

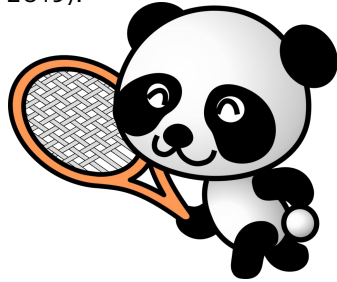
A photograph of four children running along a dirt path in a lush forest. The path is covered with fallen leaves and ferns. The children are wearing casual clothing and boots, suggesting a cool or damp environment. The background is filled with tall trees and dense foliage, with sunlight filtering through the canopy. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Improving Education Through Outdoor Activities: A Foundation Phase Curriculum Report

BY TY GARLAND

INTRODUCTION / RATIONALE

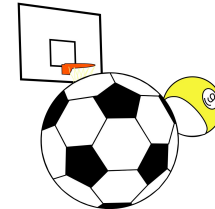
Children from 3 to 7 years old, a critical developmental stage marked by quick changes in physical, cognitive, and socioemotional domains, are served by the Foundation Phase curriculum. Children are naturally curious, active, and ready to explore their environment when they are this age. They flourish in settings that provide chances for experiential, hands-on learning, which is in perfect harmony with the tenets of outdoor education Allen and Kelly, 2019).



The Foundation Phase curriculum inclusion of outdoor learning opportunities is justified by the understanding that young learners have a variety of requirements and learning preferences (Department for Children ,Education,Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2009). Children's imagination, inventiveness, and curiosity are stimulated by the rich tapestry of sensory stimulation, wide spaces, and natural components found in outdoor surroundings (Bento and Dias, 2017). Furthermore, via the coordinated development of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills, outdoor learning promotes holistic development.



In this report, we investigate how high-quality outdoor activities improve kids' learning in a number of areas, such as the development of motor skills, creativity, inclusion tactics, and incorporating the natural world (Sagepub, 2013). We demonstrate the transforming effect that outdoor learning has on children's educational experiences by analytical observations and thoughtful observations, and we provide suggestions for maximizing outdoor learning opportunities within the Foundation Phase curriculum.





CREATIVITY & IMAGINATION IN OUTDOOR PLAY



The great outdoors are excellent for encouraging children's imagination and creativity. Children use natural materials and open-ended resources to engage in imaginative role-play, storytelling, and creative expression through unstructured play and exploration (Kiewra and Veselack, 2016). Here are a few ways:



1. Unstructured Exploration - Children can freely explore and interact with their surroundings in outdoor areas without being restricted by scheduled activities. Children are allowed to create their own games, stories, and adventures in these unrestricted environments, which promotes creativity and a sense of independence.



2. Integration Of Natural Materials - Natural objects like twigs, stones, leaves, and mud are excellent building blocks for imaginative play. These objects become props for dramatic play, construction materials for shelters and forts, and canvases for artistic expression in the hands of children, opening up a world of creative and self-expression opportunities.



3. Imaginative Role Play - Children's creative role-play situations are sparked by outdoor settings and often mirror their interests, life experiences, and cultural influences. Children immerse themselves in rich, imaginative worlds that foster their creativity and narrative skills, whether they're role-playing scientists conducting research in a makeshift laboratory, pirates embarking on a high seas adventure, or explorers in the jungle.



4. Problem Solving & Innovation - Children who play outside are more likely to overcome obstacles, find solutions, and adjust quickly to changing conditions. Children solve problems together, whether they are building a bridge over a stream, coming up with plans to catch made-up animals, or working together to construct a fort. These cooperative problem-solving activities foster critical thinking, creativity, and inventiveness.

5. Connection To Nature & Environmental Stewardship - Playing outside creates a strong bond with the natural world and teaches children to take care of the environment. As a result of their growing empathy for living things, natural interest about ecological processes, and realization of how intertwined they are with the environment, children are motivated to take care of the planet and promote sustainability.

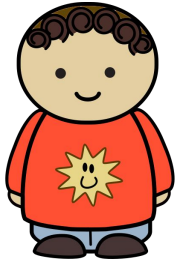
((Kiewra and Veselack, 2016))



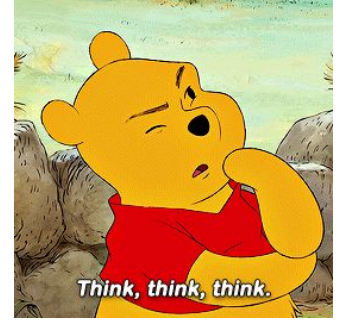
OBSERVATION & REFLECTION

CREATIVITY & IMAGINATION IN OUTDOOR PLAY

A reflection or observation that I made was when I visited the first school and saw children making “Mud Bowls” using the natural materials around them. Some were using sticks, apples, dry mud, wet mud, grass and so forth but all children had a different mud bowl for different reasons all aided through Outdoor Learning and Play. They had access to the integration of natural materials with their resources. They had also delved into Imaginative Role Play by using leaves as some form of “food”, water as sauce, mud as the main dish. The children, as you could clearly see had a strong bond and connection with nature and the outdoors.



The children were using their problem solving skills and adaptability. Children solve problems by experimenting with various materials and construction methods to create their Mud Bowls, which calls for adaptability, flexibility, and inventiveness. They must face difficulties like locating appropriate materials, modifying their designs in light of availability, and working with peers to overcome barriers. This sharpens their critical thinking and decision-making abilities in practical settings (Bullard, 2012).



In a nutshell seeing kids create Mud Bowls while playing outside highlights the transformational potential of nature-based learning opportunities in encouraging imagination, discovery, teamwork, and environmental consciousness (An, 2024). Young learners are given a lifetime love of learning, nature, and discovery by educators who provide them opportunity to interact with natural materials and the outdoors. This fosters holistic development(Chawla, 2020).



It has been observed that children's play outside fosters their creativity, problem-solving skills, and capacity for divergent thought. Children's creative potential is nurtured and a lifetime love of exploration and discovery is instilled by educators who encourage design, building, and invention in outdoor environments (Bullard, 2012).

DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSICAL SKILLS & OBJECT CONTROL

Children can learn basic movement skills, such as balance, coordination, agility, and object control, in dynamic outside surroundings. Strength, endurance, and spatial awareness are developed through exercises like climbing, jumping, throwing, and catching that also support the development of gross and fine motor skills (Sutapa et al., 2021). Here are a few ways:

Balance & Coordination - Children must maintain balance and coordination as they cross a variety of surfaces and terrains seen in outdoor contexts, such as grassy fields, gravel walkways, and uneven terrain. Engaging in activities like walking on logs, climbing over rocks, and navigating obstacle courses necessitates that kids modify their body alignment, balance their weight, and synchronize their motions to prevent falls or slips (Yang, Lin and Tsai, 2015).



Gross Motor Skills Development - Running, jumping, and climbing are examples of outdoor activities that help build gross motor skills. These abilities need the use of vast muscle groups for movements necessary for daily jobs and physical activity. Through active play, children can develop their muscles, improve their coordination, and boost their general physical fitness with the help of climbing structures, playground equipment, and natural features (GOV.UK, 2014).

Agility & Spatial Awareness - Children learn agility and spatial awareness while playing outside, where they are encouraged to move in different directions, change speeds, and navigate obstacles. Playing games and engaging in activities that require running, dodging, weaving, and navigating through small areas promotes the development of children's reflexes, spatial judgment, and capacity to recognize and react to environmental changes (BEYER et al., 2016).

Fine Motor Skills & Object Control - Engaging in outdoor play activities that involve tossing, catching, and manipulating objects with different shapes, sizes, and textures promotes the development of fine motor skills and object control. During imaginative play and discovery, children develop their hand-eye coordination, precision, and control as they catch flying discs, toss balls, and work with natural items like sticks, leaves, and rocks (NHS Isle of White, 2019).

Strength & Endurance - Children can participate in physical activities that improve their strength, endurance, and cardiovascular fitness in outdoor settings. Children can build upper body strength and endurance by climbing, swinging, and hanging from bars or ropes, and they can improve their cardiovascular health and general physical endurance by jogging, biking, and hiking (niDirect Government Services, 2018).

Confidence & Competence - Engaging in outdoor play and physical activities helps children develop a sense of competence and confidence as they learn new abilities, overcome obstacles, and accomplish personal goals. Children's self-worth, resilience, and confidence in their capacity to surmount challenges and confidently and resolutely traverse their physical surroundings are all enhanced by their successes and accomplishments in outdoor play (Sport England, 2019).





OBSERVATION & REFLECTION

DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSICAL SKILLS & OBJECT



An observation that springs to mind is seeing one of the children rolling down a steep muddy hill on her back, laughing, running back up and trying again. Then 10 minutes later seeing the same child covered in mud with a smile on her face.

The 5 main benefits I took from this observation are:

1. **Physical Development** - Rolling down a hill improves coordination and the development of gross motor skills by using the arms, legs, and core muscles. Climbing back up the hill improves general physical fitness by strengthening leg muscles and offering cardiovascular exercise.
2. **Sensory Stimulation** - A child can have a rich sensory experience when rolling down a muddy hill since they can feel the mud texture against their skin, smell the earthy scent, and hear the squelching sound as they roll. Encounters with the natural world improve children's cognitive growth and sensory integration, aiding in their understanding of their surroundings and cultivating a respect for the environment (Summers, Vivian and Summers, 2019).
3. **Risk Taking & Resilience** - When rolling down a steep hill, a child must take certain risks in order to negotiate the terrain and feel the sensation of speed and loss of control. Children gain resilience, confidence, and self-regulation abilities through conquering obstacles and taking calculated risks during outdoor play, which equips them to handle uncertainty and adjust to novel circumstances (Little, 2020).
4. **Emotional Well-Being** - The child's laughter and sense of liberation demonstrate the psychological advantages of engaging in outdoor play and fostering a relationship with nature. Playing outside, unstructured and spontaneously, releases endorphins and creates a feeling of enjoyment and contentment that improves mood, lowers stress levels, and improves emotional well-being (UNICEF, 2023) .
5. **Connection To Nature** - The youngster can form a strong bond with nature and feel a sense of belonging and connection to the Earth by being submerged in the natural world and getting coated in mud. Developing a connection with nature fosters a sense of duty for preserving and safeguarding the natural world, empathy for other living things, and environmental stewardship (DeVillie et al., 2021).

When given the chance to play outside, youngsters seem to exhibit more competence and self-assurance in their physical pursuits. Children build a solid foundation of physical literacy through active play and discovery, which is crucial for their long-term health and wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2013).

To sum up, watching a kid roll down a muddy hill illustrates the many advantages of playing and exploring outside. Through engagement in physical activities, sensory stimulation, taking risks, emotional health, creativity, and connection to the natural world, children cultivate vital abilities and traits that support their overall growth and wellbeing. Encouraging children to play outside in natural settings is crucial for their physical, emotional, and cognitive development as well as for creating a lifetime love of the great outdoors and outdoor activities (Scottish Government, 2020).



INCLUSION STRATEGIES & ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATIONS



It is possible to customize outdoor learning environments to support inclusive practices and meet a variety of learning requirements. Using techniques like the STEP framework (Space, Task, Equipment, People), educators can create outdoor learning experiences that are tailored to each student's skills, interests, and preferences (PHE.EPS CANADA, 2018). Here are a few of those ways:

Space - In order to allow for a wide range of activities and movement patterns, outdoor learning environments should be built with plenty of space for play, exploration, and social contact. Children can select settings that best fit their unique needs and preferences when distinct zones are designated within the outdoor environment, such as quiet areas for sensory breaks, open spaces for energetic play, and secluded corners for solitary introspection.



Task - It is important to consciously create outdoor activities that offer a variety of challenges and engagement opportunities to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. An example could be encouraging children of all interests and ability levels to participate in and meaningfully contribute to outdoor learning experiences is ensured by providing a range of activity alternatives, such as scavenger hunts, nature walks, sensory exploration stations, and collaborative art projects.

Equipment - It's critical to select and set up outdoor supplies and tools in a way that promotes accessibility, safety, and involvement for all children. Offering wheelchair-accessible swings, sensory-friendly play structures, and adjustable seating configurations, for example, are examples of inclusive playground equipment that ensures kids with special needs or physical restrictions may play and explore outside to the fullest.

People - Every child should feel appreciated, respected, and supported in their individual learning journey in an inclusive and welcoming culture that is fostered by outdoor learning spaces. In particular, putting in place peer buddy systems, cooperative learning exercises, and group projects promotes empathy, supportive relationships, and pleasant social interactions between kids from different backgrounds and skill levels. Educators can also lead conversations and activities that encourage empathy, understanding, and acceptance of individual diversity, which will help to build an inclusive and respectful culture within the outdoor learning community.

5. Varied Sensory Experiences - Rich sensory experiences seen in outdoor settings can be customized to meet the requirements and preferences of children with a range of sensory preferences. For instance, giving kids access to things that are rich in senses—like sand, water, natural textures, and fragrant plants—allows them to meaningfully engage their senses, which fosters sensory integration, self-regulation, and emotional wellbeing.community (Education Scotland, 2009).

6. Accessible Pathways & Adaptable Equipment - Accessibility should be a priority when designing outdoor learning environments, including low-height equipment, handrails, smooth pathways, and ramps to ensure that kids of all abilities can play safely and explore. Incorporating adjustable features like height-adjustable tables, adaptive seating, and sensory-friendly equipment, as well as installing wheelchair-accessible pathways and even surfaces, can guarantee that outdoor learning environments are inclusive and hospitable to children with physical disabilities and mobility challenges (Miracle Recreation, 2012).

Educators may create outdoor learning environments that celebrate diversity, promote fairness, and enable all students to grow and prosper in their educational journeys by applying the **STEP** framework and embracing the concepts of inclusion and accessibility.





OBSERVATION & REFLECTION

INCLUSION STRATEGIES & ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATIONS



A fantastic observation which reflects STEP and inclusive learning within the outdoor environment was how accessible the facilitator made it and how after every small task the teacher would get them around the campfire to gather thoughts, express themselves and learn from others. This gives ideas to those who are struggling for creativity and ideas whilst also boosting confidence and competence in those that are thriving. (Hayes, 2017)

Below are 3 advantages, benefits or the good bits from the reflection or observation shown:

Promoting Equity & Access

Ensuring equal access to educational opportunities and resources for all children, irrespective of their skills or characteristics, is a goal of inclusive outdoor learning environments. Teachers can proactively address participation barriers and build environments that suit a range of learning needs and preferences by putting tactics like the STEP framework into practice. (Kelly et al., 2022)

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

Children who play in inclusive outdoor environments feel more a part of the community and have a sense of acceptance and worth for who they are. In order to foster positive social relationships and mutual respect, educators foster a supportive and inclusive environment by embracing variety and appreciating each child's individual skills and accomplishments. (Bowen, 2021)

Nurturing Empathy & Understanding

Children who are raised in inclusive outdoor learning environments develop empathy, compassion, and understanding while they discover the value and celebration of individual variations in skills, experiences, and backgrounds. Children build empathy and respect for others through group projects, peer interactions, and shared experiences, which promotes an inclusive and accepting environment in the learning community. (Lewis, 2023)

The significance of designing inclusive spaces with a range of sensory experiences, accessible routes, and adjustable equipment is brought to light by observations. (Casey and Harbottle, 2018). Through the promotion of equity and acceptance of diversity in outdoor learning environments, educators cultivate a feeling of empowerment and belonging in every child. (Dari, 2023)

In summary, the observation of inclusive outdoor learning environments demonstrates the transforming power of establishing situations that give every child a sense of belonging, support, and empowerment so they can grow and learn. Teachers create the groundwork for a more equitable, compassionate, and inclusive society where all children have the chance to realize their full potential and make valuable contributions to their communities by emphasizing equity, diversity, and inclusion in outdoor education practices. (Entrust, 2020)





MY 3 OBSERVATION CONCLUSION

Children's interactions with the outdoor environment in each of these observations enabled educational experiences that went beyond the typical classroom setting. Children developed a comprehensive understanding of fundamental topics across the curriculum and fostered a sense of wonder, curiosity, and appreciation for the world around them by immersing themselves in outdoor adventure, inquiry, and discovery. Teachers can create dynamic and engaging learning experiences that support children's academic progress and holistic development by purposefully integrating outdoor learning opportunities.(O'Brien and Murray, 2007)





CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS



To conclude, there is great potential for enhancing children's educational experiences and promoting holistic development through the integration of outdoor learning experiences into the Foundation Phase curriculum . In order to optimize the advantages of outdoor learning, educators are urged to (Welsh Government, 2015):

1. Adopt a child-centered strategy that places an emphasis on inquiry, play, and discovery.
2. Offer chances for genuine interaction with the natural world and education about environmental issues.
3. Adopt inclusive practices and modify the surroundings to meet the requirements of a variety of learners.
4. To support outdoor learning programs, cultivate cooperative collaborations with communities, environmental organizations, and parents.

In order to nurture the whole child and equip them to become lifelong learners, environmental stewards, and engaged contributors to the creation of a sustainable future, educators must prioritize outdoor experiences and capitalize on the advantages that come with nature-based education (Welsh Government, 2023).



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