

Awe and Wonder.



The Environment.

The area that I have chosen is a valley in South Gower called Ilston Valley Woods. It is situated at the rear of a tiny village of around twenty small cottage style homes, some of which were originally built hundreds of years ago. This rural environment has so many learning and playing opportunities for child led play and learning. This valley has it all. It has water, mud, trees, grass, and rocks. With these in mind, it brings fish, pond skaters, gnats, flies, birds, ducks and so much more. This valley sits directly under a flight path for small domestic planes and other aircraft such as gliders so when there is a gap in the trees you can see and hear the planes buzzing around overhead. All of these factors give children the opportunities to walk, talk and explore and the possibilities are endless.

First things first, as soon as you step off the bus you hear the birds chirping and the stream trickling on its way underneath the bridge that leads you into a graveyard. The stream is about 4 inches deep and flows quite fast. I wonder if we find some leaves or small twigs and drop them into the water they will float and come out the other side of the bridge – a game called Poohsticks from Winnie The Pooh. Shall we have a race? If children are wearing their waterproof clothing and wellington boots shall we walk underneath it and we can reenact the story 'Billy Goats Gruff'. Following the footpath the children will come to an arched gate, also known as a kissing gate, and then they will come to this wild and wonderful place. On their right-hand side they will see the same stream that they crossed with large pebbles and branches fallen from the trees above make small barriers for the water to rush through. On the left they will see the beautiful green garlic plants, trees and other shrub bushes that come in so many different colours. The stream the children can see is a learning opportunity and a visual representation of the importance of how streams serviced villages like this hundreds of years ago. With this stream in mind the child can collect small sticks and leaves and watch them flow down the stream and this is a visual representation of how if the flow is strong the stick moves faster or if the stick doesn't move why doesn't it? Where the water is still there are bugs sitting on the surface called pond skaters. How many can you find? They move very fast, so you have to be quick to see and count them.

In the grassy areas children can look for flowers, garlic plants and small amphibians such as frogs and toads that call this environment home. When not in the water, or making their way to the water, they sit in thick vegetation to stay hidden from predators. We have to be very quiet to not disturb them though, how quiet can we be? Children naturally explore so adults can observe these small areas and help when asked without interrupting exploration and play. There are leaves on the ground along with sticks fallen from the trees above. Children can look and find different leaves, as there are so many different shapes colours sizes and textures. What trees did these leaves come from do we think? Are the trees close by or did the wind bring them from further away from trees that we cannot see? Sticks can be used safely as toys to play like swords or wands, or they can be used to build

shelters from the rain or dens. Who can make the biggest den? If we are using branches, what else around us can we use?

In the stream, under the tree roots the water gets a little deeper, with adults' supervision and some very quiet and patient children, fish will come out and explore their surroundings. This can lead to some inquisitive children asking questions such as how many more fish are hiding? What colour are the fish? What are the fish going to eat? These questions should be answered with care as to not turn play into education. All around us we can hear all sorts of birds tweeting and singing. I wonder what they are saying. I wonder what the children think they are saying. Whilst looking for them sitting high up in the trees, can we see where they live? Can we see any little nests from the little birds, or big nests from the big birds? What colour are the birds? How big are the birds? These are all questions that may run through the child's mind and can be used to direct play with peers, pretending to be birds flapping arms through the trees and looking for worms in the mud. This can promote curiosity and help them discover new textures, elements, and insects. There are paths that follow the whole length of the river section. In some parts its clear, in some parts there is lots of mud and standing water. With children wearing wellies and waterproofs we can ask questions such as, how deep is the water? Can we see if we can cover our feet in the mud? Can we use sticks and make a bridge or path to get past the mud?

At the top of the valley, just the other side of the trees there is farmland. Children may ask what that animal is I can hear? Is it a cow or a sheep? Well if it was a cow, what noise does a sheep make? What about a pig? Can we find any food that a farm animal may eat in this valley? By hearing animals around them, children may imitate them and as stated above, it promotes curiosity.

As we sit down and eat our lunch in the clearing just behind the area that has been photographed we can all put our heads together and think of what could live in the valley now and may have lived here before. Hundreds of years ago did people live here. How do we think it changed over time? Talking to children and hearing their ideas promotes self-esteem and confidence and that is very important when working with children at such a young age.

Throughout this experience it is vital that adults observe what the children are doing. Being there just in case the children need anything really strengthens this experience for them. It gives them the opportunity to explore and play with objects that they want to play with and then only have help when they feel they cannot do it. For example, if the children want to build a den with large sticks, they may be a little bit too heavy for young children so helping the child whilst following their instructions to ensure that it remains child led. Allowing the children to explore using their own senses really promotes positive wellbeing and teaches children how the world around them works by using the smallest of objects. By allowing children to lead play it gives them the opportunity to give and take instructions which is very important for their growth.

Risk assessment.

With any type of outdoor activity, I feel that it is vital to carry out a risk assessment on the areas that the children will be coming into contact with. By doing this it gives me the opportunity to see the area beforehand and ensure that it is an enriching environment that is suitable for the children to enjoy safely. By carrying out risk assessments it opens eyes to the possibilities of play but also the possibilities of how children could actually end up hurt if not supervised properly. By going into the details of the potential risks, it really opens your eyes as to how unsafe some of the simplest of things really are to children. As an adult I could walk down the path that runs along the stream and not have a second thought about it, but as a child, they could walk too close to the edge without realising and could fall in as the water can be quite deep in places, it would mean that the child could be fully submerged within seconds and may not be able to ground their feet so they can stand. The more in-depth the risk assessment, the more fun the children can have as the risk assessment sets out a plan to be able to enjoy the activity even if it has a level of risk to it. Helping children do this from a young age helps them enjoy the environment around them and if they wish, balance their own risk by undertaking the more 'dangerous' activities. Risk assessments also show parents that thought, and consideration has been put into what we would like the children to learn and the environments they play in. Risk benefit assessments are a great way of showing parents and practitioners not only the risk but the benefit to the children, and how this area or activity can enrich the children's learning opportunity, development skills and education. Using these risk benefit assessment forms allows practitioners to be prepared and know what to expect or teach to the children, for example road safety or dangers of standing too close to a stream, before they get to the activity making for a more enjoyable experience for the children.

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:		Date:	
Assessor:		Review date:	

The boxes in the table below will expand as you type into them; pre-entered text is simply for illustration. You should delete irrelevant items and replace with text relevant to your circumstances.

Your overall risk rating – Low, medium or high – is based on your judgement about whether the BENEFITS of the activity or opportunity outweigh the RISKS.

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
Wading in the water.	Promotes curiosity. Gives children the opportunity to see what is in the water. Touch and feel the stones under the water.	Water – drowning if not supervised. Rocks – Slippery when wet, Slippery when covered in moss or other	Children and adults	Only allow a certain number of children in the water at one time to ensure a good ratio. When in the water no running.	M
Playing with sticks	Promotes curiosity and fuels the imagination.	Sticks – some can be sharp. Can be used as weapons. Running – some areas of the woods can be muddy and wet, so it becomes a falls hazard.	Children	Supervision to ensure that children play safely. Observe, don't intervene unless needed.	L
Looking for animals in the undergrowth	Promotes curiosity and fuels the imagination. Develops knowledge of animals and the	May find animals that can bite. May have allergies to the things they find/come across.	Children, adults.	Supervision to ensure that if they find animals that children don't touch them, they just observe.	L

	environments that they live in.				
Looking for fish in deeper water.	Promotes curiosity and fuels the imagination. Develops knowledge of animals and the environments that they live in.	Deeper water – more risk of drowning if a child slips. Rocks – Slippy rocks. Falls.	Children and adults.	Strict supervision but allow curiosity.	H
Playing in the mud.	Promotes curiosity and fuels the imagination.	Mud can be slippy.	Children.	Light supervision to ensure that children play but are safe whilst playing.	L
Building shelters/dens	Promotes curiosity and fuels the imagination.	Bigger sticks can be heavy. If bigger sticks/logs are being used they must be checked that they aren't rotten as these could break and hurt the children if they fell on them.	Children and adults who are helping.	Supervision and assist if asked.	
Playing under the bridge	Promotes curiosity. Gives children the opportunity to see what is in the water. Touch and feel the stones under the water.	Water – drowning if not supervised. Rocks – Slippy when wet, Slippy when covered in moss or other	Children and adults	Only allow a certain number of children in the water at one time to ensure a good ratio. When in the water no running.	M
Playing Poohsticks	Creates curiosity about the movement of water and the objects floating in the water.	Leaning over the bridge to see the sticks – the bridge is about 5ft high so if a child was to fall, they could seriously hurt themselves.	Children	Ensure that children do not lean over the railings. Get children to pick sticks and watch from a distance.	H
Looking for birds in the trees.	Will teach children where they can find bird nests and what the size of	Trips and falls as children looking up for the birds and nests.	Children	Ensure that when the children are looking up for the birds and the nests	L

	them means – bigger the nest, bigger the birds.			they are still paying attention to where they are walking to ensure that they don't fall.	
Using the amorous gate.	Will teach children to navigate the gate. Will teach children patience as Only one child can go through it at once.	Fingers can get caught in the hinges or the lock.	Children	Ensure that children use the gate carefully.	L

Adults supporting science and mathematics Outdoors.

Non-statutory Curriculum guidance for the early years' foundation stage (2020) states that Adults may help children improve their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination, and agility by making games and offering opportunities for play both inside and outside. The basis for the growth of physically healthy bodies as well as social and emotional wellbeing is provided by gross motor abilities. Precision and fine motor skills are important for hand-eye coordination, which is later related to early reading. Children can gain competence, control, and confidence through repeated and diverse opportunities to explore and play with small world toys, puzzles, arts and crafts, and the practise of using small tools with adult feedback and support.

Non-statutory Curriculum guidance for the early years' foundation stage (2020) also highlight that by giving children numerous and varied opportunities to acquire and apply this understanding, such as through the use of manipulatives like little pebbles and tens frames for arranging counting, children will create a solid foundation of knowledge and language that will serve as the foundation for their future mastery of mathematics. Additionally, it is crucial that the curriculum offer pupils ample opportunities to advance their spatial reasoning abilities across all branches of mathematics, such as shape, space, and measures. Children must cultivate good attitudes and interests in mathematics, search for patterns and links, recognise connections, take turns, and communicate their observations to adults and peers, and not be afraid to make mistakes.

Ofsted (2012) believe that children learn best when they actively participate in the environment they live in, when they have meaningful experiences that matter to them, and when adults around them pay attention. Our goal is to provide kids with as many opportunities as possible to play and understand the world. We watch them play and make plans that reflect their passions. In addition to providing products and courses that promote self-initiated learning and discovery as essential components of raising content, motivated children, we also share children's experiences with parents and carers, for instance through stay and play days. Our findings demonstrate that every child makes tremendous growth, particularly in terms of their attitudes and dispositions, social skills, communication, and language and literacy abilities.

The Department for Education highlights that personal, social, and emotional development (PSED) in children is essential for their cognitive growth as well as for them to have healthy, happy lives. The significant attachments that shape their social world serve as the foundation for their personal growth. Children can learn how to comprehend their own feelings as well as those of others by developing strong, warm, and supportive interactions with adults. Children should be helped to control their emotions, form a positive self-concept, establish manageable goals for themselves, have faith in their own skills, persevere and wait for what they want, and direct attention as required. The children will learn how to take care of their bodies, including appropriate food, and manage personal needs autonomously through adult modelling and coaching. Through encouraged play with other children, the children

develop their social skills and learn how to get along with others, cooperate, and settle disputes amicably. These qualities will offer a safe foundation from which children can succeed in school and later in life. Practitioners must plan a challenging and pleasurable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development by considering the unique requirements, interests, and development of each child in their care. It is required of professionals dealing with young children to lay a solid foundation for their growth in the three key areas. Children benefit from a broad curriculum and opportunities to develop and apply their knowledge in the distinct areas of study. This is crucial for vocabulary expansion and language development.

Buckinghamshire Council (no date) assert that a setting where children feel protected, cared for, and at ease as well as being in good physical, mental, and emotional health is known as a strong emotional environment. Children must develop a strong attachment and a relationship of trust with a Key Person who is responsible for making sure that their education and care are customised to match their unique needs. To assist and further children's learning and development, all adults must connect with them and pay attention to their interests. This involves working together to solve problems and maintain sustained shared thought. Children do best in a welcoming environment built on respect for one another and where their individuality is celebrated. In situations where parents and professionals collaborate, children experience educational benefits. When adults place a high priority on children's emotional health and provide direct guidance about what is acceptable behaviour. Activities that induce a feeling of flow are frequently child-directed, which means that children take command of their own education by investigating subjects that they decide on and find personally important. Children are motivated to learn in child-directed learning environments because they are doing something just for the experience's sake and not because they anticipate getting something in return. This is how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differ from one another. Children who are naturally driven do something because they find it enjoyable play is an excellent example. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, happens when children do something to get something in return or to avoid getting something in return This is highlighted by A Eisenmann et al (no date).

Lydney Robinson and Claire Francis of The Sensory Trust (no date) state that various unanticipated physiological changes in our bodies can be brought on by awe. Feeling a sensation of amazement can cause goosebumps, changes in our heart rate, shivers, a hitch in the chest, and a warm fuzzy feeling. The vagus nervous system is the main character in this mind-body interaction. The vagus nerve, also referred to as the carer nerve, runs across a large portion of our upper body. It has a strong relationship with the immune system and regulates internal organ functions like controlling inflammation and assisting digestion. The vagus nerve can be stimulated for reasons other than improved physical wellness. It also has a connection to our emotional health, including our reactions to stress, trauma, and anxiety.

Willows pre-school (2023), state that in the EYFS, awe and wonder as early years professionals, we are aware that exploring the world with our younger companions as though for the first time is one of the most satisfying aspects of our profession.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of being a practitioner is being able to inspire children with the wonder of the natural world and nurture their intrinsic sense of curiosity, which is a significant contributor to their early learning objective of "Understanding the World." Children experience so many firsts, such as the first time they see a rainbow or taste olives. These firsts inspire us to practise mindfulness in our busy lives and to enjoy the moment as it is. Practitioner-planned and -implemented activities are a great approach to inspire delight and awe for the world they live in. Links to the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL) "Magic moments" have a strong connection to the CoEL because they naturally address the unique needs of each child and make connections between the themes of positive relationships, enabling environments, and learning and development as the child interacts with experiences through play, active learning, and being a creative and critical thinker.

Action For Healthy Kids (2020) highlight that there are several ways a secure and encouraging learning environment is beneficial to a child's overall health. Engagement in the learning environment is important, Strong bonds exist among the larger school community as well as between students, instructors, families, and schools. Engagement in the family and community should Schools recognise and promote cultural identity and familial customs because they are socially conscious and culturally responsive. Relationship-building entails nurturing adults who take a positive outlook and pay attention to and recognise the needs and life experiences of students. Participatory and inclusive; the community should be welcomed to take part in school activities and be convinced that their involvement is worthwhile. Overall Safety of the children in the classroom will ensure they also feel safe outside of the classroom, this can be done by ensuring there is no place for violence, bullying, harassment, or the use of controlled substances in schools or activities related to education. Mental safety: the school has adopted and is putting social emotional learning into practise. Experiential learning, behaviour modelling, mindfulness, and other teaching methods are used. The staff is knowledgeable on trauma sensitivity. Physique Security: Bullying and online harassment are topics of cultural awareness and prevention. Health curricula contain lessons on preventing substance abuse. Drills and safety plans are examples of emergency readiness and management strategies that are in place and well understood. Environment: The intellectual, physical, and disciplinary settings are all well controlled, encouraging, and fair. Environment, Physical the structure is spotless, well-lit, and heated to a pleasant level. Water that is clean is available. Access to a playground is available on school grounds. There is no crowding. Instructional Setting restorative practises, innovative environments, and participatory, engrossing learning are all part of effective classroom management. Physical Health School health services and programmes are available to students. Meals and food are of the highest nutritional quality. The day is filled with movement and physical exercise. Mental Health Programmes and services for mental health are available to students (i.e., counsellors and/or social workers are on-site at the school). Staff members have received crisis intervention and de-escalation training. Instead of being punitive (like suspension and expulsion), discipline is proactive (such as circle time, empathy role-playing, school-wide atmosphere changes, and conflict resolution). Through self-

management, the school promotes self-discipline. With these steps in place within the learning environment the practitioner is showing the child that the healthy and stable environment they have in the classroom will follow them to the forest or any other outdoor environment they may visit in their school years.

To conclude, using the early years curricula and following the guidelines to ensure a child feels safe, healthy, and able to ask questions, a practitioner will be able to ensure a rich learning environment where education such as science or maths can be promoted. Knowing when to step back from children's play is crucial. It's important to get down on a child's level, have meaningful conversations, pay attention, and only inquire when absolutely required. Children grow in temperament and attitude towards learning as a result, and they are more willing to learn and take part in school activities. Additionally, this fosters self-assurance, self-worth, and the capacity to maintain an inherent desire to study. Children then begin learning independently during planning time. Children can communicate their ideas, beliefs, and choices through planning, which also helps them feel more purposeful.

Reference List

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