

What is the Importance of outdoor learning for children?

Abstract

Research in this area has previously shown that there are a variety of benefits to outdoor learning. These benefits include aiding in the development of children, and they are shown to have a positive effect on other areas of the child including their mental health and well-being. To be able develop this more within early years settings, it is important to research and develop the knowledge with findings on how deeply the importance for outdoor learning is for children. In this portfolio, research studies and articles will be reviewed to understand what other academics have found from doing their research and to observe any challenges they faced while holding their study.

Literature review

The importance of outdoor learning for children is an important topic many academics have researched. An interesting article by Kiviranta, L et al (2023) explains that allowing children to have access to the outdoor environment has been shown to have positive impacts on children's health, mental health and wellbeing. However, in contrast to this, Kiviranta et al (2023) continues to explain that there are exceptions to this depending on the individual challenges each child may face. For example, a child with severe asthma which can be worsened by pollen may not benefit from this. Kiviranta et al (2023) states that there were some challenges in putting into effect outdoor learning. Some of the challenges faced may be a limited range of outdoor learning materials. Another challenge faced may be unsuitable weather conditions for the children to be exposed to for extended periods of time. It is noted that some of the children's parents may not approve of their child participating in outdoor learning due to their personal reasons. However, Kiviranta etl al (2023) research shows that the children that do participate in outdoor learning have a higher chance of developing leadership skills accompanying the other skills they will develop such as problem solving, increased confidence and self-esteem and concentration skills.

Another piece of evidence shown by Willoughby, M (2014) explains that children may develop a more positive attitude to learning when outdoors. This, as a result, may keep the children more engaged in their learning and the activities that they are participating

in. Willoughby (2014) directs the article to the crucial point that by nurturing the children's natural love for nature and the outdoors, early years practitioners will be encouraging the natural draw to the outdoors that children have in which they may maintain for their lives. Willoughby (2014) reminds the reader that not all children are gaining experiences outdoors. This could be due to economic factors such as the location or safety of where the child lives. It is shown that outdoor learning can provide a setting for a variety of different learning experiences for the children. An example of this would be giving the children a variety of materials to explore and engage in messy play activities with. Willoughby (2014) further explains that there are physical benefits which are gained by being outdoors. By being outdoors children will be receiving vitamin D from the sunlight they will be subjected to which promotes healthy physical development alongside physical exercise. The article by Willoughby (2014) shows that, additionally there are negative impacts in not allowing access to outdoors. The research states that by not allowing children to access the outdoors and restricting them could lead to signs of ADHD. This shows by not allowing children access to outdoors it could affect their development and could possibly result in ALN within the children.

Based on what has been shown in these pieces of evidence, it is important to delve deeper and explore this topic more thoroughly in further research.

Methodological Considerations

For this topic, research will be carried out on children in early years settings aged between 3 and 5 years old for a period of 2 months. By carrying out the research in a setting that the children are comfortable in it is probable that the results found from the research will be more accurate than if the research was being held in a new environment in which the children are uncomfortable and unfamiliar with. By observing the children for the 2-month period mentioned previously it will allow room for a variety of different experiences during this research. During the 2 months, the children and setting will experience a variety of weather conditions and other potential challenges to present themselves.

The methodology chosen for this research will be observations and interviews. West Sussex Council (2021) explains that observations although they are formal, are

objective and allow the early years practitioner to see the child individually while in a large group. This will allow the data of the research to be examined with the ability to analyse each individual child's engagement with the outdoor learning and the activities in which they are partaking in. However, a limitation to narrative observations may be that the early year's practitioner could potentially miss a vital observation while recording other aspects of the observation. Another limitation to this form of observation is that it could be time consuming for the early year's practitioners. It would be wise for the researcher to take this into consideration and appoint a designated person to recording observations.

Interviews will also be a helpful asset in this form of research. West Sussex Council (2021) continues with the reminder that as part of the UNCRC Article 12 it is the right of the child to be able to express their opinion and to have it be heard and considered by the early year's practitioners. A limitation that interviews may have could be children may feel under pressure or may not want to talk to the early year's practitioners. Alternatively, the child may not want to talk to the early year's practitioners about the research they are conducting.

Questionnaires will not be used during this study as it may be too difficult for the children to engage with due to the young age of the participating children and their reading levels at the age of 3-5 year olds.

Neaum, S (2016) explains that it is important to have a clear purpose when observing children and the recording process coincides with that. Neaum, S (2016) continues to explain that Reggio Emilia schools have a well-defined view of the children's experiences while in attendance. Similarly, the researcher will be focusing on the experiences of the children engaging in the outdoor learning.

Ethical Considerations

All parents of children chosen to participate in this research will be sent a consent form to allow or deny permission for their child to be involved in the research. In line with UNCRC Article 12, children will have freedom of speech if they do not wish to be involved, or they do not wish to engage in outdoor learning on a specific day. The data resulting from the research will be stored in a confidential and ethical way in coherence with The Data Protection Act 2018 and the Equality Act 2010, ensuring it is stored securely and

appropriately in a locked draw. GOV.UK explains that the Data Protection Act 2018 protects how an individual's information is used and shared. GOV.UK further explains that the Equality Act 2010 is a law introduced by the government to protect people from discrimination. The researcher will work in coherence with the Data Protection Act 2018 by only sharing information with relevant parties such as co-researchers and the organisation the research is being done on behalf of.

Expanding upon this, all children participating in the research will be called Child A and Child B. This will help protect the anonymity of the children and will allow no room for judgement or discrimination based on their responses and the findings of the research. This will additionally make sure to adhere to the Human Rights Act, Article 8, in which all humans have the right to have their private life's which shall not be interfered with unless done so by lawful powers. By working in co-operation with The Data Protection Act 2018, Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998, Article 8, it will not only protect the children, and the families involved in the research but also the people conducting the research and the organisation the research is being conducted on behalf of.

Reference list

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