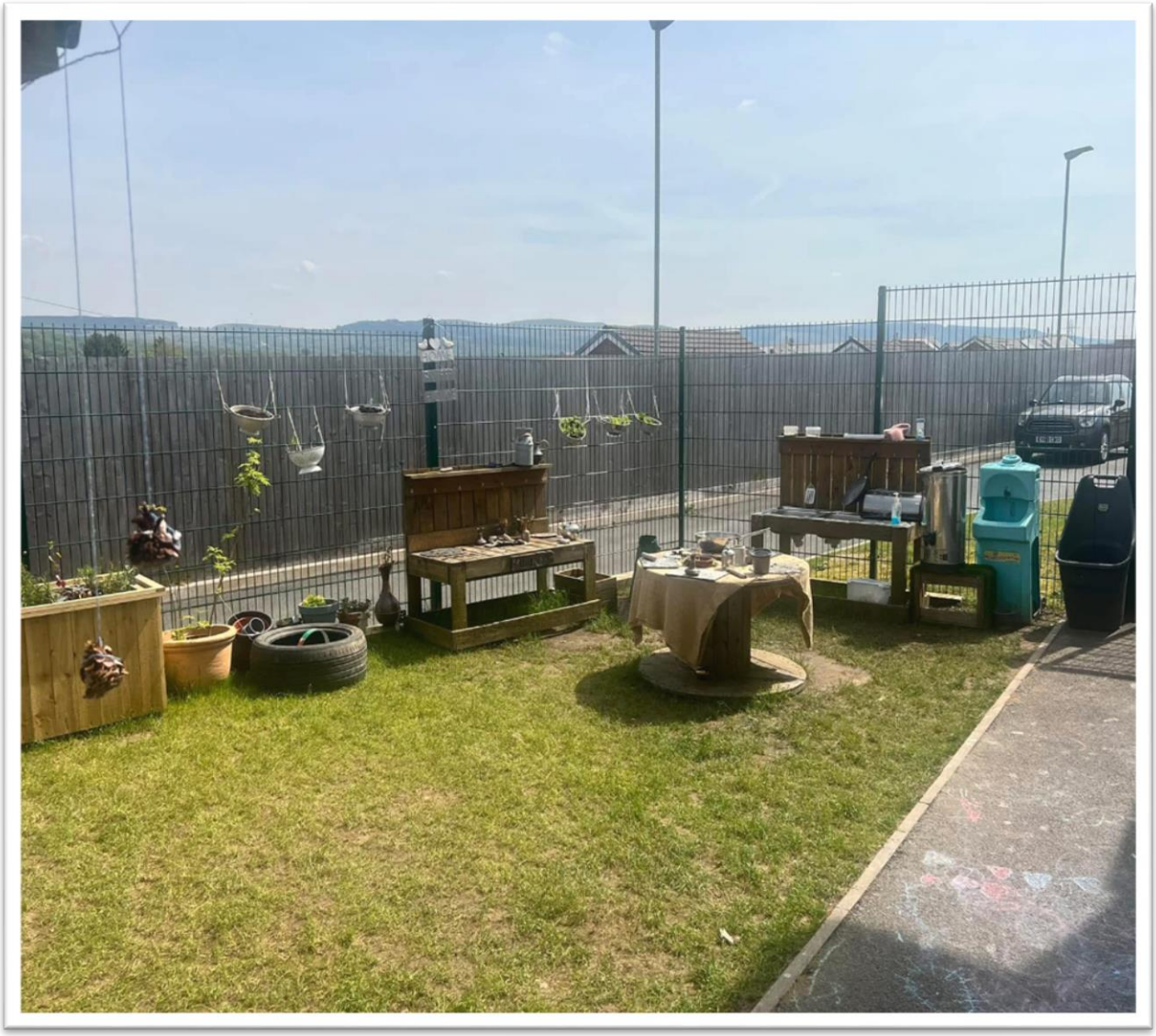
I have not used any form of AI within my work.

Learning journey through the outdoors

Part 1:



Source: Rachael's Playhouse 2025.

Part 2:

After careful consideration I have decided to choose this image as it holds personal significance for me. For this assignment, I am sharing a photograph of the side garden at my workplace. This space is especially meaningful, as it is used daily by the children who attend the setting. As you can see from this image it is a space in which provides endless opportunities to explore the world of nature around them.

Within this area you will come across a mud kitchen, workbench, wooden planters and a table where different provocations are set up daily, all based on the children's likes and interests. These are recorded through detailed observations and by following In the Moment Planning, as outlined in the Curriculum for Wales (no date). This allows us to respond instantly to what the children are showing curiosity in, whether it is through their play, conversations, or interactions with others. this ensures that we can set up activities that grasp the children's focus and attention which encourages deeper engagement and learning through play. We also take notice of the areas that are less used, which helps us reflect and adapt the environment by adding in new resources, changing layouts, or introducing fresh ideas to grasp the children's interest. Through exploring different parts of the garden, the children receive a wide range of learning experiences that promote their language and communication skills, fine and gross motor development, and by strengthen their physical body development. The outdoors becomes an enriching environment that supports the holistic growth and development through meaningful play.

Meaningful play in the outdoor area encourages children to explore by using mathematical and scientific concepts through hands on experiences. In our outdoor area we ensure to include variable activities for example pouring and measuring in the mud kitchen as this aids to support early maths, meanwhile exploring through the use natural materials encourages scientific thinking due to asking open ended questions on what will happen during a cause and effect-based activity. Moreover,

through having group discussions based on the property of the natural materials as this provides children with endless learning opportunities based on the weight and textures this then enables the children to cast a vote based on if they think an item will sink or if it will float. These experiences are being supported and role modelled by the practitioner at our settings, where we observe and respond to the children's interests, ensuring that their play supports all areas of their holistic development.

The garden, shown in the image above, is accessed daily by children in our setting, ranging in age from 6 months to 5 years. Each developmental stage of childhood offers unique opportunities for outdoor exploration and learning. Outdoor experiences during the early years are essential for helping children develop an understanding of how to care for and engage with the natural world around them. We achieve this at our setting through hands-on activities such as planting a variety of fruits and vegetables, where children actively take part in nurturing their environment. They take pride in witnessing the full growth cycle from planting seeds to harvesting nutritious produce which is incorporated into snack times each week.

our practice is supported by Froebel's trust, as they highlight the importance of nature, play, and experiential learning in early childhood development (Froebel, no date).

Image below Source: Rachael's playhouse, 2025.

in this photograph provided you can see an example of a provocation we set up in our setting during our monthly Together Time session, where we invited parents to join their children in experience something new and intriguing. During this session, we explored how to grow food from food waste, as a setting we try to encourage the children on how to become sustainable and how to make better life choices

through hands-on learning. Together, we planted a variety of fruits and vegetables including blueberries, raspberries, squash, potatoes, tomatoes, and spring onions. During the planting activity, the children used their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination as they carefully used a knife to cut the produce and then they carefully placed it into the soil. during the step by step process the children were extremely focused and engaged as they were throughout the process. As we worked together, we talked about the importance of recycling food waste and how it can be turned into compost at our setting we try to introduce larger vocabulary for example decomposition and the process behind the life cycles, and soil health. The children and parents were fascinated that the food we throw away at home or during snack time break down over a period and they then release nutrients that help plants grow strong and healthy. each step the children counted the seeds, measuring soil, and comparing the sizes and shapes of different fruits and vegetables they then worked as a team to decide what size plant post we needed for the produce to fit and have space to germinate. At the end of the session our families were invited to take their planted produce home, and we then expressed how we would like to see photos of the growth of their produce the children planted independently.

Image source: Rachael's Playhouse, 2025.

this activity carried out at my setting is based on the children's love for a tea party however we enhanced it using edible glitter. the multi colour edible glitter was a thoroughly enjoyed by the children WBL looked at me and said "wow that is like a magical fairy potion. the glitter is going round and round" I then replied "your right is does look like a magical potion created by fairies ". to further enhance the activity, we provided a range of fresh herbs and handpicked lemons, oranges and also grapefruits for the children to explore their senses. during the activity scientific concepts was spoken about for example what do you think would happen to our water if we placed some orange juice into it? also what would happen if be placed a rose petal onto the water do you think it would sink or float? moreover, mathematical concepts came into the activity when we spoke about measurements we discussed how many millilitres do you think it would take to fill up our glass jar? all these

questions asked to the children made them stop what they was doing as the said “let me put on my thinking cap“ I then replied “ that would be an excellent idea let's put them on together and think about the question“. we then produced multiple plans and the children voted on what they think would happen to the water during the process of the activity. Through daily provocations provided within an early year setting, children are provided with open-ended learning experiences that support their understanding of scientific and mathematical concepts. These experiences also help them gain factual knowledge about the world around them. Outdoor play provides children with rich and meaningful opportunities for learning that I believe is beyond what is offered indoors. It supports all areas of children’s holistic development by encouraging sensory exploration, curiosity, and hands-on discovery. As children engage with the natural environment, they also develop their language and communication skills through shared conversations, questioning, and expressive play as they continue to work as a team throughout the provocations.

Part 3:

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:	Side garden located at Rachael's Playhouse Hirwaun.	**Date:**	24/09/2025
Assessor:	Lucy Pitt (2405438)	**Review date:**	24/10/2025

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	Over all risk after precautions

					RATING: L/M/H
Walking across an uneven grass area.	supporting the children's balance and stability by walking over an uneven ground. Strengthens the children's muscle development, fine and gross motor development.	This can result in children falling over, causing injuries to themselves or others including head injury, broken bones, and sprains.	All children and adults present.	To be thoroughly checked to ensure that the ground has become significantly worse due to dips to become present within the grass areas. We will verbally communicate with the children on the importance of being careful when walking or running across the grass verge. Ensure there is no obstructions or hazards placed in the way of the dips within the ground. During summertime ensure children are provided with appropriate footwear to ensure their safety.	Medium risk
Using a knife.	Support children's fine and gross motor skills, hand eye coordination, and core strength as they concentrate to move the knife in a back-and-forth motion.	Causing accidental injuries for example cutting to hands, fingers. Injuries to eyes and feet also other body parts and injuries cause to others.	Themselves, other children, and adults.	A member of staff to be always seated and present when the children have access to a sharper knife. Possible one to one during this activity due to risks of injuries. It is important that the practitioners role model how to correctly hold a knife and how to use it correctly before allowing the children to do so and ensure that the items are placed on an even surface to ensure the items can be cut up safely.	High risk
Mud kitchen	Support the development of the children's language and communication skills through exploration. Endless opportunities to further enhance the children's learning outcomes.	Possibl0e harm to themselves through placing face into stagnant water within the sink causing children to drown or become unwell due to it not being freshly placed water. Sharp edges of the kitchen could cause bodily injuries.	Children and adults.	Ensure sink is emptied and is free of stagnant water to reduce risk of children placing their face into the water and drowning themselves and due to it being stagnant water it Harbers bacterial which can make children unwell if consumed. Ensure that it is being cleaned thoroughly between uses to ensure it is free of germs and food items for example lemons and limes used for tea making. Also check the kitchen to ensure there is no sharp edges that could cause injuries to the children.	Low to medium risk

Planting from food waste	Widen their knowledge through research and putting into their practice to test out their ideas. Language and communication skills being enhanced also.	If waste is left behind it may lead to rodents looking for food due to them smelling the waste. this then leaves the garden with rodent dropping left within the garden this could cause children to become unwell if digested.	Children and adults.	Ensure that each workspace is thoroughly cleaned to ensure no food is left behind. Before use ensure that there is no evidence that a rodent has been to explore. Once thoroughly checked area will be safe to continue to be used. ensure food waste is non mouldy due to the increase of bacteria's living within. Also ensure that all utensils, bowls and containers are thoroughly cleaned before and after the activity.	Medium risk

Part 4:

The research carried out by Kellstedt, Suess, and Maddock (2023) supports the idea of how outdoor experiences during the early childhood can provide long-term benefits on the children, due to early childhood exposure to the outdoors this influences how much time individuals spend in nature as adults. Outdoor play ranges from mild exploration examples ranging from walking on uneven grass and collecting leaves. Furthermore, higher-level examples of exploration include planting, digging, climbing, or building all of which can be enhanced through having an enabling adult present to further extend the learning experiences provided to children. This can be supported by introducing some elements of risky play for example climbing a ladder. Furthermore, Friedrich Froebel was the person who produced the idea of kindergarten back in 1887, with deep meaning behind the word kindergarten is “children’s garden.” He believed that children learn best when they are free to explore and play, especially in nature. Froebel saw outdoor play as a key part of how children grow and develop not just physically, but also emotionally, socially, and mentally. He thought nature was a teacher, giving children the opportunities to learn through real experiences for example by touching, moving, building, and observing. His ideas currently scaffold the importance of outdoor play today in early years settings, following the curriculum for Wales children are encouraged to lead their own learning and use natural materials to be creative. Froebel’s approach helps

children build in confidence, solve problems, and connect with the world around them all through play and exploration outdoors.

Each level of outdoor exploration provides children with the opportunity to learn in diverse ways, all of which support each area of the child's holistic development. Outdoor play helps children grow physically, emotionally, socially, and mentally. It encourages them to explore the world around them by using their senses, ask questions, and build on their knowledge of real-life things. It also gives them the chance to develop their language and communication skills through shared conversations and expressive play. As suggested by Brodie (n.d) this is all supported with Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, this suggests that children learn through a variety of modalities including bodily-kinesthetics, naturalistic, and interpersonal intelligences all of which are enriched experiences elevated by the outdoor environments. He creates links to mathematical and scientific concepts as he believes it can be introduced through children counting sticks, measuring soil, predicting what will happen next, or describing exactly what they see within the surrounding environment.

Outdoor play encourages children to explore science and maths through play. This is supported by the work of Bruce (2015), who highlights the importance of active learning through play. Maynard and Waters (2007) also discovered that outdoor environments offer unique opportunities for children to develop independence, problem-solving skills, and deeper connections with nature. Moreover, Froebel's early ideas and research into the how the outdoor areas support children and adults is also continuing to influence practice today, as it emphasises the value of nature and hands-on experiences in early childhood education (Froebel, no date).

By offering regular outdoor opportunities, practitioners not only support immediate learning but also help children build a meaningful connection with the natural world around them through free play opportunities. The sensory experiences, freedom to explore, and opportunities to take risks all contribute to children's holistic development not only physically but also emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Early interactions with nature have been shown to shape lifelong habits and attitudes, fostering environmental awareness on how we can care for our environment and to become environmentally friendly and their own personal well-being. This highlights just vital the role of outdoor play holds in early childhood education, particularly as it encouraging

children to explore their curiosity, build resilience, and a grasp their sense of belonging within the natural environment around them. On the other hand, the study by Kiviranta and others (2023) looks at outdoor learning from a modern point of view. It shows how being outside helps children learn things like science and maths, and how it supports their health, wellbeing, and overall development. The study also talks about the challenges practitioners face today, like unpredictable weather, limited resources, and the need for proper training to make outdoor learning effective. Froebel did not focus on those practical issues, but his ideas still match up with what the research says. Both Froebel and the study agree that outdoor play is important as they explain their point of view in diverse ways as Froebel through his deep-rooted theory and philosophy, and Kiviranta et al. through current evidence and current practice. Together, they show that outdoor learning is not just Beneficial but essential for helping children grow, explore, and thrive.

In 1971, Simon Nicholson introduced the Theory of Loose Parts, which emphasised the importance of open-ended materials in children's play and learning. He believed that environments rich in loose parts such as stones, shells, feathers, and recyclable items encourage creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills in children. These materials allow children to manipulate, combine, and transform their surroundings, fostering a sense of belonging and innovation. Loose parts also support children who are beginning to develop schemas, as they can be easily transported, stacked, sorted, and reimagined within different areas of play. The flexibility of loose parts enables children to construct meaning through hands-on exploration and self-directed learning.

In addition to supporting imaginative play, loose parts offer valuable opportunities for developing mathematical and scientific thinking. Children engage in varying ranges of activities such as comparing sizes, estimating weight, predicting whether objects will sink or float, and observing how materials move through space. These experiences promote questionable learning, where children are encouraged to ask questions, test hypotheses, and reflect on outcomes. Whether working independently or as a team, children build critical thinking skills and deepen their understanding of core concepts by hearing practitioners talking about larger vocabulary such as density, force, biodegradable as children hear these wors they begin to naturally add them into their play. Loose parts also play a vital role in language and communication development. As children engage in shared play, they negotiate roles, describe their creations, and

describe their ideas. This fosters expressive language, social interaction, and vocabulary growth. Practitioners can enhance these experiences by modelling rich language, asking open-ended questions, and encouraging children to explain their thinking. Nicholsons approach aligns with the *Curriculum for Wales: Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings*, which promotes experimental play-based learning across all Areas of Learning and Experience. By embedding loose parts into outdoor and indoor environments, they believe that practitioners can create an inclusive and dynamic spaces that nurture holistic development for the children.

Moreover, Observations play a vital role in early years education, particularly when planning and setting up outdoor environments that truly reflect and respond to children's developmental needs. By closely observing children in their play practitioners can observe how they move, interact, and engage with their surroundings as this is doing practitioners gain valuable insight into their interests, schemas, and preferred learning styles. This knowledge becomes the foundation for creating outdoor spaces that are not only safe and stimulating but also tailored to support individual and group learning. For example, if a child shows interest in collecting natural objects like leaves or stones, it is then noted, and a provocation will be introduced for example sorting trays, magnifying glasses, or themed nature hunts to deepen their engagement. Similarly, observing children who enjoy climbing or balancing can lead to the inclusion of physical challenges that promote gross motor development and risk assessment.

Observations is used as key tool for continuous assessment, helping practitioners to align outdoor provision with curriculum goals such as those outlined in the Curriculum for Wales and developmental pathways, which emphasises experiential, child-led learning. As Bruce (2015) highlights, observing children during play reveals how they interpret and make sense of the world around them, offering insights to their emotional wellbeing, social development, and cognitive growth. These insights allow practitioners to adapt the environment by adding loose parts, adjusting layouts, or introducing provocations that spark curiosity and creativity. Moreover, observations ensure that children's voices are at the fore front of the planning process, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging in the outdoor space.

Based on the curriculum for Wales for non- maintained setting, Free-flow access to outdoor garden areas in early years settings offers children the freedom to choose where their preferred learning environment is supporting independence, and self-

regulation. According to Elliott and Davis (2023), free access to the garden encourages children to engage with nature on their own pace promoting physical activity, creativity, and environmental awareness. Outdoor spaces also provide rich opportunities for inquiry-based learning, especially in science and mathematics, where children can explore natural materials, observe changes, and test ideas through play (Fleer, 2021). This aligns with Gibson's Theory of Affordances, which suggests that the environment offers action possibilities based on how individuals perceive and interact with it. For young children, a stick might afford digging, building, or measuring depending on their intent and imagination. Free-flow access enhances these affordances by allowing children to move freely and respond to the environment in meaningful ways. However, while the benefits are clear, there are also challenges. Fleer (2018) notes that maintaining effective supervision across indoor and outdoor spaces can be demanding for practitioners, requiring careful planning and staffing. Additionally, unpredictable weather and the need for safe, well-equipped outdoor environments can limit consistent access and require additional resources (Elliott, 2008). Despite these challenges, research consistently supports the value of free flow play in fostering holistic development and meaningful learning experiences.

in conclusion, outdoor play in early years settings is a fundamental aspect of child development, offering a wide range of benefits that extend beyond the immediate learning environment. Theorists such as Froebel, Nicholson, Gibson, and Gardner have laid the foundation for understanding how nature, open-ended materials, and sensory-rich environments contribute to children's holistic growth. Froebel's concept of the "children's garden" continues to influence modern practice, highlighting the importance of freedom, exploration, and connection with nature. Nicholson's Theory of Loose Parts supports creativity and problem-solving, while Gibson's Theory of Affordances explains how children perceive and act upon the possibilities offered by their surroundings. Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences reinforces the idea that children learn in diverse ways, many of which are enriched through outdoor experiences.

Contemporary research, including studies by Kellstedt et al. (2023) and Kiviranta et al. (2023), confirms that early exposure to outdoor environments has long-term benefits, influencing how individuals interact with nature throughout their lives. These studies also highlight the challenges practitioners face, such as unpredictable

weather, staffing pressures, and the need for well-equipped outdoor spaces. Despite these barriers, the Curriculum for Wales: Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings continues to promote outdoor learning as a key part of play-based education, encouraging children to lead their own learning and engage with the natural world.

Outdoor play supports all areas of development physical, emotional, social, and cognitive while also fostering curiosity, resilience, and environmental awareness. It provides opportunities for children to explore scientific and mathematical concepts, develop language and communication skills, and build meaningful relationships with their peers and surroundings. With thoughtful planning and support from enabling adults, outdoor environments can become powerful spaces for inquiry, creativity, and growth. As both theory and research suggest, outdoor learning is not just beneficial, it is essential for helping children thrive in early years settings and into adulthood.

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