor learning should not just be a supplementary activity but a vital part of early childhood education. With careful support and creative assessment methods, practitioners can ensure that the learning experiences outside are as rich and structured as those inside, paving the way for well-rounded child development.

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